

THE CLARITY OF GENERAL REVELATION

The doctrine of clarity is from three sources: general revelation, special revelation and Historic Christianity.

1. General Revelation

General revelation consists of what may be known about God and man and good and evil by all men, everywhere, at all times.

The clarity of general revelation (CGR) is opposed to all that is raised up against the knowledge of God; it is opposed to skepticism (knowledge is not possible) and to fideism (knowledge, as proof based on understanding, is not necessary).

CGR is the *first* elementary teaching in philosophical and theological foundation.

- i. It is self-evident that we think: we have concepts, judgments and arguments. Acts of thinking by reason are distinct from sense impressions.
- ii. It is self-evident that **reason in itself** (the laws of identity, non-contradiction and excluded middle) is the laws of thought.
- iii. **Reason in its use** is *formative* (used to form concepts, judgments and arguments which are the forms of all thought). It is *critical* (used as the test for meaning). It is *interpretive* (used to interpret experience in light of basic beliefs). It is *constructive* (used to construct a coherent worldview).
- iv. **Reason in us** is *natural* (not conventional; the same in all who think). It is *ontological* (it applies to being as well as to thought). It is *transcendental* (authoritative, self-attesting; it cannot be questioned since it makes questioning possible). It is *fundamental* in human nature, the basis for understanding good and evil, which directs human desires and actions.
- v. **Common Ground** is the necessary condition for thought and discourse (public life). Human society is a society of rational beings. Participation in human society depends on the exercise of one's capacity to use reason.
- vi. The **Content of Common Ground** consists of *reason* (as the laws of thought), *integrity* (as a concern for consistency vs. the logical and existential absurd), *Rational Presuppositionalism* (we must think of the less basic in light of the more basic) and *The Principle of Clarity* (that the basic things are clear to reason).
- vii. **The Principle of Clarity** affirms that the basic things about God and man and good and evil are clear to reason. One must *neglect, avoid, resist and deny* reason in order not to see what is objectively clear. Not seeing what is clear to reason is without excuse. All acts that are contrary to one's nature as a rational being are morally evil. The inherent consequence of moral evil is meaninglessness and boredom and guilt.
- viii. **Clarity and God's Existence**—It is clear to reason that there must be something eternal and that *only* some (God the Creator) is eternal: matter exists and matter is not eternal; the soul exists and the soul is not eternal.
- ix. **Clarity and the Moral Law**—It is clear to reason that there is a moral law grounded in human nature and that this law is objectively clear, comprehensive (for all of life) and critical (a matter of life and death in *every* sense).
- x. **Clarity and Special Revelation**—In response to the Problem of Evil (if God is all good and all powerful why is there evil?), CGR *requires* special revelation to show how God can be both just *and* merciful to man in sin and death.

2. Special Revelation

Special revelation, given by God and committed to writing, *is* Scripture, and is set over and against all other claims of special revelation. This is the doctrine of *Sola Scriptura*.

Scripture is not set over and against reason and CGR. Scripture presupposes the existence of reason *and* CGR and must be consistent with both reason and CGR.

Only Genesis 1-3, which teaches creation–fall–redemption, and what builds on this, qualifies as Scripture.

The Word of God (the *Logos*) which is eternal is in all men as reason, is in creation as general revelation, is in history as Scripture, is incarnate in Jesus Christ, and by the Holy Spirit is in the Church as the Historic Christian Faith and in the believer by regeneration and sanctification. The *Logos* is Truth (John 1:1-18, 3:3, 16:13, 17:17).

