

## HERMENEUTICS – THE ART OF BIBLE INTERPRETATION

Reading and studying the Bible is unlike any other reading we would conduct in our modern era. Ancient writings provide a variety of obstacles that we must overcome including translation of ancient languages into a modern form, historical and cultural differences, etc. The difficulty in overcoming these and other obstacles is necessary so we can understand what the original hearers would have known when they heard this message. Hermeneutics is the art of understanding the issues and forms of communication to allow the text to speak into our life as God intended.

### 1.0 Introduction

- How to study and understand the Bible.
  1. The Bible is the **Word of God**:
    - Is better understood as the self-disclosure of God to humanity.
    - Man could never find or understand God, so God was compelled to reveal Himself to humanity.
    - God's revelation was through individuals who God selected to give His message through.
    - God's anointing of His messengers and the emotional, intellectual, personal, & cultural filters each added to the message, and is part of the message.
    - The Bible as the "Word of God" contains enough for us to learn about God's Character, His Nature, to form a relationship with Him, and to establish correct thinking about Him. However, the Word is not all that God is, and the Holy Spirit was promised to continue to reveal God to Jesus' disciples throughout the ages, and to lead them into Truth – keeping us shepherded until the Time of His Return.
    - The Bible is best understood as a love letter from God to humanity.
  2. God's revelation:
    - Occurs when God parts the curtain separating Himself from us and reveals Truths we could otherwise not know or learn. The curtain separating the Holy from the Holy of Holies in the OT is a significant image, and the tearing of the curtain at Jesus death is a critical statement to humanity that the barrier is gone.
    - Revelation was progressive over time – Adamic covenant [promise=purposeful life with God, sign=faithful obedience], Noahic covenant [promise=never to destroy again, sign=rainbow], Abrahamic covenant [promise=land & offspring, sign=circumcision], Mosaic covenant [promise=a holy nation, sign=Sabbath], Davidic covenant [promise=monarchy, sign=son], New Covenant [promise=restored humanity & creation, sign=Cross and Resurrection].
    - God is eternal and unchanging.
    - The progressive revelation does not reveal a changing nature of God but displays a more extravagant progression of God's Love and His plan for the redemption of humanity.
    - 'Humanity' means the individual created beings set in time and space.
  3. The Word of God is Alive

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- Heb 4:12 For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; **it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.**
- Because it is alive, it defines itself anew in meaning and expression throughout the ages to people of different culture, social/historical settings, etc.
- 4. Listen to God – what did He say? What did He mean?
  - Prayerfully and expectantly approach scripture – anticipate meeting with God.
  - The Holy Spirit wants to guide you, are you paying attention? Closed eyes and ears frustrated Jesus – many people were secure and confident in their knowledge and status quo and were not open to hear God’s new self-disclosure.
- 5. Practical Safeguards for Study
  - First prayerfully read the text, what does it seem to be saying?
  - Then use an authoritative source such as a good Study Bible and/or commentary to understand the setting, the author, the historical context, and the people or persons for whom the text was written.
  - Read the commentary to understand:
    - **What did it mean to the original hearers? This is a key thought!**
    - What then can we extrapolate as the application to us here and now?
  - Since the Word of God is “Alive and sharper than any two-edged sword” which is capable of dissecting a physical body. The Bible is Spiritual, so what is the sword application saying in a Spiritual context? Is there a fresh extrapolative interpretation and a resultant application we can derive from the text?
  - Do not simply look to invent new thinking – the Spirit wants to guide you... listen, study, double check, discuss what you are thinking with trusted & mature friends to guide you.
  - Ponder what is God saying... first to His people in the original historical and cultural context, then how it would be applied to our present historical and cultural context, and finally to you personally?
  - Theology is the disciplined search and study of God. Good theology acts as a filter that helps keep us on track when studying scripture. Think of it as train tracks – where the rails provide boundaries to keep us on track... such is sound doctrine and theology.
    - Doctrine – are statements of belief of a community that they hold in common. Theology – are thoughts held about God. Together they engage the head (IQ = cognitive/volitional) and the heart (EQ = emotive/relational).
    - Head and heart must be involved and balanced both in theology and hermeneutical study in submission to and dependence upon the Spirit.
  - God never acts in a manner inconsistent with His Character, and often His reasons won’t be completely known this side of the grave – 1 Cor 12:12.
  - Be patient – God does not promote confusion, but some things occur over time.

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- General Thoughts on Communication:
  1. Communication is a wondrous gift from God.
  2. Communication is interaction between individuals to promote understanding via an exchange of information, thoughts, insights, perspectives, etc. The same is true of communication with God.
  3. Interpretation is the process whereby we render raw information [that is the signals and symbols we perceive] as meaningful to ourselves and then make them communicable to others.
  4. Information enters our brain through the senses and are codified and stored, to later allow us to recognize and identify them. We receive this information:
    - Through the eye-gate as patterns of light [radiant energy] – visual information.
    - Through the ear-gate as patterns of sound [audible energy] – audible information.
    - Through the gates of our other senses – taste, touch, smell.
    - A healthy mind and heart will fairly constantly process information consistently and accurately. Altered states of consciousness render mixed signals and cause confusion.
  5. Information itself is value neutral – it is what it is until we interpret it and make out of it something meaningful and useful.
- Understanding is the digestion of raw information into something useful:
  1. It is open to interpretation by all individuals based upon their experience, expectations, and limits of reason or perception.
  2. In the process of understanding information, we apply/assume/presume meaning and we ascribe relevant values.
  3. Ethno-centricity is an anthropological term of the human presumption that all people look at reality and process information from a common human perspective and value structure. Obviously, we don't. Social & cultural differences abound.
  4. All information and in fact all communication undergoes the process of interpretation by the individual receiving it. This process of decoding symbols – visual, spoken, written, etc. is what we term “understanding.”
  5. There is therefore an inherent personal nature to this process as each person interprets information somewhat differently. Thus, giving each other reasonable boundaries for different interpretation approaches is both wise and gracious.

## 1.1 What is Hermeneutics?

- It is the study of the meaning of literature – it is the disciplined study of the text and the words that comprise it to facilitate understanding it's meaning.
- The Greek base of the word Hermeneutics means “to translate” – which means “to express thoughts and meaning in another language while retaining the sense of the original language. To communicate across boundaries comprised of time, space, language, history, culture, etc.
- Thus, hermeneutics is the study of the nature of the interpretative process through time.
- Messages can be verbal and non-verbal.
  1. Verbal messages are what is either written or spoken, they are still words. However, often what is not written or spoken can also be meaningful. Conversation has the merit of allowing one to ask questions of the speaker on clarifying their intent, etc.

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This is more difficult in dealing with written text, though it should still be pursued. Also, one may not always receive a clear or correct answer from their questions.

2. Non-verbal messages have to do with body language, spacial considerations & proximity, elevated use of spoken language, humor, anger, etc. These elements occur frequently in personal dialogue but are far more subtle in written text. Example of close friends or husband/wife where a gesture or comment may convey much inside information.
- **Exegesis** means “to learn or draw out meaning.” It is the ‘art’ of interpreting – more specifically of finding ‘the meaning’ of the message.
  1. One facet of all art is creativity – where we apply new ways or means of rendering an interpretation useful or meaningful.
  2. This involves issues of insight, skill, imagination, method, and practice.
  3. This is the opposite of eisegesis – which means to read in meaning... where the interpreter is validating a pre-conceived idea or notion. Often our frame of reference, theology, etc. allows us to read into the text or situations meaning that isn’t there or wasn’t intended by the author.
- **Homiletics** comes from the root word *homilia*, which means ‘a conversation’ – homiletics is the art of the verbal presentation of a text.
  1. The Prophets are some of the best-known preachers of the Old Testament.
  2. Modern day preachers are taught how to artfully present their messages for maximum impact upon their audience.
  3. The delivery of the message is part of the intended meaning of the speaker/author.
- **Hermeneutics** is not only used in biblical studies:
  1. It is also used in law – as lawyers interpret the law, and derive the subsequent intent and/or application of the law.
  2. It is used in all literature – as we seek to understand literature in its various forms as:
    - Poetry
    - Prose
    - Lyrics
    - Narrative

### 1.2 Why should we learn about Hermeneutics?

- Because we need to know not only what God said, but also what He meant by it.
- **Our paramount goal is – ‘Knowing God’**
  1. <sup>2 Tim 2:15</sup> Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.
  2. Ps 119 – God revealed Himself through creation so all would be aware of Him.
  3. <sup>1 Cor 2:9-14</sup> God went to the trouble of saying it; how can we fail to go to the trouble of seeking to understand it?!
  4. <sup>Ps 111:10</sup> The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; all who follow his precepts have good understanding. To him belongs eternal praise.
  5. <sup>Pr 1:7</sup> The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and discipline.
  6. <sup>Pr 2:5</sup> then you will understand the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of God.

