

THE NATURE OF REVELATION

The God Who Reveals

- ▶ Christianity is founded on revelation
- ▶ We rest our hope on the reality that God has revealed Himself
- ▶ Before we explore Scripture as revelation, we need to understand divine revelation as a whole
- ▶ Our goals for this study:
 - ▶ Understand what revelation is
 - ▶ Learn what revelation teaches us about God
 - ▶ Understand how God has revealed Himself to us

The Nature of Revelation

- ▶ “Revelation of God” – an multifaceted expression
 - ▶ Underscores *source*
 - ▶ Underscores *object*



The Nature of Revelation



1. Revelation is Grace

- ▶ Defining “revelation”
- ▶ Our society deeply values “**personal privacy**”
- ▶ Do we think of personal privacy in relation to **God**?

“God’s willful self-disclosure, wherein He **forfeits** His own **personal privacy** so that His creatures might **know** Him”

- Carl F.H. Henry

- ▶ Divine revelation originated out of God’s **absolute sovereign will**
- ▶ **Nothing** acted upon him or **compelled** him to reveal himself

1. Revelation is Grace

- ▶ Divine freedom is an **essential attribute** of God

“There is **no person** or **force** that can ever **dictate** to God what he should do. He is under **no authority** or **external restraint**”

- Wayne Grudem

“Our God is in the heavens; he does **whatever He pleases**”

Psalms 115:3

“...according to the **good pleasure** of his **will**”

Eph 1:5 (cf. 1:9; Phil 2:13; Col 1:19)

1. Revelation is Grace

- ▶ This attribute **applies equally** to God's **self-disclosure**
- ▶ **God** revealed himself out of "the good pleasure of **his will**"
- ▶ It should be **obvious** from this that revelation is an act of **grace**

APPLICATION

- ▶ What **attitudes** or **responses** should this elicit from **us**?

"If divine revelation...means anything, it implies among other things that God **need not** have thus disclosed Himself. God might indeed have **remained silent** and **incommunicative** in relation to His creatures. His revelational speech to mankind is not an **inescapable** or **inevitable** reality. It is instead a **demonstration** of **His own character**"

- Carl F.H. Henry

2. Revelation is Necessary

- ▶ The **necessity** of revelation grows out of God's **freedom**
- ▶ If revelation is given only by **divine initiation**, then man's knowledge of **God** is **impossible** apart from revelation

“Because humans are **finite** and God is **infinite**, if they are to **know** God it must come about by **God's manifestation of himself**”

- Millard J. Erickson

While revelation isn't necessary for **God** to provide...

...it **is** necessary for **man** if he is to have **any** knowledge of his Creator.

2. Revelation is Necessary

“In the study of **all other** sciences man places himself **above** the object of his investigation, but in **theology** he does not stand above but rather **under** the object of his knowledge. In other words, man can know God **only** in so far as the latter **actively makes Himself known**. God is first of all the **subject** communicating knowledge to man, and can only become an **object** of study for man in so far as the latter **appropriates** and **reflects** on the knowledge conveyed to him by **revelation**. Without revelation man would **never** have been able to acquire **any** knowledge of God.... The position must be maintained...that theology would be **utterly impossible** without a **self-revelation** of God.”

- Louis Berkhof

2. Revelation is Necessary

- ▶ Genesis 1 provides implicit reference to this fact
- ▶ God **creates** man and woman (1:26-27)
- ▶ He **reveals** to them their **divinely-intended** purpose and function (1:28)
 - ▶ To procreate
 - ▶ To fill the earth
 - ▶ To subdue it
 - ▶ To exercise authority
- ▶ He **places** them in the garden with the **intent** to cultivate it (2:15)
- ▶ He **directs** them to what they **may** and **may not** eat (1:29; 2:16-17)
- ▶ He **warns** them about the consequences of disobedience (2:17)

Implicit in this account is that man's **knowledge** of his...

existence
purpose
moral responsibility

...relied upon **God's** self-determined communication

2. Revelation is Necessary

Scripture as Food

- ▶ Food is **essential** for man's existence
- ▶ So too is God's **word**

“He **humbled** you and let you be **hungry**, and **fed** you with manna...that He might make you **understand** that man does not **live** by bread **alone**...

“I have **treasured** the words in his mouth more than my **necessary food**”

Job 23:12

“Like newborn babies, **long** for the **pure milk** of the **word**...”