- i. Man is the image of God, a person, who can know God. There are several aspects of the image of God each of which reveals God.
- ii. Man, as the image of God, is to exercise dominion in the earth: he is to name and rule in the creation by natural law (science and technology) and by moral law (humanities and the arts).
- iii. The goal of dominion is the knowledge of God, which is eternal life, man's chief end, the good.
- iv. The work of dominion, which is corporate, cumulative and communal, *will* be completed, as signified by the Sabbath: the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea (Isaiah 11:9).
- v. The invisible things of God from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being *understood* by the things that are made, even his eternal power and divine nature, so that they are without excuse (Romans 1:20).
The law of God is written in the hearts of all men (Romans 2:15, Deuteronomy 30:12-14).
Through faith we *understand* that the worlds were framed by the word of God (Hebrews 11:3). Faith *is* understanding.
- vi. Man is fallen: no one seeks God; no one *understands*; no one is righteous. All have sinned and come short of the glory of God. The wages of sin is *spiritual* death, inherent in not understanding—meaninglessness and boredom and guilt, without end.
- vii. The Fall serves to deepen the revelation of divine justice and mercy. Moral evil is not removed abruptly. Unbelief in every form and degree of admixture with belief is allowed to work itself out in world history.
- viii. Natural evil (the curse of toil, strife and old age, sickness and physical death, increasing at times to war famine and plague), is imposed by God on mankind to restrain, recall from and remove moral evil, covered over by self-deception and self-justification. The curse is given *with* the promise (Genesis 3:7-19).
- ix. The promise is that through a spiritual war which is age- long and agonizing, good will overcome evil; one to come in the place of Adam will undo what Adam did and do what Adam failed to do—rule to make God known (Genesis 3:15).
- x. In this spiritual war believers are to demolish arguments and every pretension that is raised up against the knowledge of God and take every thought captive to make it obedient to Christ (2 Corinthians 10:4-5).

3. Historic Christianity

Christ sent the Holy Spirit to lead the Church into all Truth.

The Historic Christian Faith (HCF) is the work of the Holy Spirit leading the Church into all Truth through the pastor-teachers, in response to challenges, coming to agreement after much discussion, expressed in its creeds, for the unity of the faith.

This unity of the faith is the holy, catholic and apostolic faith, which grows until the Church comes to the full measure of the stature of Christ, who fills everything in every way (John 16:13; Ephesians 4:10-16; Acts 15).

- i. HCF is corporate (it is the work of many, in councils, not simply notable individuals), cumulative (it must build on what comes before), and communal (it is increased by sharing). Councils may err on some matters that were not sufficiently discussed, and those that have erred were corrected after more discussion.
- ii. The present high-water mark of HCF is the Westminster Confession of Faith (WCF, 1648). It includes six creeds from before the Reformation and six creeds from the beginning of the Reformation. Challenges of the past four centuries remain to be answered.
- iii. The WCF is doxological in focus. The doxological focus goes beyond what is traditional, soteriological and cultural (law and kingdom) to the praise of the glory of God.
- iv. Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever, in all that by which he makes himself known, in all his works of creation and providence (Shorter Catechism Q1, 101; WCF 4.1, 5.1). If we *do not* glorify God we *cannot* enjoy God.
- v. The light of nature (reason) and the works of creation and providence (general revelation) do so far manifest the goodness, wisdom and power of God as to leave men inexcusable (WCF 1.1).
- vi. If there is no CGR then there can be no inexcusability and therefore no sin, no need for Christ and no need for Scripture as revelation concerning the coming of Christ's redemption.
- vii. If there is no CGR and no inexcusability then the Church cannot call men to repentance and faith. All such faith will prove to be in vain when subject to scrutiny under trials of faith.
- viii. If there is no CGR then the Church cannot make disciples of all nations. Nations will inevitably sink into moral decay and collapse. No secular utopia can supply meaning.
- ix. If there is no CGR then the Church cannot glorify and enjoy God forever. No mystical state or heaven without the knowledge of God is an escape from meaninglessness.
- x. The Church is the pillar and ground of the Truth; it is the salt and light of the world. The Church must now therefore *show* CGR in order to *establish* its foundation, that it may overcome its divisions and reach unity of the faith, that the world may believe the Truth. The *Logos* is Truth.