

What Makes Special Revelation Special?

Selected Scriptures

June 20, 2021

Alright, greetings everyone. Welcome to the theology hour. Let me open with a word of prayer. Father, thank you so much for the day we've had so far and it is a joy to worship together as a local church and under the authority of Jesus Christ. We thank you for the world that we live in, that everywhere we look there is evidence of your design, your eternal power, your divine nature, your perfections. Especially as you have opened our eyes to the truth, everywhere we look we see the fingerprints of your creative hand and your good hand. We thank you so much that we live in your world, that we, through the world, we are, have, find every occasion and every opportunity to give thanks to you. To honor you as God and give thanks.

And we rejoice in the opportunity tonight to learn more about general and special revelation. How you have disclosed yourself to us and revealed to us in words your glory so that we may worship you and worship you in spirit and in truth. We commit tonight to you and just ask that you would guide and direct our

thinking. Help up to be righteous in the way we think and what we speak. Pray that you would guide and direct this study. In Jesus name, Amen.

Just want to introduce and kind of review what we covered last time. We talked about general revelation last time and tonight we'll talk about the limitations of, of general revelation and talk about special revelation. Just get into that subject just a little bit.

So, according to Bruce Demarest, "General revelation is the divine disclosure to all persons, at all times, and in all places by which humans come to know that God is and what he is like." So, the, the, the key, a key term in there is the term disclosure. General revelation is God's disclosure. Divine disclosure to all persons. And notice the universal language there, "All persons, all times, in all places by which human beings," that's us we know, come to know that God is and we come to know what he's like. It doesn't matter if you're regenerate or unregenerate, what condition you're in as a human being, general revelation is available to you. It's, and it's not a matter of words. General revelation is not a matter of words; it's a matter of disclosure.

So, it's called revelation because it's revealing something about God, and it's called general because it gives general knowledge about God. His eternal power and divine nature. We talked about Psalm 19:1 to 6. We, we went into that about the nature of general revelation. We considered the reach of general revelation, the location of it, and the substance of it.

As concerns the reach of general revelation, we're talking about what general revelation discloses, when it discloses it, who receives it when it's disclosed, and where they access the disclosure of, of the knowledge of God. So, it discloses, general revelation is what discloses universal truth. All the time, to everyone, in every place.

As concerns the location of general revelation, we're getting more specific about where general revelation discloses those universal truths and we said the truths of general revelation come via external means and internal means. So, externally, general revelation discloses universal truths via creation and providence. Through, by what God has made and then how he governs what he has made bringing all things, every contingency, every verity, into conformity to his perfect will and for the execution of his will. Internally general revelation discloses



universal truths by virtue of the *imago dei*, the fact that we're created in God's image, and he conveys a sense of God to all.

So, it's Calvin's term *Sensus Divinitatis*, this, this sense we have of God. Just an, just an innate sense. And then instructing the conscience of every individual by the law of God that's written on the heart. So, internally we have, not only a sense of God, but we also have a sense of right and wrong, morality, truth, and error. What's, what's, and really, it's according to what you see written in the ten commandments, but that's inscribed on the heart, not in words, again, but in a sense and then the conscience bears witness. And that's Romans 2:14 to 15. The conscience bears witness to the truth inscribed on the heart and then it either accuses or excuses based on our violation or upholding of that sense of the law.

And, finally, we as, as concerns the substance of general revelation, like what does it consist of, we looked at Romans 1:19 to 20 which kind of summarizes that. You can turn there if you'd like. If you'd like something better to do than looking at me. You can look at your Bibles and, and see something so much more glorious right there. As concerns the substance of general revelation, Romans 1:19 to 20 says there "That what can be known

about God is plain to them." That is all creatures, all men.

"Because God has shown it to them."

So, no one can tell you, I'm ignorant, I'm one of those who don't, I don't know anything about God because God hasn't made himself plain to me. Well, it says right there in Romans 1:19 that God has made himself plain to you because God has shown it to you. So, who am I to believe, you the creature or God the creator, who wrote it right here in black and white?

And then it says, "For his invisible attributes, namely his eternal power and his divine nature, have been clearly perceived ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made." So, ever since the creation of the world, ever since the foundation of the world, there's no one in all history who can say, No, God I don't perceive any of this. That's not true of me. There's nobody here walking around in our circles or in our part of the world that can say, I'm an exception to the historical universal rule. No! God says everything, his eternal power, divine nature clearly perceived ever since the very beginning.

So, we organized the substance of, or we organized all that, all this into two categories, general revelation in its substance discloses something about the person of God and also the power of God. So, regarding God's person. God is, as we said last time, God is transcendent. He's self-existent, independent, invisible, pure spirit, infinite, eternal, perfect and therefore, since he's perfect, he's unchanging. He is simple, simple essence, he is pure act in his essence.

And you say, can you get all that out of Romans 1? Yeah, absolutely you can. You can pull all of that out. God is transcendent over his creation not a part of his creation. He's also eminent, he is involved in his creation and therefore, he is sovereign in his creation. He's in complete and total control over the universe that he's made, he rules all things by his good and wise providence.

So, that's what we learned about in the substance of general revelation. We learned about God's person, we also learned about God's power right there from Romans 1:19 to 20. God's power is infinite and since it's infinite, it's therefore sufficient to produce the sum total of all he's made, all the individual parts all the way down to the structure, the pieces, the parts of an

atom. Pieces or parts of energy itself, which, you know, can be described but you can't tell what it is. $E = mc^2$ describes energy, but it doesn't tell you what energy is. Energy just is.