1 Peter 2:2

...but man **lives** by **everything** that proceeds out of the mouth of Yahweh”

Deuteronomy 8:3

2. Revelation is Necessary

Scripture as Light

- ▶ Darkness can represent **ignorance** and lack of **knowledge** (Job 37:19; 38:2; Eccl 2:14)
- ▶ Light portrays the **illumination** of God's **truth** in life

“Your word is a **lamp** to my feet and a **light** to my path”

Psalm 119:105

“The unfolding of Your words gives **light**; it gives **understanding** to the **simple**”

Psalm 119:130

“So we have the more-sure **prophetic word**, to which you do well to **pay attention** as to a **lamp shining** in a **dark place**, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your heart”

2 Peter 1:19

2. Revelation is Necessary

- ▶ In both metaphors, the emphasis is on man's utter reliance on God's revelation
- ▶ Without it, he goes hungry
- ▶ Without it, he walks in darkness

So if man is to **know** God, he must **rely** on God's **self-disclosure**

APPLICATION

- ▶ What **attitudes** or **responses** should this elicit from **us**?

3. Revelation is Accessible

- ▶ We acknowledge the fact that God is **incomprehensible**
- ▶ God's fundamental **nature**, **being**, and **essence** make humans **incapable** of **fully** knowing God
- ▶ In other words, it is **impossible** for us to **fully** know or understand any single thing about God

“Great is Yahweh, and highly to be praised, and his greatness is **unsearchable**.”

- Psalm 145:3

“Oh, the **depth** of the **riches** both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How **unsearchable** are his judgments and **unfathomable** his ways!.”

- Romans 11:33

3. Revelation is Accessible

- ▶ But this doesn't mean that God is **in-apprehensible**
- ▶ That is to say, God is not **unknowable**

Our knowledge may be limited

by our **humanness**

by our **fallenness**

by the **amount** of God's self-disclosure

Yet we **can** know God and understand God—
partially, but **truly**

3. Revelation is Accessible

“That which God **reveals** of himself in and through creatures is so **rich** and so **deep** that it can **never** be known by any human individual. In many respects we do not even understand the **universe** of created beings, which again and again confronts us with **enigmas** and **mysteries**. How then should we be able to understand the revelation of **God** in all its riches and depth? But by admitting all this we by no means **deny** God’s knowability. God’s incomprehensibility, instead of abrogating his knowability, presupposes and affirms the **same**. The unsearchable riches of the Divine Being constitute a **necessary** and **important** element of our knowledge of God.”

- Herman Bavinck

3. Revelation is Accessible

- ▶ God **has** revealed himself to humanity
- ▶ He was not **obligated** to do so, nevertheless he has
- ▶ Man's status as God's image drives toward this fact
- ▶ Because we are his image, we naturally **expect** that God would communicate himself to us
- ▶ In other words...

“Having made man in His own image and having endowed man with the **capacity** to commune with Himself, it is **reasonable** to **expect** that this competency in man would be exercised; that in due time God **would** disclose to man truth concerning Himself and His **purposes**, also man's true **place** in the divine plan of creation—his **relation** to God, to **eternity**, to **time**, to **virtue**, to **sin**, to **redemption**, as well as to all other **beings** in this universe in which man's life is cast.”

- Lewis Sperry Chafer

the Lord **takes pleasure** in revealing himself

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"I will magnify myself, sanctify myself, and **make myself known** in the sight of many nations; and they will **know** that I am Yahweh."

- Ezekiel 38:23

the Lord **takes pleasure** in revealing himself

3. Revelation is Accessible

- ▶ This knowledge is **multifaceted**
- ▶ It is **intellectual**
- ▶ But its ultimate goal is **relational**
- ▶ As we learn **about** God, we come to **know** God
- ▶ Here we see the results of the **fall** on humanity

We can **know** God and **not know** God at the same time

- ▶ We can know him **cognitively** without knowing him **relationally**
- ▶ The former is supposed to lead to the latter, but man's spiritual condition

“This is eternal life, that they may **know** you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.”

- John 17:3

gets in the way!

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“No one knows the Son except the Father; nor does **anyone** know the Father except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son **wills to reveal him.**”

- Matthew 11:27

gets in the way!

3. Revelation is Accessible

- ▶ Thus, the apostle Paul can write...

“...the world in **its** wisdom did **not** come to **know God**”

- 1 Corinthians 1:21

- ▶ And yet can rejoice in his **own** salvation in which he aimed...

“...to know **him**
and the **power** of his resurrection
and the **fellowship** of his sufferings”

- Philippians 3:10

3. Revelation is Accessible

“Thus it is possible to say of an individual that ‘he **knows** God’ and, at the **same time**, ‘he does **not know** God’—both statements can be true of the **same person** (whether believer or unbeliever) at the **same time**. The believer has **saving** knowledge of God, but does not know God **fully**. An unbeliever may ‘know’ (= know **about**) the God of the Bible, from both natural revelation and special revelation, yet still not have **saving** knowledge of God.”

- William D. Barrick

Yet the question remains, not **if** man can know, but **how** man can know...