

Living Way Church
Biblical Studies Program – April 2013
God’s Unfolding Revelation: An Introduction to Biblical Theology
Lesson One

- I. Introduction: Why Christians Should Be Concerned With Biblical Theology
 - A. We all find some parts of the Bible difficult to understand
 - B. The meaning of the Bible is not settled solely on our understanding of its inspiration and authority
 - C. Biblical theology gives us the means of dealing with problematic passages in the Bible by relating them to the one message of the Bible
 - D. Biblical theology enables us to relate any Bible story to the whole message of the Bible
 1. Biblical theology is a means of looking at one particular event in relation to the total picture
 2. This total picture is God’s unfolding plan in redemptive history
 - E. Biblical theology shows the relationship of all parts of the Old Testament to the person and work of Jesus Christ
 1. The overwhelming testimony of the New Testament is that Jesus fulfills the Old Testament, which means the Old Testament is, ultimately, about Jesus
 2. Jesus claimed that He Himself is the subject of the Old Testament
 - a. Luke 24:25-27 – *“And he said to them, ‘O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?’ And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.”*
 - b. Luke 24:44-45 – *“Then he said to them, ‘These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.’ Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures”*
 - c. John 5:39-40 – *“You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life.”*
 3. Prophecy, law, narrative, wisdom saying, or apocalyptic vision are all related to the coming of Jesus Christ
 4. Biblical theology is an approach that shows these relationships, so that the Old Testament can be understood as Christian Scripture
 - F. Biblical theology assumes the unity of the Bible – there is one overall message, rather than a number of unrelated themes; therefore, Biblical

theology enables us to map out the unity of the Bible by looking at its message as a whole

- G. Biblical theology provides the basis for the interpretation of any part of the Bible as God's word to us
 - 1. A proper understanding of the biblical text requires that we know the meaning that the original writer or speaker intended
 - 2. But we must go beyond this to the question of what the text means for us now

II. How Is Possible To Know God?

- A. God makes Himself known
 - 1. God knows us and allows Himself to be known by us
 - 2. He has spoken to us and told us what He wants us to know of Him
 - 3. *Theology* is the word we use to refer to what we know about God
 - 4. Every Christian is a theologian, but some are more able theologians than others
- B. Ways of doing theology
 - 1. **Systematic theology** is the systematic organization of truths or doctrines under certain headings
 - a. Systematic theology asks: *What should Christians believe now about any aspect of Christianity?*
 - b. Its results: Christian doctrine
 - 2. **Historical theology** looks at the emergence of key doctrines from particular times in the history of Christianity
 - a. Historical theology asks: *What have Christians believed about their faith at any given time?*
 - b. Its results: a record of the development of Christian doctrine
 - 3. **Pastoral theology** addresses the way the Word of God touches people in every aspect of their life
 - a. Pastoral theology asks: *How should Christians minister to one another so that they grow to maturity in Christian living?*
 - b. Its results: care, healing, nurture, and growth in the local church
 - 4. **Biblical theology** follows the progress of revelation from the first word of God to man through to the unveiling of the full glory of God in Christ
 - a. Biblical theology asks: *By what process is God revealed Himself to mankind?*
 - b. Its results: the relating of the whole Bible to our Christian life now
- C. Biblical theology is sometimes considered to be a part of a wider discipline called *Exegetical Theology*
 - 1. Exegesis is the process of getting out of the text what it actually

says in its original setting

2. Exegesis involves a number of distinct operations:
 - a. **Textual criticism** is the task to uncover the most reliable text of the Old and New Testaments
 - (1) Textual criticism asks: *What is the text?*
 - (2) Its results: providing the most reliable text possible from which our English translations can be made
 - b. **Biblical introductions**
 - (1) Biblical introduction asks: *What kind of document is this, where did it come from and how, who wrote it and with what purpose?*
 - (2) Its results: providing background information to the meaning of the text
 - c. **Biblical exegesis** (also called *grammatical-historical exegesis*) focuses on the meaning of words (grammar) in their own historical context
 - (1) Biblical exegesis asks: *What was the text intended to convey to those for whom it was originally written?*
 - (2) Its results: understanding of the intended meaning of the text
 - d. **Biblical canonicity** addresses the canon – the extent of Holy Scripture
 - (1) Biblical canonicity asks: *What are the extent of the text and the nature of its authority?*
 - (2) Its results: recognition of the whole Bible as the authoritative Word of God
3. Exegetical theology involves a number of different approaches to the Biblical text in order to understand it as part of a process in history that resulted in the finished Bible
4. The last stage of exegetical theology is biblical theology, examining the progression of God's revelation to mankind

