

### **Introduction:**

- Systematic theology refers to what God’s inerrant word says about various topics. Various branches:
  1. Bibliology – Study of the Bible
  2. Theology Proper – Study of God
  3. Anthropology – Study of Mankind
  4. Hamartiology – Study of sin
  5. Christology – Study of Christ
  6. Soteriology – Study of Salvation
  7. Pneumatology – Study of Holy Spirit
  8. Ecclesiology – Study of the Church
  9. Eschatology – Study of End Times
  
- Systematic Theology is the “Queen of the Sciences”
  
- This section is called “Bibliology,” or the doctrine of the Bible.<sup>1</sup>
  
- Questions:
  - What is the Bible?
  - How did we get the Bible?
  - How do we know that these 66 books of the Bible are God’s words? What about other, supposed holy books?
  - How do we know that it is true?
  - What about the various translation errors lost over the years?

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<sup>1</sup> I am indebted to Paul Lamey (Bibliology Syllabus) and Andy Snider (Theology 1, Master’s Seminary Syllabus) for their help in compiling these notes.

- What is the Bible?

**The Old Testament**

1. Genesis 2. Exodus 3. Leviticus 4. Numbers 5. Deuteronomy 6. Joshua 7. Judges 8. Ruth 9. 1 Samuel 10. 2 Samuel 11. 1 Kings 12. 2 Kings 13. 1 Chronicles 14. 2 Chronicles 15. Ezra 16. Nehemiah 17. Esther 18. Job 19. Psalms 20. Proverbs 21. Ecclesiastes 22. Song of Solomon 23. Isaiah 24. Jeremiah 25. Lamentations 26. Ezekiel 27. Daniel 28. Hosea 29. Joel 30. Amos 31. Obadiah 32. Jonah 33. Micah 34. Nahum 35. Habakkuk 36. Zephaniah 37. Haggai 38. Zechariah 39. Malachi

**The New Testament**

1. Matthew 2. Mark 3. Luke 4. John 5. Acts (of the Apostles) 6. Romans 7. 1 Corinthians 8. 2 Corinthians 9. Galatians 10. Ephesians 11. Philippians 12. Colossians 13. 1 Thessalonians 14. 2 Thessalonians 15. 1 Timothy 16. 2 Timothy 17. Titus 18. Philemon 19. Hebrews 20. James 21. 1 Peter 22. 2 Peter 23. 1 John 24. 2 John 25. 3 John 26. Jude 27. Revelation

**Definition:** The Bible is an objective, propositional revelation (1 Thess 2:13; 1 Cor 2:13), verbally inspired in every word (2 Tim 3:16), absolutely inerrant in the original documents, infallible, and God breathed. We teach the literal, grammatical historical interpretation of Scripture which affirms the belief that the opening chapters of Genesis present creation in six literal days (Gen 1:31; Exod 31:17). The Bible is God's written revelation to man, and thus the 66 books of the Bible given to us by the Holy Spirit constitute the plenary (inspired equally in all parts) Word of God (1 Cor 2:7-14; 2 Pet 1:20-21).

"When we embrace everything the Bible says about itself, then – and only then – will we believe what we should believe about the word of God, feel what we should feel, and do with the word of God what we ought to do."<sup>2</sup>

- Key Questions:
  - What should we believe about the Bible?
    - Everything it says is true – "The sum of Your word is truth, and every one of Your righteous ordinances is everlasting" (Ps. 119:142).
    - Everything it demands is right – "I know, O LORD, that your rules are righteous" (Ps. 119:75).
    - Everything it provides is good – "How blessed are those who observe His testimonies, who seek Him with all their heart" (Ps. 119:1-2).

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<sup>2</sup>Kevin DeYoung, *Taking God at His Word* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2014), 16.

- How should we feel about the Bible?
  - Delight – “I have rejoiced in the way of Your testimonies, as much as in all riches” (Ps. 119:14, cf. vv. 24, 47, 70, 77, 143, 174).