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7. <sup>Pr 9:10</sup> “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.”
  8. <sup>Pr 10:27</sup> The fear of the LORD adds length to life, but the years of the wicked are cut short.
  9. <sup>Pr 14:27</sup> The fear of the LORD is a fountain of life, turning a man from the snares of death.
  10. <sup>Pr 15:16</sup> Better a little with the fear of the LORD than great wealth with turmoil.
  11. <sup>Pr 15:33</sup> The fear of the LORD teaches a man wisdom, and humility comes before honor.
  12. <sup>Pr 16:6</sup> Through love and faithfulness sin is atoned for; through the fear of the LORD a man avoids evil.
  13. <sup>Pr 19:23</sup> The fear of the LORD leads to life: Then one rests content, untouched by trouble.
  14. <sup>Pr 22:4</sup> Humility and the fear of the LORD bring wealth and honor and life.
- The priority is “Knowing and Understanding” what God has revealed about Himself.
    1. Knowing about God is not the goal, it is the Knowing God personally and relationally that is our goal.
    2. Knowing and walking with God is a relational experience. Even to this day, when we use the term “walk with me” to someone, companionship and relational intimacy is the intent.
    3. Understanding any person involves interaction and taking the time to be acquainted with them – their personality, their sense of humor, their likes and dislikes, how they think and act in circumstances, etc.
    4. When we know someone, it is fairly easy to recognize something they would say... such is also true of God... when we know His heart, we can more easily sense His intentions.
  - To know and understand we need to perform an intelligent and critical evaluation.
    1. The Word of God is too important to treat lightly or casually.
    2. It is our responsibility as disciples [followers of Jesus being conformed into His Likeness] to approach Scripture in a worthy manner.
    3. We need to be aware of all the aspects that impinge upon and affect our understanding.

### 1.3 Practical Separations we need to overcome to understand what God is telling us in Scripture

- Historical distance – Take a look at the historical timeline in your study Bible:
  1. We are separated by anywhere between 4,000 and 2,000 years from the biblical events
  2. Abraham circa 2,100 BC – this would be the “Bronze Age” of cultural development.
  3. Joseph in Egypt circa 1,900 BC
  4. Moses circa 1,500 BC
  5. Judges circa 1,300-1,100 BC
  6. King David circa 1,000 BC
  7. Prophetic writings 850-450 BC
  8. New Testament writings circa 40-90 AD].

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9. Perspective – consider the cultural and historical changes that have occurred in the last 100 years... or even the last 50 years. The “Industrial Revolution” began in 1790 and exploded through the early 1900’s. The “Technical Revolution” began in the 1980’s and we have witnessed astonishing changes since then. Now imagine how an “Bronze Age” culture of Abraham, Moses and the Judges or an “Iron Age” culture such as the Roman Era would view their world... we need to hear and see life as they understood it. We need to start from what we know of their perspective and work from there... utilizing hermeneutical skills and our thoughtful imagination.
- Language distance – Scripture is translated from ancient Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek – these languages have different means of conveying meaning.
  1. Hebrew has the fewest words – approximately 3,000 words, hence their meaning can only be derived by context in the sentence/paragraph structure.
  2. Greek is a more expressive language – approximately 4,500 words... but nothing as complex as English where we have great specificity of meaning with some 200,000 words in our modern lexicon. To properly understand the original thoughts of the Biblical writers, we need lexicons, dictionaries, and commentaries. Many words have to read in parallel manuscripts to better understand the message the author meant to convey.
  3. Modern college English employs some 20,000 words, with some 200,000 words in play.
  4. Thinking in a different language is an art form – even in modern languages the word form differential between English and French are substantial. It is even more so with ancient languages.
  5. The written language is fixed at the original time of writing, while the receptor languages... the languages into which the original is being translated are constantly in flux as new idioms and figures of speech are developed and old ones discarded as these concepts of understanding are refined over time.
- Cultural distance – their world is not our world.
  1. Problem of *ethnocentricity* – the imposition of our “world view” and/or “understanding” upon the ancients or any other culture for that matter.
  2. When we learn something, it emerges out of the context of our life experiences. It is a challenge to place oneself into another’s context that has a different life experience, let alone to receive their message come away with their intended meaning – which is what hermeneutics intends to do.
  3. 21<sup>st</sup> century humanity does not share the same values or world view as the 1<sup>st</sup> century – thus we need to catch up with what the original readers/hearers would have known and believed to understand the author’s intended meaning.
- Pre-understanding – your own background and/or your denomination/church theological bias will color what you see and believe. Some may find the information contained in this study somewhat threatening as it may challenge long held thoughts or beliefs. The key is to rely on God and inquire what He would have you hear – remember that His Spirit is within and desires to lead you into the fullness of His truth.
  1. “You must unlearn what you have learned” – Yoda teaching the young Luke Skywalker.
  2. Beware of what you believe... it may get in the way of the Truth!



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3. “God said it, I believe it and that settles it” – this is bad theology as well as a bad bumper sticker. At best it may show faith, at worst it demonstrates a closed mind that is not listening to how God communicates.
4. “Minds like a parachute function best when open” - unknown
- Problem of theological disagreement – requires humility and sensitivity to preserve the mandate of Christian **Unity in Faith**.
  1. There are many aspects evangelical Christians accept as different – we will get into a short theological review in section 1.6 – obvious differences include:
    - The timing of the Lord’s second coming – Pre-trib/mid trib/post trib - etc
    - The nature of the Lord’s second coming or Millenarianism [Rev 20:1-10]
      - Pre-millennialist hold that the dead in Christ will be raised and the living believers will be caught up in the air with Him and then will reign with Him on earth for a thousand years followed by a final struggle and then judgment.
      - Post-millennialists see the return of Christ taking place after the millennium.
      - A-millennialist hold there is no literal millennium – they see this period being the ‘church age’ or the period of time between His Advent and second coming.
    - Salvation security demonstrates some major disagreement between Arminianism and Calvinism. However, both would affirm to the Deity of Jesus as the unique atonement for sin, God as Triune, and most of the foundational Christian doctrines.
    - It is always wise to look for what binds believers together in promoting the unity of the faith rather than focusing on what separates us.
  2. Read and re-read! Think and re-think! Dennis Prager’s book Think a Second Time is a great example... it speaks to people who made up their mind on their world view in their formative high school and college years and then go to their graves without rethinking their world view in terms of what they have learned and been exposed to through their lives. It is always wise to rethink what we think we know and why we believe it. This is way different than doubting God, instead it’s a manner of seeking God.
  3. Teach with humility and respect for the thoughts of others. Some folks have strong faith and can take some push back, others have a simple or maybe weaker faith that could become unhinged.
  4. Maintain your conviction on things that are certain under the watchful heart of the Holy Spirit Who leads us into all Truth.
  5. The more remote or uncertain the idea, the more circumspect we should be.
  6. It is wise maintain humility by not representing your thoughts as “thus says the Lord” when teaching the “Word of God.”
  7. “Theology is not something that you get out of a book – theology develops when you see things that make no sense to you and you cry out to God ‘help me make sense of this’.” – Danny Baumann YWAM missionary, author, and evangelist.
  8. Do not be threatened by slightly divergent thoughts or beliefs... consider them prayerfully... and respect the thoughts of others even though you disagree.

