



## SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

### 1. The Doctrine of Revelation

Rev. Dr John M. Brentnall

#### ***Introduction***

Theology proper investigates the revealed knowledge of God. God alone knows Himself, and no-one can know anything at all about Him unless He reveals Himself in a way we can understand. “For what man knoweth the things of a man save the spirit of man which is in him? Even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God” (1 Corinthians 2:11).

This view of theology presupposes three truths, namely, that:

#### *1. God has revealed Himself.*

(a) In Creation. “The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament showeth His handiwork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night showeth knowledge. There is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard.” (Psalm 19:1-3). As Cornelius Van Til says: “The entire universe is lit up by God.”

(b) In Christ. “That which was from the beginning . . . of the Word of life . . . was manifested unto us. That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us.’ (1 John 1:3). About the knowledge of God in Christ, John Owen majestically says: “In Him God was, in Him He dwelt, in Him He is known, in Him He is worshipped according to His will, in Him there is a nearer approach to us by the divine nature than ever could enter into the heart of man to conceive. In His Person, and in the work it was designed unto, the wisdom, power, goodness, love, grace, mercy, holiness and faithfulness of God are manifested to us. This is the one blessed image of the invisible God, wherein we may learn, wherein we may contemplate and adore, all His divine perfections.”

(c) In Scripture. “The mighty God, even the Lord, hath spoken, and called the earth from the rising of the sun unto the going down thereof.” (Psalm 50:1). “God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in

time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son.” (Hebrews 1:1-2). Here the great Robert Bruce of Kinnaird comes to our aid. Besides God’s general revelation of Himself in creation, he says, “He hath manifested Himself to His Kirk by a special and particular revelation . . . by an heavenly light and supernatural understanding . . . This supernatural light and understanding is offered by the Word and is given to us by the Spirit of God. . . . Therefore there is no way to seek God truly but in the mirror of His own Word and Spirit conjunctly; that is, by the Word piercing the ear and the Spirit piercing the heart.”

### *2. Man in sin rejects the knowledge of God.*

“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold [down] the truth in unrighteousness; because that which may be known of God is manifest in them, for God hath showed it unto them.” (Romans 1:18-19). “But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.” (1 Corinthians 1:14). Commenting on the phrase in Romans: “who hold the truth in unrighteousness”, William S. Plumer says: “The truth here referred to is the truth in regard to the nature and will of God, however made known; in particular as manifest in the works of nature and in the government of the world. Calvin: ‘The truth is the true knowledge of God.’ The word rendered ‘hold’ . . . seems to mean ‘possess’, though some fine scholars prefer ‘imprison’, ‘suppress’, ‘hinder’, ‘detain’, ‘confine’ or ‘oppose’; Chalmers has ‘stifle’. When any truth is possessed without a corresponding practice it is held wickedly, hurtfully, wrongfully.”

### *3. Man must be delivered from his spiritual blindness in order to know God, the true Object of theology, aright.*

“And this is life eternal, that they might know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent.” (John 17.3). “But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost, which He shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour.” (Titus 3:4-7). Comments David Dickson aptly: “No light save

the light of God's revealed Word in the Holy Scriptures for the mirror, no light but the light of God's Spirit illuminating the mirror, can make a man understand, or believe, or sensibly discern, the wisdom, comfort and felicity which are held forth to His Church in His ordinances, [ie regarding "God reconciled through Christ."] and felt in himself by experience."

The etymology of the term *theology* sheds some light on its nature. Theology is either 1. "the speaking of God" Himself or 2. "the speaking about God" by man. If we accept the first of these understandings, we view theology as "God speaking" or "some-one speaking for God." The church father Theodoret applied this understanding to the prophets and apostles of the Old and New Testaments. In this case theology is identical with Holy Scripture.

Usage, however, suggests that the second of these etymological origins is the more common. When the astronomer Tycho Brahe said: "We must think God's thoughts after Him," he indicated that our thinking must begin with God before descending to man and the universe. This approach is exemplified in the profound Scottish theologian, John 'Rabbi' Duncan. He confessed: "The tendency of all my thinking is not to look upwards from man to God, but downwards from God to man." With Augustine, therefore, we reduce our definition of theology simply to the knowledge of God.

Nevertheless, we must be clear as to the kind of knowledge this is.