“I will lift up my hands toward your commandments, which I love, and I will meditate on your statutes” (Ps. 119:48).
  - Desire - “My soul is consumed with longing for your rules at all times” (Ps. 119:20, cf. vv. 5, 10, 17, 40, 131). And 14 times, the psalmist expresses a desire to know and understand the word (vv. 18, 19, 27, 29, 33, 34, 35, 64, 66, 73, 124, 125, 135, 169).
  - Dependence
    - For purity – “How can a young man keep his way pure? By keeping *it* according to Your word” (Ps. 119:9).
    - For holiness – “Your word I have treasured in my heart, That I may not sin against You” (Ps. 119:11).
    - For personal revival – “Plead my cause and redeem me; revive me according to Your word” (Ps. 119:154).
    - For peace – “Those who love Your law have great peace, and nothing causes them to stumble” (Ps. 119:165).
- What should we do with the Bible?
  - Study it – “I will meditate on Your precepts and regard Your ways” (Ps. 119:15).
  - Memorize it – “Your word I have treasured in my heart that I may not sin against You” (Ps. 119:11).
  - Obey – “Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep Your word” (Ps. 119:67).
  - Speak it – “I will also speak of Your testimonies before kings and shall not be ashamed” (Ps. 119:46).
  - Sing it – “Let my tongue sing of Your word, for all Your commandments are righteousness” (Ps. 119:172).
  - Praise God for it – “Seven times a day I praise You because of Your righteous ordinances” (Ps. 119:164).
  - Pray it – “I sought Your favor with all my heart; be gracious to me according to Your word” (Ps. 119:58).

- “This is the spiritual reaction the Spirit should produce in us when we fully grasp all the Bible teaches about itself.”<sup>3</sup>
- Bibliology can be broken into some of these categories:
  - Revelation, Inspiration, Necessity, Inerrancy, Authority, Clarity, Sufficiency, Illumination, Preservation, Canonicity
- The answer to the three major concerns of religion--God, humanity, salvation—require revelation.

## 1. What is Revelation?

Revelation is a divine activity: not, therefore, a human achievement. Revelation is not the same thing as discovery, or the dawning of insight, or the emerging of a bright idea. Revelation does not mean man finding God, but God finding man...In revelation, God is the agent as well as the object. It is not just that men speak about God, or for God; God speaks for Himself, and talks to us in person. . . God has spoken a word for the world, a word to which all people in all ages are summoned to listen and to respond.<sup>4</sup>

### A. Revelation is a redemptive act of God.

The revelation that Scripture discloses to us . . . is one single historical and organic whole, a mighty world-controlling and world-renewing system of testimonies and acts of God.<sup>5</sup>

- 1 Corinthians 15:3–4 “For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures”
- 1 Corinthians 1:18 “For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.”
- E.g., Stephen’s defense to the High Priest in Acts 7; in Acts 20:27 Paul says his preaching was “declaring the whole purpose of God.”

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<sup>3</sup> DeYoung, 22.

<sup>4</sup> J. I. Packer, *God Has Spoken: Revelation and the Bible* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 47.

<sup>5</sup> Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 1:340.

“[Revelation] is, in one word, itself a redemptive act of God and by no means the least important in the series of His redemptive acts.”<sup>6</sup>

B. Revelation is God’s power and authority<sup>7</sup>

- Whenever and wherever God reveals Himself, it is always with power and authority. It reveals His nature and his Lordship over all things.
- 1 Corinthians 2:4 “and my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power”
- Paul describes his revealed apostolic ministry in 2 Corinthians 6:7 “in the word of truth, in the power of God”
- 1 Thessalonians 1:5 “for our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as you know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake.”
- Isaiah 55:11 “So will My word be which goes forth from My mouth; It will not return to Me empty, Without accomplishing what I desire, And without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it.”

C. Revelation is God speaking.

- Ca. 530 times in Scripture “says the Lord”
- This also means that it is God’s presence (e.g., John 1 “word became flesh and dwelt”). Also burning bush, Mount Sinai, Holiest place in Tabernacle & Temple were all God speaking and revealing His presence.

