

# A Light in the Darkness

THE DOCTRINE OF THE WORD OF GOD

# Why Study the Doctrine of the Word?

- Foundational to everything in the Christian life
- One of the most under taught doctrines in the church
- Far more nuanced and complicated than generally assumed
- Theological, apologetic and devotional value

# Content Outline

- Module 1: Revelation
- Module 2: Canon
- Module 3: Transmission
- Module 4: Translation
- Module 5: Inspiration
- Module 6: Inerrancy and Infallibility
- Module 7: Authority and Necessity
- Module 8: Clarity and Sufficiency
- Module 9: Illumination

# The Difficulty of Defining “Revelation”

- Both in every day language and Scripture, the concepts of “revelation” and “revealing” are used with quite a bit of variety. This exacerbates the challenge of understanding what we mean when we talk of theological “revelation.”
- **Shedd**: “... revelation in its general and wide signification is any species of knowledge of which God is the ultimate source and cause.”
  - **A Difficulty for Shedd**: of which kinds of knowledge is God *not* the *ultimate* source and cause?
- **Erickson** (2<sup>nd</sup> edition of *Christian Theology*): “God’s manifestation of himself”
  - **A Difficulty for Erickson**: Isn’t ‘manifestation’ just a synonym for ‘revelation’ in this case? Does this help us understand anything about what revelation *is*?

# Defining “Revelation” Continued...

- Berkhof: “When we speak of revelation, we use the term in the strict sense of the word. It is not something in which God is passive, a mere ‘becoming manifest,’ but something in which He is actively making Himself known... a purposeful act on the part of the Living God.
  - A Difficulty for Berkhof: Ultimately, what would it mean for God to passively reveal himself? Which acts of God are not done purposefully?
- Chafer: “...the divine act of communicating to man what otherwise man would not know.”
  - A Difficulty for Chafer: Does scriptural content that can be known from external sources (e.g., “Jerusalem is a city in Israel”) not count as revelation?

# The Difficulty of Defining “Revelation?”

- Resisting Oversimplification

- While definition/analyses are helpful, we must resist oversimplification for the sake of theological expediency. A “component element” analyses seems best:

- Revelation: making known that which was either previously unknown or otherwise unknowable

- “making known”: objective (manifested) vs subjective (communicated)

- “that which”: the content can be a person, information, feelings, thoughts, an action or something that can be known through perception/reason.

- “unknown”: contingent or necessary ignorance of content apart from the revelation.

- Divine Revelation: revelation disclosed by God

# General, Natural or Original Revelation

- The Core Idea: Revelation that is available through the natural world, the content of which is not salvific
  - General: captures the idea that this kind of revelation is *available to everyone*
  - Natural: emphasizes the *physical creation and nature*
  - Original: highlights that this kind of revelation has been *present since the beginning* and is not a particular event, *per se*.
    - While all of the terms have strengths and weaknesses, we will use ‘natural revelation’ to encompass all these nuances and to articulate the core idea.
- The question of whether general/natural/original revelation is available to infants and/or the mentally impaired is outside the scope of this module, but the distinction between subjective vs. objective revelation is helpful here.