

Building Your Theology

Study Guide

LESSON
THREE

RELYING ON REVELATION



THIRD MILLENNIUM

MINISTRIES

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HOW TO USE THIS LESSON AND STUDY GUIDE

This study guide is designed for use in conjunction with the associated video lesson. If you do not have access to the video, the study guide will also work with the audio and/or text versions of the lesson. Additionally, the lesson and study guide are intended to be used in a learning community, but they also can be used for individual study if necessary.

- **Before you watch the lesson**
 - **Prepare** — Complete any recommended readings.
 - **Schedule viewing** — In the Notes section of the study guide, the lesson has been divided into sections that correspond to the video. Using the time codes found in parentheses beside each major division, determine where to begin and end your viewing session. IIM lessons are densely packed with information, so you may also want to schedule breaks. Breaks should be scheduled at major divisions.
- **While you are watching the lesson**
 - **Take notes** — The Notes section of the study guide contains a basic outline of the lesson, including the time codes for the beginning of each section and key notes to guide you through the information. Many of the main ideas are already summarized, but make sure to supplement these with your own notes. You should also add supporting details that will help you to remember, describe, and defend the main ideas.
 - **Record comments and questions** — As you watch the video, you may have comments and/or questions on what you are learning. Use the margins to record your comments and questions so that you can share these with the group following the viewing session.
 - **Pause/replay portions of the lesson** — You may find it helpful to pause or replay the video at certain points in order to write additional notes, review difficult concepts, or discuss points of interest.
- **After you watch the lesson**
 - **Complete Review Questions** — Review Questions are based on the basic content of the lesson. You should answer Review Questions in the space provided. These questions should be completed individually rather than in a group.
 - **Answer/discuss Application Questions** — Application Questions are questions relating the content of the lesson to Christian living, theology, and ministry. Application questions are appropriate for written assignments or as topics for group discussions. For written assignments, it is recommended that answers not exceed one page in length.

Notes

I. Introduction (0:28)

II. Finding Revelation (1:57)

Divine revelation must play a crucial role in Christian theology.

A. General Revelation (2:50)

God reveals himself through all created things in general and to all people in general. Sometimes called “natural revelation” because this revelation comes through the medium of nature or creation.

1. Medium (3:53)

God reveals himself through the creation, from what has been made.

Creation under the influence of human beings is also a conduit of revelation.

2. Content (6:20)

General revelation reveals at least two kinds of information to human beings:

- God's attributes
- our corresponding moral responsibilities

The attributes of God that cannot be viewed directly are seen indirectly in his creation.

Various aspects of creation reveal moral responsibilities that we bear before God.

B. Special Revelation (8:57)

Not given to all people in all places, but to specific or “special” segments of humanity.

Special revelation has taken many forms throughout history, but God disclosed himself most clearly and fully in his Son Jesus.

Prior to the coming of Christ, God revealed himself and his will in many special ways:

- He spoke directly to people.
- He gave supernatural dreams.
- He opened eyes to visions.
- He spoke through prophets, priests, kings and sages.

The standard for Christian theology is God’s revelation in Christ.

C. Interconnections (11:53)

Interconnections will help us see that we should never neglect either form of revelation.

1. Overlap (12:21)

General and special revelation overlap significantly.

Special revelation in the Scriptures touches on many subjects that form a continuum between extraordinary and very common insights.

- very special revelation — esoteric; given in extraordinary, supernatural ways
- middle ground — mixing of esoteric and insights granted by the Spirit through more ordinary means
- generalized special revelation — the Holy Spirit guided biblical authors to make right observations about ordinary experiences

General revelation also includes a wide variety of content.

- very general revelation — things that are known to most if not all mentally competent people who have ever lived on the earth
- middle ground — experiences given only to some because they are limited in some way, such as by time or space
- specialized general revelation — extraordinary elements; things that we often associate more closely with special revelation

We look to the Scriptures as our authority not only in purely religious and moral matters but also as they touch on history and science.

2. Need (19:00)

Special revelation is designed to specify, clarify and reveal God and his will beyond what general revelation presents.

Building theology out of general revelation (natural theology) must be guided by special revelation.

The Scriptures address a limited number of things directly. They speak of relatively few things compared to the breadth of general revelation.

Various aspects of general and special revelation form webs of multiple reciprocities.

The role of general revelation:

- What we learn from general revelation enables us to understand special revelation.
- General revelation is necessary for successful application of the Bible.

III. Understanding Revelation (24:30)

It is one thing for God to give his revelation to us, and another for us to use it properly in theology.

A. Hindrance of Sin (25:46)

If God were to leave the influence of sin unchecked, we would reject his revelation with all our strength.