*So how does God speak His revelation . . . ?*

## 2. God “speaks” through “General” Revelation

Definition: “The knowledge of God’s existence, character, and moral law, which comes through creation to all humanity.”<sup>8</sup> This revelation of God is general as it is generally available to all, through conscience and creation. However, it is significantly different than how God has spoken in Special Revelation (the Bible).

A. It is witnessed by the creation.

“The creation is the first revelation of God, the beginning and foundation of all subsequent revelation. The biblical concept...is rooted in that of creation.”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> B. B. Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1964), 81.

<sup>7</sup> The chief confessions of faith in Scripture are of God’s lordship (Deut 6:4-5; Rom 10:9; 1 Cor 12:3; Phil 2:11).

<sup>8</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 122.

<sup>9</sup> Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:307.

- Psalm 19:1–3 The heavens are telling of the glory of God; And their expanse is declaring the work of His hands. <sup>2</sup>Day to day pours forth speech, And night to night reveals knowledge. <sup>3</sup>There is no speech, nor are there words; Their voice is not heard.

Creation declares and “pours forth speech,” with not with words (v. 3).  
Creation, therefore, is not the “67<sup>th</sup> book of the Bible.”

[U]ltimately raises the question of a Designer. . . .The scientific method does not allow us to exclude data which lead to the conclusion that the universe, life and man are based on design. To be forced to believe...that everything in the universe happened by chance—would violate the very objectivity of science itself. Certainly there are those who argue that the universe evolved out of a random process, but what random process could produce the brain of a man or the system of the human eye?<sup>10</sup>

- Acts 14:17 “and yet He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good and gave you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness.”
- Romans 1:18–20 “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, <sup>9</sup>because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. <sup>20</sup>For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.

“Men cannot open their eyes without being compelled to see him.”<sup>11</sup>

B. It is witnessed by the *image of God*.

- Genesis 1:26–27 “Then God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” <sup>27</sup>God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.

“...a sense of divinity is by nature engraven on human hearts.”<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> From Wernher Von Braun quoted in “Wernher Von Braun: The Father of Space Flight,” in *Acts & Facts*, vol. 44, No. 1 (January 2015), 20–21.

<sup>11</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Louisville: WJK, 1960), 1:52.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 1:51.

- Acts 17:22 “So Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, “Men of Athens, I observe that you are very religious in all respects.
- Acts 17:28–29 “...or in Him we live and move and exist, as even some of your own poets have said, ‘For we also are His children.’”<sup>29</sup> “Being then the children of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and thought of man.
- Rom 2:14–15 – Paul answers the problem of how can Gentiles be sinners if they have never heard the Law of Israel and Paul says that God has written the DNA of “right and wrong” on the hearts/consciences and they know sin instinctually.

“All believers, regardless of their particular persuasion, though they may be naturalists in their heads, are supernaturalists in their heart.”<sup>13</sup>

Therefore, since from the beginning of the world there has been no region, no city, in short, no household, that could do without religion, there lies in this a tacit confession of a sense of deity inscribed in the hearts of all....Indeed, even idolatry is ample proof of this conception....[S]ome...who deny that God exists, yet...they from time to time feel an inkling of what they desire not to believe.<sup>14</sup>

There is within the human mind, and indeed by natural instinct, an awareness of divinity [*divinitatis sensum*]. This we take to be beyond controversy. To prevent anyone from taking refuge in the pretense of ignorance, God himself has implanted in all men a certain understanding of his divine majesty.<sup>15</sup>

#### C. Evaluation:

- God reveals himself universally and this is a universal observation.

“all religion rests on revelation, on belief in a conscious, voluntary, intentional disclosure of God to human beings.”<sup>16</sup>

- This revelation is limited (not salvific). It supplies us with a knowledge of God’s existence and some of his attributes of power such as goodness and justice but it leaves us unfamiliar with the person of Christ.

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<sup>13</sup> Bavinck, 1:308.

<sup>14</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 1:44–45.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., I.3.1.

<sup>16</sup> Bavinck, 1:286.



