

## ACBC Theology – Question 4

### 4. Define general revelation and special revelation and describe the nature of their authority as well as their relationship to one another.

#### I. Define general revelation.

A. General revelation is the knowledge that God has revealed to all of mankind through His creation; through the natural world.

1. “*Natural revelation* is the knowledge that God conveys to human beings through nature. It is also called *general revelation* because it comes to all mankind and through all the experiences of human life.”<sup>1</sup>

a. Romans 1:18-23; 2:12-16

2. “Clearly, everything that God has made, and every event that takes place, reveals God in some way. For everything in the world is God’s creation, and everything that happens is God’s providence. Indeed, no fact can be rightly understood apart from God.”<sup>2</sup>

3. “The knowledge of God’s existence, character, and moral law, which comes through creation to all humanity, is often called ‘*general revelation*’ (because it comes to all people generally). General revelation comes through observing nature, through seeing God’s directing influence in history, and through an inner sense of God’s existence and his laws that he has placed inside every person. General revelation is distinct from ‘*special revelation*,’ which refers to God’s words addressed to specific people, such as the words of the Bible, the words of the Old Testament prophets and New Testament apostles, and the words of God spoken in personal address, such as at Mount Sinai or at the baptism of Jesus.”<sup>3</sup>

B. The Authority of general revelation:

1. General revelation can be thought of as our conscience, in that God has revealed to everyone a basic sense of right and wrong imprinted in our hearts. Because of this general knowledge of right and wrong, we are held to honor God and give thanks to Him (Romans 1:21).

2. Romans 1:18-21

“God has given human beings a clear revelation of himself (Rom. 1:19), including a revelation of his ‘invisible attributes’ (v. 20), from the natural world (‘in the things that have been made,’ v. 20). The knowledge we gain from this is

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<sup>1</sup> John Frame, Systematic Theology, 537.

<sup>2</sup> John Frame, Systematic Theology, 537.

<sup>3</sup> Wayne Grudem, Systematic Theology, 122-123.

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not only a knowledge of information about God, but a knowledge about God himself, a personal knowledge (v. 21). That revelation has a moral content (v. 32) that requires human beings to honor God and give thanks to him (v. 21). But, Paul says, human beings fail to honor him as they should. Rather, they ‘suppress’ the truth (v. 18), they exchange ‘the truth about God for a lie’ (v. 25), and they do not ‘see fit to acknowledge God’ (v. 28). Though they fail to worship God, they do not abandon religion altogether. Rather, they worship idols (v. 23), and that idolatry leads them into Paul’s full catalogue of sins. He mentions first sexual sins (vv. 24-27), then ‘all manner of unrighteousness’ (vv. 28-31). So the revelation is a revelation of the ‘wrath of God’ (v. 18).”<sup>4</sup>

### II. Define special revelation

A. Special revelation is essentially the Word of God. Everything that has been revealed by God and, through divine inspiration, written in the Bible is considered to be special revelation.

1. Hebrews 1:1-3
2. “God’s words addressed to specific people, including the words of the Bible. This is to be distinguished from general revelation, which is given to all people generally.”<sup>5</sup>
3. “Special revelation includes all the words of Scripture but is not limited to the words of Scripture, for it also includes, for example, many words of Jesus that were not recorded in Scripture, and probably there were many words spoken by Old Testament prophets and New Testament apostles that were not recorded in Scripture either.”<sup>6</sup>
4. “Special revelation is: 1. Revelation by word. 2. Revelation not given to all mankind, but to people chosen by God to hear it. 3. Revelation about salvation . . . and other matters.”<sup>7</sup>
5. The Scriptures principally teach what man is to believe concerning God, and what duty God requires of man (2 Tim. 1:13; Eccl. 12:13).”<sup>8</sup>
6. 2 Timothy 3:15-17; 2 Peter 1:3

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<sup>4</sup> John Frame, Systematic Theology, 538.

<sup>5</sup> Wayne Grudem, Systematic Theology, 1255.

<sup>6</sup> Wayne Grudem, Systematic Theology, 123.

<sup>7</sup> John Frame, Systematic Theology, 689.

<sup>8</sup> Millard Erickson, Christian Theology, 179.

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### B. The authority of Special Revelation.

1. Special revelation has the authority to place demands on us, specifically to know the Word, believe the Word, and obey the Word.
2. “The Scriptures principally teach what man is to believe concerning God, and what duty God requires of man (2 Tim. 1:13; Eccl. 12:13).”<sup>9</sup>
3. “The authority of Scripture means that all the words in Scripture are God’s words in such a way that to disbelieve or disobey any word of Scripture is to disbelieve or disobey God.”
4. “To say that God’s Word has authority, as we have seen, is to say that it creates obligations in its hearers: obligations to believe what it says, to do what it commands, to write it on our hearts, and so on.”
5. God’s authority “cannot be questioned. God will not be tested by any authority higher than himself. His word is not subject to evaluation by human standards. It is not doubtful or disputable. As we have seen, the clay may not dispute the intentions of the potter.”
6. 2 Tim 1:13; Eccl 12:13; Deut 6:4-9; Deut 10:12-13

### III. Describe their relationship to one another.

- A. General revelation is enough knowledge and information to bring us to the understanding that God exists, that He created everything that exists, that He instilled a standard of right and wrong in everyone’s heart, and that we stand condemned because we violated that standard. However, general revelation is not enough to save us.
- B. Special revelation solidifies the official God-breathed standard of right and wrong. It confirms our condemnation, but also shows us the path of salvation, by God’s grace, through faith.

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<sup>9</sup> Spurgeon’s Catechism, Question 3.

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### Resources:

**Wayne Grudem, Systematic Theology, 121-124.**

ACBC Approved Reading

**John M. Frame, Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Christian Belief (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2013), 519-593.**

**Millard J. Erickson, Christian Theology, 3rd ed (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 121-167.**

Jay E. Adams, A Theology of Christian Counseling: More Than Redemption, The Jay Adams Library (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979), 16-37.

Heath Lambert, A Theology of Biblical Counseling: The Doctrinal Foundations of Counseling Ministry (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 35-64.

Charles Caldwell Ryrie, Basic Theology (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1986), 63-66.

John MacArthur, ed., Biblical Doctrine: A Systematic Summary of Bible Truth (Wheaton: Crossway, 2017), 70-75.

Paul P. Enns, The Moody Handbook of Theology (Chicago: Moody Press, 1989), 155-159.

Louis Berkhof, Systematic Theology, Complete ed (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co, 2018), 128-143.