Week of Prayer 2024: Wednesday

Head: The Word as Revelation

Sub: Examining John 5:39

**By Robert Osei-Bonsu**

As we consider “the Word as revelation,” perhaps we need to start by answering the question “In what ways has God revealed Himself?” This fact is foundational to the Christian faith. God has revealed Himself in words and acts through many different channels, but most fully in the person of Jesus Christ.

God’s explicit intention is that through this revelation, humans may come to know Him and enter a saving relationship, which will result in eternal fellowship with Him (John 17:3). Both the Old and New Testaments present a record of how God manifested Himself in human history, especially the history of Israel, and supremely in the person of Jesus Christ. Without this divine revelation, humanity would perish, ignorant of God’s real character and estranged from Him through sin and guilt.

Thus, the Bible is rightly called the Word of God because it contains God’s inspired words. The purpose of God’s Word is to give us information and reveal Jesus to us. Jesus said in John 5:39 that you search the Scriptures because you believe they contain eternal life. They are those who bear witness to me. This crucial verse emphasizes the central role of the Word of God as a revelation from Jesus.

**Historical and Theological Background**

John’s Gospel dates from the first century, between A.D. 70 and 90—a period marked by a mixture of cultural (Roman, Greek, and Jewish) influences. Tension existed between Jewish religious leaders under Roman rule and Jesus’ followers. Jesus’ statement in John 5:39 challenged the Jewish religious leaders regarding their understanding of the Torah, the Prophets, and religious practice as the ultimate authority. Instead, Jesus redirected the leaders’ focus on Him as God’s supreme revelation.

In the Gospel of John there is a dialogue between Jesus and the religious authorities who question His authority and identity. Jesus challenges their understanding of Scripture, positing that Scriptures speak about Him, so they should study them to gain eternal life. Luke 24:27, 44, and 45 reinforce the idea that Jesus is the center of Scripture and His role in God’s plan of redemption. The New Testament highlights Jesus as God’s Word, fully revealing God and fulfilling the Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah.

The Christian view is that to understand the Word of God in its entirety as a revelation of Jesus, you must acknowledge the Bible’s entire focus. The Old Testament is a precursor to the New Testament, which reveals Jesus Christ. God’s redemptive plan is revealed throughout the Scriptures from Genesis to Revelation. The Word of God is not a collection of morals or stories, but a coherent narrative highlighting Jesus Christ as the world’s Savior.

John 1:1-14 describes Jesus as the Word, the eternal Word of God who existed from the beginning of the world and took on flesh to dwell among us. It emphasizes Jesus’ divinity and His role in creation and redemption. Hebrews 4:12 also describes the Word as a powerful living force capable of discerning one’s thoughts and motives. The Word can inspire transformation and change. John 5:39 and other verses of the Bible depict the Word as a dynamic and divine power that reveals God’s purpose and character.

**Theological Implications of John 5:39**

John 5:39 states that the Word of God is more than written words. It symbolizes Jesus’ divine nature as the messenger of God’s redemption plan. Jesus is more than a teacher or prophet; He embodies God’s message for humanity. This concept emphasizes the importance of the Old Testament Scriptures in helping us understand Jesus and His teachings. The Scriptures challenge religious leaders to put their faith in Jesus, the ultimate fulfillment of its message. The Word of God can transform us, leading to spiritual growth, obedience, and becoming more like Him.1

John 5:39 is Jesus’ response to the Jewish leaders who challenged His authority. This verse highlights the purpose of the Scriptures, which Jesus explained to them. “You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me” (ESV).2 They believed they could discover the path to eternal life by studying the Scriptures. Jesus clarifies, however, that the Scriptures are meant to testify about Him, who is the way to eternal life.

Understanding the meaning of this verse requires an understanding of its context. The verses preceding this one tell of Jesus’ healing a man. This man had had a disability for 38 years. The healing occurred on a Sabbath day, and the Jewish leaders questioned Jesus’ authority. Jesus told them that He had authority as the Son of God. In verse 39 He explained that the Scriptures exist, not simply to be read, but to lead people to Him. The Scriptures are centered on Him and testify to His existence. They are evidence of His identity and what He came to do.