“It displays the works of creation and providence, but does not rise up to the works of redemption and grace which can become known to us by the word alone.”<sup>17</sup>

- Mankind rejects this revelation in his understanding (1 Cor 1:21) and in his sinful rebellion (Rom 1-3).
- Without a divine interpretation (Scripture), is unable and unwilling to evaluate or make proper conclusions about general revelation. It doesn't lead him to salvation and understanding, it leads him into further bondage and confusion.
- The religion of those outside of Christ is described as darkness,<sup>18</sup> ignorance,<sup>19</sup> imaginary wisdom,<sup>20</sup> and as unrighteous sin.<sup>21</sup>
- \*General revelation is enough to render humanity guilty before God, but not reconciled to God; it is enough to condemn, but not save (Rom 1:18-23).
- Every moment of beautiful sunset, mountain landscape, taste of good food, instance of laughter, recreational enjoyment, relational pleasure, and the like; they are reminders of our great accountability to God and corresponding responsibility to repent. Though they are moments of delight, they are, even more, moments of judgment (“...so that they are without excuse,” Rom. 1:20).
- We can look at the creation for a lifetime, yet, the creation will never speak the saving gospel of Jesus Christ to us.
- We need something more; a different type of revelation if we are going to be reconciled to right relationship with our Creator.

### **3. God speaks through “Special” Revelation**

Definition: The knowledge of God as revealed in the 66 books of the canon; the Bible.

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<sup>17</sup> Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1992), 1:57.

<sup>18</sup> Isa 9:1; 60:2; Luke 1:79; John 1:5; Eph 4:18.

<sup>19</sup> Acts 17:30; 1 Pet 1:14; Rom 1:10ff.

<sup>20</sup> 1 Cor 1:18f.; 2:6; 3:19f.

<sup>21</sup> Rom 1:24ff.; 3:9.



A. Special revelation is witnessed through acts, events, miracles, prophets, Apostles, as recorded and interpreted by Scripture.

- Hebrews 1:1-4 “God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, <sup>2</sup>in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world. <sup>3</sup>And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, <sup>4</sup>having become as much better than the angels, as He has inherited a more excellent name than they.

B. Jesus (the incarnate Word) is the main focus of the Bible (the written Word).

- He is the full and complete revelation of God (John 1:1; 18; 14:9; 17:6; Col 2:9).

He does not so much make a revelation of God as Himself is the revelation of God; He does not merely disclose God’s purpose of redemption, He is unto us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption.”<sup>22</sup>

“It remains impossible to avoid the fact that our only access to Christ and his words is through the content of the Bible.”<sup>23</sup>

**Excursus: “What Was Jesus’ View of Scripture?”**

- Jesus took a literal view of Adam & Eve (Matt 19:4), Jonah inside the fish (Matt 12:38-41), Solomon & Sheba (Matt 12:42), & Sodom & Gomorrah (Matt 10:15)
- The OT pointed to Him (John 5:39-47; Luke 24:25-26; 44-45)
- The Holy Spirit was given to insure the message of Scripture (John 14:16-17)
- The Spirit would inspire the Gospel accounts (John 14:25-26)
- The Spirit would inspire the message & accounts that form Acts (John 15:26-27)
- The Spirit would inspire the Epistles (John 16:12-15)
- Revelation is the final word of Jesus until He returns (Rev 1:2, 19; 22:18-19)

#### 4. Implications for us:

A. We can take God at His Word.

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<sup>22</sup> Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, 96.

<sup>23</sup> Timothy Ward, *Words of Life: Scripture as the Living and Active Word of God* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP, 2009), 44.

“Holy Scripture is not an arid story or ancient chronicle but the ever-living, eternally youthful Word, which God, now and always, issues to his people. It is the eternally ongoing speech of God to us.”<sup>24</sup>

- Psalm 119:42 “So I will have an answer for him who reproaches me, For I trust in Your word.”