The noetic effects of sin: Sin darkens our minds.

1. General Revelation (26:40)

Sin causes us to suppress much of what we know, and blinds us to much of what general revelation has to offer.

To the degree that we are bereft of God's grace, we twist the facts of general revelation into conformity with our depraved desires.

2. Special Revelation (27:58)

Sinful human beings resist the teaching of the Scriptures if left without the mercy of God.

The problem of sinful misinterpretation of the Bible is not limited to unbelievers; it infects believers as well.

B. Illumination of Holy Spirit (30:13)

Deriving true theology from revelation results from the personal ministry of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

1. **Special Revelation (31:45)**

Illumination: The Spirit's work in giving insight into special revelation.

The Spirit of God operates in non-redemptive ways so that non-Christians understand many aspects of special revelation.

- common operations of the Spirit
- in the context of common grace

The Spirit's illuminating work is greater among believers than among unbelievers.

Because the Spirit alone illumines us, Christian theologians must devote themselves to keeping in step with the Spirit.

2. **General Revelation (35:10)**

The Holy Spirit gives men and women the ability to handle general revelation properly.

- wisdom

- illumination

The Spirit of God teaches both believers and unbelievers the truth of general revelation.

C. **Results (38:24)**

Christians must build theology by relying both on general and special revelation.

General and special revelation never actually contradict each other. God has no difficulty putting together what he reveals in all of creation and in Scripture.

What we know from special and general revelation:

- Is not revelation *per se*.
- Always falls short of perfection.

When we encounter apparent discrepancies between special and general revelation:

- We may have misunderstood special revelation.
- We may have misunderstood general revelation.
- We may have misunderstood both special and general revelation.
- We may have encountered a mystery that is simply beyond our human comprehension.

Yield judgment to what you believe the Bible teaches — even though you may need to correct your understanding of Scripture later.

IV. Developing Confidence (44:41)**A. Analog Quality (46:11)**

Binary thinking: Evangelicals often think simply of:

- things they know
- things they don't know

The situation is more complex than a binary model suggests.

Analogue thinking: We hold our theological beliefs with varying degrees of confidence.

Web of beliefs:

- Outer layer — Low confidence; we change, remove, and add to these beliefs with ease.

- Core — High confidence; it is difficult to modify, remove or add to these core beliefs. They affect large portions of everything else we believe.
- Middle layers — Varying degrees of confidence and commitment.

Various levels of confidence appear in every Christian theology.

B. Process of Deference (52:22)

The Holy Spirit teaches and convinces us through a process of deference. We submit to the influences the Spirit ordinarily uses to teach us.

“God in his ordinary providence maketh use of means, yet is free to work without, above, and against them, at his pleasure” (*Westminster Confession of Faith* 5.3)

The Holy Spirit illumines us and confirms our theological positions in both extraordinary and ordinary ways.

In formal theology we are more concerned with the ordinary processes that the Spirit uses.

- *Exegesis of Scripture*: interpretation
- *Interaction in community*: interaction with the entire human race, especially with believers
- *Christian living*: success and failure, prayers, worship, and service to God

C. Appropriate Alignment (59:09)

We should bring appropriate alignment to the levels of confidence we have in our various beliefs.

One of our major responsibilities as Christian theologians is to determine how much certainty to place in particular beliefs.

We should align our levels of confidence with the results of faithful deference to exegesis, interaction in community, and Christian living.

- The more harmony there is, the more confidence we should have.
- When exegesis, interaction and Christian living are disharmonious and of nearly equal weight, we should have less confidence.

V. Conclusion (1:03:22)

5. How does sin hinder our understanding of God's general and special revelation?

6. How does the Holy Spirit help us understand God's special and general revelation?

7. How should we handle apparent conflicts between general and special revelation?

8. What does it mean to say that theological conclusions are analogue rather than binary?

Application Questions

1. How might your understanding of God through general revelation draw you closer to him?
2. How might understanding the similarities and differences between special and general revelation change the way a person does theology?
3. How does it make you feel knowing that sin still works within us to suppress and skew much of God's revelation? What hope does the Holy Spirit bring? How can we guard against theological errors caused by the noetic effects of sin?
4. Why is it necessary to approach the confidence that we have in theological positions analogically? Describe a situation in which a binary approach to confidence might cause problems in the church.
5. What impact have exegesis, community and Christian living had on your own beliefs? Which of these influences has been most important to you? Why?
6. What beliefs do you hold with the most confidence? What beliefs do you hold with very little confidence? Why do you assign these levels of confidence to these particular beliefs?
7. What is the most significant insight you have learned from this study? Why?