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CHRIST HAS MADE HIM KNOWN

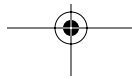
Theology is not just knowing about God, but knowing him. To know him we need to be restored to friendship with him. In other words, we do biblical theology as Christians, not as neutral observers. Through the preaching of the gospel we have been brought to faith in Jesus Christ. Christ conquers our rebellious hearts and minds so that we worship him as Lord. Our only knowledge of Christ comes through Scriptures, and they give a united testimony to him. Christ is proclaimed as the one who reveals God to us; he is the Word of God. The Bible is the book about Christ that is inspired by the Holy Spirit. God has ensured that the Bible gives an infallible testimony to Christ. Biblical theology thus centers on Jesus Christ as the revealer and savior. To understand the Bible, we begin at the point where we first came to know God. We begin with Jesus Christ, and we see every part of the Bible in relationship to him and his saving work. This is as true of the Old Testament as it is of the New.



THE THEOLOGIAN IS A BELIEVER

The Christian is a believer in Jesus Christ. That obvious fact should not escape us! The word of the gospel takes hold of us and, by the Holy Spirit's power, turns us from darkness to light, that is, turns us to Christ. The gospel is the message of the kingdom of God as it comes through the person and work of Jesus of Nazareth. The gospel centers on the birth, life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus as God's way of saving us from death and of making us members of his eternal kingdom.

As we begin the Christian life by placing our whole trust in the Christ of the gospel event, so in the same way we continue in the Christian life. The gospel not only brings us to the new birth and faith as Christians; it is God's means of saving us totally. The gospel is the power of God for salvation (Rom 1:16), and this means the whole of salvation for the whole person. Thus the gospel converts us, the gospel sustains us in the Christian life and brings us to maturity and the gospel brings us to perfection through our resurrection from the dead.





An important part of salvation is having our rebellious minds and wills changed so that they become compliant to the Word of God. The Christian can no longer think like an atheistic humanist. The truth-suppressing mind is overcome by the Holy Spirit, who brings it to accept and believe the gospel. This renewing of the mind is a continuous process (Rom 12:2), and it means that the Christian develops the mindset of Christian theism. Since our perfection is not reached in this life, we all retain some measure of humanistic thinking. We must continually strive to overcome this evil through the power of the gospel.

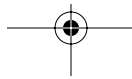
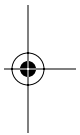
As biblical theologians, we not only believe, but we also understand and accept the word of God as self-attesting. We will do more than simply describe what is in the Bible. We will sit under the authority of God's Word and seek to describe what we know to be the content of one unified and self-consistent Word of God.

Unfortunately, the biblical theologian may compromise the principle of the self-attesting Word of God, and apply unbiblical criteria for assessing the nature of the Bible and its message. He will then rearrange its parts, reconstruct its history, remove the texts which do not fit his particular philosophy and reinterpret the whole in the light of his own presuppositions which are the product of God-denying thought. Many biblical theologies have been written in which the biblical presuppositions have been rejected in favor of humanistic ones.

TRUTH IS RESTORED IN CHRIST

Jesus not only saves us from the effects of our sinful ignorance; he also informs our minds of the nature of the truth. We cannot separate the saving and revealing work of Christ. We are saved that we might truly know God and live in fellowship with him. The truth is restored for us in Christ. In everything Christ was and did during his earthly ministry, he was revealing to us the truth about God, ourselves and the whole created order. Thus, part of our salvation is to be saved in our minds. When the Holy Spirit of God applies the gospel to the sinner so that faith ensues, there is a new birth, which includes the renewal of the mind. From that point onward every fact in the universe is seen as affirming the reality of God. The Christian mind is being restored to its correct function of interpreting all things by God's Word.

This mind-restoring work of Christ in his gospel derives from his eter-



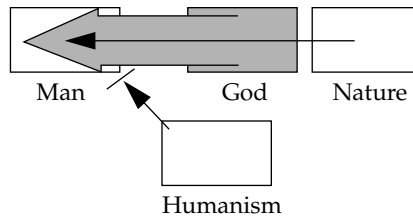


nal role as the agent and purpose of creation. Paul says that all things were created in Christ, through Christ and for Christ (Col 1:16). This signifies that the meaning of the universe is found in the gospel. God created all things with a view to their redemption in Christ. The gospel is God's forethought, his blueprint to creation, not a mere afterthought because of sin.