There is a knowledge of God possessed exclusively by our Lord Jesus Christ in His human nature, the result of its union with His divine nature. This is called the **'theology of union.'** When our Lord prayed: "O righteous Father, the world hath not known Thee: but I have known Thee" (John 17:25), He was referring to this theology of union. This is not the kind of knowledge we may have.

There is also a knowledge of God possessed by His elect in their state of heavenly blessedness. This is called the **'theology of vision.'** David refers to it in Psalm 17:15—"As for me, I will behold Thy face in righteousness." John eagerly anticipates it when he writes: "When He shall appear, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is." (1 John 3:2). This knowledge shall not be ours until we see God in glory.

There is also a knowledge of God acquired here on earth by those whom God loves. It is termed the **‘theology of study.’** This is the knowledge afforded us in that great covenant promise: “All shall know Me, from the least to the greatest.” (Hebrews 8:11). As John Owen says: “None, upon the account of their difference from others . . . are excepted or excluded from the grace of this promise; they shall all not only be taught to know, but they all shall actually know the Lord; that is, the whole Church shall be taught of God, and shall so learn as to come unto Him by saving faith in Christ.” This is the knowledge that God is pleased to give us as we study His Word by the light of His Holy Spirit.

All this brings us to the conclusion (which the Holy Spirit teaches us in our own experience) that we are wholly dependent on God for our knowledge of theology. In all other studies the investigating subject places himself ABOVE the object to be studied. But in relation to God we stand BENEATH Him, and find ourselves dependent on Him. So we must always acknowledge with the Psalmist: “In Thy light shall we see light,” (Psalm 36:9); “The entrance of Thy words giveth light,” (Psalm 119:130); and cry to Him: “Open Thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of Thy law.” (Psalm 119:18). All our knowledge of God, therefore, is imparted by Him, and received by us. And when He is pleased to impart it to us, all we must do is believe it, understand it, reflect on it, absorb it, experience it, practice it and urge others to do the same.

Abraham Kuyper summarizes the only appropriate attitude when he writes: “In his entire theology the theologian must stand in the presence of God as his God, and as soon as for a single instant he looks away from the living God, in order to engage himself with an idea about God over which he will sit as judge, he is lost in phraseology, because the Object of his knowledge has already vanished from his view. As you cannot kneel in prayer before your God as worshipper in any other way except as dependent on Him, so also as theologian you can receive no knowledge of God when you refuse to receive your knowledge of Him in absolute dependence upon Him.”

Yet with His own assurance that He will ‘teach sinners in the way’, and ‘guide the meek in judgment’ (Psalm 25:8-9), we may embark on the study of God in the sure knowledge that what we learn from Him is no

fantasy of the imagination, but true knowledge of the only true and living God. As John ‘Rabbi’ Duncan says: “If we are made in the image of God, we can reach and positively apprehend Him in whose image we are made.”

Let us then heed the fervent exhortation of the Puritan Richard Alleine: “Study your God, Christian. Roll His sweetness over in your mouth. See what you have, laid up in Him. Read His glorious and wonderful names over and over. Walk through those chambers of His presence, His glorious attributes. Look at His power and see what that will do for you. Look at His wisdom and see what that will do for you. Look at His goodness, His mercy, His faithfulness, His holiness, and see what treasures are laid up for you in each one of these. Enter into all these because they are yours. Let your eye be there, let your meditation be there, let your soul be there every day—for there is your portion. Search out your God and know Him as He is.”

Theology, then, is not merely the reception of information about God, it is rather our knowing God Himself. Accordingly, “divinity [the old name for theology] is the doctrine of living to God.” (William Ames). Only when our knowledge of God attains to what is written of Enoch, namely, that he walked with God, can it be said to bear its proper fruit in us. As Abraham Kuyper reminds us: “Only when your God and you have met each other, and associate and walk together, does religion live in your heart.”

Theology should, thus, be the most delightful study we could ever engage in; for “it is the very life and blessedness of a creature so to see what God is as to be pleased and delighted that He is what He is.” (John Love). At the same time, the very distance between God and ourselves should constantly remind us that our search for that full and satisfying knowledge of God which constitutes our highest bliss must go on and on, till we arrive at the point where no further investigation is required; that is, when we see Him face to face. Only then shall we know even as we are known. (1 Corinthians 13:12).

Yet despite the deep consciousness of our limitations (the fruit of both our creature-hood and our sinner-ship) we should persevere in our systematic pursuit of God. For, as Herman Witsius remarks: “All the

truths of our holy faith are exceedingly precious, and are at the same time intimately connected together.”