III. How Do We Know What Is Real And True?

- A. There are three main views of how we know what is real and true
 1. The first view is that we are completely independent of God (atheistic [or secular] humanism)
 - a. The assumption in this approach is that we as human beings are in control of the whole process of gaining knowledge
 - b. We assume that, given enough time and given access to all parts of the universe, we would be capable of knowing all there is to be known
 - c. We broadly describe this position as secular or atheistic humanism

- (1) God is ruled out as impossible or as irrelevant
 - (2) It is humanistic in that it sees man to be at the center of the process and in control of his situation
 - d. All forms of humanism *make the assumption* that the human mind alone is the final judge of what is or is not true
 - e. See diagram 1 - Atheistic Humanism
- 2. The second view is that we are only partly independent of God (theistic humanism)
 - a. There is an area of truth that is beyond our human abilities to find out
 - b. To know anything about the spiritual or supernatural realm requires revelation
 - c. Knowledge that comes by revelation is simply added to the knowledge we gained by ourselves
 - d. Theistic humanists see the knowledge gained by revelation as "filling the gaps" in our naturally gained knowledge, in order to complete the picture
 - e. Since he already understands something of the nature of reality, the theistic humanist is likely to see God as being subject to the same laws of the universe as we are
 - (1) Added revelation from God is always filtered through natural knowledge
 - (2) Human reason will, therefore, sit in judgment on the Bible to determine what aspects of it can be accepted as revelation from God
 - f. See diagram 2 - Theistic Humanism
- 3. The third and biblical view is that knowledge is dependent on God (Christian theism)
 - a. God created everything and therefore knows everything
 - b. The Bible presents God as quite distinct from everything in creation
 - (1) God is not merely a part of a general reality
 - (2) He is the Creator, Sustainer, and Controller of everything that exists in reality
 - c. Man was created to know God
 - (1) Every fact in the universe speaks of its Creator and is open for us to discern (Ps 19:1; Rom 1:19-20)
 - (2) In addition, we are made in the image of God; this means that we know ourselves only as we know God, and know God only as we know ourselves
 - d. Man in the image of God communicates by word, and this reflects the fact that God is One who communicates by word

- e. Christian theism recognizes that, even before sin entered the world, man was dependent upon the word of God for a correct interpretation of the world
 - f. See diagram 3 – Christian Theism (before the fall)
 - g. Christian theism (unlike the other views) treats seriously the matter of sin
 - (1) According to the Bible, sin brings death
 - (2) This current state of death means not only that every living thing eventually dies (departs this life), but also that relationships with God are severed
 - (3) In fact, all relationships in the whole creation are affected (Gen 3:15-24; Rom 8:20-22; Eph 2:1-3)
 - h. The Bible also indicates that man suppresses the knowledge of God that is to be had through nature – he knows the truth but suppresses it in his wickedness (Rom 1:18-25)
 - i. All forms of humanism are expressions of the sinful nature – of mankind’s refusal to acknowledge the truth of God
 - j. See diagram 4 – Christian Theism (man after the fall)
- B. How can we know the truth of God?
- 1. If the sinfulness of man makes him unable to recognize the truth, what hope is there?
 - 2. The Bible tells us that the deadness of man’s heart and his hatred of God are overcome by the goodness of God (grace and mercy)
 - 3. In His goodness and mercy, God gives a new and special revelation of Himself, and He subdues our rebellious wills by His Spirit, so that we understand and received His revelation
 - 4. See diagram 5 – Christian Theism (man redeemed in Christ)
- C. Presuppositions
- 1. Presuppositions are the assumptions we make in order to be able to hold some fact to be true
 - a. These assumptions are a starting point
 - b. They are self-attesting (final authority cannot be proven on the basis of some higher authority)
 - c. If the starting point is false then everything that is seen to follow from it will also be false
 - 2. The alternatives:
 - a. Either we work on the basis of a sovereign, self-attesting (self-proving) God who speaks to us by His Word that we accept as true because it is His word
 - b. Or, we work on the basis that man is the final judge of all truth
 - 3. The Christian position: the Bible is God’s Word, and that it says

