

Approaches to Theology

By: E. Edward Zinke

I. The history of religion is the history of man's attempt to discover God.

- A. In general, man attempted to find some basis within the world around him by which he may come to knowledge of God. On the basis of the natural outworkings of the forces of nature, of interpersonal relationships, of psychological factors and of rational processes of the mind, man postulates a concept of God which is in harmony with the structure of reality as he sees it.
- B. Many solutions to the problem of existence and attributes of God have arisen out of man's attempt to use that which is available to his natural experience and rational process as a basis for postulating a God: polytheism, dualism, pantheism, agnosticism, atheism, deism, theism.
- C. Each of these concepts regarding the existence and attributes of God represents an attempt to come to knowledge about God on the basis of what is available to man within the world, and each is a possibility and follows logically from the experienced world or from rational processes. Unfortunately in his search for God, man has in effect attempted to build his own God. This is idolatry.

II. Christian thought to the reformation.

- A. In general, theology used metaphysics – a philosophical concept of reality – as its starting point.
- B. Origen.
 - 1. Origen was strongly influenced by his time, especially by the allegorical method of interpretation of Philo and by Neoplatonism.
 - 2. Origen's concept of scripture paralleled the secular concept of the nature of literature, namely that there are two basic levels of meaning – the literal and the spiritual.
 - 3. Origen used principles for the interpretation of Scripture which harmonized with his concepts of the nature of scripture.
 - a. The allegorical method was suited for sifting out the literal and spiritual meaning.
 - b. Origen stated rules for determining when Scripture is not to be interpreted literally.

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- 1) When a literal meaning would not otherwise be in harmony with other passages of Scripture.
 - 2) When a literal meaning would be out of harmony with that which is worthy of God.
 - 3) When a literal meaning would make an interpretation impossible (based upon the contemporary thinking of the age).
 - 4) Origen intended to remain within the bounds of Scripture, but the acceptance of an external method – the allegorical method of interpretation – allowed him to impose contemporary philosophical thinking upon the words of Scripture. Thus Origen’s concept of reality dictated to the text rather than the text to his concept of reality.
- C. A basic change in orientation to the Scripture took place in the eleventh century. Up to this time theologians intended to allow scripture to be authoritative. With the reintroduction of Aristotle beginning in the eleventh century, the authority of Scripture was either modified or replaced by philosophical systems of thought.
- D. Anselm.
1. Reason puts man in touch with the whole order of being and has its own principles of operation.
 2. The ontological argument for the existence of God arose out of a definition of God: God is a being than which nothing greater can be conceived. All men have as an object of thought the idea of something than which nothing greater can be conceived. The question is whether the object which exists as a concept in man’s mind also exists in reality. To deny existence this object would be a contradiction of terms for if such an object does not exist, then we can think of another being which is greater by reason of existence than the being of which nothing greater can exist. Such a conclusion would be contradictory and absurd. Therefore the object than which nothing greater can be conceived must exist in reality.
 3. Anselm’s argument was formed within a thought-world which assumed a necessary relationship between thought processes and reality. What is conceivable of necessary exists in reality and in God.
- E. Thomas Aquinas.
1. Revelation is given a primary role in the development of theology.
 - a. Revelation is a gift communicated to the prophets and comes to us through Scripture.

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- b. Revelation brings spiritual truths which would not otherwise be available by the exercise of human reason.
 - c. Revelation provides the fundamental principles of theology which are not subject to debate nor capable of rational demonstration. The fundamental propositions of Scripture are the starting point or presuppositions of theological thinking.
 - d. Aquinas rejected even the Immaculate Conception on the basis of Scriptural testimony.
2. Reason provided the structuring principles for the organization of the fundamental propositions given by Scripture.
- a. Aquinas accepted the epistemology of Aristotle that knowledge is based upon what the senses perceive. The senses provide data which when interpreted by reason yields knowledge.
 - b. Aquinas furthermore went beyond Aristotle by indicating that faith is also a road to truth. Thus both reason and faith provided means of obtaining knowledge of God and the universe.
 - c. Since man and the natural world have their source in the creation of God, they are in harmony with one another. Human reason operating within the natural world is essentially independent of revelation. It is an adequate and self-sufficient instrument and operates upon its own laws in obtaining truth within the world of man's natural experience as well as within limited aspects of the spiritual realm.
3. The relation between revelation and reason.
- a. Both revelation and reason bring knowledge to mankind. Revelation is given, whereas reason brings knowledge by means of interpretation of the data of the senses.
 - b. Revelation does not come from reason but is given in accordance with reason. It does not alter man's natural reason except by bringing what reason contains to fuller perfection.
 - c. The fact that revelation brings something new into the sphere of reason does not mean that there is a contradiction between reason and revelation. Revelation does not imply any correction of the structure which characterizes the work of reason. The new knowledge which is given in revelation is an extension of knowledge gained through reason.
 - d. Since all truth comes from one source, there is order and harmony within all knowledge. Thus although revelation and reason deal with different (although not

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unrelated) realms of truth and although there are limits to the human mind, there is nonetheless only one truth. God is the origin of both nature and revelation; therefore, reason and faith have their source in God and cannot be in conflict with each other.

- e. God has given both the first principles of thought in the natural world and the articles and the articles of faith in the revealed world. If there were any conflict between faith and reason. It would mean that God was acting falsely by intending to deceive man. *Thus it is presupposed that God as the Creator will operate in accordance with the natural world as interpreted by reason. Thus how God will act is ultimately determined by the conception of the natural world.* Faith does not negate what is brought about by reason but actually presupposes the rational structure.
 - f. Aquinas is saying that truth is truth wherever it may be found. God is the author of truth whether it is in revelation or in the natural world. There can be no contradiction between them.
4. The task of theology is to bring faith and reason into a dynamic interrelationship.
- a. The purpose of theology is to determine and express through the use of reason illuminated by faith the meaning and significance of the supernatural knowledge of God given in Scripture in order to reconstruct in a rational and human way the truth which God has been pleased to give in Scripture.
 - b. Revelation as communicated in Scripture expresses the content of faith and is therefore the starting point for and presupposition of the work of the theologian.
 - c. Reason provides the basic philosophical structure within which the truths of revelation are organized.
 - d. The content of Scripture is normative in that it provides the basic materials to be interpreted and sets the limits to the philosophical system. Reason, which is independent of revelation since it operates upon its own principles, is used to establish the structure within which the content of revelation is expressed. It is reason which gives unity to the system of ideas.
 - e. In effect then, the role of reason in theology is both dominant and determinative. The new which is given in revelation is coordinated with knowledge obtained by reason and it is interpreted in terms of that same knowledge. Revelation does not abrogate the existing thought categories, rather it brings to conclusion the existing lines of thought by allowing reason to provide the structure for theology. The message of Scripture is not shaped by the philosophical system of thought but actually its content is also changed.

