

Dr. Robert A. Peterson, Revelation and Scripture, Session 2, The Revelation of God, Assessment, Knowing God and Our Posture, Psalm 119

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This is Dr. Robert A. Peterson in his teaching on Revelation and Holy Scripture. This is session 2, Jensen, The Revelation of God, Assessment, Knowing God and Our Posture, Psalm 119.

Let us pray. Father, we pray you will guide us in your truth, even as we explore alternate ideas. Open our minds, encourage us, and help us to solidly base our faith and life on your holy scriptures; we ask through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Finishing up Peter Jensen's introduction to his good book on The Revelation of God as part of InterVarsity's Contours of Christian Theology series. He gave the three after talking about the Enlightenment and its tremendous assault on the traditional Christian faith, especially as personified in Voltaire and Hume. He stressed three of the major emphases of the neo-orthodox view of scripture, namely emphasizing revelation as history, as God's self-giving, and above all, as Jesus Christ. All three of which separated to some degree from the words of God in the Bible.

He is assessing that and seeing some strengths, but also criticizing that tearing apart of what God had put together within his word and of his word. Yet, he says, the hostility to Christian revelatory claims, when presented as in any way authoritative or unique, remains unabated. It is often observed that modernism has given way to post-modernism.

Without a doubt, claims for Christian revelation must cope with an exceptionally relativistic environment, coming to terms with the New Age, energetic cults, the new physics, the insights of post-Vatican to Roman Catholicism, and the strongest face-to-face encounters between living and powerful religions in centuries. It competes to make its message heard, having lost its favored status in the West, as far as many people are concerned. The choice between, say, Mormonism and Protestantism has far more to do with style than with truth.

The question of revelation is more than ever of missionary concern. And if, on the one hand, the prevailing Western culture is more accepting of faith claims, on the other, it is less accepting of such claims posed in an exclusive way. Not surprisingly, much attention is being given to the whole question of the relation between Christian revelation and the revelations on which other faiths are based.

The nature and authority of the Bible remain a contested area. But the debate now includes theories of literary criticism and hermeneutics in a way unknown before. The pluralism of current thought expects a corresponding pluralism in the use of the Bible.

Some of the older debates about the historical sources of the Bible have been bypassed. New questions are being raised and answered about the literary nature of the text, or texts as it now stands. Without a doubt, there have been advances in the understanding of Scripture, and these have been welcomed by conservative scholars as well as by more liberal ones.

There's some promise here for overcoming some of the sterile approaches that had come to characterize Scripture interpretation in all schools of thought. However, there are also dangers to any claim to a revelatory status for biblical material. In particular, the systematic theology of the Church, including such great dogmas as the Trinity, is premised on a reading of Scripture that new approaches may endanger.

In the Protestant world, the day of the National or Confessing Church seems to be passing, and with it, the mechanism by which dogmatic understandings of the Christian faith were transmitted. Catholicism and orthodoxy are options for some, but they too are no longer protected, as once they may have been, from the intellectual challenges of modernism and postmodernism. There remains a vital need for an understanding of revelation that will honor the word by which God rules His Church and calls men and women to Himself.

Protestant evangelicalism continues to make much of its claim to know that God has revealed Himself to us, especially through His inspired word, the Bible. It deliberately places itself in the stream of faith that flows to us from the pre-Enlightenment orthodoxy. Indeed, evangelicals say that men and women from all cultures may have, and ought to have, a relationship with God.

They say we may know God through His word. Furthermore, there is an exclusiveness about this claim that the focus of God's revelation is to be found in the Christ of the Bible. They agree that there is a general revelation of God through the natural world, but they continue to share with Calvin the view that this revelation is not a saving one because of the incapacity of sinners to respond appropriately to it.

Clearly, such assertions are in stark contrast to the thinking of both the culture and much of the Church. It is agreed that it is the duty of evangelical Christians, having made such assertions, to offer a coherent and persuasive account of how we may know God so that its adherents may be nourished and united and its message effectively promoted in the Church and in the world. In choosing to talk about revelation as a response to the Enlightenment, we have chosen the wrong initial category.