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- Problem of clinging to what you want to believe – this is **Subjectivism**:
  1. Make “the Truth” your goal and objective. Be diligent and scrutinize the details. Remember there are many others who are far more intelligent & wise than you that have done this very thing through the ages, and that many have come away with different insights and thoughts – don’t presume you are right, it’s wise to presume you may be wrong and be open to allow God to develop your thinking over time. Don’t force a timetable on learning or understanding, allow and expect the Spirit to lead you.
  2. Don’t hold on to thoughts just because you like them or what they may convey... hold yourself to a higher standard and learn to wait upon God to make things clear.
  3. Grapple with the Word to draw out its meaning knowing that our relationship with God is a dance but working with the Bible is often a wrestling match.
  4. Avoid **devotionalism** – this is a sentimental and emotional counterfeit to knowing the Truth. Feelings are helpful when God uses them to reaffirm what is true, but all too often sentimentalism and devotionalism are easy ploys to pull us toward thoughts and ideals not in keeping with God’s truth. Know the Word – allow it to captivate your mind and soften your heart. Remain expectant before God that He will guide you. Be sensitive to His presence as Godly emotion is real as revealed in the Psalms. This is true devotion and Spiritual dependence, and not merely a sentimental or emotional counterfeit.
  5. It is too easy to accept the thinking of another rather than thinking it through yourself... but until you do so it can never be your own.
  6. Don’t add words that God didn’t write. Never put your words in God’s mouth... such is the heart of false prophets.
  7. Our words need to proclaim God’s Truth not just to evoke emotion, or worse trying to impress others with our wisdom or knowledge, and worse yet to manipulate another to do what you want them to do. This is the nature of Spiritual abuse.
  8. Spiritual abuse will be severely judged by our Lord – don’t believe something because you are told to do so... allow God to develop your theology holistically.
  9. Christian media [and many in the pulpit] place too much emphasis on feelings and emotional response rather than the Truth. We need to raise the bar. Emotion and feelings have their place in verifying what we know. The role of the heart is to validate the mind, and the role of the mind is to constrain the heart – where there is dissonance or conflict you need to study, pray and sometimes submit to mentors and disciplers for guidance.
  10. Teach God’s Truth and allow the Spirit to apply it to their life – never settle for short cuts, like simply making people’s life better, or helping their life work better, or making them feel better about themselves.

### 1.4 Summary

- Hermeneutics is to identify, expose, and resolve problems that exist with our understanding.
- Without good hermeneutics we are helpless to decide what God is saying to us.
- Our priority is to derive an objective basis of Truth – in its context; objective is balanced and supported by good translations and a proper application of hermeneutics. It always points toward and reveals God.



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## 1.5 Hermeneutical Primary Principles & Theorems for Study:

- P1 – The Author’s Intended Meaning is the only proper goal of interpretation
  1. Begin with – what did the author say?
  2. What did the author’s original hearers understand?
  3. This requires profound sympathy with the sender of the message.
    - Who was the sender?
    - Who was the messenger?
    - Who was the author/editor?
- P2 – The Text is the proper object of interpretation, rather than the event to which the text refers.
  1. The description of the event is not the same as the event. The author God used is relating to us what they felt about, and what they understood about, and/or what they learned about the event. There was a particular if not specific meaning and significance, or they wouldn’t have written it.
  2. We have to rely on the Word God provided us, because we cannot re-enter history and relive the events. History is always being rethought and re-evaluated... not that the events changed, but our interpretation or emphasis has evolved. God’s message within the context of the past events, have application for events we experience.
- P3 – Synthesis precedes analysis
  1. Synthesis begins utilizing a wide-angle lens, it is seeing the big picture in context.
  2. Analysis proceeds downward to greater and greater detail – like with a microscope.
  3. Like reading a map – start with general area and then progress to specific area.
  4. The basic unit of meaning of the Bible is the “Whole Literary Work.” Then it gets more specific about a whole thought or story in context. Meaning is not found in a line or word out of context. Never build a theology out of a word or verse out of context; always consider the thought from within the framework of the whole message of redemptive history.
- P4 – Every book of the Bible is a prophetic message; it is never mere history. The message is always offered within a specific historical and cultural perspective.
  1. Each author had a theological point they were making – they are telling their audience something about God.
  2. They are also telling us something about humanity, and our relationship with each other and with God.
  3. Understand that cultural mores and values change over time; never impose our modern way of thinking upon the ancients revealed in Scripture.
- P5 – It’s OK to observe and to bring out secondary emphasis, but it is intellectually and spiritually dishonest to overlook or ignore the author’s main point of any passage.
  1. Keep the author’s main point as the main point.
  2. Don’t let your purpose interfere with your method.
- P6 – The “publication date” or date of authorship is crucial to the “Pre-Interpretation”
  1. It helps define for us the original audience, setting, and intent of the message.
  2. It helps place you in context for better understanding, hence a clearer interpretation.
- P7 – A primary commitment is to integrity:
  1. It is immoral to twist scripture to suit our own ends.
  2. Even when the goal is noble, the means must be right.

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### 3. Espouse the Truth – not “christian-ese”

- P8 – There is no mere ‘cookbook’ or ‘color-by-number’ approach to interpretation/exegesis

**“If at the end of the series on Hermeneutics you are not overwhelmed with the task of understanding the reality of 2 Tim 2:15, then either I, or you have failed.” – Dr Tuck**

### Become a workman approved by God:

2Ti 2:14 Keep reminding them of these things. Warn them before God against quarreling about words; it is of no value, and only ruins those who listen.

2Ti 2:15 Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.

2Ti 2:16 Avoid godless chatter, because those who indulge in it will become more and more ungodly.

2Ti 2:17 Their teaching will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus,

2Ti 2:18 who have wandered away from the truth. They say that the resurrection has already taken place, and they destroy the faith of some.

2Ti 2:19 Nevertheless, God’s solid foundation stands firm, sealed with this inscription: “The Lord knows those who are his,” and, “Everyone who confesses the name of the Lord must turn away from wickedness.”

2Ti 2:20 In a large house there are articles not only of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay; some are for noble purposes and some for ignoble.

2Ti 2:21 If a man cleanses himself from the latter, he will be an instrument for noble purposes, made holy, useful to the Master and prepared to do any good work.

2Ti 2:22 Flee the evil desires of youth, and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.

2Ti 2:23 Don’t have anything to do with foolish and stupid arguments, because you know they produce quarrels.

2Ti 2:24 And the Lord’s servant must not quarrel; instead, he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful.

2Ti 2:25 Those who oppose him he must gently instruct, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth,

2Ti 2:26 and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will.

### 1.6 Theological Basics

- What is theology? Definitions:
  1. “If we look at the word *theology* and break it down into the two Greek words from which it is composed—*theos* (meaning “God”) and *logos* (meaning “study”)—theology is ‘the study of God’.”
  2. “Theology is not a mere set of facts *about* God; it is knowledge *of* God that grows out of a personal and intimate relationship with him.
    - That relationship, for Christian theology, comes through God’s Word—both the written Word – the Bible, and the living Word – Jesus Christ and His Spirit that indwells all believers.
    - The Bible is the foundation of all Christian theology and the rule of faith.”
    - There is a place for knowing God through his works, and personal experience, but not when it is in direct conflict with the Bible.
    - This takes wisdom – to allow people to experience God directly and have their hearts and minds shaped over time – maturing is a process God is responsible for [Phil 1:6].
  3. Theology is “the study of the nature of God, His Truth, and our faith – and most importantly, how it all affects humanity.”
    - It is man’s words based upon God’s Self revelation in Scripture as to His Character, Nature, Person, and Purpose.
    - It is different from Biblical history or church history, which focus on the *stream of events* through time.

