

UNIT 3: God's Revealing Work

Section 1: Overview & Introduction: God's Work of Revelation

Theological Works:
Berkhof, Calvin, Culver
Enns, Erickson, Tenney

INTRODUCTION:

This morning we begin a brand new unit in our Systematic Theology Study. In Unit 1 we studied Theology Proper – discussing the existence, being, nature, and attributes of God. In Unit 2 we discussed God's Work of Creation in its planning, originating, and sustaining aspects. Now, in Unit 3, we will delve into God's Revealing Work! In the coming sessions we will examine God's method of revealing Himself to mankind. We will spend considerable time discussing the nature of the Scriptures as revelation from God. We'll look at the doctrines of inspiration, infallibility, inerrancy, authority, perspicuity, necessity, sufficiency, and illumination, as well as discuss the subjects of interpretation, canonicity, and textual criticism. The Scriptures are so important to our faith, so we must be familiar with these foundational truths and principles to defend our faith in a world that remains so antagonistic against the Lord and His Word. But before we get to these matters, we need to spend some time discussing the principle of revelation itself.

Q1: What is meant by revelation?

Q2: What categories has revelation been divided into?

I. Defining & Discussing Revelation

A. Origin of the Term

1. The word "revelation" is derived from the Latin *revelatio* which denotes "unveiling"
2. OT Heb term *galah* "to be naked" – removal of covering which obstructs the view
3. NT Gr. term *apocalupto/apocalupsis* meaning "disclosure" or "unveiling"
4. Also Gr. term *phaneroo/phanerosis* meaning "to make manifest, expose to view"
5. So revelation is the process by which God "unveils" Himself to humanity... Without this, theology would be impossible! **Berkhof** explains, "If man is ever to know and serve God, the latter must reveal Himself."
6. But by this we don't mean to explain that God has "exposed" Himself to man. Culver explains, "We do not mean that any man, or angel with eyes which transfer impulses from fleshly organs to a fleshly brain, ever has seen that infinite and eternal spirit whom we call God. (see **Ex 33:20, Jn 1:18**) Revelation in this sense of the word may be a statement of fact (In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth), or announcement of abstract truth (Righteousness exalts a nation). It may take the form of a command (Thou shalt not commit adultery), or of a narrative of past events (the book of Chronicles), or a prediction (Your God shall come). Sometimes it is reflection of the human author on spiritual experiences (The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want)."

B. Definitions

1. **Pentecost**, "Revelation is that act of God whereby He discloses Himself or communicates truth to the mind, whereby He makes manifest to His creatures that which could not be known in any other way. This communication may occur in a single, instantaneous act, or it may extend over a long period of time, and may be perceived by the human mind in varying degrees of fullness."

2. **Berkhof**, “In its active sense [revelation] denotes the act of God by which He communicates to man the truth concerning Himself in relation to His creatures, and conveys to him the knowledge of His will: and in the passive sense it is a designation of the resulting product of this activity of God.”
3. **Ryrie**, “Historically, the two avenues through which God has taken the initiative to reveal Himself have been labeled general and special revelation. General revelation includes all that God has revealed in the world around us, including man, while special revelation includes various means He used to communicate His message in what was codified in the Bible.”
4. **Erickson**, “Because humans are finite and God is infinite, if they are to know God it must come about by God’s manifestation of Himself. There are two basic classifications of revelation. General revelation is God’s communication of himself to all persons at all times and in all places. Special revelation involves God’s particular communications and manifestations of Himself to particular persons at particular times, communications and manifestations that are available now only by consultation of certain sacred writings.”

C. Discussing Revelation

1. **Berkhof**, “The idea of revelation assumes (a) that there is a personal God who actively communicates knowledge, (b) that there are truths, facts, and events which would not be known without divine revelation, and (c) that there are rational beings to whom the revelation is made and who are capable of appropriating it.”
2. **Calvin**, “The pious mind does not devise for itself any kind of God, but looks alone to the one true God; nor does it feign for him any character it pleases, but is contented to have him in the character in which he manifests himself, always guarding, with the utmost diligence, against transgressing his will, and wandering, with daring presumption, from the right path.”
3. **Horne**, “Revelation provides the answer to fallen man’s twofold predicament: (1) his ignorance of God and therefore of himself, (2) his guilt before God. God has revealed Himself in Christ not only to make us knowledgeable but also to make us holy.”

II. Categorizing Revelation

A. *Two Similar but Different Organizing Principles*

1. *Natural and Supernatural*
 - a. This distinction was not to imply that some revelation doesn’t come from God, but to discriminate between two different modes of revelation.
 - b. Natural revelation is communicated through the media of natural phenomena, while supernatural revelation implies a divine intervention in the normal course of events; it is supernatural not only in origin, but also in mode.
 - c. This is the traditional division utilized by the Roman Catholic Church
2. *General and Special*
 - a. It was felt that the former distinction was faulty since even heathen religions are based on similar beliefs regarding revelation.
 - b. While similar and containing some overlap with the natural/supernatural scheme there is some difference.

- c. Rather than contemplating the origin and mode of revelation, the general/special categorization contemplates the extent and purpose of revelation.
- d. **Berhof**, “General revelation rests on the basis of creation is addressed to all intelligent creatures as such, and is therefore accessible to all men; though as the result of sin they are no more able to read and interpret it aright. Special revelation on the other hand rests on the basis of re-creation, is addressed to men as *sinner*s with a view to their redemption, and can be properly understood only by the spiritual man. General revelation is not exclusively natural, but also contains supernatural elements; and special revelation also comprises elements which assume a perfectly natural character.”
- e. This was the division utilized by the Reformers

B. Further Defining the General/Special Distinction

1. General

- General revelation is *general* in the sense that it is universally available (to all persons at all times) and is less particularized than special revelation.
 - a. In Nature
 - (1) Discuss Psalm 19:1-6
 - (2) Discuss Romans 1:18-21
 - b. In Providence/History
 - (1) Discuss Matthew 5:45
 - (2) Discuss Acts 14:15-17
 - (3) Discuss Daniel 2:21
 - c. In Humanity
 - (1) Discuss Romans 2:14-15
 - (2) Calvin, “A sense of deity is inscribed on every heart... *man* may be condemned by [his] own conscience when [he] neither worships Him nor consecrates his life to His service.”

2. Special

- Special revelation is *special* because it is not available to all people at all times but was particularly given by God to specific individuals as He pleased when He pleased.
 - a. In Dreams/Visions, Theophanies, Angels
 - (1) See Gen 20:3,6; 31:11-13, 24; 40-41; Joel 2:28; Isaiah 1:1; 6:1; Ezek 1:3
 - (2) See Gen 16:7-14, Ex 3:2; 2 Sam 24:16; Zech 1:12
 - (3) See Dan 9:20-21, Lk 2:10-11, Rev 1:1, 19:17
 - b. In the Prophets
 - (1) See Moses, Elijah, Elisha, etc.
 - (2) See also Major and Minor Prophets...
 - c. In Christ
 - (1) The epitome of God’s revelation is found in the Person of Jesus Christ.
 - (2) Discuss Col 1:15-20
 - (3) Discuss Heb 1:1-4
 - d. In Scripture
 - (1) Discuss Ps 19:7-14 & Ps 119
 - (2) Discuss II Tim 3:16-17
 - (3) Discuss II Pet 1:13-21