

# A Light in the Darkness

THE DOCTRINE OF THE WORD OF GOD

# 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.

# Natural Revelation | Five Key Passages

## – Ps. 19:1-6

- Delitzsh: “the *doxa*, which God has conferred upon the creature as the reflection of His own, is reflected back from it, and given back to God as it were in acknowledgement of its origin.”

## – Rom. 1:16-32

- Reason and sense perception can discern from the visible world that there is a creator, along with some basic attributes of the creator.
- This is sufficient for holding people responsible (“without excuse”), but not for allowing saving knowledge of God.

# Natural Revelation | Five Key Passages

## – Rom. 2:11-16

- Everyone is endowed with a conscious awareness of right and wrong and a conscience that experiences the feeling of guilt in wrongdoing.
- Because Paul does not say *how*, exactly, God writes the law on peoples' hearts, there is discussion about whether or not this is properly considered “natural revelation.”

## – Acts 14:15-17

- God's testimony to himself here is his providential preservation of life as the “living” and active God, as well as the generous (good) provider of gladness!

# Natural Revelation | Five Key Passages

## – Acts 17:16-29

- The *implicit* argument Paul makes to people who are already theists is:
  - 1) God exists
  - 2) he made everything, so we are his offspring
  - 3) offspring are like their parents, to make the points that
    - the rise and fall of nations shows God's providential hand
    - God is not made of gold, silver or stone
    - God does not live in manmade temples
    - God is not far from us
- Could we know those these things *apart* from Acts 17 (e.g., special revelation)?
  - It seems hard to say, only because we *do* know Acts 17. But at the very least, the passage suggests that these things could/should be realized.

# Summary | Natural Revelation

- It seems that natural revelation discloses to all humans, regardless of time or place, that God exists along with some of his attributes (eternity, wisdom, power, goodness) an awareness of what is right and wrong in God's world, a we have done wrong with the accompanying sense of guilt.

# Special Revelation

- Ironically, “special revelation” is simultaneously:
  - Broader than natural revelation in that it addresses more issues
  - Narrower than natural revelation in that its content has more specific intent and is not available to everyone, everywhere at all times.
- Forms of Special Revelation
  - Miraculous Acts
    - Ex. 4:2-4; 14; 1 Kgs 18; 2 Kgs 20:8-11; all the miracles of Jesus, climaxing in the resurrection
  - Direct Communication of Information
    - General Conversation (Gen 3:9-19; 4:9)
    - Commands (Gen 12:1; Ex. 19:21)
    - Promises (Gen. 12:2; Ex. 20)
    - Answer to Questions (1 Sam 10:22; Job 38-41)
    - Information about the Future (Ex. 18-22; Isa 42:9)



# Special Revelation

- Theophanies
  - Theophany: The visible manifestation or appearance of God.
    - Embodied Theophanies (Gen 16:10; 17:1; 32:22-32)
    - Elemental Theophanies (Ex. 3:4-6; 13:21; 19:18; Acts 9:3)
  - Often, theophanies are accompanied with direction communication of information, but are obviously more than mere speech.
- Dreams
  - Gen 41:25; Num. 12:6; 1 Sam. 28:6; Dan. 2:3; Matt. 2:21
    - That the meaning of dreams was often not understood without interpretation does not make them less genuine revelation.

# Special Revelation

- Visions
  - Unlike dreams, visions typically occur when the subject is awake, sometimes even apparently transporting them beyond their material environment in some supernatural way.
    - Dan. 9:24-27; Ez. 37:1-14; Acts 9:10; 2 Cor. 12:1-4; Revelation)
- Symbols/Sign-Acts
  - Jer. 28:10; Ez. 37:15-23; Acts 21:10-11
- Jesus Christ
  - The fullest and clearest manifestation of God's nature is revealed in Jesus (Jn. 14:9; Heb. 1:1)
    - Christ revealed himself physically in history and continues to reveal himself to individuals in salvation—united with Christ (Eph. 2:6; 5:31-32; 1 Cor 6:15-17), the direct presence of the indwelling Spirit (Jn. 14:17; 1 Cor. 6:19; Rom. 8:16)) and new hearts (Ez. 36:26-27) with a new law “written” on them (Jer. 31:33)

# Special Revelation

- Everything that Jesus said—even those things not recorded—can rightly be considered special revelation (Lk. 24:27; Jn. 21:25)
- Private Experience
  - Matt. 10:19; Acts. 19:21; Rom. 8:16
  - Private experience, like illumination (see below) is always to be regarded as *epistemically* submissive to God's word and evaluated as such (1 Kgs 13:11-22; 2 Cor 11:14; Gal. 1:8).
- God's Written Word
  - God's own finger (Ex. 20; Dan. 5:5; John 8:8)
  - The Scriptures (2 Tim. 3:16-17) – **This will be the principal subject of this course**