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5. The net effect of using reason as the context in which to structure and interpret revelation transformed the theology of Aquinas into philosophical system rather than Biblical theology.
- F. Theoretical arguments for the existence of God.
1. The argument from cause to effect.
 2. The argument from design.
- G. Summary: The Christian theology which developed after the apostolic period was to a large extent a direct extension and prolongation of the ancient philosophy of Greece whereby a rational process was used to establish a frame of reference in which the world was seen to be intelligible. The conviction was shared by all schools of thought that there existed a single reason and intelligible explanation of the universe on the natural level and a single analysis of man and his powers that could be discovered, elaborated and taught and that it was valid for all men and final within its own sphere. This required the assumption that there is a natural continuity from the natural world to the supernatural and that man is capable of perceiving correctly the real world.

III. The Reformation period.

- A. William of Ockham.
1. Man does not acquire knowledge by purely rational processes. The only knowledge which is available to man is that which comes by direct experience. Neither universal concepts of reality nor knowledge of God are available to man through direct experience.
 2. Neither universal concepts of reality nor knowledge of God are available to man through direct experience.
 3. Since God cannot be known by direct experience, it follows that God cannot be known by any means in which man naturally acquires knowledge.
 4. Ockham concluded that neither the characteristics nor the existence of God could be conclusively demonstrated rationally.
 5. Ockham insisted that the acceptance of God's existence and acquaintance with his attributes must rest upon scripture. By regarding revelation as a given, Ockham opened the door to the acceptance of Scripture alone, appealing solely to the literal word of Scripture as the norm by which doctrine could be acknowledged as universal and necessary for salvation.

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B. The Reformation.

1. The principle of *sola Scriptura*, the Bible alone, meant not only the priority of Scripture over the church and tradition, but also priority over all methods of obtaining knowledge. Thus the Reformation rejected any approach which started within a concept of reality or within a system of reason or philosophy.
2. The principle of *sola Scriptura* meant that method for the study of Scripture must arise out of Scripture itself.
3. The *sola Scriptura* concept did not deny that God could speak through other channels.

C. A period called "Protestant Orthodoxy" in which a rational system of theology was developed immediately followed the Reformation.

IV. The contemporary theological scene.

A. Immanuel Kant revolutionized man's concept of the thought processes themselves and thereby provided the context for contemporary theology.

1. He denied that the mind of man is a *tabula rasa*, an empty vessel, which simply receives impressions from the exterior world. He insisted that the mind of man itself determines the character of knowledge.
2. Kant questioned the possibility of theoretical arguments for the existence of God, stating that objects or things in themselves cannot be known except in relation to the experience of the knowing subject.
3. Kant made a new appeal for the existence of God which rested not on speculative thought but on practical reason in relation to responsible human action.
 - a. He argued that man is structured a priori in such a way as to live under certain moral imperatives.
 - b. Man also so structured as to have an insatiable desire for happiness. Furthermore man finds himself driven toward the supreme good – the ideal union of moral perfection and complete happiness.
 - c. The drive toward the supreme good is a priori within man himself rather than something derived from experience.
 - d. The supreme good (which is a priori within man himself) cannot be fulfilled in this life. Therefore there must be a life beyond in which man can fulfill the moral requirements of his being.

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- e. Furthermore, living a moral life throughout eternity would not necessarily bring about happiness. Therefore Kant postulated a God who is capable of bringing about such an order of things within eternity. Only thus argued Kant, could the a priori within man find fulfillment.
4. Kant stated that the status of this argument is not objective valid proof but simply justification for the concept of a perfect and infinite God.
 5. Kant turned from Scripture to the moral law written in the heart as the basis for his theology. This meant that Scripture was interpreted morally. The movement was from morals to theology rather than from theology to morals.
- B. Friedrich Schleiermacher, the father of “contemporary theology,” illustrates the kind of theology that has been done since Kant. The basic turn to the human subject presented a way of doing theology which is dominate in both Protestant and Catholic theology.
1. As with Kant, Schleiermacher stated that religion is not found in metaphysics nor in some sacred book. Nut he also disagreed with Kant’s idea that it is found in the moral life. By contrast, Schleiermacher stated that mental life is composed of perception, felling and activity. Perception and activity deal with knowledge and moral life whereas feeling issues in religious life.
 - a. Religion for Schleiermacher was grounded in the structure of human existence. It was the creation of the priori self-consciousness which was neither scientific nor moral, but centered in feeling.
 - b. Consciousness of religious truth was immediate self-consciousness.
 - c. Religious truth was basically a feeling that our being and living is being and living through God. It was a feeling or consciousness of ourselves as being absolutely dependent.
 - d. By placing the basis of religion within felling, Schleiermacher broke down the distinction between the natural and the supernatural. The immanence of God in man and the world became the basis for theology.
 2. The theology of Schleiermacher became a description of the content of conversation. Christian doctrines are formulations in language or objectifications of the prior Christian feeling. Consciousness of truth is the objectification of the self-consciousness, and doctrine was defined relative to self-consciousness rather than to Scripture.
 - a. The given was a priori experience rather than Scripture.

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- b. Revelation did not stand at the center of Schleiermacher's theology for revelation was not considered to communicate knowledge; rather it gave the ability for the rise of a new religious experience.
- C. Nineteenth century Protestant Liberalism developed within the general milieu of the inception of the present scientific age which stressed the autonomy of man.
- D. A basic line of continuity runs from medieval Catholic theology to the nineteenth century Protestant liberalism and finally to the twentieth century Protestant liberalism and Catholic theology.
 - 1. Medieval Catholic theology started with metaphysics.
 - 2. Nineteenth century Protestant liberalism started with a philosophy of man.
 - 3. Contemporary Protestant and Catholic theology start with a philosophy of man.
- E. With the exception of the Reformation, the theologies we have reviewed have had the following in common:
 - 1. A natural continuity is assumed from the natural world in which man exercises his reason and comes to know, and the world of religion.
 - 2. It is also assumed that man has capabilities to determine either the nature of reality or the nature of man as the basis for a theological system.
 - 3. Each of these systems in its final analysis posits criteria other than Scripture as the basis for evaluation of theology.

V. Contemporary method in Biblical studies also grows out of the concept that there is natural continuity from the realm of nature to the world religion. The historical-critical method and the related methods of literary criticism, form criticism, redaction criticism, and tradition criticism all move within and presuppose the natural world order.