Trusting, then, in God’s promised help, we now consider the great question: “How may God be known?” In answer, Reformed theology recognizes two aspects of revelation: general and special. Whereas general revelation embraces the whole creation, its origin and God’s providential control of it throughout its entire history, special revelation embraces the Lord Jesus Christ and the Holy Scriptures. The latter are God’s own testimony to the former, the swaddling-clothes in which the Saviour of the world is wrapped.

### ***1. General Revelation***

#### *A. Holy Scripture speaks of creation’s testimony to its Maker.*

Besides the passages from Psalm 19 and Romans 1 already quoted, there are two other passages particularly germane to our purpose:

“We . . . preach unto you that you should turn from these vanities [ie idols] unto the living God, which made heaven and earth, and the sea, and all things that are therein: who in times past suffered all nations to walk in their own ways. Nevertheless, He left not Himself without witness, in that He did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness.” (Acts 14.15-17).

“God, that made the world and all things therein, seeing that He is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands . . . For in Him we live, and move, and have our being.” (Acts 17.24,28).

Such statements inform us that God is always speaking to us through the entire creation. They also indicate that we know, in the telling phrase of Francis Schaeffer, that “He is there, and He is not silent.” Psalm 8, David’s night meditation, and Psalm 19, his day meditation, disclose the same truth. The whole created universe is a revelation of God. The proof of God’s presence is not to be sought here or there. It presses relentlessly on us everywhere.

The passage in Acts 17 actually tells us why God has given men this revelation of Himself: “that they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after Him, and find Him, though He be not far from every one

of us.” (verse 27). This is a most moving statement. It informs us that God desires communion with His creature man!

*B. Scripture also teaches that in the heart of every human being there is a wistful ‘sense of God’ which remains unfulfilled until we actually come to know Him.*

Although the patriarch Job had grace besides this natural longing, he expressed it perfectly when he cried out: “Oh that I knew that I might find Him!” (Job 23:3). This is what theologians term ‘the innate knowledge of God.’ Everyone is vaguely aware of God’s presence in his life, and everyone knows that he will have to come to terms with Him, even though that may involve the complete rejection of Him. This natural sense has been put in man’s heart by God Himself.

*C. Scripture also informs us that God has placed a ‘deputy’ in every soul of man which records our every thought, desire, motive, word and deed on His behalf. This is conscience.*

Let us hear Romans 2:12,14,15: “For as many as have sinned without law [ie the written law of the ten commandments] shall also perish without law: and as many as have sinned in the law [ie the self-same moral law given through Moses] shall be judged by the law . . . For when the Gentiles, which have not the [written] law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: which show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the meanwhile accusing or else excusing one another.” In this way God reveals Himself in the very core of our being. Says Stephen Charnock in this connection: “If there were no God, conscience were useless; the operations of it would have no foundation if there were not an eye to take notice and a hand to punish or reward. . . . The accusations of conscience evidence the omniscience and the holiness of God; the terrors of conscience, the justice of God; the approbations of conscience, the goodness of God.”

*D. Furthermore, even our natural reason bears witness for God.*

“Understand, ye brutish among the people: and ye fools, when will ye be wise? He that planted the ear, shall He not hear? He that formed the eye, shall He not see? He that chastiseth the heathen, shall He not correct? He that teacheth man knowledge, shall not He know?” (Psalm 94:8-10).

Comments George Horne: “It is God who bestoweth on man the powers of seeing and hearing, and therefore . . . He Himself must needs be possessed of those powers in the highest perfection. . . . It is God who hath instructed the world, by His revelations, in religious knowledge.” David’s self-reflection in Psalm 139 is similar in import.

This knowledge forms the basis of Jonathan Edwards’s distinction between man’s natural ability and his moral inability to know God. Through the noetic effects and moral ravages of sin man cannot know God as He should be known. But through the natural faculties that God has created in him he actually does know God. This knowledge is true, though very defective.

Thus the Scriptures clearly recognize the fact that His works both outside and within man reveal His being and attributes.

It is on the basis of this natural knowledge of God that men have tried to reach Him. From the dawn of history they have toiled in this task. They have done so by two main methods. One is to follow the kind of instinctive, intuitive feeling we have that by some ‘inner light’, ‘transcendental meditation’ and ‘absorption of self into the Infinite’ we shall arrive at God. This is Mysticism. The other is based on the notion that by a process of pure reasoning we must inevitably arrive at belief in God. This is Rationalism. All false religion is based on one or the other of these, or a combination of both.