So, God made all the parts, he made all the, if there are, if, if light is particles or waves or something of both, we don't know. But if light is particles, God made all those particles, he made the waves of light, he made the waves of everything. He's, he's made all the parts. And in his infinite power, he's made all the things that hold together as well, the complexity of the joining together, the compounding and joining of parts. The universe and all it contains.

So, in his infinite power, God is the only sufficient cause of and reason for everything that exists. In fact, if you do not start presupposing God, it is impossible to prove anything at all. If you go into any other worldview any other belief system and try to presuppose their belief system, you cannot reason consistently to what we see and live, the world we see and the world we live in. Only by presupposing God, that's the only way we get here in our reasoning consistently.

Okay, so all that's review of what we talked about last time and tonight we want to start with the limitations of general revelation. As great as reveal, as general revelation is in creation and conscience and all the things, we see of God's eternal power and divine nature, we need to understand that God has designed general revelation with inherent limitations. That's not to, it's not to diminish general revelation at all, it's just to say it does, it does what it's designed to do, and it's not designed to do absolutely everything.

It helps us to see and appreciate, when we understand limitations, helps us to see and appreciate the need for revelation of God that moves beyond mere disclosure and what we can perceive passively so to speak and then, and, and then it helps us to see that God created us, because he created us in his own image, by design we are created and designed to need God's words, we need his mind, we need his thinking, we need his reasoning, and his words communicated to us.

So, that's, that's the first, the burden of this first part is to just show you why it is we need God's words, and we can't just be, stick with what we see revealed in, in nature. Perhaps you've heard that saying, all truth is God's truth. Have you

ever, have you ever, anybody heard that? Just put up your hand high and proud. Okay, good. So, about half of you have heard the saying, all truth is God's truth. And usually, all truth is God's truth, is, is meant to, to dissuade anybody from, from arguing against the fact that we can dip into disciplines in the world and draw out truth from psychology or psychotherapy or phrenology, feeling the bumps and stuff on our heads, or whatever it is. We can dip into those sciences because, all truth is God's truth. If we find truth there, we can extract it, chew up the meat, spit out the bones, and use it for our advantage.

So, that's the saying, all truth is God's truth, and usually, use it, use it, you hear it in the context when you challenge, hey should you be really reading all those psychology books to try to help this person with their problems? They say, well, all truth is God's truth. I find truth here. I chew up the meat, spit out the bones, and I use it to apply to people's lives. And so, all truth is God's truth is meant to keep you from challenging that.

The saying, all truth is God's truth is, it's a tautology. It is true on its face. It's true without having to prove anything.

But, you know so, it's true on its face but it really does cry out for qualification. Especially in a modern, secularized age with a prideful confidence in unaided human reason. All truth is God's truth, yes, but we don't have equal access to what general revelation discloses about God.

All truth is God's truth, but our analysis of what we find in the world is not equally reliable. I'm going to trust a brain surgeon over someone in IT to tell me about brain stuff. Does that make sense? We don't all have equal capability to analyze what we find in the world. Our reason also, secondly, is fallen. And so, therefore, our fallen reason is not wholly reliable. In fact, our fallen reason is often more prone to lead us astray and lead us into error with what we find out there in the rocks and in the, in the psyche and all that other stuff.

All truth is God's truth, but all truth disclosed in general revelation, all of it is subject to interpretation. It's subject to interpretation and, particularly, this is where we as Christians want to say, we need to, we need the interpretive grid of what God revealed to us in his words, to look through his words that were given by the Holy Spirit, we need to look through that grid through this book that he's authored and given

to us, back to *sola scriptura*, we need to look through that grid in order to interpret anything around us. Psalm 36:9, "In your light, we see light."

So, if we're going to discover the truth that is out there that, all truth is God's truth and we, we want to find truth in creation, we can find it in the cosmos and in the, in the dirt and in the rocks, and in the, in the cells, we can find truth there. But we need, we need the grid of special revelation to help us to see what is truth, what's truly meat and what the bones are. You're not going to find that in the unaided use of your reason just going into any textbook. You'll be led astray very quickly.

So, all truth is God's truth without talking about the limitations of general revelation that, that, that statement is misleading at best and, and honestly, it's manipulative at worst. Often times, it's a thinly veiled justification for compromising with the philosophies of, of the world. And to take old abandoned philosophies and rewarm them up again, heat them up in the microwave, blend them with some Bible verses and then unleash them on the unsuspecting Christian public. And it's also a justification to defend the pride of, using unaided human

reason. So, be careful when you hear, all truth is God's truth. It's tautology, it's a true statement, but it needs qualification and especially understanding the limitations of general revelation.

So, let's consider just some of the inherent limitations of general revelation. First, to say that general revelation is limited by design. It's limited by God's design. General revelation is limited in its witness by God's design. It's meant to disclose truths but not to speak words of truth. So, look back at Psalm 19 for a moment. And I'll, I'll just read there. "The heavens declare the glory of God and the sky above proclaims his handiwork. Day to day," pours, "pours out speech. Night to night reveals knowledge." And then verse 3. "There is no speech, nor are there words whose voice is not heard." And then in quote, air quotes 'their voice is heard throughout all the earth, the, their words go out to the ends of the world.'

