

Session 2: Revelation and the Doctrine of the Word of God

Two Types of Revelation: General Revelation and Specific Revelation

General Revelation: General revelation provides sufficient information to know that God exists and that God possesses amazing attributes. However, general revelation is not sufficient to know God personally or savingly.

Specific Revelation: Specific revelation provides sufficient information to know that God exists God personally and savingly.

Three loci of general revelation: Nature, History, and the Constitution of the Human Being

“God has given us an objective, valid, rational revelation of Himself in nature, history, and human personality. Regardless of whether anyone actually observes it, understands it, and believes it, even though it may well have been disturbed by the fall, it is nonetheless present.” (Erickson, 136)

Nature: Psalm 19:1 The heavens tell of the glory of God; And their expanse declares the work of His hands.

History: Acts 17:24-26 The God who made the world and everything that is in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made by hands; nor is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all people life and breath and all things; and He made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation.

The Constitution of the Human Being: Romans 2:14-16 For when Gentiles who do not have the Law instinctively perform the requirements of the Law, these, though not having the Law, are a law to themselves, in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience testifying and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them, on the day when, according to my gospel, God will judge the secrets of mankind through Christ Jesus.

“Natural theology maintains not only that there is a valid, objective revelation of God in such spheres as nature, history and human personality, but that it is actually possible to gain some true knowledge of God from these spheres- in other words, to construct a theology apart from the Bible.” (Erickson, 129)

Knowing God:
General Revelation and Specific Revelation

I. General Revelation Proofs for God's Existence (Philosophical, Observational)

- A. The Ontological Argument: If we can imagine an all-powerful, creator, one must exist because I can only imagine with my mind things that actually exist or have some basis in reality
- B. The Cosmological Argument or First Cause Argument: the universe exists and the universe is not eternal, therefore someone who is eternal must have created it
- C. The Teleological Argument: the universe seems to be ordered and purposeful as though designed and directed by someone greater than the universe
- D. The Aesthetical Argument: The universe contains tremendous beauty as if to communicate that the creator behind the universe is even more beautiful
- E. The Moral Argument: there is a sense “oughtness” or a sense of right and wrong that transcends cultures, geography and languages.

“Sin has a double effect on the efficacy of the general revelation. On the one hand, sin has marred the witness of the general revelation. The created order is now under a curse. The more serious effect of sin and the fall is on humans themselves...this blindness would affect the ability to see God in the creation.” (Erickson, 137)

“General revelation evidently does not ordinarily enable the unbeliever to come to the knowledge of God.” (Erickson, 137)

God is a God of revelation. From the beginning, God displays His revelatory nature through the spoken creation. Then God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light. Genesis 1:3. God speaks the creation into being because He the purpose of the creation is God’s self-disclosure through the creation.

“General revelation is inferior to special Revelation, in both the clarity of the treatment and the range of subjects considered. The insufficiency of general revelation therefore required special revelation.” (Erickson, 145-146)

II. Special Revelation

- A. History in General, but especially Jewish history, the history of Christ, and the history of the church
- B. The Bible
- C. Fulfilled Prophecy in History, especially in the Person of Jesus Christ
- D. The Transformed Lives of Believers
- E. The Work of the Holy Spirit within Individual Lives

Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." And Jesus said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. Matthew 16:16-17

All things have been handed over to Me by My Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father; nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him. Matthew 11:27

The Doctrine of the Word of God

I. "The Word of God" means (See II Timothy 3:16-17, II Peter 1:21)

A. The person of Jesus Christ (See John 1, I John 1, Hebrews 4:12, Revelation 19:13)

John 1:14-18 And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us; and we saw His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth...No one has seen God at any time; God the only Son, who is in the arms of the Father, He has explained Him.

B. Speech by God

1. God's Decrees: Powerful, creative words from God that cause something to happen. (Genesis 1:3)

Genesis 1:3 Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light.

2. God's Words of Personal Address: God speaking directly to people. (Genesis 2:16-17)

Genesis 2:16-17 The Lord God commanded the man, saying, "From any tree of the garden you may freely eat; 17 but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for on the day that you eat from it you will certainly die."

3. God's Words through Prophetic Voice: God speaking to us through selected people. (Deut. 18:18-20, Jeremiah 1:7)

Deuteronomy 18:18-19 I will raise up for them a prophet from among their countrymen like you, and I will put My words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them everything that I command him. 19 And it shall come about that whoever does not listen to My words which he speaks in My name, I Myself will require it of him.

4. God's Words in Written Form: God speaking to us through the Bible. (Exodus 31:18, Isaiah 30:8)

Exodus 31:18 When He had finished speaking with him on Mount Sinai, He gave Moses the two tablets of the testimony, tablets of stone, written by the finger of God.

II. Canon of Scripture

The Word Canon means rule, measure or standard. The Canon of the Bible is the collection of all the books that belong to the category of the Word of God.

A. The debate over the Old Testament books

1. The Jewish debate
2. The church debate

B. The debate over the New Testament books

1. Paul's quote from the book of Luke as Scripture, I Timothy 5:18 and Peter's verse concerning Paul, II Peter 3:15-16

I Timothy 5:18 For the Scripture says, "You shall not muzzle the ox while it is threshing," and "The laborer is worthy of his wages."