The answer of God Himself to such efforts is brief but emphatically clear: “The world by wisdom knew not God.” (1 Corinthians 1:21).

This is so for two reasons:

(1) Poor, weak, finite man can neither erect nor climb a ladder to the Infinite God. “Canst thou by searching find out God?” asks Zophar rhetorically (Job 11.7).

(2) Sin has so vitiated our minds and wills that we are both blind to see and powerless to take the only way there is to know God so as to enjoy Him. If we fail to see God in His works of creation and providence, it is not because He is not there. It is because we are blind. And if we refuse to hear God speaking to us through conscience and reason, it is not because He is silent. It is because we have made ourselves deaf.

Jonathan Edwards is correct, therefore, to deny the traditional ‘theistic evidences’ (or proofs for the existence of God) any value in acquiring a saving knowledge of Him. “The Gospel of the blessed God,” he says, reminding us of the only way in which God may be thus known, “does not go abroad a-begging for its evidence . . . It has its highest and most proper evidence in itself . . . He that truly sees the divine, transcendent, supreme glory of those things which are divine, does, as it were, know their divinity intuitively. He not only argues that they are divine, but he sees that they are divine . . . A view of this divine glory directly convinces the mind of the divinity of these things, as this glory is in itself a direct, clear and all-conquering evidence of it.” While the ‘evidences’, he continues, may be useful to bring unbelievers to serious consideration of the claims of God, even to sub-serve God’s purpose of begetting faith in them, as well as to confirm the faith of existing believers, they can never draw men out of their natural state in sin to the knowledge of God as pacified and reconciled.

This fact points us to the insufficiency of natural or general revelation.

*Firstly, it cannot answer the question, “How can man be just with God? or, How can God be just and yet justify the ungodly?” (Charles Hodge).*

Men have anxiously pondered this question for ages without reaching an answer. Neither Mysticism nor Rationalism are able to deal with it. And yet man feels both the need to be freed from his guilt and his inability to atone for that guilt before going to meet his Judge. Besides this, God Himself barred the way into His presence as soon as Adam sinned. (Genesis 3:24). Try as he might, man cannot put himself right with God by his own unaided efforts. The prophet Micah expresses this hopeless state when he says: “Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God? Shall I come before Him with burnt-offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my first-born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?” (Micah 6:6-7).

*Secondly, general revelation cannot lead us to trust in Christ, who is the only Mediator between God and men, and the only way to God.*

Yet trust in Christ is declared in Scripture to be absolutely essential to salvation. “He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him.” (John 3:36). For the saving knowledge of God we must go to Christ. It is nowhere to be found outside of Him. He was sent for this very purpose: “He that hath seen me hath seen the Father.” (John 14:9). “And this is the will of Him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on Him, may have everlasting life.” (John 6:40). So Herman Bavinck well says: “If you, O man, want to know who God is, do not ask the wise, the scribes, the disputers of this age, but look upon Christ and hear His Word!” Then, for our encouragement, he adds: Knowing God in Christ brings with it eternal life, imperturbable joy and heavenly blessedness.”

*Thirdly, general revelation leaves us all without excuse.*

“For the invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse.” (Romans 1.20). Romans 2.1 passes the same verdict on us. Neither the blindest heathen nor the most book-learned Biblical scholar will be able to say before the judgment-seat: “I did not know that there is a God.”

*Fourthly, general revelation retains the point of contact between God and men, so that when He is pleased to call His elect into Christ by the Gospel, He has a means of access to their hearts.*

By not allowing all sense of Himself to be extinguished, despite our immeasurable wickedness, God is able to speak and make Himself heard and understood. When He calls us by His Gospel He always addresses first our reason and conscience, before penetrating deep into our affections and wills. And when, by His grace, we hear so as to believe to the saving of our souls, the knowledge of God revealed to us in Christ becomes indeed good news from a far-off land. It is thus a great source of comfort and a great preservative against despair to know that we are never out of God’s reach. As Augustine once said: “He is with us even in the depths out of which we cry to Him.”

Despite its utter inadequacy to bring us to God, general revelation has considerable value. It is owing to general revelation that men retain some religious and moral sense. By it they are aware of truth and falsehood, good and evil, right and wrong, justice and injustice, beauty and ugliness. Through its working they value ties of family, community, religion and state. On its basis they engage profitably and healthily in production, distribution and recreation. The fact that its ministrations are confined wholly to the realm of time and space, therefore, must not lead us to under-estimate its usefulness.