So, what is missing by, missing from general revelation? In verse 3, it says, "There's no speech, there are no words." You don't hear the sun going around the earth and saying, let me tell you all about my power that God put in me and I'm going to proclaim to you God did me, God did this, this whole burning

thing. And he, you know, the sun then fills in all the gaps of your understanding. Tells you how many light years you are away and the, it doesn't say, it doesn't tell you how fast his light travels. He doesn't, he doesn't give glory in words to the God who created him. So, there are no words, there is no voice that's heard. If you're hearing voices of the sun, better get your head checked.

General revelation in all of its forms, external witnesses and internal witnesses, it lacks articulate speech. There's just a sense, a *Sensus Divinitatis* a sense of God. There's a sense of right and wrong, a, a sense of ought and ought not, a should and should not that goes on to my heart when I'm about to commit sin, should not do that. When I, when I see something I ought to do and I don't want to do it but there's something in my, you know it's like little Jiminy Cricket on my shoulder saying, you ought to go and help that person. You know there's a sense of I ought to do that. This, does a Jiminy Cricket reference hit anybody? Okay, good, thanks. Thanks for rescuing me from that. That is Disney, what am I doing? There is no Jiminy Cricket. It lacks articulate speech. The conscience does not speak with words, it's just a sense.

But the first, notice the first thing that God did when he created Adam and placed him in the garden was what? Go feel your way through your job responsibilities? Test the different trees and see which one will kill you? No! God spoke to him. God told him what to do, what he created him for. What he put him there for. He gave him commands. He told him "Thou shalt not." God never intended his creation to be the solitary witness of his glory. He drew near to speak to us and to interpret the things, interpret to us the things he had made. Genesis 2:5 to 23, you can read that and see that God intends to convey inwards truths to Adam to help him to interpret the world that he's been dropped into.

General revelation provides the context for God speaking to us for his special revelation. General revelation is, is the setting that you could say special revelation is the center piece. General revelation is like the backdrop on the stage, but special revelation might be the main actors on the stage. They're the ones that are doing the dialogue, everything else is backdrop and setting to give it fullness, to give it beauty, to give it glory.

So, God is the sole interpreter of the world that he made and his Word is the means by which he explains his world to all mankind. God created us for relationship with him. He didn't, not, not as a means of his self-fulfillment, after all God's independent, he has no needs, he's self-existent. So, he has no needs to fulfill but he created us for relationship for our sake that we might give him glory, so that we can know him and proclaim his glory and that comes by words.

The general revelation can never fulfill all of God's design to glorify himself because it wasn't meant to. General revelation provides the context and the setting in which man learns about his creator, from his creator, and learning to interpret creation with words taught by his creator in special revelation.

So, first limitation of general revelation is that it's limited by design. And the second limitation of general revelation is it's limited by the fall. So, as we enter into the world and God interprets the world to Adam and Eve and, but then the fall happens and immediately we're into another part of what God decreed. Limited, limited by the fall.

So, the Bible tells us, and this is where you want to go back to Romans chapter 1, in Romans 1:18 to 25. The Bible tells us that general revelation, in a sense was compromised in fulfilling God's purpose by the fall because of its effects on us. So, it says, the wrath, Paul writes, "The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all," unrighteousness or, "ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth."

So, God put truth in general revelation and there's no problem before the fall. It's all there, there's no suppressing going on. But then after the fall, after sin enters into the world, now there's this holding down of the truth. That works contrary to the design of general revelation that God intended. I want you to see everything that glorifies me, that brings glory to my name. My eternal power, my divine nature. And man by his sin says, Nope! Not going to pay attention. It's not there if I don't see it. If I close my eyes, I can't see it. I can't intuit it. I don't know you're there.

So, by the fall, "For what can be known about God is plain to them because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely his eternal power and divine nature, have

been clearly perceived ever since the creation of the world in the things that have been made, so, they are without excuse. For although they knew God," and here's what the fall did, "they didn't honor him as God or give thanks to him, but because they didn't honor God or give thanks, they became futile in their thinking and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools and they exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man, birds, animals, creeping things. Therefore, God gave them up." It says in verse 24, their hearts, "into the lust of their hearts, to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because" verse 25, "they exchanged the truth about God for a lie." That happened in Genesis 3. God gave them truth; they preferred a lie instead. "And they worshipped and served the creature rather than the creator who's blessed forever. Amen."

So, the fall changed things. It changed what we could perceive. It's not the fault of what God did that, because everything out there's clearly perceived. What changed is us. We hid our eyes; we darkened our own souls. We became futile in our thinking because we preferred a lie to the truth. So, once you, when you start with a lie, it's not going to get any better from there. It's not going to get any clearer.

So, we've talked about this text so much because it's such a foundational text. But just by way of review, just want to hit it again, just, just a couple of points. General revelation is completely, wholly sufficient to do what it is designed by God to do; to disclose the truth about God to us, but because of the fall, unaided, fallen human reason distorts what is clearly disclosed in general revelation. It turns what God designed for good into an opportunity for evil and an opportunity for idolatry.

So, sinners suppress the truth it says in verses 18 to 20.

Sinners refuse to honor the creator with praise and gratitude in verse 21. Sinners elevate themselves over their creator verse 22 and they worship the creation verse 23 and verse 25. No one, no fallen sinner is a neutral objective interpreter of the world. No scientist sits in the lab in neutrality. They don't enter into a lab into this, this enclosed space and throw all subjectivity and all biases and all presuppositions, they don't leave them at the door as they enter into the lab. They bring them with them because it's in, it's inside of them. They don't enter in and immediately go into divine objectivity mode. They can't do it.