I am not suggesting, therefore, that we simply turn back again to Scripture as such and reinstate it as revelation forthwith. It is better to follow the more prominent biblical category of the knowledge of God and the more crucial biblical category of the gospel by which this knowledge arises. To do so will give the opportunity to reassess the nature and role of Scripture and so to understand revelation, not in exactly the same way as they were used before the Enlightenment, but in a way that is true to Scripture and to the Christian faith.

I thank Peter Jensen for his good book, *The Revelation of God*. I commend it to you. And I move on to a biblical introduction to the doctrines of Revelation and Scripture.

Here, I show a dependence upon the book *Christian Theology, The Biblical Story and Our Faith*, written by Christopher Morgan, in which I have played a role as well. Psalm 139 and verse 6. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, and I cannot attain it. Verse 17.

How precious to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them! In Psalm 139, David contemplates the infinity of God. God's infinity somehow does not result in His being distant from us but intimately close. God searches us and knows us completely.

He knows us when we wake up when we go to sleep, and every place in between. He understands our very thoughts. He watches all our steps and knows what we are about to say before we say it.

God is beyond us, yet around us, with us. God is present with us, no matter where we are. He is present with us in heaven, and He is present with us in the grave, Sheol.

He is with us when we live in the West and when we live in the East. He is there when it is light and when it is dark. God intricately creates us, paying attention to every feature.

God knows us while we are in our mother's womb and plans our days. Verse 16. When as yet there was none of them.

Interestingly, David's knowledge of God's infinity leads David not to despair but leads him to have humility and hope. God's thoughts are beyond our ability to track, and His ways are above ours. So, David humbly cries out to God for wisdom.

David knows he'll never know God completely in this life, but God knows him, and he knows God. David and no one else will know God completely in any life since He is infinite and we are finite. So even when his enemies oppose him, David finds hope in God as his ever-present covenant Lord, whom he knows and who knows him.

Further, recognizing his limited ability to grasp God's infinity does not keep David from singing about what he does know. Indeed, what he does know about God is foundational to his emphasis on what he does not know. It's his genuine knowledge of the truth about God that drives David to confess he cannot fully comprehend God.

David knows God truly but cannot know Him exhaustively. And this leads to faith. God is the infinite creator, not David, and we are His finite creatures.

God is holy. We are sinners. Yet God graciously stoops to communicate with us.

And even more graciously, God loves us and sends His Son to save us. Through faith in Christ, we're saved and become His people. As with David, God knows us, and we know God.

So, like David, we rightly feel the burden of our finiteness and realize that we will never plumb the depths of God. And like David, we simultaneously strive to know as much as we possibly can about our covenant Lord. Let's think about knowing God and our posture in studying the truths of His word.

Knowing God and our stance in theology. How do we approach the Bible to understand its teachings? Even its teachings about God reveal Himself in the various ways He has, summarized by the words general and special revelation. As the word implies, general revelation is God's making Himself known to all people everywhere all the time.

Special revelation is God making Himself known to some people in some places, some of the time. I quote St. Augustine, whose years were 354 to 430. He, of course, was the prominent theologian of the early church.

He is famous for his personal confessions, which are still studied in the field of psychology for their insights into human nature, and his magisterial *The City of God*. Luther and Calvin looked to him as the father of the Reformation because of his teachings on salvation and grace. He wrote of God in the opening of the confessions, and I quote, You give us delight in praising You because You have made us for Yourself, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in You.

Close quote. That is a very common quotation. How do we, as believers in Christ, approach the study of God and His word? Psalm 119 is a helpful guide.

In fact, I know of no better guide, and so bear with me as I read this great psalm. Blessed are those whose way is blameless, Psalm 119, who walk in the law of the Lord. Blessed are those who keep His testimonies, who seek Him with their whole heart, who also do no wrong but walk in His ways.