II Peter 3:15-16 ...just as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you, as also in all his letters, speaking in them of these things, in which there are some things that are hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction.

II Timothy 3:15-16 that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness;

2. The apostolic authority associated with the books of the New Testament

3. The internal witness of the books of the New Testament (I Thessalonians 2:13, II Thessalonians 3:6)

I Thessalonians 2:13 For this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of mere men, but as what it really is, the word of God, which also is at work in you who believe.

3. The books were recognized by the church around the world in their teaching and preaching ministry

4. The books bore the marks of inspiration

5. The lack of internal witness of books excluded from the canon

6. The lack of apostolic authority for books excluded from the canon

7. The Marcion heresy (AD140) and the first official list of approved books

Four Gospels, Acts, 13 letters of Paul, Jude, 1 John, 2 John, Revelation, Wisdom of Solomon, and the Apocalypse of Peter (early 2nd century work)

Three classes of texts: those that should be read in church, canonical but not necessarily read in church, maybe not canonical but should not be read in church

8. Books under question that were ultimately included: Hebrews, 2 Peter, 2 John, 3 John, Jude

9. Books under question that were ultimately excluded: The Didache, The Shepherd of Hermas, First Clement, Epistle of Barnabas

10. Books considered good to read but not canon: The Apocrypha

11. Books immediately rejected: The Nag Hammadi (Gnostic-Coptic writings)

C. The debate over the Apocrypha (helpful and useful to believers but “were not books of the canon”)

1. Council at Trent in 1546 declared the Apocrypha to be part of the canon because it included teachings that supported Catholic doctrines such as prayers for the dead and justification by faith plus works.

2. Rejected by Protestants who used both the historical claims of the Jewish theologians and the early church concerning these writings and the actual content of the writings themselves.

II Timothy 3:16-17 All Scripture is inspired by God and beneficial for teaching, for rebuke, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man or woman of God may be fully capable, equipped for every good work.

III. Inspiration

A. Defined: The supernatural influence of the Holy Spirit on the Scripture writers that rendered their writings an accurate record of divine revelation

B. Theories of Inspiration

1. The intuition theory makes inspiration largely a high degree of insight.

2. The illumination theory maintains that there is an influence of the Holy Spirit upon the authors of Scripture, but involving only a heightening of their normal abilities

3. The dynamic theory emphasizes the combination of divine and human elements in the process of inspiration and the writing of the Bible.

4. The verbal theory insists that the Holy Spirit's influence extends beyond the direction of thoughts to the very selection of words used to convey the message.

5. The dictation theory is the view that God actually dictated the bible to writers.

IV. Inerrancy: The inerrancy of Scripture means that Scripture in the original manuscripts does not affirm anything that is contrary to fact.

A. Various Theories:

1. Absolute inerrancy holds that the Bible, which includes rather detailed treatment of matters both historical and scientific, is fully and completely true

2. Full inerrancy holds that the Bible is completely true. While the Bible does not primarily aim to give scientific and historical data, such scientific and historical assertions it does make are fully true.

3. Limited inerrancy regards the Bible as inerrant and infallible in its salvific doctrinal references. A distinction is drawn between nonempirical, revealed matters on the one hand, and empirical, natural references on the other.

4. Inerrancy of purpose holds that the Bible faithfully accomplishes its purpose, which is to bring people into personal fellowship with Christ, not to communicate truths

B. Absolute or Full inerrancy holds that the Bible always tells the truth

1. The Bible is inerrant and still speaks in ordinary language that can be understood

2. The Bible is inerrant and still include loose or free quotations (and rounding of numbers and poetic language)

3. The Bible is inerrant and still include unusual or uncommon grammatical constructions

C. Inerrant versus infallible versus _____

D. From the short statement from the Chicago Statement of Inerrancy...

1. God, who is Himself Truth and speaks truth only, has inspired Holy Scripture in order thereby to reveal Himself to lost mankind through Jesus Christ as Creator and Lord, Redeemer and Judge. Holy Scripture is God's witness to Himself.

2. Holy Scripture, being God's own Word, written by men prepared and superintended by His Spirit, is of infallible divine authority in all matters upon which it touches: it is to be believed, as God's instruction, in all that it affirms, obeyed, as God's command, in all that it requires; embraced, as God's pledge, in all that it promises.

3. The Holy Spirit, Scripture's divine Author, both authenticates it to us by His inward witness and opens our minds to understand its meaning.

4. Being wholly and verbally God-given, Scripture is without error or fault in all its teaching, no less in what it states about God's acts in creation, about the events of world history, and about its own literary origins under God, than in its witness to God's saving grace in individual lives.

5. The authority of Scripture is inescapably impaired if this total divine inerrancy is in any way limited or disregarded, or made relative to a view of truth contrary to the Bible's own; and such lapses bring serious loss to both the individual and the Church.

V. The Four Characteristics of Scripture:

A. Authority: The authority of Scripture means that all the words in the Scripture are God's words in such a way that to disbelieve or disobey any word of the Scripture is to disbelieve or disobey God.

B. Clarity: The Bible is written in such a way that its teachings are able to be understood by all who will read it seeking God's help and being willing to follow it.

1. The Bible affirms its own clarity

2. The Bible assumes clarity for moral and spiritual truths

3. The Bible does have some difficult passages that require much study to understand (See II Peter 3:15-16)