So, by unaided human reason, which is what Romans 1 says, we are biased against the truth. We, we have an instinct, a proclivity, a desire even, by our fallen nature to suppress the truth, to hold it at bay, to hold it down, to ignore it, and refuse to submit to it. That's a condition that all unbelievers are in. And that's why the saying, all truth is God's truth is really misleading, because it gives the impression that we can have at it; just dive into the world as a neutral objective observer of the world. I mean we're just scientists; we're just looking at rocks. Oh, but your interpretation of what those rocks mean and what they're telling you, that's informed by worldview, that's informed by your anti-Christian, anti-supernatural, anti-God bias.

So, you can't dive into the world of general revelation without examining and exposing the presuppositions that we have inherited from the fall, those that bias our, and distort our perspective. There's no such thing as neutrality when it comes to truth as Ephesians 4:17 and 18 also says, the mind is a battle ground and our battle is fought with ideas. 2 Corinthians 10:3 to 5, so, we can't allow ourselves to be taken captive, we can't allow our conversation to be hijacked, our thinking to be

hijacked by the philosophy and empty deceit of an unbelieving worldview. We have to be consistent and reason from scripture, even to reason from scripture about our reasoning. We have to think from scripture about our thoughts. It's called epistemology.

So, we have to have a biblical epistemology. We have to understand what we're up against when it comes to looking at the world around us, looking at general revelation whether it's creation, providence, conscience, the law of God written on the heart, whatever it is, we have to realize that we're coming into it not as neutral creatures, we're coming in with biases and presuppositions, we've in, we've inherited from the fall itself.

So, if general revelation has become so severely compromised because of the fall, and because its effects on our, on our thinking, what use does general revelation have in a post-fall world? Thanks for asking. Here's the purpose. God's original purpose for general revelation, even in light of the fall, it has not changed. His purpose in revealing things in creation and conscience and providence that continues. His purpose hasn't failed. General revelation keeps on doing Psalm 19, "The heavens declare the glory of God." They keep, continue, "day after day

they," pour, "pour forth speech. Night after night they display knowledge." That is happening all the time.

So, general revelation is doing what it's designed to do regardless of whether or not anyone can receive it. You've heard that metaphysical question, if a tree falls in the woods and no one's there to hear it, does it still make a sound? Silly question, yes, it does. George Berkeley's metaphysical question, he's arguing for immaterialism. He sees reacting against materialism and he's saying, all that exists in the world are ideas in perceiving minds. There's no matter at all. But that's stupid because God made matter. He made stuff, right here. This is not just an idea, an idea that's perceived by my mind floating in this thing right here that's an idea, a figment of my imagination called, that I call a body and you might call a body, but might not be.

Why am I going off on this tangent anyway? We know that matter exists. We know that immatter exist, if that's a word. We know that material things and immaterial things exist because Psalm 19:1 says. Genesis 1:1 and then Psalm 19:1 says, "The heavens declare the glory of God and the sky above proclaims his handiwork." There's stuff that shows his glory. General

revelation continues to display the glory and power of God regardless of the condition of those who perceive it. Immaterial realities and material realities alike declare the glory of God.

But in a post-fall world, general revelation takes on a new role, one it didn't have in its original design. It takes on a new role and instead of only being the context and setting for special revelation, general revelation now takes on the role of providing accountability for the sinful mind. For sinful mankind, it becomes the basis of God's condemnation for our sins. So back to Romans 1:20, "that since the creation of the world his invisible attributes his eternal power, his divine nature have been clearly seen being understood through what has been made and so," What? "they are without excuse." What they know to be true but deny. What they see, but suppress. What they understand, but won't admit, won't confess. God sees it and he holds them accountable to what they know, and they're without any excuse at all. There is no one who will be able to stand before God and say, I didn't realize you were there. They can't claim ignorance.

So, because of general revelation, they're and bec, in light of the fall, general revelation has taken on a new role of holding

sinners accountable to God for what they know to be true about God. What they know they ought to do because of general revelation, namely verse 21, "To honor God as God and give him thanks."

So, because of general revelation sinners can't plead ignorance. They know and because they know they are accountable, and they are left without any excuse at all for not bowing and worshipping and honoring God and giving thanks. So, just a, a couple of comments about the role of general revelation in a post-fall, not a post-fall but a post-fall world.

First, realize that what God teaches in general revelation, or I should say discloses in general revelation, whether it's in its pre-fall or its post-fall roles, what God discloses in general revelation does not save sinners. It cannot save sinners; it was never intended for the purpose of saving sinners. General revelation is for the purpose of humankind rejoicing in God and seeing the manifold glory of God and responding in worship and praise. But it, it was not ever intended and designed to save sinners. What's needed for the salvation of sinners? Words. Words. Understanding.

So second, now that we live in a post-fall world and until we enter the new heavens and the new earth, general revelation will serve its original purpose for all the redeemed, but it'll serve different purposes for sinners. For unregenerate, unbelieving, reprobate sinners, general revelation is the witness against the rebellion, it provides daily evidence of the justice of God's condemnation against them and again, doesn't represent any flaw in God's original design for general revelation, his purposes to disclose his glory through creation and conscience continue unabated, but it does reveal the fatal flaw in the fallen creature, it reveals sin. It reveals the fact that something is inherently wrong and needs to be fixed.