You have commanded your precepts to be kept diligently. Oh, that my ways may be steadfast in keeping Your statutes. Then I shall not be put to shame, having my eyes fixed on all Your commandments.

I will praise You with an upright heart when I learn Your righteous rules. I will keep Your statutes. Do not utterly forsake me.

I'm using the ESV as my primary text, although when I quote from this theology book, it also cites the Christian Standard Bible. How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to Your word. With my whole heart, I seek You.

Let me not wander from Your commandments. I have stored up Your word in my heart that I might not sin against You. Blessed are You, O Lord.

Teach me Your statutes. With my lips, I declare all the rules of Your mouth. In the way of Your testimonies, I delight as much as I delight in all riches.

I will meditate on Your precepts and fix my eyes on Your ways. I will delight in Your statutes. I will not forget Your word.

Deal bountifully with Your servant that I may live and keep Your word. Open my eyes that I may behold wonderful things out of Your law. I'm a sojourner on the earth.

Hide not Your commandments from me. My soul is consumed with longing for Your rules at all times. You rebuke the insolent, accursed ones who wander from Your commandments.

Turn away from me scorn and contempt, for I have kept Your testimonies. Even though princes sit plotting against me, Your servant will meditate on Your statutes. Your testimonies are my delight.

They are my counselors. My soul clings to the dust. Give me life according to Your word.

When I told of Your ways, You answered me. Teach me Your statutes. Make me understand Your precepts, and I will meditate on Your wondrous works.

My soul melts away for sorrow. Strengthen me according to Your word. Put false ways far from me and graciously teach me Your law.

I've chosen the way of faithfulness. I set Your rules before me. I cling to Your testimonies, O Lord.

Let me not be put to shame. I will run in the way of Your commandments when You enlarge my heart. Verse 33: teach me, O Lord, the way of Your statutes, and I will keep it to the end.

Give me understanding that I may keep Your law and observe it with my whole heart. Lead me in the path of Your commandments, for I delight in it. Incline my heart to Your testimonies and not to selfish gain.

Turn my eyes from looking at worthless things, and give me life in Your ways. Confirm to Your servant Your promise that You may be feared. Turn away the reproach that I dread. Your rules are good.

Behold, I long for Your precepts. In Your righteousness, give me life. Let Your steadfast love come to me, O Lord, Your salvation according to Your promise.

Then shall I have an answer for him who taunts me, for I trust in Your word. And take not the word of truth out of my mouth, for my hope is in Your rules. I will keep Your law continually forever and ever, and I shall walk in a wide place, for I have sought Your precepts.

I will also speak of Your testimonies before kings and shall not be put to shame, for I find my delight in Your commandments, which I love. I will lift up my hands toward Your commandments, which I love. And I will meditate on Your statutes.

Remember Your word to Your servant in which You have made me hope. This is my comfort and my affliction that Your promise gives me life. The insolent utterly deride me, but I do not turn away from Your law.

When I think of Your rules from of old, I take comfort, O Lord. Hot indignation seizes me because of the wicked who forsake Your law. Your statutes have been my songs in the house of my sojourning.

I remember Your name in the night, O Lord, and keep Your law. This blessing has fallen on me, and I have kept Your precepts. Verse 57, the Lord is my portion.

I promise to keep Your words. I entreat Your favor with all my heart. Be gracious to me according to Your promise.

When I think of my ways, I turn my feet to Your testimonies. I hasten and do not delay in keeping Your commandments. Though the cords of the wicked ensnare me, I do not forget Your law.

At midnight, I rise to praise You because of Your righteous rules. I'm a companion of all who fear You, of those who keep Your precepts. The earth, O Lord, is full of Your steadfast love.

Teach me Your statutes. You've dealt well with Your servant, O Lord, according to Your word. Teach me good judgment and knowledge, for I believe in Your commandments.

Before I was afflicted, I went astray, but now I keep Your word. You are good and do good. Teach me Your statutes.

The insolent smear me with lies, but with my whole heart, I keep Your precepts. Their heart is not feeling fat, but I delight in Your law. It is good for me that I was afflicted that I might learn Your statutes.

