

## 177 God's progressive revelation

I went to a brilliant wedding last weekend – such a sense of God's love in the congregation and the couple alike, and I had lots of conversations with friends that I hadn't seen for ages. "How are you?" they said, so I told them! It was such a joy to talk about the Lord.

One thing I noticed myself doing (apart from talking too much, sorry!) was describing God's 'big picture' and gesticulating with two hands pulling an imagined group of people across in front of me, as God engages with humankind through the centuries, trying to draw us into a better and better understanding of the true nature of God, and what it means to live in love with God and with one another.

God used a series of fallible people, including Abraham, Moses, David, the prophets, and finally Jesus himself who, as a human, *could* have failed, but thankfully didn't. (I wonder how many times Jesus prayed, 'Thy will be done!')?)

So did God stop trying to teach us in AD 30, with the ascension? Or was God's revelatory job finished perhaps, in AD 90, when the final book of the New Testament was completed? Did humankind now know enough about God to see us through to the end of time? Does the Bible teach us everything that God wants us to know about how best to live in love?

Yes, and no! I believe that the Bible is infallible – it will not fail to communicate what God intends – but it was written by fallible humans and it has to be interpreted by fallible humans.

We interpret the Bible in terms of what we think God is like, and throughout history humans have had a limited and distorted view of God. God has tried to draw us towards a better understanding, but it takes time. Here are a few possible queries.

Why does the OT *not* clearly teach that men should only have one wife?

Why does the NT *not* clearly teach that slavery is a gross abuse of human rights and dignity?

Why does the NT *not* clearly teach that physically beating children is psychologically harmful?

My answer to these and other issues on the minds of Christians today, including human sexuality, is that God doesn't use mind-melding, so it's a long, slow process. As God allows us to increase our understanding of how humans 'work', at all sorts of levels, God can help us to learn new things, to our betterment, but **only** if we are willing to put aside the former prejudices that affect our understanding of Scripture.

The other problem is that, like the Jews of old, we learn and improve... and then slip back again.

One clear example to me is that Jesus radically challenged society's attitude to women, and the early church seems to have had women leaders, yet over the centuries male dominance returned, and is sadly still rife.<sup>[154]</sup>

Prejudice is a killer for human relationships, and for our relationship with God.

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P.S. Someone has just told me that 'progressive revelation' is a 'thing' that theologians discuss. Here, it is just a phrase I thought of to express my feelings about God wanting to 'move us on'.