Mind distorted by sin, reason not leading him to God as it ought to. Instead, the sinner takes what's holy, righteous, and good and he worships creation instead of God. And if the rocks and the trees had a voice they would cry out in protest, point them to the God they ought to worship.

So, as wonderful as general revelation is and obviously it is glorious. We live in Colorado and every time we come out of here and we see the sunset, it is absolutely beautiful. God puts on the canvas of the sky, every single night a different design for

us to enjoy and appreciate and love. And if any of us takes a drive up into the mountains or even drives east, goes into the plains and goes to the Pawnee Grasslands, or wherever we go, we see evidence of this magnificent glory of God's creations and, and then we reason from that up to the creator and say, what, who is like you? What, what can I say but you are holy, holy, holy?

So, as wonderful as general revelation is, and it is, it is not meant to be a solitary, solo, lone witness to the glory of God. General revelation has an essential partner. We call it a Bible, special revelation, words of God. General revelation, as I said, is the setting and the stage for the main character and the main character is the conveying of God's mind and God's thought to us, created in, cause we're created in his own image.

So, put those two together, general and special revelation, together they reveal the full knowledge of God that he wanted to reveal to us and that which he's disclosed to us as creatures. It, does the Bible contain everything, every fact about God that can be known? God is infinite right. This is a finite book, but it leads us in, infinite portals to discover the mind of God and as we enter into our eternal state, we're going to be unhindered

in any way from learning all about God. That is what I look forward to most is that continual learning and discovering and rejoicing in the God that I know and the God that saved me.

So, together full knowledge of God which he has disclosed to us as creatures. Let me read to you a couple of paragraphs from Berkhof, Louis Berkhof in *Systematic, The, well, Systematic Theology*. "First of all, Kuyper calls attention to the fact that theology as the knowledge of God differs in an important point from all other knowledge. In the study of all other sciences man places himself *above* the object of his investigation and *actively* elicits from it his knowledge by whatever method may seem most appropriate, 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 reflect, "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. And even after God has revealed Himself

objectively, it is not human reason that discovers God, but it is God who discloses Himself to the eye of faith. However, by the application of sanctified human reason to the study of God's Word man can, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, gain an ever-increasing knowledge of God."

Skipping ahead, he says, The, this, "the position must be maintained, however, that theology would be utterly impossible without a self-revelation of God. And when we speak of revelation, we use the term in the strict sense of the word. It is not something which God is passive, a mere quote "becoming manifest," but something in which He is actively making Himself known. It is not, as many moderns would have it, a deepened spiritual insight which leads to an ever-increasing discovery of God on the part of man;" Again, putting God underneath the microscope of man. "But a supernatural act of self-communication, a purposeful act on the part of the Living God."

That's a distinction then between general and special revelation. With general revelation we are over the subject. We are looking at general revelation as the object and we examine it by whatever methods we deem most appropriate. With special revelation the reverse is true. God, the subject, is the one who

reveals, and then as the object we are still in subjection and in submission to him. And so, it is not unaided human reason but aided human reason and a submissive human reason, submissive to his, his will and his words.

So, we'll go into special revelation now and start with a definition. What is special revelation? Special revelation, what is special about it? Special revelation is God disclosing truth to man through words. God disclosing truth to man through words. So, whereas general revelation is universal in its reach, special revelation is specific, targeted, and determined by the divine will. Think about the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ, you can think about the person and work of Christ, all that he's said, all that he did, all that the apostles wrote in scripture. What can be known about Christ, that is not universal knowledge. It's particular. It's articulated through the preaching of the gospel and not everybody hears the preaching of the gospel.

The knowledge of Jesus Christ is not universally accessible to all people, in all places, at all times like general revelation is. It's not like the sun in its orbit. It must be brought specially and particularly to people. That's why, that's what fuels the missionary enterprise or the missionary impulse. So,

it's not just physical, Christ's physical presence. It's not just his spiritual presence, but by spirit and by word, it's disclosure of the knowledge of Christ. It comes to specific people, at specific times, in specific places. That's why we do red team, green team missionary work and everything else.

Emery Bancroft writes, "Special revelation is *primarily* for fallen man and is remedial. As general revelation was given to man as man, *special revelation was given to man as sinner.*"

Louis Berkhof again expands the thought on this, "General revelation," says Berkhof, "is rooted in creation, is addressed to man as man, and more particularly to human reason, and finds its purpose in the realization of the end of his creation, to know God and thus enjoy communion with him. Special revelation is rooted in the redemptive plan of God, is addressed to man as sinner, can be properly understood and appropriated only by faith, and serves the purpose of securing the end for which man was created in spite of the disturbance wrought by sin. " and " In view of the eternal plan of redemption it should be said that this special revelation did not come in as an after-thought, but was in the mind of God from the very beginning."

Just to clarify those comments because they can seem to relegate special revelation to something supplemental, less important, being remedial, something remedial to general revelation. It's, that's not exactly true. We need to, as we make distinctions, we need to be careful in our language, but think about this that God did speak to Adam directly and he did that apart from Eve and he did that prior to Eve's creation. But he spoke to Adam directly and that revelation falls within the category of special revelation. God disclosing truth about himself, knowledge about himself to Adam through words and when, when did that happen? Before or after the fall? Before the fall.

So, he didn't speak to Adam as a sinner, so it wasn't just coming after and only supplemental, it was spoken through words to Adam before the fall. So, the pre, this is the pre-fall world in Adam created in innocence and God spoke to him then. So, special revelation, it's a part of the full unveiling of the glory of God. Both general and special revelation pre-fall.