Neither must we over-estimate its practical value, especially in this present age of vaunted natural religion posing as supernatural, saving grace. The faithful and eminent pastor Wilhelmus a Brakel supplies the necessary corrective to our excessive esteem of it. In view of its insufficiency to bring us to God, he cries: “May everyone therefore strive earnestly to acquire the knowledge of God without which there can neither be faith, love, religion nor salvation. Do not be satisfied with only a natural knowledge, which cannot lead you to a saving knowledge of God, but rather strive to behold God’s glory in the face of Jesus Christ.”

## ***2. Special Revelation***

If there is no hope for us in general revelation, how thankful we should be that God has been pleased to make a further revelation of Himself which cannot fail to bring His people to know Him. This is what theologians call Special Revelation. This special revelation has a very definite objective; namely, “to reveal to us the character of God . . . especially . . . in His saving grace.” (D. M. Lloyd-Jones).

This is where the Bible is unique. It alone gives us this special, saving knowledge of God. Indeed, this is its supreme purpose. For its whole message is an account of the infinite, eternal, holy, wise, righteous and most merciful God drawing aside the veil and granting us in Christ a sight of Himself which ravishes our hearts and saves our souls.

Here again we must shun with all the force of our being the false notion that the Bible is simply the story of the religious quest of mankind or of the Jewish people. No! It is God’s own account of Himself—who He is, what are His purposes, how and when He acts to fulfil those purposes,

and why. It is uniquely special in that it imparts to us knowledge that can never be gained elsewhere. Such a revelation is therefore indispensable for us to know, glorify and enjoy God here in time and throughout eternity.

While this module is not the place to enter into a full exposition of the inspiration, inerrancy, infallibility, sufficiency and authority of Holy Scripture, certain facts bearing on it as the revealed, authentic Word of God need to be stated.

*A. Its human writers claim to be divinely-inspired and -authorized messengers of God.*

It is He who both spoke His Word to them and commissioned them to commit His revealed will to writing. “This claim must be admitted, or the sacred writers must be regarded as fanatics or imposters.” (Charles Hodge). Both prophets and apostles received the divine command to write: “And the Lord said unto Moses, Write thou these words.” (Exodus 34:27). “What thou seest, write in a book, and send it unto the seven churches.” (Revelation 1:11). Indeed, God said directly to Jeremiah: “Behold, I have put my words in thy mouth.” (Jeremiah 1:9.) King David too could say: “The Spirit of the Lord spake by me, and His Word was in my tongue.” (2 Samuel 23:2). Louis Gausson’s *Theopneustia* and Edward J.Young’s *Thy Word is Truth* both deal thoroughly with these claims. 2 Timothy 3:16 and 2 Peter 1:21 confirm them.

One statement by Gausson is crucial to our understanding. Referring to the God-breathed origin and nature of Scripture, he says: “This miraculous operation of the Holy Ghost had not the sacred writers themselves for its [ultimate] objects - for these were only His instruments, and were soon to pass away; but . . . the holy books themselves, which were destined to reveal from age to age to the Church the counsels of God, and which were never to pass away.” We may therefore conclude with the Puritan Edmund Calamy: “The Word of God hath God for its Author . . . There is not a word in it but breathes out God and is breathed out by God . . . . It transcribes the mind and heart of God.”

*B. Its message is wholly divine.*

No other book makes known the person, grace, offices and work of Christ, who is God manifest in the flesh. "He is the clearest revelation of God ever made to man. He is the manifested God. His words were the words of God. His acts were the acts of God." (Charles Hodge). No other book reveals to mankind the only way of salvation devised by God in His adorable wisdom. Its message could not have originated anywhere else but in God.

*C. Finally, the Bible is fully authenticated to us by the inward testimony of the Holy Spirit.*

He is the One bestowed on God's people specifically to guide them into all its truth (John 16:13) and to empower it to work wonders on the ungodly. (1 Thessalonians 1:5-10). What power resides in the Word of God when accompanied by the agency of the Holy Spirit! It has turned the world upside down. It overthrows false religions wherever it is received. It shapes the course of human history. It transforms squalid, benighted, superstitious communities into God-fearing, uplifted and enlightened men and women. It guarantees justice and integrity, social order and stability, human liberty and virtue. It is yet to change the world.