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- It is *developmental* [growing over time] and *experiential* [born out of our personal life experiences].
- It has a profoundly *personal* aspect, as well as a *corporate* aspect.
  - Since each believer has a different set of life experiences, and since God intervenes and interacts with us as individuals, we will each have a personal experience of God that will vary somewhat from others. However, all truth about God radiates out like spokes on a bicycle tire from the Hub [God] to the rim [humanity].
  - Corporate worship includes joining with others who generally share a similar knowledge of, appreciation for, application of, and expression of the God we worship.
  - It is not by accident that the New Testament writers stressed *unity in love* as the defining evidence of spiritual maturity.
- 4. Theology is often taught as:
  - “An organized [often formalized or systematized] body of observations or opinions concerning God and man’s relationship to God.”
  - “A specialized study regarding God and known religious truths.”
- 5. There are different schools of theology:
  - Historical theology – studies what was held to be true through the developing history of the church. It is church belief in motion.
  - Biblical theology – relies on exegesis to draw out what the Scriptures say about God. Every writer of Scripture had specific theological perspectives that influence their writing.
  - Systematic theology – takes specific issues or points of doctrine and develops a view of God from that. Systematic is more prone to eisegesis distortion than Biblical which relies on exegesis.
  - Apologetic theology – has to do with presenting faith in the context of a non-believing audience... that is frequently hostile to faith.
- 6. A proper approach to theology begins with:
  - Background information on history, culture, semantics, etc.
  - Defined hermeneutical practices.
  - Accepted range of deviation understanding that each person will have a slightly different theological position because of their own relational experience with God and their world view that has shaped it.
- What does theology do? “It provides a filter through which personal thoughts of God are developed, directed, and focused.”
  1. Positively: It may help keep thoughts on track – e.g.: God is Loving; hence any conclusions I may derive to the contrary can be presumed as in error.
  2. Negatively: It may keep us from revelations about God – e.g.: as with the Scribes and Pharisees – they rejected Jesus because He didn’t do what they expected Him to do [among other things, they expected Him to immediately overthrow the world powers and establish the Millennial Kingdom with the Jews ruling the world when He entered Jerusalem]. The “Lamb of God” who suffered and died to free the world of sin was not part of their theological agenda that was first and foremost all about themselves.

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- What can be known about God?
  1. It is limited to what He has revealed about Himself [more to come in section 2.6 “Forms of Revelation”]
  2. It is limited to our ability to properly understand what He has revealed. Perception is foundational for believing – misperception inevitably equates with misunderstanding.
  3. It is limited to our personal knowledge and experience of His revelation.
  4. The principal element in revelation is God Himself. God engages us through the revelations He has provided – General Revelation [that which can be known about God from His Creation] and Special Revelation [that which can be known about God from Scripture].
  5. The point of seeking to know God is about relational intimacy with God, not merely extraneous knowledge about Him.
- What do we accept as “**approved knowledge**” about God? Only what His revelation has clearly revealed about Himself. What the scriptures revealed fall into two basic groups:  
**Attributes of God** – which are perfect qualities or characteristics revealed about God.  
**Names of God** – which attest to aspects of His Nature.
  1. **Incommunicable Attributes of God:** these are attributes that are true only of God, and there are no analogies we can relate to from a common experience.
    - God is Spirit – He has no material body. The word spirit means ‘wind’. [John 3:6-8; 4:24]
    - God is One – Unity of God – there is only One God, and there is no other like Him [Isa 44:8]
    - God is Eternal – He has no beginning or end [Ps 102:25-27]
    - God is Independent – God does not owe His existence upon anyone or anything else.
    - God is Infinite – There are no limits to His existence.
    - God is Immutable – He does not change Ps 102:27]
  2. **Communicable Attributes of God:** these are attributes of God that humanity has in some lesser measure and thus we can relate to it somewhat, although only God has these in perfect measure.
    - God’s Sovereign Will... will be done – God desires certain things and not others; He requires certain actions and not others. These are expressions of His Will.
      - Determinative Sense – God causes things to happen out of His Sovereign Right. [Eph 1:11]
      - Permissive Sense – God allows something’s to happen that are not in conflict with His will [Acts 2:23]
      - Prescriptive Sense – in which He expresses His desire for specific response from His creatures which is not forced or coerced [Ps 143:10]
    - God is All-powerful – He has a Will and the complete Capacity to realize it. [Ps 115:3; Rev 1:8]
    - God is Just – He acts in accordance with His own sense of justice, His own standard of Perfection. In regard to humanity, He punishes sin and disobedience, and rewards faithfulness and obedience.

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- God is Good – God is the highest expression of good and always acts beneficially toward His creation [Acts 14:17, and especially toward His own people [Ps 73:1].
  - God is Love – God Loved the world because He created it, He continues to act out of love even when the world does not respond in a loving manner. [John 3:16; Eph 5:25]
  - God is Grace – God’s unmerited love for humanity is an expression of His Goodness.
  - God is Mercy – God’s response to the pitiful human condition brought about by the effect of humanities rebellion against God. Mercy is to provide the help and comfort we need but could not provide for our self.
  - God has Dominion – He is the Lord and King of kings – He rules heaven and earth and will do what He deems to be good and right and is not answerable to anyone else. [1 Sam 3:8; Acts 17:25]
  - God is Knowledge – He knows the past, present and future, and nothing is hidden from Him.
  - God is Self-Determinative – He is what He is because He is. His revealed name – “I Am that I Am” – He always was and always will be God. [Gen 21:33]. To a lesser degree – we are who we are before Him, which is distinct from other created beings.
  - Omnipresent – spatially, He is everywhere at once; while we are in one place at a time.
  - Omniscient – He knows everything and sees everything at all times; nothing is hidden from Him; we can know things and see things, but we are limited.
  - Omnipotent – He is powerful and capable of doing anything, except that which conflicts with His other basic attributes [e.g. He is Good so He cannot be evil]. Our capabilities are limited and imperfectly expressed.
  - God is Sovereign – He is in control and is free to do anything He Wills – restrained only His Character and Nature, and such that He voluntarily imposes upon Himself. [Gen 9:13-16] Humanities sovereignty is subordinate to God’s and limited.
3. **“Personal Revelations”** must always be secondary revelations and tested by an accepted theological standard.
- There are ‘supernatural manifestations’ that continue in the modern world – not all that is spiritual is from or of God. We are required to ‘test’ such manifestations to understand from whence they derive.
  - Personal revelations will never be in disagreement with scriptural revelations.
  - Personal revelations will often challenge individuals into a deeper commitment or relationship with God when properly supported by Scripture [specific revelation].
- There are theological conundrums that exist – These are mysteries that will only be resolved in Heaven:
    1. If God is Good, why does He allow evil to exist?
    2. If God is omniscient and all knowing, how can I have free will? If I don’t have free will how can I chose right from wrong and accept responsibility for my choices?

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3. If God is omnipresent, how could Jesus be a true man in time and space and true God?
4. If God is omnipotent, couldn't He make a rock so big He couldn't move it? Couldn't He just make me love Him and secure my eternity in that manner?
- Theology is not something you read out of a book. Theology happens and develops because you experience something in your life that makes no sense and causes you to cry out to God "help me make sense of this!"
  1. As a consequence, something's are not readily understandable until you are placed in a position that forces you to wrestle with an experience which provides a context for a new or better understanding.
  2. You can be taught "systematic theology" – that is a system developed and promulgated by a certain teacher, school of theology, or denomination. The system may make some sense in the confines of the academic exercise in which it is learned, but it will not become your personal theology until you wrestle with these issues in your own life. In other words, God is Real but He becomes real to me when I experience Him.
- While God IS Truth... we are not God – we have only an incomplete grasp of His Truth. Thus, we need to recognize the relative importance of the truths we hold – and we need to restrain our presumptions to maintain the Christian bond of unity in love.
  1. In essential things – unity.
  2. In non-essential things – tolerance.
  3. In all things – charity.