The pre-fall world and Adam, Adam was created in innocence, he was righteous, but remember it's an untested righteousness. When Adam's righteousness was tested, he fell. So, Adam's pre-fall condition and created in innocence, that was never the final

form, that was never the end game, the purpose and design for which God created the world. God decreed eternally in one conscience thought, to consummate all things in Christ. Adam didn't fall and then God came up with a plan B. Adam's fall was in plan A and there has only ever been a plan A. Anything God plans is plan A.

So, God decreed eternally to consummate all things in Christ which means all revelation, all divine self-disclosure was always and only meant to be completed and fulfilled in Christ. Turn over to, you should be in Romans, so turn over to Colossians chapter 1. Colossians 1 and go into verse 15. "He" Christ, his beloved son, he, "is the image of the invisible God, the first born of all creation." First born, not being the first one born out of creation, but the preeminent one in creation. That's a word imagery that speaks of preeminence. So, he is the image of the invisible God. He's what's visible of what's invisible. He is the preeminent one of all creation.

"For by him," verse 16, "by him all things were created. In heaven and on earth. Visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rules or authorities - all things were created through him and for him." So, created through him but also

created for him. "He's before all things and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church. He's the beginning, the first born from the dead that in, in everything he might be preeminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross."

That is the original design. That is what God decreed and so, because he needed to make peace by the blood of his cross, guess what's in the original decree? The fall. Guess what's in the original decree? General revelation, yes. Special revelation as well. So, special revelation I would just make an argument, it's not primarily for fallen man. It's not merely remedial, even though all of it is consummated in Christ. God has given a special revelation to lead all mankind, whether pre-fall man, fallen man, redeemed man, glorified man, special revelation is designed to lead mankind to see God revealed fully, completely, and perfectly in Christ.

This article by Carl F. H. Henry says this, "The term revelation means intrinsically, the disclosure of what was previously unknown. In Judeo-Christian theology, the term is used primarily

of God's communication to humans of divine truth. That is his manifestation of himself or of his will. Essentials of the biblical view are at the, are that the *logos* is the divine agent in all revelation. This revelation being further discriminated as general or universal, so revelation in nature, history, reason, and conscience and special or particular, that is redemptive revelation conveyed by wonderful acts and words.

"The special revelation in sacred history is crowned by the incarnation of the living Word. And the inscription of the spoken, inscripturation of the spoken word. The Gospel of redemption is not there for merely a series of abstract theses, unrelated to specific historical events. It is the dramatic news that God has acted in saving history, climaxed by the incarnate person and work of Christ. Hebrews 1:2, for the salvation of lost humankind. In the redemptive events of biblical history do not stand uninterpreted, their authentic meaning in giving in the sacred writings. Sometimes after, sometimes before the events. The series of sacred acts, therefore, includes the divine provision of an authoritative canon of writings. The sacred scriptures. Providing a trustworthy source of knowledge of God and the, and of his plan.

"Despite the distinction of general and special revelation, God's revelation is none-the-less," and here's the important part, "is none-the-less a unity. It's one, because God is one. It is a unity, and it must not be artificially sundered or divided. Even prior to the fall, Adam in Eden was instructed by specially revealed statutes. To be fruitful and multiply, "he did not," and not to eat a certain fruit, etc." End quote.

So, as we wade into the waters of the topic of special revelation, I want to start here, and we're kind of wrapping up a little bit here, wrapping up means I've got a few pages left. But we want to start by clarifying the modes of special revelation.

So, turn in your Bibles now to the, toward the end to Hebrews chapter 1. Hebrews 1:1 and 2, "Long ago at many times, and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets. But in these last days he has spoken to us by his son whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world." I just wanted to read those two verses for our purposes but, man you really can't stop there, can you? "He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification

for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the majesty on high, having become as much superior to the Angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs."

So, boiling down the first two verses, there are three modes of special revelation cited in that verse or, or maybe alluded to. You can see historical phenomena there, you can see the incarnate word, and an allusion to, also, the written word. So, what do the modes of God's special revelation, his particular speaking, his, his words to the world, words to his people, historical phenomenon, incarnate word, and the written word.

First, historical phenomena. That's the clause there "many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets." So, that refers to dreams and visions and visitations. So, the Theophanes and the Christophanies of the Bible. Refers to messengers, angels, prophets that were sent bearing God's message. The incarnation of Jesus Christ is included here as a historical phenomenon, but we, we put that into a separate category because it is the pinnacle of God's revelation.

But several points to break it down. God spoke, you could say, first of all, by direct speech. This is all historical

phenomenon so, ABC and so on, I think I have A through E so five of these. God spoke, first of all, by direct speech. You can see from the narratives; we see God speaking to people. There's nothing to cause us to believe he spoke in, in anything other than an audible, normal human language. A learned language. It wasn't some special spirit revelation or some gibberish that they, they heard and interpreted. It was something that, it was the language they spoke. He spoke Hebrew to the Hebrews and Greek to the Greeks and on it goes, in Aramaic.

God spoke to, God spoke in direct speech. He spoke to his own people. So, we can see clear evidence of that. He spoke to, and I've got references, I'm not going to read them all here but, Adam, Noah, Abraham, Rebekah, Isaac, Jacob, Joshua. He spoke to other people as well, those who were not necessarily his people. Spoke to unbelievers. Cane, Abimelech, Laban Nebuchadnezzar, Balaam, spoke to Hagar.