B. We can trust the character of God.

- He is personal (Psalm 119:73 “Your hands made me and fashioned me; Give me understanding, that I may learn Your commandments.”)
- He is good (Psalm 119:42 “So I will have an answer for him who reproaches me, For I trust in Your word.”)
- He is faithful (Psalm 119:86 “All Your commandments are faithful.” Psalm 119:90 “Your faithfulness continues throughout all generations; You established the earth, and it stands.”)
- He sustains us (Psalm 119:116 “Sustain me according to Your word, that I may live; And do not let me be ashamed of my hope. Psalm 119:117 “Uphold me that I may be safe, That I may have regard for Your statutes continually.”)
- Look for the character of God in Psalm 119.

C. We, the Church, must labor for the ministry of the Word

- We, the church, have an obligation to read (1 Tim 4:13), obey (John 14:23), uphold (1 Tim 3:15), and preach (2 Tim 4:1-2) the Word of God that sanctifies us by the Spirit (John 17:17).
- Older men must be “sound in the faith” (Titus 2:2) and older women must “teach what is good” (Titus 2:3). This implies well-grounded in and teaching/discipling others in the word.
- Deacons must “hold to the faith” (1 Tim 3:9)
- Elders must be able to handle the Word of God with instructive insight (1 Tim 3:2), able to instruct in sound doctrine and refute error (Titus 1:9).
- All believers must accurately handle the Word with studied worship (2 Tim 2:15).

Contrast this with the words of Roman Catholic Cardinal Hosius: “Better would it be for the interests of the church had no Scripture ever existed.” Likewise, Valentina who said, “It would be better had it not been written.”<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Bavinck, 1:384.

<sup>25</sup> Cited in Turretin, 1:57.

D. We have communication from God for the purpose of communion with God.

- John 15:7-8 “If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. <sup>8</sup>“My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples.
- Psalm 119-the way of blessing is found exclusively in walking in the Law of the Lord not anything else.

E. We see the need of the lost (in general revelation).

It [i.e., the *image of God* in general revelation] keeps human beings from degrading themselves into animals. It binds them to a supersensible world. It maintains in them the awareness that they have been created in God’s image and can only find rest in God. General revelation preserves humankind in order that it can be found and healed by Christ and until it is.<sup>26</sup>

F. We can rightly interpret general revelation (creation) through the lens of special revelation (Scripture).

The “more we learn about God’s creation, the more I am impressed with the orderliness and unerring perfection of the natural laws that govern it. In this perfection, man – the scientist – catches a glimpse of the Creator and his design for nature. . . .”

Noting further that the Bible is the “most effective bulwark ever built against the erosive effects of time...The Bible is...the revelation of God’s nature and love.”<sup>27</sup>

G. We see the redemptive purposes of God.

Revelation is our personal Creator and Upholder addressing us in order to make friends with us. We do not find Him; rather, He finds us...it is a word of pardon and peace, a message of reconciliation by the death of Jesus and of ‘a way back to God from the dark paths of sin.’<sup>28</sup>

“Revelation therefore is always an act of grace; in it God condescends to meet his creature, a creature made in his image.”<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Bavinck, 1:322.

<sup>27</sup> Cited in “Wernher Von Braun: The Father of Space Flight,” 21.

<sup>28</sup> Packer, 61.

<sup>29</sup> Bavinck, 1:310.

CONCLUSION:

- 1) There are two kinds of revelation given by God; General and Special Revelation.
- 2) General Revelation is that knowledge of God generally available to all humanity through creation and conscience (e.g. God's eternity as we wonder about how long the creation has existed; God's power as we look at the stars consider that nothing can make itself; God's intelligence as we consider the micro-machines at work in the trillions of cells in our body; God's kindness as we taste a ripe strawberry that just happens to work well with our tastebuds; God's wisdom in the birth of a child; God's righteousness as we experience guilt when we violate what we understand to be right and wrong; etc., etc., etc.)
- 3) We can only know God in a limited fashion through General Revelation: we cannot know the gospel through GR. We require Special Revelation.
- 4) Special Revelation is the knowledge of God given through His word, that is otherwise undiscoverable through conscience and creation.