- what God wants it to say in exactly the way He wants to say it
- D. The presuppositions of biblical theology
 1. God made every fact in the universe, and He alone can interpret all things and events
 2. Because we are created in the image of God, we know that we are dependent on God for the truth
 3. As sinners, we suppress this knowledge and reinterpret the universe on the assumption that we, not God, give things their meaning
 4. Special revelation through God's redemptive work, reaching its highest point in Jesus Christ, is needed to deal with our suppression of the truth and hostility to God
 5. A special work of the Holy Spirit brings repentance and faith, so that sinners acknowledge the truth which is in Scripture
 - IV. Christ Has Made Him Known (John 1:18)
 - A. Theology is not just knowing about God but knowing Him
 - B. Through the preaching of the gospel, men and women are brought to faith in Jesus Christ - He conquers our rebellious hearts and minds and we worship Him as Lord
 - C. Our knowledge of Christ comes through Scriptures, and they give a united testimony to Him
 - D. To understand the Bible we begin with Jesus Christ
 1. We see every part of the Bible in relationship to Him and to His saving work
 2. This is as true of the Old Testament as it is of the New
 - E. Truth is restored in Christ
 1. Jesus not only saves us from the effects of our sinful ignorance; he also informs our minds of the nature of the truth.
 2. We cannot separate the saving and renewing work of Christ - we are saved that we might truly know God and live in fellowship with Him
 - F. Christ interprets the whole Bible
 1. Every word of the New Testament comes from the Holy Spirit's testimony to Jesus
 2. The New Testament records the central facts of the gospel and explores the implications of the gospel for the lives of God's people
 3. What went before Christ in the Old Testament, as well as what comes after Him, finds its meaning in Him
 4. The Old Testament must be understood in its relationship to the gospel event
 - G. The relationship of the Old Testament to Christ (see diagram 6)
 - V. And We Know Him Through Scripture

- A. According to Jesus, the Old Testament is the Word of God
 - 1. Jesus never expressed any doubts about the truth of Old Testament history; in fact, the events of Israel's history were seen as part of the one history in which Jesus Himself played the decisive role
 - 2. Jesus taught what the Old Testament says is what God says
 - a. Matt 19:4-5 - *"Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, 'Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh'?"*
 - b. Jesus understood the word of the Old Testament to be His most effective weapon, because it carried the authority and power of God Himself (Mt 4:1-11; Lk 4:1-13 cf. Mk 12:24)
- B. The Old Testament is the Word of God about Christ
 - 1. As mentioned earlier, the testimony of the New Testament is that Jesus fulfills the Old Testament
 - 2. The Old Testament is about Jesus - He is the subject of the Old Testament (Luke 24:25-27; 24:44-45; John 5:39-40)
- C. The New Testament interprets the Old
 - 1. It is impossible from the Old Testament alone to understand the full meaning of God's acts and promises that it records
 - a. The Old Testament does not stand on its own
 - b. It is incomplete without its conclusion and fulfillment in the person and work of Jesus Christ
 - 2. God's revelation in Scripture is progressive, moving by stages from the original promises given to Israel, until the fullest meaning of these promises is revealed in Christ
 - 3. As Christians, we must return to the principles of Old Testament interpretation dictated by the New Testament
 - a. In doing Biblical theology as Christians, we do not start at Genesis 1 and work our way forward until we discover where it is all heading
 - b. Diagram 7 - Non-Christian approach to the Old Testament
 - c. Rather, we first come to Christ, and He directs us to study the Old Testament in the light of the gospel
 - d. Diagram 8 - Christian approach to the Old Testament
- D. The Old Testament is a progressively revealed word
 - 1. The Old Testament has a historical framework
 - 2. The writers of the Old Testament saw a unity in that history
 - a. It tells a single, coherent story that centers upon a particular line of people
 - b. The account of each successive stage of Israel's history builds upon what has gone before