Let us ensure, by God's grace, that we keep this priceless heritage pure from the contaminating mind of man. So precious is His Word to God that He solemnly and repeatedly charges us to receive it just as it is. "Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish aught from it." (Deuteronomy 4:2). "To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them." (Isaiah 8:20). "Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures, nor the power of God." (Matthew 22:29). "For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: and if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book." (Revelation 22:18-19). "And the Scripture cannot be broken." (John 10:35).

Let us hear the wise pastor again as he calls us to fill our hearts and lives with this unique revelation from God: “The eunuch read while riding in his chariot (Acts 8:28). The Bereans searched the Scriptures daily (Acts 17:11). How everyone ought to practice this in private, prior to going to work, both by himself alone and with his family. At noon, when one nourishes his body, he ought also to nourish his soul. In the evening after work, one must end the day by seeking some refreshment from the Word of God. In the meantime, while engaged in his occupation, by meditating upon what has been read the soul will maintain communion with God. He will be enabled to understand the spiritual meaning as well as to experience the power of God’s Word. This will cause the soul to grow in grace, protect against vain thoughts, control the tongue, suppress corruptions and direct man to fear God.” (Wilhelmus a Brakel).

### ***Summary***

We may summarize the link between Theology and Revelation by saying that Theology is the fruit of Revelation. What we study must be what God has revealed. Revelation presupposes that:

- (i) God has revealed Himself.
- (ii) Man is the one to whom God has revealed Himself.
- (iii) Communication between God and man has therefore been established.

Furthermore this revelation has been made to man:

- (1) as a dependent creature.
- (2) as a continuous process in nature and as a completed book in Scripture.
- (3) as an organic unity [ie to the whole human race] and not to individuals [outside the writers of Scripture].
- (4) as general, to leave all men without excuse for not knowing, serving and worshipping God.
- (5) as special, in view of sin as the great obstruction to our knowledge of God, and in view of redemption as the special purpose of God for His own glory and the salvation of His people.

Several points, all of vital importance, need to be re-enforced:

(1) God reveals Himself primarily for His own sake, not man's. The knowledge of God is therefore given not primarily for our benefit, but because God takes pleasure in being known.

(2) This knowledge of Himself is true, objective knowledge, despite its incompleteness. "We are . . . like God, so that our knowledge is true; and we are unlike God, and therefore our knowledge can never be comprehensive." (Cornelius Van Til). Still, as Thomas Boston says: "Though it is impossible in our present state to know God perfectly, seeing He is incomprehensible, yet so much of Him is revealed in the Scriptures as is necessary for us to know in order to our salvation."

(3) Man has been made capable, first by nature, then by grace, of transposing this revelation into subjective knowledge. This fact indicates the prime importance of faith; for as Augustine says: "I believe in order that I may understand." This believing is the fruit of God opening the eye of the soul in order for us to perceive Himself, a most glorious Being, who excels us in everything good.

(4) Who He is and what He requires of us is communicated by our innate knowledge of Him, enriched by our acquired knowledge of Him. "Thus there is a revelation of God about us and within us, and the latter culminates in the personal knowledge of the living God, as a God who dwells among and associates with us, and allows us to associate with Him." (Abraham Kuyper).

(5) God's revelation to us as sinners neutralizes the disorder caused by the entrance of sin, extends the knowledge of Himself to include His relation by grace to us as sinners, and enriches this knowledge to secure our eternal communion with Him.



SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY  
1. The Doctrine of Revelation

Assignment

Write a SHORT ESSAY (Introduction, Three Paragraphs, Conclusion) on any ONE of the following quotations:

- (a) ‘God hath given us the twinkling starlight of Nature and the perfect sunlight of Scripture.’ (George Swinnoek)
- (b) ‘The works of God reveal His Being and attributes.’ (Charles Hodge)
- (c) ‘It is the writing itself that now supplies the place . . . of the persons in and by whom God originally spake to men.’ (John Owen)
- (d) ‘Where Scripture leads, we may safely follow.’ (Loraine Boettner)
- (e) ‘This book [the Bible] treats of God: what God is, and what His will is. (Thomas Boston)
- (f) ‘Doctrine is the mind of God seen in the facts.’ (John Duncan)
- (g) ‘God will have nothing added to His Word, nor taken away from it.’ (Albrecht Durer)