The law of Your mouth is better to me than thousands of gold and silver pieces. Your hands have made me and fastened me. Give me understanding that I may learn Your commandments.

Those who fear You shall see me and rejoice because I have hoped in Your word. I know, O Lord, that Your rules are righteous and that in the faithfulness You have afflicted me. Let Your steadfast love comfort me according to Your promise to Your servant.

Let Your mercy come to me so that I may live for Your law, which is my delight. Let the insolent be put to shame because they have wronged me with falsehood. As for me, I will meditate on Your precepts.

Let those who fear You turn to me so that they may know Your testimonies. May my heart be blameless in Your statutes that I may not be put to shame.

81. My soul longs for Your salvation. I hope in Your word. My eyes long for Your promise, I ask.

When will You comfort me? For I have become like a wineskin in the smoke. Yet I have not forgotten Your statutes. How long must Your servant endure? When will You judge those who persecute me? The insolent have dug pitfalls for me.

They do not live according to Your law. All Your commandments are sure. They persecute me with falsehood.

Help me. They've almost made an end of me on earth, but I have not forsaken Your precepts. In Your steadfast love, give me life so that I may keep the testimonies of Your mouth.

Forever, O Lord, Your word is firmly fixed in the heavens. Your faithfulness endures to all generations. You've established the earth, and it stands fast.

By Your appointment, they stand to this day, for all things are Your servants. Your law if Your law had not been my delight, I would have perished in my affliction. I will never forget Your precepts, for by them, You've given me life.

I am Yours. Save me, for I have sought Your precepts. The wicked lie in wait to destroy me, but I consider Your testimonies.

I've seen a limit to all perfection, but Your commandment is exceedingly broad. O how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day. Your commandment makes me wiser than my enemies, for it is ever with me.

I have more understanding than all my teachers, for Your testimonies are my meditation. I understand more than the aged, for I keep Your precepts. I hold back my feet from every evil way in order to keep Your word.

I do not turn aside from Your rules, for You have taught me. How sweet are your words to my taste! They are sweeter than honey in my mouth. Through Your precepts, I get understanding. Therefore, I hate every evil way.

Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path. I've sworn an oath and confirmed it to keep Your righteous rules. I am severely afflicted.

Give me life, O Lord, according to Your word. Accept my freewill offerings of praise, O Lord, and teach me Your rules. I hold my life in my hand continually, but I do not forget Your law.

The wicked have laid a snare for me, but I do not stray from Your precepts. Your testimonies are my heritage forever, for they are the joy of my heart. I incline my heart to perform Your statutes forever to the end.

I hate the double-minded, but I love Your law. You are my hiding place and my shield. I hope in Your word.

Depart from me, you evildoers, that I may keep the commandments of my God. Uphold me according to Your promise that I may live, and let me not be put to shame in my hope. Hold me up, that I may be safe and have regard for Your statutes continually.

You spurn all who go astray from Your statutes, for their cunning is in vain. All the wicked of the earth You discard like dross. Therefore, I love Your testimonies.

My flesh trembles in fear of You, and I am afraid of Your judgments. I have done what is just and right. Do not leave me to my oppressors.

Give Your servant a pledge of good. Let not the insolent oppress me. My eyes long for Your salvation and for the fulfillment of Your righteous promise.

Deal with Your servant according to Your steadfast love, and teach me Your statutes. I am Your servant. Give me understanding so that I may know your testimonies.

It is time for the Lord to act, for Your law has been broken. Therefore, I love Your commandments above gold, above fine gold. Therefore, I consider all Your precepts to be right.

I hate every false way. 129. Your testimonies are wonderful.

Therefore, my soul keeps them. The unfolding of Your words gives light. It imparts an understanding of the simple.

I open my mouth and pant because I long for Your commandments. Turn to me and be gracious to me, as is Your way with those who love Your name. Keep steady my steps according to Your promise, and let no iniquity get dominion over me.

