

Reason and Revelation

By Pastor Alan Utting



'Seek not to understand that you may believe, but believe that you may understand.'

Augustine of Hippo

I hadn't given much thought to Reason (using the mind) and Revelation (divinely revealed truth) until reading Thomas Aquinas. I now see that revelation has strongly influenced my ministry. Many excel in reason, gaining theological degrees. I suggest revelation by seeking God in prayer is sometimes transformative of a life. Notable biblical examples include Saul/Paul and Ananias (Acts 9), where revelation prompted life-changing actions beyond reason. Although reason can guide individuals toward revelation, such insight is ultimately achieved through the work of the Holy Spirit. For years as a youngster I invited Jesus into my life, never quite sure whether He was there or not. Then after hearing about the crucifixion once again and Jesus' love for me, at home I quietly prayed my usual prayer of inviting Jesus into my life and although there was no emotion I knew without a doubt that through revelation He was with me. Revelation made the difference. There was no need to ask anymore. I suggest a mind sanctified by Jesus and His Word plus revelation will keep you obedient and effective on the long journey of faith. Let me explain further.

Observation

Some cultures prioritise intellectual achievement, while others focus on spiritual insight; a balance is essential. Paul was highly educated and effectively debated philosophers in Athens (Acts 17:16ff) and also experienced significant revelations at different times. 'I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that the gospel I preached is not of human origin. I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ.' (Revelation 1:11).

The blessings of Reason (The use of the mind)

1. The word 'mind' occurs 120 times in NIV translation.
2. 'Set your mind on things above, not on earthly things' (Colossians 3:2).
3. 'Be transformed by the renewing of your mind' (Romans 12:2).
4. 'Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth' (2 Tim 2:15).
5. All of Psalm 119 gives great prominence to the importance of the 'Word' as it draws us to the Lord.

Note:

1. Post grad studies can be good but do them for the right reasons. After receiving a prophetic word in India once, I gave up doing a Masters degree (not that I consider myself a scholar) as I felt my motives for doing it were wrong. I was after personal significance rather than being caught up with God's will for my life. Revelation touched my heart and changed my direction.
2. 'The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers' (2 Corinthians 4:4). Particularly in the Western world education has become a god. When that happens, we must reorientate ourselves.

3. Mahatma Gandhi once said to a group of missionaries, 'You Christians look after a document containing enough dynamite to blow all civilisation to pieces, turn the world upside down and bring peace to a battle-torn planet. But you treat it as though it is nothing more than a piece of literature.' A sad comment. Paul says, 'For the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk (word) but of power' (1 Cor 4:20).

The blessings of Revelation

Revelation's basic meaning is the act of 'revealing or communicating divine truth in an enlightening way'.

Paul wrote 'I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better' (Ephesians 1:17).

'I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ' (Galatians 1:12).

The apostle John received this revelation, 'The revelation from Jesus Christ, which God gave John was to show his servants what must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John' (Revelation 1:1).

C. S. Lewis, one of the intellectual giants of the 20th century considered himself to be an atheist at one stage of his life. However, he writes, 'I was driven to Whipsnade one sunny morning. When we set out I did not believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and when we reached the zoo I did. Yet I did not exactly spend the journey in thought. Nor in great emotion.' That is revelation. It takes us from one state to another.

1. Revelation may come through prophetic words, dreams, visions, intuition and especially the Word.
2. 'Preach out of revelation, not reaction' was wise advice we received at Bible College from a man God used to bring revival to the Solomon Islands in the early 1970s. Delivering a message out of reaction can be harmful, but a message born of divine revelation can bring life and insight to those who hear it.
3. Expecting, receiving, and imparting a revelation of Jesus for His glory keeps our ministry and preaching alive and life-giving.
4. When Pam and I pray for people privately, we sometimes pray that God would give them a revelation of their need and have a revelation of Jesus reaching out to them. Again, revelation has the possibility of changing lives.
5. Revelations can come from God for encouragement, conviction, warning and guidance.
6. Ask for revelation, but with all your heart seek Jesus first for Himself not simply what He gives. Keep Jesus front and centre.

Note:

1. If God leads you to a Bible school, ideally choose one that values 'teaching' and the importance of 'revelation' in preparation for a fruitful ministry.
2. Revelation never contradicts Scripture. That is the benchmark.
3. From my experience revelation may sometimes come when you least expect it.
4. Fear may deter you seeking revelation, in case you might be led astray. Have confidence in the work of the Holy Spirit. There is a saying, 'What you receive in the light, believe in the dark.'