- A. The historical-critical method accepts the norms of contemporary historical science as a means for studying Scripture. It attempts to establish when and where God has acted and spoken in the way in which He is recorded to have acted and spoken.
 - 1. The historical-critical method is a new "metaphysic." The old metaphysic said, what is rational is real. The historical-critical method says, only that which can be studied within the flow of history can be accepted as real.
 - 2. The norms of history and science are employed to test the accuracy of the written word.

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- B. Source criticism.
- C. Form criticism.
- D. Tradition criticism.
- E. Redaction criticism.
- F. In summary: Conservative contemporary Biblical-critical studies assume a base within the natural world as the criterion for verifying reports of any divine activity. It is assumed that the Bible is to be studied as is any other book.
 - 1. Such an approach to the study of Scripture imposes an external authority upon Scripture. The Bible is no longer the normative, authoritative Word of God recording His will and purpose for mankind. Rather it is tested and criticized to determine its truth value in the same way in which all other literature is tested.
 - 2. Truth is seen to be something apart from the Bible. The task of the Biblical scholar is to use the tools of historical and literary study as the basis for determining what is truth.
 - 3. Those who intend to hold to a method which arises out of Scripture cannot safely apply the methods of contemporary Biblical criticism, for in so doing they would place Scripture itself under an external criterion.

VI. Summary: The general characteristics of the theologies which have been reviewed:

- A. At the basis of the systems which have been reviewed (with the exception of the Reformation) is the assumption that there is a basic continuity from the natural to the religious and that it is possible either to start within or to work out of the framework of the natural world in the process of doing theology.
- B. These same methods by one means or another assume a predetermined notion of the nature of God and the way in which He can reveal Himself.

VII. A proposal for an approach to method in Biblical studies and theology.

Method which takes seriously the self-claim of Scripture to be the authoritative Word of God will start with Scripture as the basis for approaching theology. To start at any other point would be to compromise the authority of Scripture by placing authority in some other entity. Even if the conclusion of a scientific, historical or philosophical argument were to affirm the authority of Scripture, the authority of Scripture would nonetheless rest upon the prior authority of the grounding principle.

Method which sincerely intends to be Biblical must start by asking Scripture what it has to say about its own nature and the principles by which it is to be interpreted. Having come to an

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understanding of the nature of Scripture from Scripture itself, the inquirer may return to Scripture regarding such other topics relevant to method as the nature of God, man, knowledge, salvation, faith and reality itself.

A. The priority of scripture for understanding God, man and the universe.

1. Scripture represents itself as a genre distinct from the literature of men which is produced within the human processes. The Bible assumes everywhere that its message comes direct from God Himself.

2. The Word of God is an issue in the great controversy between Christ and Satan.

a. The fundamental issue involved in the decisions at the tree of knowledge of good and evil, the flood, the tower of Babel, and in the wilderness of temptation had to do with man's relation to the Word of God.

b. "The wise man of this world talked of science and the fixed laws of nature, and declared that there could be no variation in these laws, and that this message of Noah could not possibly be true. The talented men of Noah's time set themselves in league against God's will and purpose, and scorned the message and the messenger that he had sent. When they could not move Noah from his firm and implicit trust in the Word of God, they pointed to him as a fanatic, as a ranting old man, full of superstition and madness. Thus they condemned him because he would not be turned from his purpose by reasoning and theories of men. It was true that Noah could not controvert their philosophies or refute the claims of science do called; but he could proclaim the Word of God; for he knew it contained the infinite wisdom of the Creator, and, as he sounded it everywhere, it lost none of its force and reality because men of the world treated him with ridicule and contempt," – *Signs of the Times*, April 18, 1895, pp. 243-44.

3. This same reliance upon Scripture was also the basis of the Protestant Reformation, E.G. White in *The Great Controversy* sees the Seventh-Day Adventist Church as the complete fulfillment of the Protestant return to the sole authority of Scripture.

"Wycliffe accepted the Holy Scriptures with implicit faith as the inspired revelation of God's will, a sufficient rule of faith and practice.... He taught not only that the Bible is a perfect revelation of God's will, but that the Holy Spirit is its only interpreter, and that every man is, by the study of its only interpreter, and that every man is, by the study of its teachings, to learn his duty for himself." – *The Great Controversy*, p. 93.

" 'Prove to me [Jerome] from the Holy Writings that I am in error,' he said, 'and I will abjure it.'"

'The Holy Writings!' exclaimed one of his tempters, 'Is everything then to be judged by them? Who can understand them till the church has interpreted them?'

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'Are the traditions of men more worthy of faith than the gospel of our Savior?' replied Jerome. 'Paul did not exhort those to whom he wrote to listen to the traditions of men, but said, 'Search the Scriptures.'

'Heretic!' Was the response. 'I repent having pleaded so long with you. I see that you are urged on by the devil,' " – *Ibid.*, p. 114.

The Waldensians declared that, "The Bible is the only infallible authority in religion, and that 'No man should be coerced to believe, but should be won by preaching.'" – *Ibid.*, p. 238.

Alaf Petri of Sweden, "Declared that the teachings of the Fathers are to be received only when in accordance with the Scriptures; that the essential doctrines of the faith are presented in the Bible in a clear and simple manner, so that all men may understand them.... He showed that the decrees of the church are of no authority when in opposition to the commands of God, and maintained the great Protestant principle that 'the Bible and the Bible only' is the rule of faith and practice." – *The Great Controversy*. p. 243.

"Luther saw the danger of exalting human theories above the Word of God. He fearlessly attacked the speculative infidelity of the schoolmen and opposed the philosophy and theology which had so long held a controlling influence upon the people. He denounced such studies as not only worthless but pernicious, and sought to turn the minds of his hearers from the sophistries of philosophers and theologians to the eternal truths set forth by prophets and apostles." – *Ibid.*, p. 126.

"Fearlessly did Luther defend the gospel from the attacks which came upon every quarter. The Word of God proved itself a weapon mighty in every conflict. With that word he warred against the usurped authority of the pope, and the rationalistic philosophy of the schoolmen, while he stood firm as a rock against the fanaticism that sought to ally itself with the Reformation.