God spoke also, so, first, first one is God spoke by direct speech, he also spoke by divine visitations. So, he, the visible presence of God. There in Genesis 3, Exodus 19, Exodus 40. He also spoke by the Angel of the Lord which seems to be a Christophany in many places.

God spoke, third, by dreams or C, letter C by dreams. So, that's to say that God spoke to people while they were sleeping in a very vivid, obvious, divine visitation spoken through words. God spoke by visions as well, while people were not sleeping, he spoke to them while they were awake. So, you can see all kinds of, you know Isaiah 6 is a perfect example of that. God spoke by direct speech, he spoke by divine visitations, he spoke by dreams, he spoke by visions, and he also spoke by messengers. He used holy angels and he used human prophets.

So, won't go into all the detail on that we can, we could go into, but we could unpack it if we wanted to. So, he spoke by direct speech, divine visitation, dreams, visions, messengers, and the ultimate revelation of God, according to Hebrews 1:2, the ultimate revelation of God's Word combines several of those elements, direct speech, divine visitation, messenger, spoke in Christ, the incarnate word.

That is the emphasis in Hebrews 1:1 and 2. It's the contrast between all that God had done to reveal himself before in those, in the last days, in the former times, to the fathers and the prophets. And these days, these last days, he has spoken to us,

again, by his son. And that is a final revelation. Hebrews 1:1 and 2.

So, "Long ago in many times and in many ways, God spoke," past tense, "to our fathers. And these last days he has spoken to us," perfect, the sense of a perfect tense there, "who has spoken to us by his son." Listen to this bit from Emery Bancroft, he writes this, the passage of scripture, "This passage of scripture distinctly marks out Jesus Christ as the epitome of the revelation of God's person and will as well as the culmination of redemption. Christ is the supreme event of revelation as well as a definitive word of God's speaking as he declared his teaching to be Thy word. His word and deed are one and we need not and cannot choose between them. He is the final and supreme expression of revelation as historic event, as God himself becomes flesh and enters into the flow of history as expressed in the language and culture of first century Palestine.

"He is the center of history and revelation as he is the subject to pre-interpretation Old Testament and post-interpretation New Testament. Thus, scripture is the history interpretation and inerrant record of God's revelation that culminates in his own

presence among men. The scriptures, especially the New Testament, are the perpetuation within the church of the apostolic experience and comprehension of the incarnation. The only Christ is the Christ revealed to us in scripture. Written witnesses of the life of Christ is the extension of his spoken word. One cannot accept the authority of Christ, nor understand his message without understanding and accepting the authority of the New Testament. Other doctrines concerning the scriptures, such as canonicity and inspiration are thus equally as important as revelation since scripture itself is revelation."

So, just to put the importance of scripture into context is the right, the true interpreter of Christ as a historical event. So, Jesus Christ is the divine word, John 1:1 to 3, "In the beginning was the word, the word was with God, the word was God. He was in the beginning with God, all things were made through him," without any, "without him was not anything made that was made."

So, it falls in the category of created, he did it. So, Jesus Christ is the divine word, he's also the divine life. Turn to 1 John 1. 1 John 1:1 through 4, "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our

eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands concerning the word of life and the life was made manifest and we have seen it and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life which was with the father and was made manifest to us. That which we have seen and heard; we proclaim also to you so that you too may have fellowship with us. And indeed, our fellowship is with the father and with his son Jesus Christ. Writing these things to you so that our joy may be complete.

"This is the message we've heard from him and proclaim to you, God is light, in him is no darkness at all." Jesus Christ is the divine life and note in that section all the references to the physical senses. Sensory experience, the divine life became flesh and blood, and you touch him and know him and see him and hear him speak. Jesus Christ as the Word, the incarnate Word. He is the divine word; he is the divine life. He's also the divine interpreter. John 1:18 says, "No one has ever seen God, but the only God who is at the father's side, he has made him known."

Jesus Christ is also the divine image. He's the image of the invisible God. "For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell." Jesus Christ is also the divine wisdom, just jot down

Colossians 1:24 to 27, 1 Timothy 3:16, Colossians 2:3, Colossians 2 verses 8 to 10. Did you get all those? Well, that's why we're recording it and you can come up here afterwards and jot them down if you want to.

It is important to understand that Jesus Christ is the divine word, he's the divine life, he's the divine interpreter of God, and the interpreter of all things. He's the image of God, he is the wisdom of God. And it's important to understand his role because it's through him and through what he said and taught and what he commissioned his apostles to do, to write down everything in scripture and the spirit, he sent the spirit to allow them to remember everything that he taught and said and be able to write that down that the scripture then becomes our interpreter of all reality. He is the interpreter of all reality. He's the interpreter of God himself. And so, if we're going to think God's thoughts after him, we've got to think Christ's thoughts after him, and if we're going to think Christ's thoughts after him, we're gotta think biblically. We've got to think scripture thoughts.

So, historical events, even the incarnation itself has to be interpreted to us by the Holy Spirit through the spoken, written

Word of God. It's due to our fallen nature that any naked bare event can be, often was, it still is, misinterpreted. How many different people have their own view of who Jesus is? They all read the pages of scripture and say, well, my Jesus wouldn't condemn everyone, anybody for their, their sexual preferences. I mean, he's the one who put that love in them. My Jesus wouldn't condemn. My Jesus... There's only one Jesus and his, he needs to be interpreted, rightly understood, not through a fallen but through a redeemed nature that's in subjection to the Word of God.