3. With then the progression of unified history of the Old Testament, there is the progression of a unified theology
 - a. It is a progressive revelation of God and of His purposes for the salvation of His people
 - b. Two key events, above all, are seen as the preparation for the coming of Jesus
 - (1) The covenant promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob
 - (2) And the reign of David
 - c. Three people – Abraham, David, and Jesus – bind the saving purposes and acts of God into a single great work of salvation
4. The theology of the Old Testament is a progressive, redemptive revelation
 - a. It is *revelation* – in it God makes Himself known
 - b. It is *redemptive* – God reveals Himself in the act of redeeming us
 - c. It is *progressive* – God makes Himself and His purposes known by stages, until the full light is revealed in Christ

VI. The Bible Is The Divine-Human Word

- A. God chose Jesus Christ, the Word, as the way He would speak and act among us – Jesus Christ is revealed as a union of true God and true man in one person
- B. The Bible is a union of a truly divine word and a truly human word in one book
- C. Jesus is God's final and fullest revelation
 1. No one is able to understand Christ without God's Word and the Holy Spirit
 2. The mere facts of biblical history do not interpret themselves
 3. Progressive revelation means that God's revelation was not given all at once in the beginning, but was revealed by stages until the full light of truth was revealed in Jesus Christ
 4. See diagrams 9 and 10 – False views of revelation
- D. God reserved His greatest revelation until the point of fulfillment
 1. Jesus does not simply fulfill the promises
 2. He is the final and the fullest revelation of what the promises are really about
 3. See diagram 11 – Biblical Revelation

VII. We Begin And End With Christ

- A. As Christians, we should be interested in the proper interpretation of the Bible so that we know and understand what God is saying to us through His Word
- B. Without some understanding of the overall plan or structure of the Bible,

- it is difficult to correctly relate the various parts of the Bible to ourselves
- C. In order to know how any given part of the Bible relates to us, we must answer to prior questions:
 1. How does the text in question relate to Christ?
 2. How do we relate to Christ?
 - D. Jesus Christ is the link between every part of the Bible and ourselves
 - E. The gospel is the word about Jesus Christ and what He did for us in order to restore us to a right relationship with God

VIII. In Summary

- A. Biblical theology deals with what God makes known to us in the Bible, and with the way He makes it known
- B. There are three distinct (but related) “ingredients” to biblical theology
 1. Understanding the Bible means understanding the words that the Bible authors used in the way they intended them to be understood
 2. Understanding the Bible means understanding the historical story with in which the message of the Bible is unfolded
 3. Understanding the Bible means understanding the way words and history are used to reveal the truth about God and His redeeming activity
- C. Jesus Christ as “the pattern” of biblical theology
 1. Because Christ sums up the whole of biblical revelation, what is revealed of Him controls the way we do biblical theology
 2. From our starting point with Christ, we find ourselves moving backward and forward between the two Testaments
 3. Our understanding of the gospel is enhanced by our understanding of its Old Testament roots, and (at the same time) the Gospel shows us the true meaning of the Old Testament
- D. Jesus Christ shows us that biblical theology is about God bringing in His kingdom, in which all relationships are restored to perfection
- E. There is a great diversity in the Bible; yet, within the diversity in the Bible there exists an overall unity – an overarching theme we can recognize and understand
 1. The various biblical authors come from a variety of backgrounds
 - a. They emphasize different aspects of what God is doing and how He is doing it
 - b. They use different ways of expressing the truth in words
 2. Yet, the clear assumption throughout Scripture is that it is a single work, revealed to us by the one God
- F. Biblical theology emphasizes the theme or themes which provide the basis for understanding the single, unified message of the Bible