This verse has essential implications for our understanding of the Bible. The Bible is more than a collection of historical accounts or poems. The Bible is God’s revelation of His plan of redemption through Jesus Christ. When we study the Scriptures, we must explore its testimony of Jesus and His redemptive work on the cross. It is only through Him that we can have eternal life.

We must study God’s Word with a Christ-centered perspective. Each passage, story, or teaching should be read to understand how it relates to Jesus. When we read about Abraham’s willingness to sacrifice Isaac, we can see God’s willingness for His Son to be sacrificed for us. We can read the Psalms and see Jesus’ emotions and struggles as He faced His cross.

We must study the Word of God and put it into practice. The Word of God should inform and transform us. We should be transformed by Jesus’ love, grace, and truth as we encounter Him through the Word. We should strive to live our lives in a way that reflects His character and mission.

Ellen G. White affirms that the Bible bears witness to Jesus Christ. “The Old Testament Scriptures reveal Christ, and bring us to a knowledge of His prerogatives.”3 She emphasizes that it is crucial to study the Scriptures to understand Jesus Christ. In *The Great Controversy* Ellen G. White posits that the Bible was not written just for scholars but was also intended for ordinary people. The truths that are necessary for salvation become more apparent as the noonday. No one will make a mistake or lose their way unless they follow their judgment instead of God’s revealed will.4 Use the Word of God to spread Jesus’ teachings. It can change people’s lives and give hope to the entire world.

**Missiological Implications of John 5:39**

John 5:39, from a missiological perspective, emphasizes Jesus’ vital role and the importance of spreading the Word through evangelism. This verse challenges religious practices that place other authorities above Jesus. It calls for a change in focus, urging us to look at the Scriptures and see Jesus as God’s true revelation. Acts 4:12 and Romans 10:14, 15, are other Bible passages that highlight the implications of this concept for missionary work. These passages emphasize the importance of proclaiming Jesus as the sole means of salvation. John 5:39, however, calls on all Christians to proclaim Jesus as God’s Word, who reveals God’s grace, truth, and salvation, regardless of background.

This verse encourages believers to read the Bible and recognize how it points to Jesus. It is essential to equip and disciple Christians to understand the Bible, recognize Jesus as its center, and share this revelation with others. John 5:39, from a missiological perspective, emphasizes Jesus’ message and the importance of His role in evangelism. It challenges religious systems and traditions that place other authorities above Jesus. It calls for a shift in focus to examine Scripture and encounter Jesus, the ultimate revelation of God. As believers are equipped with this knowledge, they can then share the revelation and lead others to understand the Scriptures better.

**Conclusion**

The Scriptures challenge the traditional belief system and focus on Jesus. Understanding His teachings is easier when we understand the historical context. Examining relevant verses helps us understand God’s Word and emphasizes Jesus’ divine nature.

The Word of God reveals Jesus Christ. It is more than a collection of old texts. The Word of God should be approached from a Christ-centered point of view, and we should seek to meet Jesus through it. It is crucial to apply the teachings of Christ to our daily lives and allow them to change us. We should also use it to spread the gospel. Remember that we can understand and experience Jesus through the Word of God. Let us make sure to share this with others. John 5:39 tells us that the Scriptures lead us to Jesus and point us in His direction. As we read and study the Bible, we should always keep this in our minds and try to find how each passage relates to Him.

1 Robert H. Gundry, *A Survey of the New Testament,* 5th ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012).

2 Scripture quotations marked ESV are from *The Holy Bible,* English Standard Version, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

3 Ellen G. White manuscript 109, 1899.

4 Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* (Mountain View, Calif.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn.,1911), pp. 598, 599.

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Questions for Reflection:

Have you ever considered John 5:39 as relating to our method of mission?

How can you use the Word today to encourage someone else?