"Each of these opposing elements was in its own way setting aside the Holy Scriptures and exalting human wisdom as the source of religious truth and knowledge. Rationalism idolizes reason and makes this the criterion for religion. Romanism, claiming for her sovereign pontiff an inspiration descended in unbroken line from the apostles, and unchangeable through all time, gives ample opportunity for every species of extravagance and corruption to be concealed under the sanctity of the apostolic commission. The inspiration claimed by Mūnzer and his associates proceeded from no higher source than the vagaries of the imagination, and its influence as subversive of all authority, human or divine. True Christianity receives the Word of God as the great treasure house of inspired truth and the test of all inspirations." – *The Great Controversy*, p. 193.

The protest of the princes at the Diet of Spires also upheld the authority of Scripture. "There is no sure doctrine but such as is conformable to the Word of God.... The Lord forbids the teaching of any other doctrine.... The Holy Scriptures ought to be explained by other and clearer texts; ... this Holy Book is, in all things necessary for the Christian, easy of understanding, and calculated to scatter the darkness. We are resolved, with the grace of God, to maintain the pure and

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exclusive preaching of His only word, such as it is contained in the Biblical books of the Old and New Testaments, without adding anything thereto that may be contrary to it. This word is the only truth; it is the sure rule of all doctrine and of all life, and can never fail or deceive us. He who builds on this foundation shall stand against all the powers of Hell, while all the human vanities that are set up against it shall fall before the face of God' 'The principles contained in this celebrated Protest.... constitute the very essence of Protestantism.'" – *The Great Controversy*. p. 203.

Zwingli also presented the Word of God as the only infallible authority. He declared that he was introducing no new **method** but the old **method** employed by the church in earlier and purer times.

"The more he searched the Scriptures, the clearer appeared the contrast between their truths and the heresies of Rome. He submitted himself to the Bible as the Word of God, the only sufficient, infallible rule. He saw that it must be its own interpreter. He dared not attempt to explain Scripture to sustain a preconceived theory or doctrine, but held it his duty to learn what is its direct and obvious teaching. He sought to avail himself of every help to obtain a full and correct understanding of its meaning, and he invoked the aid of the Holy Spirit, which would, he declared, reveal it to all who sought it in sincerity and with prayer.

"'The Scriptures,' said Zwingli, 'come from God, not from man, and even that God who enlightens will give thee to understand that the speech comes from God. The Word of God.... cannot fail; it is bright, it teaches itself, it discloses itself, it illumines the soul with all salvation and grace, comforts it in God, humbles it, so that it loses and even forfeits itself, and embraces God.' The truth of these words Zwingli himself had proved. Speaking of his experience at this time, he afterward wrote: "When....I began to give myself wholly up to the Holy Scriptures, philosophy and theology (scholastic) would always keep suggesting quarrels to me. At last I came to this, that I thought, "Thou must let all that lie, and learn the meaning of God purely out of His own simple word." Then I began to ask God for His light, and the Scriptures began to be much easier to me.'" – *The Great Controversy* pp. 173-74.

"But God will have a people upon the earth to maintain the Bible, and the Bible only, as the standard of all doctrines and the basis of all reforms. The opinions of learned men, the deductions of science, the creeds or decisions of ecclesiastical councils, as numerous and discordant as are the churches which they represent, the voice of the majority – not one nor all of these should be regarded as evidence for against any point of religious faith. Before accepting any doctrine or precept, we should demand a plain 'thus saith the Lord' in its support." – *Ibid.*, p. 595.

B. A Biblical understanding of the nature of God also points to the priority of Scripture as the basis for a true knowledge of God.

1. The nature of God in relation to the priority of Scripture.

God is not only immanent but also transcendent, in His transcendence there is an immeasurable distance between God and man. God is Infinite, the Holy One, the Most

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High, the Sovereign of the universe.

“Who has measured the waters in the hollow of His hand,
And marked off the heavens by the span,
And calculated the dust of the earth by the measure,
And weighed the mountains in a balance
And the hills in a pair of scales?
Who has directed the Spirit of the Lord,
Or as His counselor has informed Him?
With whom did He consult and **who** gave Him understanding?
All the nations are as nothing before Him,
They are regarded by Him as less than nothing and meaningless.
To whom then will you liken God?
Or what likeness will you compare with Him?
Do you not know? Have you not heard?
Has it not been declared to you from the beginning?
Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth?
It is He who sits above the vault of the earth,
And its inhabitants are like grasshoppers,
Who stretches out the heavens like a curtain
And spreads them out like a tent to dwell in.
‘To whom then will you liken Me
That I should be **his** equal?’ says the Holy One.
Do you not know? Have you not heard?
The Everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth
Does not become weary or tired.
His understanding is inscrutable.” – Isaiah 40:12-14, 17-18. 21-22, 26, 28, NASB.

Such a God –

- a. Does great things which cannot be comprehended (Job 37-41).
- b. Is perfect and incomprehensible in His judgments. Who is man that he should instruct God or disannul His judgment? “Oh the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who became His counselor?” – Romans 11:33, 34 (see also Psalms 19:9, 89:14; 96:13; 97:2; Isaiah 40; Daniel 9:7, 14; Hebrews 10:30; Job 17:23).
- c. Is righteous and the source of righteousness (Psalms 97:2; 111:3-5; 40; 142; 144; John 17:25).

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- d. Is both perfect in knowledge and the source of knowledge. God's knowledge transcends that of man. The wisdom of God is to be compared with the foolishness of men (1 Corinthians 1:25, 3:20).

"Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is too high, I cannot attain to it." – Psalms 139:6, NASB (see also Isaiah 40:13, 14; 49:9-10; Job 36:4; Psalms 94:9-10; 139:1-16).

2. God is unsearchable.

- a. God presents Himself as one who is unsearchable. "For my thoughts, are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, declares the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways." – Isaiah 55:8-9 NASB
- b. It is not inherent within the task or position of man to discover God. God is not known as the result of Man's search.

"Human talents and human conjecture have tried by searching to find out God. Many have trodden this pathway. The highest intellect may tax itself until it is wearied out, in conjectures regarding God, but the effort will be fruitless, and the fact will remain that man by searching cannot find God. This problem has not been given us to solve. All that man needs to know and can know of God has been revealed in the life and character of His Son, the Great Teacher. As we learn more and more of what man is, of what we ourselves are, in God's sight, we shall fear and tremble before Him." – *Medical Ministry*, p. 95.

"God cannot be understood by men. His ways and works are past finding out. In regard to the revelations that He has made of Himself in His Word, we may talk, but other than this, let us say of Him, Thou art God, and Thy ways are past finding out." – *SDA Bible Commentary*, Vol.6, p. 1079.

"Man cannot by searching find out God.... Only that which He sees fit to reveal can we comprehend of Him. Reason must acknowledge an authority superior to itself. Heart and intellect must bow to the great I AM." – *Ministry of Healing*, p. 438.

