

Systematic Theology 1 (TH3)

Doctrine of the Word of God

January 31, 2014

Ross Arnold, Winter 2014
Lakeside institute of Theology

Systematic Theology 1 (TH3)

1. Introduction to Systematic Theology
2. Doctrine of the Word of God
3. Doctrine of God
4. Doctrines of Creation and Providence
5. Doctrines of the “Supernatural” –
Miracles, Prayer, Angels and Demons
6. Doctrine of Christ
7. Doctrine of the Holy Spirit; Final Exam

What is “Theology?”

- **Theology:** the study of God (from Greek words *theo-* “God,” and *logos-* “study”). *Christian* theology is the study and effort to understand God as He has revealed Himself in Scripture.
- **Biblical Theology:** more specifically, the study of doctrines found in the Bible, arranged according to their chronological and/or historical background. (i.e., theology of the Pentateuch, or the theology of John’s writings, etc.)
- **Systematic Theology:** the division of theological doctrines by systematic categories or groupings, in order to better understand their final meaning and relevance for today. (i.e., theology of angels, of salvation, etc.)
- **Dogmatic Theology:** a form of systematic theology, used to articulate and defend the theological doctrines of a particular organized church body. (i.e., Roman Catholic dogma; Presbyterian dogma; dispensational theology, etc.)

Doctrine of Revelation

The Doctrine of Revelation is the theology of God having revealed Himself to humanity.

What is “revelation?”

- God’s disclosure to human beings of truth or knowledge they otherwise would not know and are incapable of discovering apart from it being revealed by God.

“Revelation” – from the Greek word “*apokalupsis*,” meaning “a disclosure or unveiling.” (This is where we get the words “apocalypse” and “apocalyptic.”)

Implied in the very concept of “revelation” is both personality and intent.

Doctrine of Revelation

The Doctrine of Revelation is foundational to both Judaism and Christianity. If our faith is based only on the cultural or religious ideas of a group of people from the past (as some believe), rather than on God's revelation, then we have no assurance it is true.

- Revelation is not concerned with knowledge we once had and have somehow forgotten.
- Revelation is not the kind of knowledge that can be obtained by research.
- Revelation comes to us from outside ourselves and (especially in regard to “special revelation”) is beyond our ability to discover on our own.

Doctrine of Revelation

Our God is a God who SPEAKS:

- God spoke to Adam.
- God spoke to Noah.
- God spoke to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.
- God spoke to and through Moses.
- God spoke to and through the Prophets.
- God spoke through the Incarnation of Christ.
- God spoke to and through the Apostles.
- God spoke & speaks through the Holy Spirit.
- God speaks to us through the written Word

Doctrine of Revelation

God is a Person, and so...

- As is true in relationship with any person, there are things about Him we can know only if He tells us.
- God is transcendent – high above us and different from us – so we can only know Him if He condescends to speak to us.
- God created us as rational, communicative beings, so it is reasonable that he would communicate with us in rational ways – in words we can understand.

TWO basic forms of Divine Revelation

- General Revelation: God's revealing of aspects of His truth through "natural means" – observation of the created physical universe, philosophy and reasoning, human conscience, and providential history – which is plainly available to all humankind.
- Special Revelation: God's revealing of particular and specific aspects of His truth through "supernatural means" such as miracles, direct communication to people, or through written Scripture. "Special Revelation" is especially concerned with matters of redemption – how we can be made right in our relationship with God.

General Revelation

The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. ² Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge. ³ There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard. ⁴ Their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world.

Psalm 19:1-4

...since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. ²⁰ For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities — his eternal power and divine nature — have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.

Romans 1:19-20

“A reverent contemplation of the physical universe with its order and design and beauty tells us not only that God is, but also that God is a certain kind of God.” Leon Morris

General Revelation

- General Revelation works, at least in part, because God made humanity in His image, and in doing so He left His imprint on humanity.
- John Calvin (and others) maintained that an immediate knowledge of God is based on our being made in His image and on Common Grace – that is, those benefits which are experienced by, or intended for, the whole human race without distinction. Common Grace includes the way in which God “*curbs the destructive power of sin, maintains in a measure the moral order of the universe, thus making an orderly life possible, distributes in varying degrees gifts and talents among men, promotes the development of science and art, and showers untold blessings upon the children of men.*” (Louis Berkhof, summarizing Calvin on Common Grace)

Special Revelation

Surely the Sovereign Lord does nothing without revealing his plan to his servants the prophets.

Amos 3:7

No one knows the Son except the Father, & no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

Matthew 11:27

Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."¹⁷ Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven.

Matthew 16:16-18

No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him"—¹⁰ but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit.

