

HEARING THE LORD

Deuteronomy 6

Some scholars feel that social media in particular — as well as a broader range of internet technologies, including algorithmically driven search and click-based advertising — have changed the way that people get information and form opinions about the world. And they seem to have done so in a manner that makes people particularly vulnerable to the spread of misinformation and disinformation.

Just as one example: A paper — a poorly done research paper — can come out suggesting that hydroxychloroquine might be a treatment for Covid. And in a matter of days, you have world leaders promoting it and people struggling to get this medicine and it being no longer available to people who need it for treatment of other conditions. This is actually a serious health problem.

So you can have these bits of misinformation that explode at unprecedented velocity in ways that they wouldn't have prior to this information ecosystem. As Carl Bergstrom says, "There's no reason why good information will rise to the top of any ecosystem we've designed."

In contrast to that is the knowledge we have from God. God's Word isn't something we have designed. It isn't the result of misinformation or disinformation. It is that Word which tells us in Deuteronomy 6:

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

But how do we know that is any more correct than all we can see on the internet? There are all kinds of different versions of the Bible, different translations, none of which go back to even over a thousand years after Moses, who spoke those words from God, lived.

"Hear, O Israel, the LORD, Your God, the LORD is one." "LORD" you notice is all written in capitals. This is because it is not the word for "Lord," but the actual name of God which He revealed to Moses back when God first appeared to him in the burning bush back in Exodus 3. The name "LORD" means "I am who I am." But even better, it means, "I will be what I will be." This is not just the God who just set the world in motion, but the God who is still active, personally involved in our world.

In confirmation class we use this symbol to describe God:



On one hand you see the circle showing that God is. He has no beginning and no end. But from the circle come the arrows, showing that God is continually reaching out in love, the “God who will be.”

“LORD” is what we write for the Hebrew “Yahweh. Yahweh is God’s name, not as a description or Social Security number. It doesn’t just identify God. It is His name because He is God, personal, not just some force or notion. And this God is one!

As we do each Reformation—and this year it is not just Reformation Sunday, but the 31st, Reformation Day!—we sang Luther’s hymn “A Mighty Fortress.” This hymn is based on Psalm 46 which says, “Be still and know that Yahweh is God.” Luther wrote, “Let God be God.” He was challenging the prevalent teaching among the scholars of the Renaissance that mortals were at the center and that everything moved around them. Instead, Luther claimed that God is the center, and without him, humanity is nothing. Human salvation lies not in things mortals do, but in what God does. How can we be certain of that? Because God tells us in His Word.

God did not create the world and then let it go on its own. “He will be what He will be.” God didn’t just guide the work of inspiring the writers of the Bible when they first wrote the words down. He was inspiring the many parts of the Bible that were first passed on by spoken words from generation to generation. He guided the work of copying the written words over the centuries, those learning and proclaiming His Word based on Scripture. He is guiding both me in sharing this word to you and you in listening to it. Otherwise it could certainly be misinformation, as when people take the Scriptures and add or subtract to it or especially take it out of the context of it being the words that convey to us the Word, Christ Jesus.

Now this is the commandment—the statutes and the rules—that the Lord your God commanded me to teach you, that you may do them in the land to which you are going over, to possess it, that you may fear the Lord your God, you and your son and your son’s son, by keeping all His statutes and His commandments, which I command you, all the days of your life, and that your days may be long. Hear therefore, O Israel, and be careful to do them, that it may go well with you, and that you may multiply greatly, as the Lord, the God of your fathers, has promised you, in a land flowing with milk and honey.

God was giving His people something more definite and certain than any other people had—His Word.

In the movie “A Beautiful Mind” the main character played by Russell Crowe is a Noble winning mathematician who is afflicted with schizophrenia. In the movie we see things as he does in his mind and are convinced that “bad guys” are trying to discredit his attempts to help with vital national security. Then we find that all of that is just in his mind. The only way they can seem to control it is with medications that crippled him into being too tired to do anything. Then he realizes that a girl that he keeps seeing in his mind never gets older. He begins to use the one thing certain in his mind—his wife—to make certain what is real what isn’t. If he meets a new person, he first asks people he knows if this person is real. With the reality of his wife he began to cope with life without the crippling effects of the medication.

We need solid ground in the midst of all the information and uncertainty out there. That is what we have in God’s Word. As we sang in “A Mighty Fortress,”

And take they our life,
Goods, fame, child, and wife,
Though these all be gone,
Our victory has been won;
The Kingdom ours remaineth.