3. Adequate knowledge of God is not available by means of the naturalistic process by which man attempts to acquire knowledge.

- a. If God is truly the transcendent and unsearchable God revealed in revelation, it is understandable that he cannot be discovered or explained within the naturalistic process of human knowing.
- b. It is not the place of philosophy to determine the ways and works of God. The human mind cannot measure infinity.

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- 1) True religion is not grounded in philosophy (Colossians 2:8).
 - 2) "For the world through its wisdom did not come to know God." (1 Corinthians 1:21).
 - 3) The Jews asked for signs and the Greeks rest their case on wisdom (1 Corinthians 1:21).
 - 4) But God has destroyed the wisdom of the wise (1 Corinthians 1:19, 20).
 - 5) For salvation comes by the foolishness of preaching (1 Corinthians 1:21).
 - 6) And the message of preaching comes not in persuasive words of wisdom but in a demonstration of His Spirit and the power of faith which rests upon God rather than on the wisdom of man (1 Corinthians 2:4-5).
- c. When man attempts to gain his knowledge of God through the natural world, the results are the worship of the creature rather than the Creator.
- 1) There is in the conscience and in nature a revelation of the power and divine nature of God (Romans 1:19, 20).
 - 2) This revelation does not lead to the possibility of a natural theology. The problem lies not in the revelation but within man, for man is incapable by means of application of his naturalistic capabilities to acquire adequate knowledge to arrive at the proper conception of the God who reveals Himself (1 Corinthians 1:21).
 - 3) Professing to be wise, man becomes a fool (Romans 1:22).
 - 4) Man misrepresents the data because of sin in his life (Romans 1:18).
 - 5) He suppresses the truth about God (Romans 1:18, 28).
 - 6) He exchanges "the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures." (Romans 1:23, NASB).
 - 7) Man exchanges the truth of God for a lie (Romans 1:25).
 - 8) The natural tendency of man by the exercise of his natural faculties is to demonstrate his foolishness by suppressing the knowledge of God available by natural revelation and exchanging it for an idol of man's own making.

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- 9) The futile speculations of man (Ephesians 4:17) lead to a darkened heart (Romans 1:21).
 - 10) God gives men up to their own evil ways which in the first place led to this suppression and exchange (Romans 1:24, 26, 28).
 - 11) As opposed to philosophical systems which attempt to gain knowledge of God, the gospel reveals the righteousness of God and the way by which God intends to save man (Romans 1:16, 17).
 - 12) "In its human wisdom the world knows not God. Its wise men gather an imperfect knowledge of Him from His created works; but this knowledge so far from giving the exalted conceptions of God, so far from elevating the mind and the soul, and bringing the while being into conformity with His will, tends to make men idolaters. In their blindness they exalt nature and the laws of nature above nature's God.... The greatest minds, if not guided by the word of God, become bewildered in their attempts to investigate the relations of science and revelation.... When they find themselves incapable of measuring the Creator and His works by their own imperfect knowledge of science, they question the existence of God and attribute infinite power to nature." – *Testimonies*, Vol.8, pp. 257-58.
4. The hiddenness of God and His transcendence over His creation places man in dependence upon God's special revelation for knowledge of God.
- a. God who is prior to and exalted above the world of man is not enmeshed within the flow of the natural world.
 - b. From a human standpoint the task of obtaining knowledge of God is hopeless, for man does not have available within himself the necessary tools by which to ascertain the nature of God.
 - 1) " 'Can you discover the depths of God?
Can you discover the limits of the Almighty?
' 'It is high as the heavens, what can you do?
Deeper than Sheol, what can you know?
' 'Its measure is longer than the earth, and broader than the sea.' "
– Job 11:7-9, NASB.
 - 2) "Neither by searching the recesses of the earth nor in vain endeavors to penetrate the mysteries of God's being is wisdom found. It is found, rather, humbly receiving the revelation that He has been pleased to give, and in conforming the life to His will." – *Testimonies*, Vol. 8, p. 280.

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- c. By the grace of God man has not been left in a state of hopelessness without possible knowledge of god. Knowledge of transcendent and hidden God requires self-revelation and God has done just that. He had given Himself to man in revelation.
- 1) “For behold, He who forms mountains and creates the wind
And declares to man what are His thoughts,
He who makes dawn into darkness
And treads on the high places of the Earth,
The Lord God of hosts in His name,” Amos 4:13, NASB.
 - 2) Knowledge of God is available only through revelation by the Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:10-16).
- d. The revelation of God has been made most fully in Jesus Christ.
- 1) No man has seen the Father except the Son (John 1:1-3, 18; 5:37; 6:34; Colossians 1:15).
 - 2) The Son who is in the bosom of the Father has declared Him (John 1:18).
 - 3) Therefore he who has seen the Son has also seen the Father (John 14:9, 10; Matthew 11:25-27).
- e. If man is to have reliable information of God, he must be willing to depend upon the revelation which God has made concerning Himself. This revelation through Jesus Christ comes to man in the Bible. Man is therefore uniquely dependent upon the Bible for a true understanding of God.
- “ ‘ The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever, that we may observe all the words of this law.’ “ – Deuteronomy 29:29, NASB.
- “Human talent and human conjecture have tried by searching to find God. But guesswork has proved to be guesswork. Man cannot by searching find out God. This problem has not been given to human beings. All that man need to know and can know of God has been revealed in His Word and in the life of His Son, the Great Teacher.” – *SDA Bible Commentary*, Vol.6, p. 1079.
- “Searching the Scriptures alone will bring the knowledge of the true God and Jesus Christ whom He has sent.” – *Fundamentals of Christian Education*, p. 415.
- f. God is the source of knowledge.

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- 1) God is Himself wisdom and therefore the source of all wisdom.
- 2) All things are what they are by virtue of God's plan and will.
- 3) Wisdom and knowledge do not have principles autonomous from God.
- 4) Since knowledge and wisdom are to be identified with God and since all things have their character by virtue of God's creative activity and His plan and will, God is also Himself the source of knowledge.
- 5) If man wants to inquire into the nature of reality he must go to God who is also the source of reality.
- 6) Just as man is dependent upon God for righteousness, so is he also dependent upon God for knowledge.
 - i. Christ is not only our righteousness, sanctification and redemption, He is also our wisdom (1 Corinthians 1:30).
 - ii. Not only did grace come through Christ but also truth (John 1:17).
 - iii. In Christ are his all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Colossians 2:3).