Now, part of being saved is learning to do theology correctly. I'm not suggesting that this take priority over all other aspects. I'm not saying that the intellectual side of salvation takes precedence. But it *is* important. I am saying that the way our minds are saved and renewed is by the Holy Spirit conforming our thinking about all things to the truth in Jesus. This is part of what it means to say, "Jesus is Lord." If we will obey him in the moral actions of our lives so that we actively combat God-denying, sinful actions, so shall we obey him in our thinking. We must combat thinking that does not conform to the truth revealed in Jesus.

Christian theism

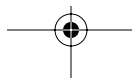
3. Man redeemed in Christ



*Christ reveals and interprets all truth about God and everything created.
The Christian resists the mindset of humanism.*

CHRIST INTERPRETS THE WHOLE BIBLE

The only way we know who Christ is and what his gospel means is through the Bible. Jesus withdrew his bodily presence from the world. In its place he left the Holy Spirit and promised that this Spirit would lead the disciples into all truth (Jn 16:13). But Jesus himself was that truth (Jn 14:6), and so he promised that the Spirit would testify of him and glorify him. This ministry of the Spirit in which he points to Christ led to the preaching





of the gospel by the apostles, and to the making of a reliable record of their witness in the New Testament. This means that what the Bible says is what God wants it to say. The Bible is infallible in the sense that it is the Word of the God of truth and it will not lead us astray.

Every word of the New Testament comes from the Holy Spirit's testimony to Jesus. The New Testament records the central facts of the gospel and explores the implications of the gospel for the lives of God's people. It shows us that the gospel is God's one way of bringing sinners to perfection. All the problems and imperfections that we experience are failures to be conformed to the gospel. The only remedy that the New Testament prescribes for our problems is to bring our lives to conform to the gospel.

Likewise, the one problem we have in the interpretation of the Bible is the failure to interpret the texts by the definitive event of the gospel. This has its outworking in both directions. What went before Christ in the Old Testament, as well as what comes after him, finds its meaning in him. So the Old Testament must be understood in its relationship to the gospel event. What that relationship is can only be determined from the witness of the New Testament itself.

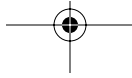
Jesus, then, is God's Word to us:

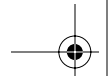
In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. . . .

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. . . . No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known. (Jn 1:1-3, 14, 18)

He is God's Word for the "last days" who brings the word of the Old Testament prophets to completion (Heb 1:1-2). He is the end of God's saving acts in the history of Israel (Rom 1:1-4), and thus fulfills all prophecy (Acts 13:32-33). The real meaning of prophecy always lies in the person and work of Jesus Christ (1 Pet 1:10-12).

This apostolic witness only restated what Christ himself said when he claimed to be the content of the Old Testament (Lk 24:27, 44; Jn 5:39). On this basis, he opened the minds of the disciples to understand the Old Testament (Lk 24:45).





The relationship of the Old Testament to Christ
Some New Testament assessments

| Old Testament | | Christ | |
|----------------------------------|-------|----------------------------|--|
| Prophetic word | ————▶ | completed (Heb 1:1-2) | |
| All prophecy | ————▶ | fulfilled (Acts 13:32-33) | |
| David's line | ————▶ | ended (Rom 1:3) | |
| Promise to David | ————▶ | fulfilled (Acts 2:30-31) | |
| Old Testament tells of salvation | ————▶ | in Christ (2 Tim 3:15) | |
| Whole Old Testament | ————▶ | concerns Christ (Lk 24:27) | |

STUDY GUIDE TO CHAPTER 4

1. Why does a biblical theologian need to be a believer?
2. How can you account for some of the differences in the way biblical theologians approach their task?
3. What does Christian theism teach about how the sinner can come to know the truth?
4. Look up the passages referred to in the last section of this chapter. What kind of relationship between Old and New Testaments do they indicate?

FURTHER READING

1. John Calvin, *Institutes*, book 1, chaps. 1-7.
2. John Wenham, *Christ and the Bible* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1984), esp. introduction.
3. *GK*, esp. chap. 9.