- **Theological Safeguards – How do we distinguish between what we know and what we think we know?**

"Learning to Distinguish Between Degrees of Certainty" by Gerry Breshears<sup>1</sup> [Dean of Theology, Western Seminary – Portland Campus]

**Use Romans chapter 14 as our clarion call:**

- A. "Things I would Die For** – these are the evangelical essentials, the fundamentals of the faith; denying them would indicate you are not a Christian."
- a. The inspiration and authority of Scripture – man could not go to God and discover Truth, God had to come to man and reveal Himself.
  - b. The Trinity or Triune God – God existing as One in three co-eternal Persons
  - c. The incarnation of the second Person of the Trinity – the Fully God/fully man, Jesus – and accepting we do not understand all the details.
  - d. The virgin birth of Jesus.
  - e. Jesus sinless life on earth.
  - f. Jesus substitutionary death as the atonement for all Sin.
  - g. Jesus bodily resurrection and conquest over Sin and death.
  - h. Jesus bodily return as Lord of Lords at the end of times – to collect the faithful, and judge the wicked.
  - i. Justification by Grace alone – the works of sinful man cannot save him.

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<sup>1</sup> Roberts, Randal: Editor. 1999. Lessons in Leadership. Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications



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- j. The Third Person of the Trinity – the Holy Spirit indwelling believers and leading them into knowledge and righteousness – Who forms Jesus’ nature, mind, character, and heart within us.
  - k. The Church as the Unified Body of believers – the worldwide organic union of Believers, represented in the local church.
  - l. Eternal Life for believers [God’s people] in Heaven as redeemed Sons and Daughters of God; Eternal Separation of the wicked, unrepentant, and unregenerate.
- B. “Things I would Divide For** – having accepted the above non-negational components of faith, these components are important issues that are often sufficiently foundational that we would divide fellowship over – these are such things as divided Paul and Barnabas [Acts 15:39], and form the basis of denominational differences.” These things could be factors preventing a unified service of the body of believers, but not render believers unfaithful to their Lord Jesus. Typically, a good argument can be made for either side of these issues.
- a. Arminianists will often divide from Calvinists over the issue of sanctification/predestination and free will. Arminianists argue that man has a choice to accept or refuse grace, while Calvinists believe grace is offered to a limited chosen and it is irresistible, etc.
  - b. Both may divide from Pentecostals over the nature and timing of the baptism of the Spirit and the impartation and use of spiritual gifts, and their appropriateness as part of regular church worship service.
  - c. Does God speak only through scripture or does He continue to employ personal [prophetic] revelation that is consistent with scripture? In what forms is the latter proper for use in services?
  - d. Both baptism and communion are accepted as signs of the New Covenant in Jesus, but are they in fact the *seal* of membership into the covenant community? Is baptism necessary for cleansing sin? Is baptism appropriate for children? What is the age of accountability? What are the appropriate elements of communion? Is it appropriate to have communion in secular places? Are the Sacraments necessary to keep our Spiritual life growing, or are they symbolic worship events? Etc.
  - e. What are the priorities of church – winning the lost? Discipling? Social justice? Worshiping God? Etc. In what proportion should ministry focus on each?
  - f. What is the responsibility of elders, deacons, & staff – who is responsible for the work of ministry and equipping the saints? May only the ordained minister, or may all disciples minister?
  - g. What is the appropriate day of service? What does the Sabbath mean in the modern church?
  - h. What style or form of church service is appropriate – Liturgical? Expositional? Celebrative? Homiletic? Who is to be involved in weekly presentations – lay and clergy, clergy alone?
- C. “Things I would Debate For** – these are the uncertain things we wrestle with inside a church body of believers or denomination – this wrestling may be prolonged or even painful, but we do it while maintaining regular fellowship, joining together in worship and proclamation and acceptance as brothers and sisters.” These are things which may be effectively argued from either position, so there is no unequivocal choice, more usually they are our **church community preference** that should not be allowed to interfere with the unity

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of the body and their corporate service. There is a great resource on exploring these issues in a non-judgmental evangelical fashion – Across the Spectrum: Understanding Issues in Evangelical Theology, Gregory Boyd and Paul Eddy, Baker Academic, 2002.

- a. Inspiration – inerrant or infallible?
  - b. Providence – is God absolutely sovereign or does He limit His control?
  - c. Foreknowledge – if God knows everything I'll do, how can I be free to choose?
  - d. Did Jesus possess all the attributes of God in the flesh including the incommunicable ones, or did He purposefully set aside some attributes of God?
  - e. What is the role of church in the community? In the society? In the culture? In the political process? In the world?
  - f. What extent should the church participate in compassionate ministries in the community?
  - g. In what order should the church service present liturgical, expository, celebrative, and intercessory components? In what form should they occur and in what proportion?
  - h. We believe that Jesus did not possess a "sin nature" – otherwise He could not have been the perfect sacrifice to atone for sinful humanity. But to what extent was Jesus tempted as a man? Was he tempted by something, but never gave into it? Could He be fully man and not have been tempted? Etc.
- D. **"Things I would Decide For** – these are the *adiaphora* of Romans 14-15 – areas of belief and behavior about which there is no law, only our **personal preferences**. These are where the Bible warns us about judging – where acceptance is a virtue and legalism a real danger." Body life should always promote unity, acceptance, tolerance, long suffering, etc.
- a. Avoid anything that would separate the body into "us" and "them" groups – such as social cliques, haves and have nots, etc.
  - b. Avoid contentious or divisive intrigues or controversy - the body should deliberately and purposefully "make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification" – Romans 14:19. The worst of these center on spiritual abuse.
  - c. What form of music should be presented – for centuries the voice alone was the norm, then accompaniment by organ or piano was allowed. Later acoustic guitars became acceptable, now electric guitars and drums and rock style music have gained acceptance, what about rap & hip-hop?
  - d. What are the appropriate behavioral characteristics of believers – is it OK to smoke? To drink? If acceptable in moderation, what constitutes moderation? Is it OK to eat meat?
  - e. What appearance characteristics are appropriate in church – long hair? Dyed hair? Piercings? Tattoos? Short dresses? Shorts on men, Etc.
  - f. What components of church worship should be regularly presented in corporate worship – speaking in tongues, healing, intercessory prayer, silent meditation, etc.

### 1.7 'Knowing' and 'Knowing About' God

- God is a Person who wants to be known and loved.
- The Bible is testimony of God's repeated reaching out to and His love affair with humanity.
- 'Knowing' involves relational intimacy, it is personal relationship. It is the same as getting to know any person we can see and feel – it is "first-person" or heart knowledge.

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- ‘Knowing about’ involves information and knowledge of something or someone – it is “second-person” or head knowledge.
- It is possible to ‘know about’ someone, and not ‘know’ them (Mat 7:23).
- It is possible to ‘know’ someone well and not love them.
- Faith as used in the New Testament Greek involves cognitive (what we believe) and relational (the person in whom we believe). Thus, belief and believed (pistis & pisteuo) is both academic and relational. The word is also correctly translated as “Trust” which conveys another first-person relational confidence.
- True Christian Faith involves ‘knowing about’ God, ‘knowing’ who God is, having a personal relationship with Him, loving Him for who He is, spending time with Him because you love Him, and serving Him because He is Worthy, Lovely, Perfect, Good, etc.
- True Christian Faith requires a balance of “mind” and “heart” – which leads into ministry or service. Thus, ‘mind’ is ‘IQ’ – knowledge and training, ‘heart’ is ‘EQ’ – emotional health, intimacy, and interdependency. Together, mind and heart engage the disciple resulting into ministry or action... such as reaching out to the needy, working for social justice, evangelism, alleviating hunger and suffering, etc.