C. The nature of man's freedom relative to the authority of the Word of God.

1. The tendency of the heart of man and the general principle prevalent in the contemporary theology and Biblical studies is to affirm a standpoint of freedom, of autonomy, from God in order to make one's decision regarding God and His Word.
2. The nature of man by creation.
 - a. The creature does not have the freedom of the Creator. Man is created in the image of God; yet man is not the Creator, he is the creature. He is not infinite but finite. Every value comes from God – worth, knowledge, and faith are given and sustained by God through Christ.
 - b. The Bible presents man as free, but not autonomous in his relationship with God. Man has the choice to live in harmony with God or under the dictates of the forces of evil.
 - c. The desire for autonomy is a perversion of the freedom which God had granted. By seeking absolute freedom man attempts to usurp the place of God and this is sin in its boldest outline.

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- d. Man's dependence upon God is not only for life but also universe within which God has placed man.
 - 1) Man in general seeks an epistemological autonomy from God and His Word.
 - 2) Man never had such autonomy even before the entrance of sin. Special revelation was essential if man was to understand his own existence and that of the world which surrounded him.
 - 3) Sin entered the world when Eve sought autonomy from the Word of God. On the Basis of principles independent of the Word of God she came to the conclusion that the tree yielded life, knowledge, and freedom rather than death. Sin is basically the desire for autonomy – the desire to live without accountability to or dependence upon God for one's action. In essence this means the desire to become a god.

3. The nature of man since sin.

- a. Ironically man's revolt against God begins by declaring freedom from the Creator and ends in servitude to sin.
- b. Man does not have the moral ability on his own strength to choose either for or against God. Man is not in a condition of moral neutrality. Sin has effected not only man's desire and capacity for God but also his understanding.

"As it is written,
'There is none righteous, not even one;
There is none who understands,
There is none who seeks for God;
All have turned aside, together they have become useless.' "
Romans 3:10-12, NASB.

- c. Apart from Christ man is a slave to sin. Man cannot deliver himself from this sinful state. Any attempt to gain a neutral position from which to free oneself is an act of the self and only serves to reinforce self-concern and autonomy. When theology desires to start from a neutral position, it is granting to those who are in the slavery to sin the freedom and the rational powers to make an autonomous decision regarding Christ.
- d. Sin is the prideful state in which man revolts against God and makes himself the measure of all things. The radical sinfulness of man indicates that not only has the moral nature of man been effected but also his reason. Man attempts to interpret the word apart from God by some principle which he discovers independently of God. The essence of sin lies in turning from the Word of God and the basis for understanding

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the surrounding world to oneself as the principle for interpreting that world. Man has attempted to shift ultimate epistemological authority in the universe from God to himself.

- e. The nature of man not only by creation but even more so because of sin points to the need of God's revelation for an adequate concept of God and the world.
4. Reason is a God-given talent to be exercised within the context of God's word. But when reason is perverted, it becomes an idol which separates rather than unites with God. Only the man who is in Christ is free. When we know the truth, the truth will make us free. The freedom which Christ gives us the freedom to live in harmony with the nature of our being. Scripture is the guidebook to that freedom. "And I will walk at liberty, for I seek Thy percepts." – Psalm 119:45, NASB.

D. The nature of knowledge relative to revelation.

1. Knowledge is the apprehension of some fact of truth in accordance with its real nature. It is understanding the data as it relates to other data and ultimately as it has significance within the totality of reality.
2. In general, knowledge is thought to be grounded within the natural world it is conceived to be based ultimately upon immediate experience and since data (which yield information of outer appearances), combined with thought processes which connect and reason about these appearances and thus arrive at general laws and truths, this process intends to yield a correspondence to reality. The goal is the discovery of that all-inclusive set of principles which allows the unification of knowledge in a complete interpretation of the universe.
3. In the last section we saw that the heart of the sin problem is the desire to set oneself up independently of God. Man's concept of knowledge is basically a continuation of his desire for autonomy.
4. Human knowledge is circular and uncertain.

"Human knowledge of both material and spiritual things is partial and imperfect; therefore many are unable to harmonize their views of science with Scripture statements. Many accept mere theories and speculation as scientific facts, and they think that God's word is to be tested by teachings of 'science falsely so called.' 1 Timothy 6:20." – *The Great Controversy*, p. 522.

5. The Christian does not attempt to acquire knowledge independently of the Creator.
 - a. God as the Creator of the universe has put into motion that which exists and has continued to govern it according to His plan.

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- b. This means that there is no fact which exists independently of God.
 - c. God as the Creator has given meaning to that which has been set into motion and its meaning may be properly understood relative to God's purpose.
6. It is the Word of God, which grounds knowledge rather than knowledge which grounds the Word of God.
- a. It is God who gives wisdom and understanding to man. God Himself teaches His people (Isaiah 54:13; John 6:45).
 - b. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (Psalm 111:10; Job 28:8).
 - c. In Christ are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Colossians 2:2, 3) for Jesus is the way the truth and the life (John 14:6).
 - d. Jehovah is the foundation of all wisdom, all truth and all knowledge (*SDA Bible Commentary*, Vol.6. p. 1079).
7. If God is the source of knowledge, if God is only known in revelation, it follows that revelation is essential for knowledge.
- a. The opening of God's Word gives light and understanding (Psalm 119:98-100, 130).
 - b. The Word is the lamp to our feet and a light to our path (Psalm 119:105).
 - c. The Word is the basis for right doing and right thinking (Psalm 119:1-2, 5-6, 9, 11, 30).
 - d. It was that truth which had been committed to Timothy that would enable him to rightly relate to knowledge (1 Timothy 6:20).
 - e. "The Bible is to be our light, our educator.... The first great lesson in all education is to know and understand the will of God. Take the knowledge of God with you through every day of life. Let it absorb the mind and the whole being. God gave Solomon wisdom, but this God-given wisdom was perverted when he turned from God to obtain wisdom from other sources. We need the Wisdom of Solomon after we have learned the wisdom of One greater than Solomon. We are not to go through human wisdom, which is termed foolishness, to seek true wisdom. For men to learn science through man's interpretation, is to obtain a false education, but to learn of God and Jesus Christ is to learn the science of the Bible." – *Fundamentals of Christian Education*, p. 414.