1 Corinthians 2:9-10

Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation.²¹ For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

2 Peter 1:20-21

Special Revelation

“Special Revelation is redemptive revelation. It publishes the good tidings that the holy and merciful God promises salvation as a divine gift to man who cannot save himself (OT) and that he now fulfilled that promise in the gift of His Son in whom all men are called to believe (NT).”

Carl Henry

Special Revelation is the communication of one Person to other persons in a number of ways, including especially...

- **Verbal and Propositional** – God has spoken to His creatures in words; rational ideas have been put forward in understandable sentences. (Implicit in this is an understanding that revelation contains propositional truths; that revelation includes statements that are informative and have truth value.)

Special Revelation

- Contrary to modern ideas (*Rudolph Bultmann and others*) God's revelation must be seen as more than just a relational ***personal encounter*** free from any propositional truth. (As in *"Don't bother me with doctrine; I just want to have a relationship with Jesus..."*)

“Revelation is certainly more than the giving of theological information, but it is not and cannot be less. Personal friendship with God and man grows just as human friendships do – namely, through talking; and talking means informative statements, and informative statements are propositions. To say that revelation is non-propositional is actually to depersonalize it... To maintain that we may know God without God actually speaking to us in words is really to deny God is personal, or at any rate that knowing Him is a truly personal relationship...”

J.I. Packer

Special Revelation

Special Revelation occurs in **THREE WAYS**:

1. Through Spoken Word from God – Adam, Abraham, Moses, the Prophets.
2. Through the Written Word – what God told the Prophets and Apostles to write down, for our sakes, and which has been communicated to us in Scripture.
3. Through the Word Made Flesh – the revelation of God through the Incarnate Christ.

Doctrine of the Word of God

Systematic Theology must begin with God's revealed words to us, especially as communicated in the Written Word of Scripture, which is the source of all our theological information and the foundation of all we believe.

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. *2 Timothy 3:16-17*

Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation of things. For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. *2 Peter 1:20-21*

Doctrine of the Word of God

“This is the principle that distinguishes our religion from all others, that we know that God hath spoken to us and are fully convinced that the prophets did not speak of themselves, but as organs of the Holy Spirit uttered only that which they had been commissioned from heaven to declare. All those who wish to profit from the Scripture must first accept this as a settled principle, that the Law and the Prophets are not teachings handed on at the pleasure of men, or produced by men’s minds as their source, but are dictated by the Holy Spirit.

“We owe to Scripture the same reverence as we owe to God, since it has its only source in him and has nothing of human origin mixed with it.”

John Calvin

Doctrine of the Word of God

The Word of God in Scripture – as the true and complete testimony of the salvation available in Jesus – is necessary for salvation:

“Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

¹⁴ How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?

¹⁵ And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!”

Romans 10:13-15

Doctrine of the Word of God

The authority of Scripture is affirmed by Jesus & his attitude towards Scripture.

- Jesus responded to the Devils' temptations, to challenges from both Pharisees and Sadducees, and explained his actions by quoting from Scripture.

“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. ¹⁸ For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. ¹⁹ Therefore anyone who sets aside one of the least of these commands and teaches others accordingly will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

Matthew 5:17-19

Doctrine of the Word of God

The Bible is the Word of God both because God spoke in giving us the Scriptures, and because He continues to speak through these words .

Through the infallible and authoritative Word, the Holy Spirit continues to interpret and apply the Word to receptive human hearts.

- “My conscience has been taken captive by the Word of God.”
Martin Luther, at the Diet of Worms

“Scripture indeed is self-authenticating.” John Calvin

Doctrine of the Word of God

The question of the accuracy and reliability of Scripture:

Inspiration: The doctrine that the Bible is a product of God's own revelation, as the Holy Spirit spoke to and through the Prophets and Apostles.

Canon: The list of books accepted as being God's inspired words to us, and so included in the Bible.

Infallibility: Without failing; completely adequate in accomplishing its goal and purpose.

Inerrancy: The belief that the Bible, as God's own words, must have been completely true and without error in any part in the original autographs.

Doctrine of the Word of God

The Canon of Scripture is now closed:

Do not add to what I command you and do not subtract from it, but keep the commands of the Lord your God that I give you. Deuteronomy 4:1-2

“Every word of God is flawless; he is a shield to those who take refuge in him. ⁶ Do not add to his words, or he will rebuke you and prove you a liar. Proverbs 30:5-6

I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this scroll: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to that person the plagues described in this scroll. ¹⁹ And if anyone takes words away from this scroll of prophecy, God will take away from that person any share in the tree of life and in the Holy City, which are described in this scroll. Rev. 22:18-19

Doctrine of the Word of God

The Canon of Scripture is now closed:

In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, ² but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe. Hebrews 1:1-2