## 2 Divine Authorship – The Bible is the “Word of God”

### 2.1 True or False: “We should interpret the Bible differently from other books?” Why or why not?

- 2.1.1 A “10-rule” mechanistic approach to the Bible as literature is unacceptable.
- 2.1.2 The Bible is different from other books – although it remains a literary work, understanding it from a literary form is very useful.
- 2.1.3 However, the Bible is **MUCH more** than a merely a book or work of literature.
- 2.1.4 Because the Bible is **TRUTH**, we do not need to apply a “truth filter” upon it when we read or study it as we would any other form of literature.
  - 2.1.4.1 Critical thinking is required on all assessments of information.
  - 2.1.4.2 Spiritual dependence on God and spiritual insight are required for all study of Scripture... and certainly directs critical thinking.
  - 2.1.4.3 As with all literature, we must understand the various factors that influenced the work – including genre, cultural norms, historical context, how it fits into the greater story, and what the author intended to say – 1<sup>st</sup> to the original hearers and secondly to us now.
- 2.1.5 The Bible is after all an **integrated Work**, not just a compilation of stories, etc. The Bible begins in a Garden with humanity and God in open relational context. The Garden is the best place on earth. The Bible ends in a new Heaven and Earth... the best place in the universe, with humanity and God in open relational context. Redemptive History is the story of how God at great Personal investment restores humanity into relational intimacy with Himself. Though written through a number of human authors and editors, the Bible is seen as an integrated work.
- 2.1.6 The Bible should be approached prayerfully, respectfully, intentionally, and with the expectation to have an encounter with God – where God’s Truth is expected and sought after, and where our life is probed and reflectively scrutinized by the Light of the Holy Spirit. Ask and expect God to probe you and to reveal

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Himself... to illuminate your heart and mind, and to convict you. God wants to correct our wrong thinking or behaving... ask Him to intervene and redirect us.

2.1.7 The Bible is presented in the language of humans – not in “Angel Speak.”

2.1.7.1 Human co-authorship is why we can approach the Bible as a literary work and expect to understand it.

2.1.7.2 Scripture is the media through which God reveals Himself and His Truth to us.

2.1.7.3 The challenge is to learn and rightly understand God’s Truth so that it draws you into a dependent love relationship with God, and with His people. Knowing the Truth alone is insufficient [James 1:21-25].

2.1.7.4 Discipleship is the process whereby faithful men and women are progressively transformed – they develop the Nature, Character, and Person of Jesus formed within over time.

2.1.7.5 Scripture is the principal medium the Holy Spirit employs for personal spiritual formation and transformation.

### 2.2 Forms of Revelation

- General revelation is the indirect non-verbal form of revelation. Creation remains the greatest non-verbal declaration of God’s Presence. [Psalm 19; Romans 1:2ff]
  1. From creation we can understand general aspects of God’s Nature and Character – His orderliness, purposefulness, Greatness, Beauty, etc.
  2. Humanity has no excuse not to know that God exists as we have creation’s testimony to His Presence.
    - Creation proclaims God’s existence and infers aspects of His Nature – this is called General Revelation or Common Grace.
    - General revelation alone does not lead to salvation... but it can prepare the heart to hear God’s Word and be made ready to receive Jesus.
- Specific revelation is the direct form of revelation [a specific message] to specific individuals/people representing all of humanity. The message forms include verbal, dreams, visions, angelic messenger, supernatural events, etc. [Romans 10]
  1. Humanity could not on our own find God, so God was compelled to reveal Himself to humanity.
  2. God left His specific witness to His chosen messengers [prophets/apostles] people [Israel/Church] in verbal form [Scripture].
- Normative Revelation – the Bible [Scripture] is the only normative form of God’s definitive revelation to all of humanity.
  1. Only Scripture discloses God – this is where His Truth, Character, and redemptive plan are revealed.
  2. Scriptural Truth through the Spirit leads to salvation and relational intimacy with God.
- Non-Normative Revelation – the leading/speaking of the Holy Spirit to us.
  1. The 1<sup>st</sup> question we have to ask – is God still speaking to His people?
    - If not, how is His message made relevant to each generation?
    - If so, how do I know His voice? How do I hear His message?

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- Discernment is obviously the key. Dreams, visions, prayerful leading, non-verbal messages and prophetic leadings are still in play through the Spirit, but they must be subordinated to the test of Scripture for God is not a god of confusion.
- 2. We must be careful when interpreting non-normative revelations and messages.
- 3. No new theology or revelation from God will be in conflict with Scripture.
- 4. Scripture advised we use discretion and “test the spirits” to be sure this is from God.
- Revelation and Truth (*Ps 19:7ff; 119:97-104; John 17:17; “Thus says the Lord”*) *God’s Truth Transcends time and history, it is not just for the here and now – but has application for God’s people throughout time and circumstances.*

### 2.3 Modes of Revelation – God has employed these modes of communication throughout scripture

OT Persons	Mode	OT Canon	NT Canon
Abraham	<u>Theophany</u>	Moses-Torah	Jesus-Gospel
Jacob, Joseph, etc	<u>Visions</u>	Torah, Prophets	Gospels, Rev
Jacob, Joseph, etc	<u>Dreams</u>	Prophets	Gospels, Epistles
Noah, Abram, Moses	<u>Divine speech</u>	Torah, Prophets	Gospels
Joseph/brothers	<u>Providence</u>	Writings, Prophets	Gospels, Epistles
Moses	<u>Mighty Works</u>	Pentateuch	Gospels, Acts, Epistles, Rev

- Theophany is God dealing directly with man – either verbally or visibly.
- Visions were ‘waking dreams’ given primarily to holy men conscripted to God’s service. This is not the current obsession of “vision-casting” or “visioneering” – these are supernatural revelations, not merely natural human insight or intuitive leaps.
- Dreams are a more obscure means of revelation – images, thoughts, etc. impressed upon our mind by God.
- Divine speech is God addressing people indirectly through Angelic messengers.
- Providence is the most obscure means of revelation – providence is the care, guardianship, and control exercised by God in the course of events. How God shapes our living history to communicate with us.
- Mighty works are miraculous occurrences where God or His Angelic messengers/servants intercede in the normal course of worldly events.

### 2.4 Revelation Authority and Characteristics

- Direct – God is the final and Ultimate Authority – God wanted to be known, and He has chosen to reveal Himself to Humanity through revelation and Scripture.
  - All revelation is from God and made sensible to humanity through the Spirit.
  - The revelation of God as creator and redeemer is comprehensible because God has given us the gifts of reason and perception.
  - Revelation is presented in the context of historical events – it has tangible aspects that make the revelation understandable.
  - Scripture is not intended to be the exhaustive revelation of God – there is much more to know and an eternity for God’s people to discover it all and experience it. Scripture provides enough substance for humanity to engage God, to know His Heart

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and Mind, what He expects from His people, and the relational interaction that results in humanity being redeemed in the process.

- Indirect – God chose people to deliver His message.
  - The medium He employed in His Self-Revelation is Scripture – the Word of God directed by the Holy Spirit.
  - Spoken into the mind and employing the language of individuals – Moses, the prophets and other Godly individuals, were selected for the task of receiving and passing along God’s revelation.
  - The quality of the Revelation and the Faith to receive it is no different today than it was from the people who heard directly from God.
- Prophetic – all revelation is prophetic in nature. “Prophetic Revelation” is intent on keeping God’s people walking correctly with Him.
  - The books of the Bible are not just history, but a ‘prophetic message’ for God’s people.
  - Prophetic writings [such as Jonah] were to and through an historical person who served as God’s literary agent with whom we can identify and relate.
  - We can discover truths about the world through our reasoning and through our senses, but not Absolute Truth about God. Absolute Truth about God only comes through revelation... it is God’s Self-disclosure.
  - God did not intend to give us information that could be discovered solely through our own thinking or through our senses. The stories, thoughts and ideas presented in these revelations are a means to capture our imagination, enrich our minds and hearts, and transform our lives.
  - Old Testament prophetic ministry – the prophet identified and anointed the king, and helped keep him properly directed to care for God’s people... in conjunction with the king and priest they led God’s people.
  - New Testament prophetic ministry – is Word ministry... keeping people properly aligned with God’s Mind and Heart.
- Transformational – God’s Truth is transformational – it has the unique quality of making us something other than we were apart from God. We should always expect there to be this transformational quality. If no transformation occurs, it is questionable if it has been properly delivered, interpreted or understood.
  - Preaching and teaching needs to be intent upon imparting ‘transformational truth’ – based upon the cross and the resurrection of Jesus. Anything else is ‘sub-Christian’ and as Paul wrote is ‘an offense to the cross’.
  - The message of the cross is offensive to the world
    - It serves notice that man is not his own ruler; that God exists and must be dealt with on His own terms.
    - The message is not just lifestyle or dogmatic truths that can be followed apart from a genuine surrender to and love for God – this is the heart of relational intimacy.
    - The ‘head’ won’t save you, but the ‘heart’ will, and the head and heart in balance is the greatest declaration of discipleship.
- Theo-Centered – true hermeneutics must be Theo-centered
  - They are Jesus centered (Christocentric), not man centered (anthropomorphic).