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- f. The wisemen are ashamed and dismayed. Because they reject the Word of the Lord, there is no wisdom in them (Jeremiah 8:9).
8. It is because God has revealed Himself that man may have knowledge which is congruent with reality. The Word of God constitutes the means for understanding and interpreting that which is collected in the universe. It becomes the basis for justifying knowledge, meaning and truth claims. It is the basis for all reasoning, even that reasoning which takes place about God's revelation and reason itself.
- E. The nature of faith and salvation relative to the priority of the Word of God.
- 1. Possible methods for determining the nature of faith –
 - a. The humanistic approach to faith seeks examples such as the faith of the scientist in his hypothesis, the faith of the historian in his conclusions, the faith of a banker in the individual to whom he is granting a loan and the faith of a traveler in the pilot of the plane. Such faith is based upon observable data as made coherent by the interpretive powers of reason. Faith is a projection based upon data into realms where data is not yet available. Each new bit of data tests the faith hypothesis.
 - b. Faith in God must not be defined relative to that which is observed within the human sphere, Father, God Himself in His Word provide the Definition.
 - 2. Toward a biblical concept of faith.
 - a. Faith is the gift of God (Ephesians 2:8) in order that faith might not rest on the wisdom of man but in the power of God (1 Corinthians 2:5).

“Faith that enables us to receive God’s gifts is itself a gift.” – *Education*, p. 253.
“No man can create faith. The Spirit operating upon and enlightening the human mind, creates faith in God. In the Scriptures faith is stated to be the gift of God, powerful unto salvation, enlightening the hearts of those who search for truth as for hidden treasure.” – *SDA Bible Commentary*. Vol.7, p. 940.
 - b. Faith is itself the assurance, the conviction, the evidence of things not seen. (Hebrews 1:11).

“Faith is not the ground of our salvation, but it is the great blessing—the eye that sees, the ear that hears, the feet that run, the hand that grasps. It is the means, not the end. If Christ gave His life to save sinners, how shall I not take that blessing? My faith grasps it, and thus my faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things unseen. Thus resting and believing, I have peace with God through the Lord Jesus Christ.” – *SDA Bible Commentary*, Vol.6. p. 1073.

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Were faith based on the data of the human senses as described humanistically above, it would be a leap in the dark, for human knowledge is uncertain.

- c. Faith is the basis of knowledge.
 - 1) Faith is the basis of knowledge. By faith we understand (Hebrews 11:3). “Only in the light of revelation can it [nature] be read aright.” – *Education*, p. 134.
 - 2) Faith is the key of knowledge (*Education*, p. 24; *Desire of Ages*, p. 139). It is the basis for discerning between truth and error (*Selected Messages*, Bk.1, p. 346; *Testimonies of Ministers*, p. 229).
 - 3) The humanistic approach states that we must find the criteria for faith whereas faith is actually the criteria for truth.

- d. Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God (Romans 11:17).
 - 1) The assurance and evidence for faith is God’s Word (*Selected Messages*, Bk.2, p. 243).
 - 2) To attempt to use the data of reason as criteria for determining whether or not Scripture is the Word of God is to doubt that which has already been declared by God. It is similar to the temptation given by Satan to Christ in the wilderness, namely, to doubt His Sonship after it had already been affirmed by the Word of God. “Genuine faith has its foundation in the promises and provisions of the Scriptures.” – *Desire of Ages*, p. 126 (see also *Early Writings*, p. 72; *Gospel Workers*, p. 260).
 - 3) “In order to have true, abiding faith in Christ, we must know Him as He is represented in the Word.” (*Fundamentals of Christian Education*, P. 433.)
 - 4) The spirit and the Word work together “the Spirit operating upon and enlightening the human mind, creates faith in God.” (*SDA Bible Commentary*, Vol.7, p. 940).
 - 5) “There is a kind of faith that takes it for granted that we have the truth; but the faith that takes God at His word, which works by love and purifies the heart, is very rare,” (*Life Sketches*, pp. 277-78).
 - 6) To base faith and Scripture upon the description of historian or a geologist is not yet to come to Biblical faith. Biblical faith comes through the Word and the work of the Spirit.

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3. Abraham, an example of Biblical faith.

“ By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went.” Hebrews 11:8. Abraham’s unquestioning obedience is one of the most striking evidences of faith to be found in all the Bible. To him, faith was ‘ the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.’ Verse 1. Relying upon the divine promise, without the least outward assurance of its fulfillment, he abandoned home and kindred and native land, and went forth, he knew nothing whither to follow where God should lead.... He could not even explain his course of action so as to be understood by his friends. Spiritual things are spiritually discerned and his motives and actions were not comprehended by his idolatrous kindred.” – *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 126.

If faith is the basis of knowledge and if faith comes from the Word of God, the Word of God has priority for knowledge.

4. The relation of salvation to the priority of Scripture.

- a. Salvation is no longer a gift if it comes through a faith itself rests on a rational argument.
- b. Man’s natural desire is to make a decision regarding God’s salvation from a posture of autonomy. To attempt to do is only to continue in man’s rebellion against God.
- c. Salvation rests upon the foolishness of preaching rather than upon human wisdom, signs and evidences in order that no flesh should glory in the presence of God. (1 Corinthians 1:18-31).
- d. “Our Salvation depends on a knowledge of the truth contained in the Scriptures.” – *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 111.

VIII. The result of using the natural world as the ground and context for theology.

- A. The attempt to ground the revelation of Scripture in the natural world implies that man already knows what God can and cannot reveal and thus that man knows what God is in Himself apart from His revelation. It is an attempt to affirm apart from the Word of God the existence of the God of Scripture who therein declares that He cannot be adequately known apart from His revelation.
- B. By attempting to ground and study Scripture within the context of the natural world, man is actually creating his own standard as a measure for Scripture.

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1. "The ingenuity of man has been exercised for ages to measure the Word of God by their finite minds and limited comprehension." – *Selected Messages*, Bk.1, p. 18.
 2. "Men consider themselves wiser than the word of God, wiser even than God; and instead of planting their feet on the immovable foundation, and bringing everything to the test of God's word, they test that word by their own ideas of science and nature, and if it seems not to agree with their scientific ideas, it is discarded as unworthy of credence." – *Signs of the Times*, March 27, 1884, p. 1.
 3. "Many attempt to judge the Creator and His works by their own imperfect knowledge of science. They endeavor to determine the nature and attributes and prerogatives of God, and indulge in speculative theories concerning the Infinite One." – *Ministry of Healing*, p. 427.
- C. "The Word of the Lord is not to be judged by a human standard." – *Testimonies*. Vol.5, p. 301.
1. "Philosophy cannot determine the ways and works of God; the human mind cannot measure infinity." – *SDA Bible Commentary*, Vol.6, p. 1079.
 2. "Truth in Christ and through Christ is measureless.... The truth as it is in Jesus can be experienced, but never explained." – *Christ's Object Lessons*, pp. 128-29.
- D. The attempt to set up the natural world as the context for the study of Scripture results in –
1. Placing the word of man above the Word of God.