That's why we have, even, even, even for the best Christian interpreters, they still need to follow guidelines called Hermeneutics. Rules of interpretation to mitigate, mitigate against any errors of reasoning. The noetic effects of sin. So, historical phenomenon including the incarnation has to be rightly interpreted and we do that by means of apostolic propositions. Propositions of truth in scripture. Those propositions, they depend on the reality of the historical phenomena itself for their truthfulness. But, to rightly interpret any of the historical phenomenon, we need to record, look to the record of scripture and the propositions of scripture.

So, we need to see them as inextricably, inseparably linked. So, we have in special revelation three modes, the historical phenomenon, the incarnate word, and, third, the written word, the written word. Everything that's contained within, and nothing outside of, the Old and New Testaments of holy scripture.

So, no apocryphal writings are included. No Book of Mormon is included. No Sarah Young's *Jesus Calling* is included or anything she's written therein. All and only what is written in the Old and New Testaments of holy scripture. The Word of God is contained in the holy, Old, Old and New Testaments of scripture and completed in redemptive, redemptive history. Recorded in the Old and New Testaments of scripture.

This is an important punctuation, note of punctuation put on by Greg Bahnsen. Bahnsen says, "The Christian has new commitments, new presuppositions, a new Lord, a new direction and goal- he is a *new man*. That newness is expressed in his thinking and scholarship, for (as in all other areas) *Christ* must have the *preeminence* in the world of thought." Colossians 1:18.

"We must concur with Dr. Cornelius Van Til in saying:" and now Bahnsen's quoting Van Til, "'It is Christ as God who speaks in the Bible. Therefore the Bible does not appeal to human reason as ultimate in order to justify what it says. It comes to the human being with absolute authority. Its claim is that human reason must itself be taken in the sense in which scripture takes it, namely, as created by God and as therefore properly subject to the authority of God... The two systems, that of the non-Christian and that of the Christian, differ because of the fact that their basic assumptions, or presuppositions differ. On the non-Christian basis man is assumed to be the final reference point in prediction... The Reformed method... begins frankly "from above." It would "presuppose" God. But in presupposing God it cannot place itself at any point on a neutral basis with the non-Christian...

"Believers themselves have not chosen the Christian position because they were wiser than others. What they have they have by grace alone. But this fact does not mean that they must accepted the problematics of fallen man as right or even as probably or possibly right. For the essence of the idea of scripture is that it alone is the," criteria, "criterion of truth.'" End quote

from, from Cornelius Van Til and end of that section from Bahnsen.

Why must we insist, as Bahnsen puts it, that "scripture alone is the sole criterion of truth?" It's because we have to be careful about binding people's consciences. We need to understand that the, our fellow creatures, our fellow human beings, they're God's creatures not ours, it's His Word and His Word alone that has authority to bind the conscience," and to command obedience not our word, not our opinions, not our it, it has nothing to do, we need to be very careful that we're not leading people astray because we're going to give an account for that.

There are very many subtle ways, "that there are other "authorities" that try to usurp God's rightful place of authority, His sole place of authority," his right to interpret all reality and to bare that authority over the conscience. In Jesus' day, usurpers were the traditions of the elders, the teachings of rabbis, the practices of the pharisees." All those things try to usurp God's place of being the sole interpreter and the sole authority over the conscience and that's what Jesus delt with all the time, pointing them back to the Word of God.

"In the fifteenth," 16th "century, usurpers were popes and councils and traditions" and, thankfully, we are here because we're children of that reformation. "Today the usurpers are personal feelings, people's experiences, their sense of intuitions, whatever promotes their own personal happiness, and whatever else is blowing in the cultural wind at any given moment." All that is demanding to have the rightful place of authority, to bind the conscience.

But as Bahnsen warns again in *Always Ready*. Quote, "Those who refuse to presuppose the epistemic Lordship of Christ, the truth of Scripture as the standard of knowledge, and the necessity of God's light before they could see light, are led into futile thoughts and darkness." And that's what prevails today, "futile thoughts and darkness" as the blind are leading the blind.

That's why we can't accept the charismatic position that we can just, God can just speak to us in our own mind. We have a sense guiding of the Holy Spirit that tells us something and it's extra biblical, it's not nailed down in Scripture. When they do that, they're entering into the territory where they're, they are going to bind somebody's conscience to something that's not God's word, God's authority.

Even if they, even if it's done in their private prayer closet, whose conscience are they binding? Their own. They don't have the right to do that, only God in his Word has the right to bind the conscience. So, we need to be very careful with that. And that's what we're going to get into next time to talk more and more about the written Word of God and it's a good stopping point for tonight.

Father, thank you for such a great day of worship and thank you for this, this body of Christ here locally in Greeley, Colorado. We thank you so much for Grace Church. We thank you for all that you're doing in and through us. We thank you Lord Jesus for your cross work. The penal substitutionary atonement that you provided for us. We thank you for the righteous life that's been granted to us as a gift. We thank you for your continual shepherding of this church and praying for us. Interceding for us according to the will of God. We thank you for deploying your Holy Spirit, living in each one of us, indwelling us and leading us into all truth. We thank you for the joy that we have together, walking in obedience to you, faithfully, as you give us grace. In Jesus name, Amen.