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- Worship needs to follow this same path.
- To many preacher/teachers “tickle people’s ears” – they provide provocative thought that doesn’t draw people into intimacy and dependency upon God. Such is not Word ministry.
- As the bronze snake was lifted up by Moses and all who saw it were saved from the venom of snakebites, only Jesus blood can save us from the venom of sin.
- We must look up to Jesus as Moses followers looked up to the bronze serpent.
- Everything listed in scripture is to show us ‘the big picture’- we may not relate to everything, but it is all-cumulative into a larger picture that we will never completely master this side of heaven.
- Preaching and Teaching – must be held to a higher standard of truth and excellence.
  - Demand that terms be used correctly – don’t rely on “Christianese” or “Christian Talk” to properly convey your message. Understand the truth well enough to speak it in your own normative language.
  - Demand that only Scripture is worthy as the final arbiter on any Truth you speak. If it can’t be related to Scriptural sources or precedents, don’t trust it. Recognize that much of the differences Christians hold may be argued equally using the same verses.
  - Don’t become dogmatic... engage in dialogue [the sharing of ideas with discussion to promote mutual understanding] and less in debate [the convincing of others that they are wrong, and you are right]. Dialogue promotes reason, respect, and the Spirit.
  - God’s Word is supernatural for the benefit of His people. It will not return to Him ‘void’ – but will accomplish God’s desired effect.
  - The sender ‘encodes’ the message, and the receiver ‘decodes’ it, but God made the revelation with the expectation that we would discover and understand, and He provides the Spirit to aid in that effort. Be careful to preach and teach clearly – God is not a source of confusion, though humanity often can be.

### **2.5 Inspiration: *God-breathed; dual authorship* – 2 Tim 3:16**

- ‘Inspiration’ is relevant only for the Revelation of Scripture. It is what we are all invited to relate to as the only authoritative ‘inspired truth,’ and this title does not apply to non-normative revelation.
- Because each person is involved in this process of receiving, sending, coding, and decoding, this means the message can be corrupted. Be mindful of this tendency and avoid such corruption or confusion when you speak and teach.
- Scripture is inspired and perfect apart from the part that man has played in translation and rebroadcast. Interestingly, we are still learning how to more properly translate words and decipher the meaning of Scripture. Each year scholars refine our understanding of Scripture through more precise translations of words. The ancient languages of the Sumerian, Egyptian, Akkadian, Ugaritic, Aramaean and Hebrew are still intensely studied as new sources are discovered and cross referenced. This cross referencing provides clearer insight into translating the ancient texts.
- Scripture partakes of the qualities of the Divine Author employing the personality of the selected and inspired human author. The combination of divine and human is how God

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chose to work on earth... after all, we are created in God's image.

- Scripture's message is reliable, but our interpretation can be flawed.
- 2 Tim 3:16 – *pasa* all *graphe* [scripture/writing] *theopneustos* [God-breathed]; = doctrine of Revelation, [i.e., none of human origin]
- 2 Pet 1:20f – *hupo* by *pneumatōs* [spirit] *hagiou* [holy] *pheromenoi* [being carried] *elalesan*[(they spoke] *apo* [from] *theou* [God] *anthropoi* [men]; = doctrine of Inspiration—**“product preserved from error otherwise unavoidable”**)
- ‘Inspiration’ in this context is not applicable to human reference, only to God's.

### 2.6 Illumination – Spirit given insight – 1 Cor 2:14f

- Illumination from the root concept of light, means enlightenment... seeing the Truth of something once obscured. The gift of the Spirit is to illuminate God's Word.
- Scripture is intended to enlighten people of God's revealed Truth.
- A pagan scholar can read and understand on some limited level biblical truths, but only the Holy Spirit renders these truths transformational so that one's fundamental outlook and nature is changed.
- At the level of the outer-man (flesh) we can understand many ‘truths’ but only at the ‘inner-man’ (spiritual level) can these truths become life for us – where they are believed and accepted.
- Illumination allows us to accept God's provision, believe and be transformed. It is a work of Grace done in our inner nature.
- It is important to understand that because of the Fall, our intellect is still ‘sin cursed’ and unreliable. God gave us a brain and He expects us to use it, but ultimately to rely on Him requires faith.
- The Holy Spirit becomes involved at the Spiritual level and gives us the ability to have faith and believe, not by the process of truth and intellect. I often quote my brother-in-law Bob who said that “if someone can talk you into something, someone else can talk you out of it.” Faith is an entirely different process. This has profound implications for evangelism... we witness and teach, but God convicts and transforms. We should focus on conversations and dialogue, rather than debate. The Spirit of Truth will ultimately bring conviction, repentance, and transformation.
- Human process - we use our brains to hear words and learn information. As information grows, we gain knowledge. As knowledge grows, we gain experience. As experience grows, we gain wisdom. As wisdom grows, we become more aware and selective of the truths we hold.
- Spiritual process – as believers we are expected to use our brains to develop our basis of information and knowledge which the Holy Spirit then affirms as revelation in the inner-man. God convicts and transforms people from the inside out, so external behavior will follow internal change. Too often we focus on what someone is doing... not what they are.
- Teaching and preaching should combine both the human and spiritual process – this is the goal of ministry.

### 2.7 Revelation – God revealed Himself

- *Revelation* = Delivery; *Illumination* = Reception: *God has assured that the Scriptural message is accurately encoded and decoded for humanity through the auspices of the Holy*

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*Spirit. What remains is the faithful translation and interpretation of His message by each believer.*

- Revelation and Inspiration relate to the delivery side of the message – for which God assumes authority.
- Illumination relates to the reception side – we must cooperate with the Holy Spirit to properly receive and understand God’s message. We have an important role to play in receiving and decoding God’s message through the auspices of the Spirit within us.
- To see with faith is to believe. However, seeing is not believing; rather, believing is seeing. Faith in the context of reasonable doubt will always be a challenge, but the more God becomes real to us in relational intimacy, the more reasonable it becomes to hold faith.
- Illumination is a faith issue in the inner man. It is spiritual and it is true, but it is hard to render into worldly thoughts and words.
- Unbelievers can read and understand truths revealed in scripture, but they cannot believe it and be transformed by it without the illumination of the Holy Spirit.
- Inspiration = the work of the Spirit in guiding the Biblical writers to capture God’s Truth in the Bible.
- Illumination = the work of the Spirit on the hearts and minds of believers to know and understand Biblical truth and connect with God through it.

### **2.8 Human Authorship and Medium Expressing God’s Truth to Humanity:**

- 2.6.1** God chose certain individuals through whom He would communicate His Truth to humanity.
- 2.6.2** Each individual was uniquely prepared by their life and experiences to be receptive and responsive to the work of the Holy Spirit. The Scripture captures both their strengths and weaknesses as Fallen humans in expressing God’s Truth.
- 2.6.3** Normal human Language at the time of contact was employed: *Like the Incarnation* – where Jesus entered history at a particular time and cultural context.
- 2.6.4** Normal human Literature was employed to preserve His message (literary). God used the human medium in use at the time to capture His Truth.
- 2.6.5** The message is not devoid of the human medium. Rather, the message (content) is couched in the medium (form). Hence, we need to study and understand the medium in its context. This is not for its own sake, but to accurately appraise the content of the message.
- 2.6.6** *God* authored not only the message [content] but also the medium [form]. The literary qualities are inseparable as the Truth. As well, the writers God employed used an artistic medium in capturing God’s message, this enhances the impact of a message (eg. as with music).
- 2.6.7** The more we can appreciate the medium of scripture, the more insight and understanding we can obtain of the message. Scripture is wonderfully complex, enough to challenge the brightest minds; yet the message is not so distant and esoteric that the simple can’t respond to it. The more you see and understand God’s plan of redemption and how it has played out through redemptive history as recorded in Scripture, you cannot help but love and appreciate God more.