"But man's inventions are not only unreliable, they are dangerous; for they place man where God should be. They place the sayings of men where a 'Thus saith the Lord' should be." – *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 110.
 2. Setting the judgment of men above the Word of God.

Men "set up their judgment as superior to the word; and the Scripture which they do teach rests upon their own authority. Its divine authenticity is destroyed." – *Ibid.*, p. 39.
 3. Measuring God

Man's measure of God will never be correct (*Signs of the Times*, March 13, 1884).
 4. Denying the existence of God.

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When men “find themselves incapable of measuring the Creator and His works by their own imperfect knowledge of science, they question the existence of God and attribute infinite power to nature.” – *Testimonies*, Vol.8, p. 258.

- E. The emphasis upon the priority of Scripture arises from the recognition that –
 - 1. To do otherwise would be to make man autonomous.
 - 2. To do otherwise would place an a priori structure upon Scripture.
- F. The goal then is understanding rather than autonomous intellectual undergirding. The purpose is to use reason in the way that God has designed that it be used.

IX. Preserving the authority of scripture in theology.

- A. The nature of Christianity and Scripture relative to method.
 - 1. The nature of Christianity requires the priority of Scripture over philosophy. Christianity is not intellectual search. It is given in Christ, the Scripture and the Holy Spirit. Man does not seek to establish or justify it, but rather to understand it.
 - 2. The nature of Scripture also has implications for method.
 - a. The explanation for the existence of scripture resides not in man but in God, not in the flow of human thought in history but in revelation, not in man’s reflections about God or His revelation but in God’s Word incarnate.
 - b. The purpose of revelation is not to provide man with data or a record of an event which must then be scrutinized and analyzed as any other data available to man. The character of Scripture is revelatory.
 - c. If scripture is to be accepted as the final authority, then it must also be the authority for its own interpretation; that is, method for the interpretation of Scripture must arise out of Scripture itself and be congruent with Scripture’s own declaration regarding its nature. To do otherwise would be to impose an external concept upon Scripture.
 - d. Since God’s revelation is distinct from that which takes place within the human sphere, the method applied to its interpretation is not the same as that applied to what is produced within the human sphere. The nature of revelation itself must be the determiner of the method for its interpretation.

“Scriptural difficulties can never be mastered by the same methods that are employed in grappling with philosophical problems. We should not engage in the study of the

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Bible with that self-reliance with which so many enter the domains of science, but with a prayerful dependence upon God and a sincere desire to learn His will." – *The Great Controversy*, p. 599.

- e. Recognizing the uniqueness of Scripture a priori excludes certain methods from consideration.
 - 1) It excludes Biblical critical studies which base their principles on starting points other than the Word of God.
 - i. The historical-critical method is not applicable to Scripture, for Scripture does not lie within the category of data which needs to be evaluated and interpreted into inter-connected whole. Rather Scripture itself is the basis for interpretation both of scripture and of other data within the universe.
 - ii. Form criticism, redaction criticism and tradition criticism cannot be applied to Scripture since they are based upon principles which arise out of analysis of the development of human literatures.
 - 2) It excludes methods which arise out of rational and existential criteria.

B. The development of a theological method must start with Scripture itself.

1. In general method in theology in its pursuit for truth has attempted to reduce theology to the study of subject matter which may be methodologically investigated in a manner similar to the investigation of such a discipline as psychology, science and history. By contrast, method which starts within Scripture affirms the desire to understand Scripture methodologically but not to investigate it for truth is the given in Scripture. The following warnings are applicable to any other method.

"Let not human reasoning be placed where sanctifying truth should be.... God calls upon us to hold firmly to the fundamental principles that are based upon unquestionable authority." – *Gospel Workers*, p. 308.

Scripture "contains the alpha and the omega of knowledge." – *Ibid.*, p. 309.

"Do not advocate theories or tests that Christ has never mentioned, and that have no foundation in the Bible. We have grand, solemn truths for the people. 'It is written' is the test that must be brought home to every soul." – *Ibid.*

"Scriptures need not be read by the dim light of tradition or human speculation. As well might we try to give light to the sun with a torch as to explain the Scriptures by human tradition or imagination. God's Holy Word need not the torchlight glimmer of earth to

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make its glories distinguishable. It is light in itself – the glory of God revealed, and beside it every other light is dim.” – *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 111.

2. Method in theology must not be determined by an a priori consideration of the nature of God, of man, of the universe, or of any aspect of these. Thus it must not start with the idea of transcendence nor with the contemporary concepts of the world nor with an analysis of human subjectivity nor with an analysis of the a priori structure of the human mind.
 - a. The starting point must be the Word of God as the structuring principle within which all else may properly be understood.
 - b. Thus method must start by asking Scripture what it has to say about its own nature and the principles by which it is to be interpreted.
- C. A theology which starts within Scripture entirely reverses the process of method in theology. Instead of starting within the natural world as a structure upon which to account for the world of revelation, theology starts within God’s revelation in Scripture.

“God has permitted a flood of light to be poured upon the world in both science and art; but when professedly scientific men treat upon these subjects from a merely human point of view, they will assuredly come to wrong conclusions.... The greatest minds, if not guided by the word of God in their research, become bewildered in their attempts to trace the relations of science and revelation.” – *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 113.

Any method or system which reserves the direction of flow by allowing external elements to flow into Scripture must be rejected. “The foundation of all true science is contained in the Bible. Every branch of knowledge may be found by searching the word of God. And above all else it contains the science of all sciences, the science of salvation.” – *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 107.

Men take the writings of scientists, falsely so-called, and seek to make their deductions harmonize with the statements of the Bible. But where there is no agreement, there can be no harmony. Christ declares, ‘No man can serve two masters.’ Their interests are sure to clash. Again and again men have attempted to put the Bible and the writings of men upon a common basis; but the attempt has proved a failure; for we cannot serve God and mammon.” – *Fundamentals of Christian Education*, p. 181.

- D. The natural world sheds light on Scripture when the natural world itself is studied in the context of Scripture. The human disciplines have their proper place within the context of Scripture.

X. The attitude with which one comes to Scripture determines his ability to hear the Word of God.

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- A. Come as a learner willing to hear the truth rather than as a critic attempting to decide what is truth in Scripture.
- B. Come in an attitude of humiliation and prayer.
- C. Allow the Holy Spirit to operate in your life.
- D. Come to Scripture repeatedly.

XI. Scripture must become the basis of the totality of one's life, not only of ones actions but also of his thinking.