

*Systematic Theology*  
*Lesson 2*

**Revelation**

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**General Revelation:**

Because we are finite and God is infinite, if man is to know God, God must take the initiative in revealing Himself.

“Although the light of nature, and the works of creation and providence do so far manifest the goodness, wisdom, and power of God, as to leave men unexcusable; yet are they not sufficient to give that knowledge of God, and of His will, which is necessary unto salvation.” Westminster Confession of Faith, Chap. 1:1

finitum non capax infiniti” (The finite cannot grasp/contain the infinite)

General Revelation, often called Natural Revelation, is general in two ways:

1. First, it is general in that it is to all men. God has revealed Himself to all persons at all times. *Psalm 19* and *Romans 1* point out that all men have access to general revelation. All they have to do is simply look around them.
2. It is also general in that it is only intended to reveal a limited amount of understanding. Special Revelation, on the other hand, was revelation given to particular persons at particular times.

In General Revelation, God reveals Himself through nature, history, and the inner conscious of man.

As Paul says in *Romans 1*, general revelation renders all men without excuse.

God has also spoken in General Revelation through history.

There is also an internal sense of deity in every person.

Do not confuse natural or General Revelation with Natural Theology. Natural Revelation is what God does. Natural Theology is what we do with Natural Revelation. It is the conclusions and theology that we develop from General Revelation.

While General Revelation is sufficient to condemn, it is not sufficient to save.

During the Enlightenment period, skepticism was voiced as to what can be known about God. Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) said that if God exists, He cannot be known. Kant insisted that the world of ideas apart from sensory perception may exist, but it is unknowable to human beings.

The Bible answers this:

God reveals Himself

God made human beings in His image, which implies knowledge and relationship, even as there is knowledge and relationship withing the Holy Trinity.

The incarnation of Jesus who exegetes God to us.

Inspiration of the Scripture.

Illumination of the Holy Spirit.

Some of the words in the Bible for revelation:

apocalypse - unveiling

epiphany - appearance

phanerosis - open manifestation

God's grace is seen in that we are creatures and we have sinned. Yet God makes Himself known so that we might know Him and be reconciled to Him. This is the whole story line of the Scripture.

Perspicuity of General Revelation: *Romans 1:20* says that God is "clearly" perceived.

The result of General Revelation:

- ▶ Notitia Dei Insita: the implanted knowledge of God. It is there because God planted it there.
- ▶ Sensus deitatis: an awareness of deity.
- ▶ Semen religionis: the seed of religion.

What man does with General Revelation: Holding the Truth; Resisting the Truth; Holding down the Truth (Cranfield); Perverting the Truth in idolatry

It is important to understand the relationship of General Revelation to Special Revelation. They do not teach a “different” God. They are in perfect agreement. Yet, to know the plan of redemption, man must have more than General Revelation. The limitation of General Revelation is more along the lines of what it does not reveal versus what it does reveal.

### **Special Revelation:**

God speaks through His written Word (the Bible) and His Living Word (Jesus)

Lets look specifically at Scripture. We will talk in later sessions about the Person and Work of Jesus Christ.

### ***The Inerrancy of Scripture***

(For excellent treatments on this subject matter, see Basic Theology by Charles Ryrie, A Theology for the Church, edited by Daniel Akin, and Systematic Theology by Wayne Grudem.)

The doctrine of inspiration naturally results in the doctrine of inerrancy. It is precisely because we believe the Bible is God-breathed that we also believe that the Scripture is inerrant, or without error, in the original manuscripts.

Working definition of inerrancy:

The inerrancy of Scripture means that Scripture in the original manuscripts does not affirm anything that is false or contrary to fact.

The definition in its simplest understanding just means that the Bible always tells the truth. Furthermore, we could add that it always tells the truth concerning everything it talks about.

Some have tried to say that inerrancy only refers to matters of faith. However, inerrancy extends to, and includes, the Bible’s words about history and science.

The Bible can be inerrant and still speak in ordinary terms or in round numbers without discounting or threatening inerrancy. We call this phenomenological language.

It is illogical to assume that the Bible contains errors because the human authors reported things in phenomenological language.

Scripture cannot rightly be understood unless we take into consideration that it has dual-sided authorship. We must affirm that the Bible is entirely the Word of God and the words of the human authors. It is the Word of God written in the words of men.

Scripture is God-breathed as *2 Timothy 3:16* makes clear. And, as *2 Peter 1* states, men were carried along by the Holy Spirit. The same word is used in the Book of Acts in speaking of the ship Paul was on being carried along by the wind. The sailors had to give up trying to control the ship, and simply let the wind carry it along. It is the same word used of the Holy Spirit carrying the writers of Scripture along.

Theories of inspiration leading to inerrancy:

**Dictation View:** This view holds that God directly dictated every word to the biblical writers to write.

**Illumination View:** This view simply holds that the biblical writers had the Holy Spirit working on them in such a way that their religious insight was elevated.

**Encounter View:** this was popularized by neo-orthodox writers like Karl Barth. There is nothing really more special about the Bible than any other book, except that the Holy Spirit is able to use the Bible in a unique way. When the reader reads it, the Holy Spirit causes a particular passage to speak to the heart of the reader, and in that moment, the Bible becomes the Word of God to the reader.

**Dynamic View:** This was in large part a reaction to the dictation view. This view held that the Holy Spirit inspired the concepts and thoughts of the writer, but basically left the fleshing out of the words to the individual writer.

**Verbal/Plenary View:** This view sees the Holy Spirit's involvement upon both the writers, and upon the writings. God inspired more than just the thoughts he wanted the biblical writers to communicate. He inspired the words (verbal), and He inspired all of the Bible (plenary). This view sees the Sovereignty of God extending to the whole process - He chose biblical writers knowing full well their education, vocabulary, background, personality, style, etc., and superintended the whole process of their writing, even down to the words used, but without asserting dictation, and also preserving and using the individual writers personality and experiences.