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### 2.9 Dual Authorship -- 2 Pet 1:20f; Heb 1:1

- 2.7.1 Humans were not “trance induced” automatons through whom God spoke. They were talented humans who were supernaturally empowered to perform the work required to properly compose the message. The Spirit enabled people to receive God’s message, but it was filtered through the individual – through their personality, their world view, their historical context, etc. All taken together, this are parts of the message God intended us to receive.
- 2.7.2 Part of the wonder of Scripture is that we could not have understood the message out of context, the human context in time and space is part of the message.
- 2.7.3 Man’s humanity, meaning our common experience, is also a part of this message. We cannot connect into God’s manner or way of thinking, but we can relate to another human relating their sense of God’s message, and their sense of awe and wonder.
- 2.7.4 The revelation over time was intentional and necessary as part of the message.
- 2.7.5 *Sensus plenior* or ‘degree of meaning’ – begs the question “how much did the human author really know when he wrote what he wrote?” While the human author knew allot of what he wrote about, his knowledge was finite. The infinite knowledge and understanding of the Divine Author was not known to the human author, but were none-the-less captured in the message.
- 2.7.6 ***Reporting faithfully – foretelling versus foreknowledge***
  - 2.7.6.1 *Dan 12:9* – Daniel and other prophets foretold (prophesied) of the Great Grace that would come in Jesus.
    - 2.7.6.1.1 Their writing was accurate as to the message essence God wanted to send at that time, but they had gaps in their knowledge and could not have known or understood much of what they wrote about God’s future revelation.
    - 2.7.6.1.2 Even the Jews in Jesus Day were not prepared for God’s Grace as revealed in Jesus as Christ – they were not prepared for a “Suffering Servant King” as related by Isaiah 53. This made no sense to their understanding of worldly redemption and their expectation of Jewish world dominance. Although they should have been aware, their thinking was clouded by the imperfect understanding of the spiritual leaders of their day.
    - 2.7.6.1.3 Further, the Jews of Jesus era they were not prepared for the revelation of God as Trinity – although Trinity was hinted at throughout Scripture, the mantra of “God is One” obscured God as Triune. This only became apparent in the New Testament where we see the Trinity (Father, Son, Spirit) simultaneously in action.
  - 2.7.6.2 *Ezekiel 1; Daniel 7; Revelation of John* – all contained fantastic imagery characteristic of Apocalyptic literature. Much of the imagery descriptions are beyond the comprehension of the Biblical writer, who faithfully employed what he knew to describe the indescribable.
  - 2.7.6.3 The human author helped by the Spirit used their historical frame of

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reference for what they were describing, as they had no other reference point except their own worldly experiences.

**2.7.6.4** The limitations of the human author in conveying these fantastic sights actually added to the impact. How do you describe the indescribable? It will be interesting standing in Glory with Jesus and witnessing these things firsthand!

**2.7.6.5** What was required of the human author was to describe the appearance of the reality the Holy Spirit was conveying, in terms they could then convey to another.

**2.7.6.5.1** Even Jesus chose simple worldly situations and analogies to describe complex spiritual realities in His Parables... and even with *His* explanation they still didn't get it.

**2.7.6.5.2** Biblical Faith then is a really interesting thing... we get enough knowledge to secure it, but not necessarily enough to empirically and objectively demonstrate it. Without the experiential and relational components, God remains an abstraction to most and not a reality.

Two passages come to mind where the Gospels speak into this reality about faith:

**2.7.6.5.2.1** Luke records a long teaching Jesus gives His disciples on the Kingdom of God (Luke 17:20-18:8). Jesus concludes this section with a question that is not rhetorical in 18:8b "when the Son of Man returns... will He find Faith on earth?"

**2.7.6.5.2.2** (John 20:29) Jesus says, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

### **2.10 The Bible as Definitive and Authoritative "Book of Truth"**

**2.10.1** The Bible contains the Truths that humanity needs to know – every part of Scripture provides Truth that is applicable to our lives. The Truth is available through the stories and images provided and the Trustworthiness of the Holy Spirit who both inspired Scripture and illuminates the faithful of every generation in reading and interpreting it to guide us. The multiple nature of the literary genres employed in Scripture also helps in communicating God's Truth to all people:

**2.10.1.1** It is not by accident that one half of the Bible is written in poetry – poetry is an extremely dense form of writing that communicates through images and emotions, it conveys feelings better than any other medium.

**2.10.1.2** Poetry is a language of density – a literary form rich with images – thus providing much more experiential shape and form than what narrative alone could provide.

**2.10.1.3** For us to enter into the richness of this medium, we need to learn how to read and interpret poetry. Refer to the Introduction to Wisdom &

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Worship Writings, and Introduction to the Prophets under the Biblical Literacy/Bible Survey section of Authentic Discipleship.

- 2.10.1.4 The other main biblical literary form Scripture employs is historical narrative – stories told in an historical context where the listener can enter into the situation and understand things through the writer’s perspective.
- 2.10.1.5 Both poetry and story are great mediums for passing on truth through the ages.
- 2.10.2 The Bible is a unified work and must be understood and studied as a whole.
  - 2.10.2.1 The Bible must be seen as a “Unified Work of Truth” where there is One Message being delivered throughout time – the progressive work of God’s plan of redemption of humanity.
  - 2.10.2.2 The Bible must be seen as a “Unified Work of Art” from some of the best and brightest minds of all time – God wisely selected the people He communicated through.
  - 2.10.2.3 Failure to see the Bible as a unified Work robs it of its power and beauty.
  - 2.10.2.4 Furthermore, the progression of the Old Testament is necessary to understand the New Testament.
  - 2.10.2.5 It is not by accident that the Gospel writers quoted Old Testament prophecy frequently – they understood Jesus ministry as a continuation and fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy.
  - 2.10.2.6 The progressive nature of God’s Covenant is crucial to understand the New Covenant in Jesus. Signs and symbols of these covenants also bring beauty and wonder to God’s Work of Redemption.
    - 2.10.2.6.1 The blood of Jesus finds significance in the shed blood of righteous Able, and of the sacrifices offered throughout the Tabernacle and Temple Cultist era – that is the ceremonial practices utilized for God’s people living with sin.
    - 2.10.2.6.2 The Dispersion of language at the Tower of Babel finds significance in the unification of language (tongues) at Pentecost.
    - 2.10.2.6.3 The fantastic visions of Old Testament prophets are counter pointed in the Apocalyptic Genre of Daniel and John’s Revelation.
    - 2.10.2.6.4 The exclusion of man and woman from the garden was to prevent them from eating of the tree of Life – which is the first promise to the church in Revelation chapter 2 – God had brought them all the way around to where He intended they should be... restoration.
- 2.10.3 Humanity could never have discovered these truths on their own. The ONLY WAY for humanity to find God was His self-disclosure.
- 2.10.4 All of humanity’s attempts to find God have led to futility and ultimately to despair.



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- 2.10.5 The main object of Scripture is God and His Ways. Scripture is the Sublime Introduction of God to humanity... a long Love Letter to humanity.
- 2.10.6 Scripture is not written from an anthropomorphic point of view. It's intent is to properly orient humanity with God.
- 2.10.7 The Bible is all about expressing God's Program to humanity.
- 2.10.8 It is not about a specific time or place per se, although Truth is revealed through a socio-cultural context to render it meaningful to us.
- 2.10.9 The Bible is not just a book of truths, morals, principles or ideas – it is all about the Person and Nature of God.
- 2.10.10 Reading scripture engages the Holy Spirit and draws us further into intimacy and dependency with Him.