Let no iniquity get dominion over me. Redeem me from man's oppression, that I may keep Your precepts. May Your face shine upon Your servant and teach me Your statutes.

My eyes shed streams of water because people do not keep Your law. Righteous are You, O Lord, and right are Your rules. You have appointed Your testimonies in righteousness and in all faithfulness.

My zeal consumes me because my foes forget Your words. Your promise is well tried, and Your servant loves it. I am small and despised, yet I do not forget Your precepts.

Your righteousness is righteous forever, and Your law is true. Trouble and anguish have found me out, but Your commandments are my delight. Your testimonies are righteous forever.

Give me understanding that I may live. With my whole heart, I cry, answer me, O Lord. I will keep Your statutes.

I call to You, save me, that I may observe Your testimonies. I rise before dawn and cry for help. I hope in Your words.

My eyes are awake before the watches of the night that I may meditate on Your promise. Hear my voice according to Your steadfast love, O Lord, according to Your justice. Give me life.

They draw near who persecute me with evil purpose. They are far from Your law. But You are near, O Lord, and all Your commandments are true.

Long have I known from Your testimonies that You have founded them forever. 153. Look on my affliction and deliver me, for I do not forget Your law.

Plead my cause and redeem me. Give me life according to Your promise. Salvation is far from the wicked, for they do not seek Your statutes.

Great is Your mercy, O Lord. Give me life according to Your rules. Many are my persecutors and my adversaries, but I do not swerve from Your testimonies.

I look at the faithless with disgust because they do not keep Your commands. Consider how I love Your precepts. Give me life according to Your steadfast love.

The sum of Your words is truth, and every one of Your righteous rules endures forever. Princes persecute me without cause, but my heart stands in awe of Your words. I rejoice at Your word, like one who finds great spoil.

I hate and abhor falsehood, but I love Your law. Seven times a day I praise You for Your righteous rules. Psalm 119, verse 165.

Great peace have those who love Your law. Nothing can make them stumble. I hope for Your salvation, O Lord, and I do Your commandments.

My soul keeps Your testimonies. I love them exceedingly. I keep Your precepts and testimonies, for all my ways are before You.

Let me come, let me, ha, let my cry come before You, O Lord. Give me understanding according to Your word. Let my plea come before You.

Deliver me according to Your word. My lips will pour forth praise, for You teach me Your statutes. My tongue will sing of Your word, for all Your commandments are right.

Let Your hand be ready to help me, for I've chosen Your precepts. I long for Your salvation, O Lord, and Your law is my delight. Let my soul live and praise You, and let Your rules help me.

I've gone astray like a lost sheep. Seek Your servant, for I do not forget Your commandments. I figure if we can quote Voltaire and David Hume, we can quote the longest chapter of the Bible as much more important.

Psalms 119 is a helpful guide. This psalm is a prayer addressed to God and is Scripture's most focused meditation on itself. It's an acrostic with units of eight verses, all beginning with successive letters of the Hebrew alphabet, from Aleph to Tau, like A to Z. Throughout, the psalm uses eight major terms to refer to Scripture, each teaching us much about its nature, authority, and effects, instruction, or law, word, decrees, precepts, statutes, promises, commands, and judgments.

The psalm ascribes many attributes to God's word. It is righteous, verse 7, good, verse 39, just, 75, true, 86, pure, 140, verses 137 and 138 ascribe the same attribute to God's word that they do to God. "You are righteous, Lord. The decrees you issue are righteous." The psalm assigns other attributes to God's word as well.

It is enduring, verse 89, reliable, 91, wondrous, 129, and trustworthy, 138. God's word has numerous powerful effects on us as we read it in faith. God uses His word to produce reverence for Him, verse 38, to purify us; verses 9 to 11, to strengthen us, 28, to comfort, 52, and to give life, 93, hope, 47, discernment, 66, wisdom, 98 to 100, understanding, verse 104, and guidance, verse 106.

