

DOCTRINE 1

UNIT THREE SOURCES FOR THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

THE GOSPEL-WAY OF KNOWING GOD

↳ 'Jesus Christ is Lord'

- This is the gospel preached by Paul.
- When this is believed, it leads to submission to Jesus.
- The lordly authority of Jesus is exercised by his words.
- To know how we should regard anything, we should turn first to Jesus himself.

↳ Jesus and Scripture

- Jesus criticised his contemporaries and was radical in approaching some issues.
- But he agreed with other Jews that the Scriptures were the word of God.
- He corrected interpretations of scripture, but never dissented from it.
- He appealed to scripture as decisive in his public teaching.

↳ Jesus and the New Testament

- Jesus was referring to the Old Testament, but the extension of his words to cover the New Testament is inescapable.
- By accepting his teaching on the Old Testament, we grant scriptural authority to the words of Jesus.
- We begin to build up the New Testament scriptures.

- Jesus' attitude to the scriptures is continued by his disciples.
- The existing scriptures are accepted as the word of God.
- That acceptance is extended to the words of Jesus.
- We can say that the Bible is an authentic source for the knowledge of God.

GENERAL REVELATION

↳ The Natural World

- Attempts have been made to prove the existence of God from the natural world.
- The Cosmological Argument: everything has a cause, but there must be an ultimate cause – that cause is God.
- The Teleological Argument: the world is planned, and so there must be a planner – that planner is God.
- It is argued that it is a leap of faith to be an atheist in a world of such complexity.
- However, it can also be shown that this is not proof of God's existence, at least not the God of the Bible.
- Some things may appear planned but others do not, some may depend on the perspective they are viewed from.
- There is a difference between absolute proof and evidence.
- We may not find absolute proof of God's existence, but we may be persuaded by the evidence.
- It is quite reasonable to believe on the basis of evidence rather than proof.
- The Bible does not attempt to prove the existence of God.

- It does, however, draw our attention to the wonder of creation and how that witnesses to the glory and power of God.
- Paul teaches that God's creative presence is discernable in creation.
- God bears witness to himself but we do not understand correctly.
- The problem with general revelation is not in the revealer but in the recipient.
- Corruption of the human heart suppresses the truth and leads to idolatry.
- General revelation may be inadequate as a means of coming to know God, but there is a similarity to a gospel-way.
- The element of language is missing, but it is still God's work.
- It may be too vague as the basis of a relationship, but can be a way of arousing human interest in the truth.
- General revelation may alert us to the possibility of a God of power and might.
- The scriptures enable us to interpret this revelation.
- General revelation may not lead to a saving knowledge of God, but it can help us to understand concepts such as faith, sin and power.

↳ Human Experience

- The experience of being human: God chooses to address us by becoming one of us and living with us.
- Through our knowledge of being human we can understand the one who became like us in all things except sin.
- The Spirit does not bypass the ordinary to bring the extraordinary.
- There has been a decline in formal connections with the church in Western Europe through the 20th Century.

- This is not the same as saying that people are no longer religious – there is now a wide spectrum of religious experience.
- Such experiences are often coloured by the previous beliefs of the person.
- Some experiences may lead to the gospel and to God, others may lead to other religions, others may lead nowhere.
- It may be better to classify religious experiences as clues that we have about God and spiritual matters.
- Some argue that all humans are born with a sense that there is a God.
- Comparing religious experience with the gospel-way of knowing God will often depend on the nature of the experience.
- Some experiences are very similar, others are very different.
- The experience of conversion is of no value in itself, it draws its value from the gospel, which gives it meaning.
- Religious experiences which are 'hints' or 'clues' may provide encounter points for the gospel.
- They may sharpen the appreciation of the gospel when it is heard.
- Our attitude to religious experience is transformed by the gospel.
- Contemporary thought is unwilling to decide between truth and falsehood – it insists on the equal worth of all religions.
- Without Christ as he is revealed in the Bible, it is hard not to accept these ideas.
- The scriptures reveal that Christ is the Son and Word of God, unique in his capacity to mediate between humans and God.
- Jesus is recorded as claiming "I am the way, the truth and the life. No-one comes to the Father except through me".

- The apostles called people out of their existing faiths into a new trust in Jesus.
- They did not affirm them in their existing religions – there is nothing in the Bible to encourage a relativistic approach.
- Major religions offer contradicting accounts of reality - it is not possible for all to be true.
- The claims of Jesus are so exclusive that they must be either right or wrong.
- Even if there are people that God saves apart from the hearing of the gospel, it is through Christ rather than their religion.

↳ Natural Theology

- It may be that God has disclosed nothing, but humans can discover something about God through their own resources.
- “Natural” does not refer to the study of nature, but rather it signifies the opposite of “supernatural”.
- It could supplant revealed theology by leading people to worship the God that they discovered.
- It could also confirm revealed theology by demonstrating that it was true.
- Natural theology can focus on the existence or on the character of God.
- The created world has been studied to see if it reveals clues.
- This leads to the question of whether or not God intended to reveal himself through his creation.
- The gospel-way of knowing God depends on a gracious revelation.
- Natural theology does testify to our interest in God, but does not stem from a humble submission.
- It is therefore not only doomed to failure, but is an expression of human pride.