God's word also stimulates many healthy responses in us. The word engenders attitudes in us toward itself, longing, verses 140, 131, delight, 16, 24, love, 47, 97, and fear, verses 120, 161. It also elicits our meditation, verses 15, 48; obedience, 4 and 5; joy, 1 and 2, rejoicing, 14, 162; hope, 43, 74; and gratitude to God, verse 62.

As the psalm teaches us much about God's word, it simultaneously offers us guidance in studying God and His word. This is a theological move, which I find reasonable and quite understandable. We study the word of God as humble listeners who receive God's instruction.

Lord, teach me your statutes, verse 12. We study theology as diligent seekers, seeking the Lord and His commands with all our hearts, verses 2 and 10. We study as faithful servants who accept His authority, follow His will, and heed His counsel, verses 17, 22, 23.

We study theology as tested travelers facing opposition as sojourners in a hostile world who desperately need wisdom from His word, verses 19 to 24. We study theology as joyful worshippers. My lips pour out praise for you. Teach me your statutes.

My tongue sings about your promise for all your commands are righteous, verses 171, 172. Psalm 119 thus compels us to study theology as whole persons, integrating

our minds and our hearts, our ways, our lips, and our feet. For the psalmist, this means that the study of God and His word is linked to our lives.

We study theology with love for the Lord, His word, and His ways, verses 41 to 48 and 97. We study theology with holiness, walking according to God's word, keeping His commands, verses 1 to 8. We study theology with prayer, knowing we need God to help us understand His word. Verse 18 opens my eyes so that I may contemplate wondrous things from your word and your law.

Give me understanding according to your word, 169. We study theology with meditation, giving careful thought to God and His ways. I will meditate on your precepts and think about your ways, verse 15.

We study theology amid trials. As Martin Luther observes, quote, teach us not only to know and understand, this is a Luther quote, but also to experience how right, how true, how sweet, how lovely, how mighty, how comforting God's word is. Wisdom beyond all wisdom.

This is from Luther's preface to his basic theological, and it's his preface from Martin Luther's basic theological writings. A wonderful edition is that of Timothy F. Lowe, preface to the Wittenberg edition of Luther's German writings in this wonderful book, Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings. There is a skill in Luther's volumes, many, many, many volumes, including exegetical studies, theological studies, and ethical studies, but Timothy Lowe's book gives you the creme de la creme.

It's a big book, but it's accessible, and you really can get into Luther through that wonderful book. Luther thought highly of trials. Of course, it was his own way, but he says if you don't have trials, you're no theologian at all.

In fact, the main thing to make you a theologian is grievous trials. He's talking about being humbled, being driven to God, and so forth. We study theology with conviction, knowing that God's word and teachings are true, even when governments, teachers, or societies try to shame us.

Verses 22 to 24, 41 to 46, 99 to 100. We study theology with diligence, reading, searching, and thinking hard about the word, verses 94, 95. We study theology with delight.

Your statutes are the theme of my song, verse 54. Your instruction is my delight, 77. We study theology with reverence, reading, thinking, and analyzing as we stand in awe of God, verse 120.

We study theology with tears, grieved that we and others do not fully prize God or his word, 136. My eyes pour out streams of tears because people do not follow your

instructions, your rules. We study theology with humility, acknowledging our insufficiency for the task and relying on God's help, God's ability to help us.

Teach me, O Lord, verse 33. Help me understand verse 34. Help me stay on the path of your commands, 35.

We study theology with hope, knowing that God has spoken in his word, that he loves to give us understanding through his word, and that he has already taught us much truth through his abiding word. Love, Lord, your word is forever. It is firmly fixed in heaven, verse 89.

We study theology in community, knowing that we learn directly from God's word and indirectly through one another. Before we take a break, I have to give you another Luther quote. Quote, the longer you write and teach, the less you'll be pleased with yourself.

When you have reached this point, then do not be afraid to hope that you have begun to become a real theologian. Again, from the preface to Luther's Wittenberg writings.

When we come back, in our next lecture, we will study knowing God and the biblical story in terms of creation, fall, redemption, and consummation.

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