

# Dr. Robert A. Peterson, Revelation & Holy Scripture, Session 4, Knowing God and Sources of Theology Resources from NotebookLM

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Briefing Document, 4) Study Guide, and 5) FAQs

## 1. Abstract of Peterson, Revelation & Holy Scripture, Session 4, Knowing God and Sources of Theology, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

Dr. Peterson's session explores knowing God and the sources of theology, emphasizing *sola scriptura* as the Bible being the chief authority that judges all others. He identifies four key sources for theological study: **Scripture**, the primary and ultimate authority; **Tradition**, the historical interpretations of the church; **Reason**, the use of our minds to understand revelation; and **Experience**, how our personal contexts shape our interpretation. **While all four contribute to our understanding, Peterson argues that Scripture must consistently take precedence.** He further outlines a theological method involving **biblical exegesis, biblical theology, historical theology, systematic theology, and practical application**, highlighting that sound theology begins with interpreting the biblical text within its broader canonical and historical context and culminates in its lived application within the church.

**2. 19 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Peterson, Revelation & Holy Scripture, Session 4 – Double click icon to play in Windows media player or go to the Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link there (Theology → Theology, Peterson → Revelation & Scripture).**



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### 3. Briefing Document: Peterson, Revelation & Holy Scripture, Session 4, Knowing God and Sources of Theology

#### Briefing Document: Dr. Robert A. Peterson on Knowing God and Sources of Theology

**Subject:** Review of Main Themes and Important Ideas from Dr. Peterson's Session on Knowing God and Sources of Theology

This briefing document summarizes the key themes and important ideas presented by Dr. Robert A. Peterson in Session 4 of his teaching on Revelation and Holy Scripture, focusing on "Knowing God and the Sources of Theology." The session emphasizes a nuanced understanding of *sola scriptura* and explores the four primary sources that inform theological study and development.

#### Main Themes:

1. **A Correct Understanding of *Sola Scriptura*:** Dr. Peterson clarifies that *sola scriptura* (Scripture alone) does not mean the Bible is the *only* source for theology, but rather the *chief* source and the ultimate authority that judges all other sources.
  - **Key Idea:** While reason, experience, and tradition are valuable, Scripture holds a supreme position. *"It means the Bible alone is our chief source, and it sits in judgment of the other sources."*
  - **Misconception Addressed:** The session explicitly refutes the idea that *sola scriptura* implies ignoring reason, experience, or tradition. *"Sola scriptura is sometimes misunderstood to mean that the Bible is the only source that we use for our theology. It is not true."*
1. **The Four Sources of Theology:** Dr. Peterson identifies and discusses the role of Scripture, Tradition, Reason, and Experience in developing theological understanding. He emphasizes their importance while underscoring Scripture's ultimate authority over them.
  - **Scripture:** The chief source, uniquely inspired, the Word of God, and the supreme authority for faith and practice. *"Scripture, as is obvious from what we outlined above from the biblical story, scripture is the chief source of all theology."*
  - **Tradition:** Important for understanding how Christians throughout history have interpreted Scripture and addressed theological topics. It conveys historical interpretations, corrects false teachings, and offers historic perspectives.

*"Tradition is important because it shows us what other Christians have said about perennial topics."* Dr. Peterson highlights the danger of inventing doctrines in isolation, using the Trinity and the Lord's Supper as examples.

- **Reason:** Essential for reflecting on revelation, clarifying concepts, questioning relationships, and analyzing systems. Theology cannot be done apart from human intellect. *"Reason is important because it helps us reflect on revelation."*
  - **Experience:** Plays a role as our personal faith journeys, cultural contexts, and life situations influence our interpretation of Scripture. *"Our theology not only shapes who we are, but is shaped by who we are."* However, experience must also be judged by Scripture.
1. **Theological Method:** Dr. Peterson outlines the process of studying theology, emphasizing a deliberate and thoughtful approach involving various disciplines.
    - **Key Components:** Introduction (pre-existing beliefs), Biblical Exegesis (interpreting passages), Biblical Theology (tracing the Bible's storyline), Historical Theology (understanding past church thought), Systematic Theology (creating a coherent whole), and Practical Theology (application). *"The process of studying theology is called the theological method."*
    - **Interconnectedness:** While there is a basic order, these elements are interwoven and should not be isolated.
  1. **The Importance of the Whole Church in Interpretation:** Dr. Peterson stresses that interpreting Scripture requires considering the understanding of the entire church, both contemporaneously and historically.
    - **Perspective of the Persecuted:** He highlights the unique insights that Christians living under persecution can offer in understanding relevant biblical passages. *"To interpret the Bible correctly, we need the whole church. That is, Christians living under persecution can help those who are not living under persecution understand better the Bible's passages that address persecution."*
  1. **Avoiding Interpretive Pitfalls:** The session warns against several mistakes in theological interpretation, including reading into passages, neglecting the theological substructure of ethical teachings, and committing the "word concept fallacy."
    - **Word Concept Fallacy:** The error of assuming a doctrine is absent if specific words are not used (e.g., John's Gospel and the doctrine of election). Dr. Peterson uses

the example of John's Gospel, which doesn't use the words "election" or "predestination" but presents the concept through themes like the Father giving people to the Son and the Son choosing his followers for salvation. *"Someone might say along these same lines, committing the word concept fallacy the Gospel of John does not mention election or predestination at all. It never uses the word elect, election, predestined, or predestination. That is true. It doesn't use those words, but that doesn't mean that the concept is not present."*

1. **The Hermeneutical Spiral vs. Vicious Circle:** Dr. Peterson advocates for a "hermeneutical spiral," suggesting that our understanding of Scripture can progressively improve as we engage with it, acknowledge our assumptions, learn from the church, and prioritize Scripture. This contrasts with a "vicious hermeneutical circle" that implies no possibility of improved understanding. *"In a sound approach to biblical interpretation of theology, there's a hermeneutical spiral..."*
2. **The Role of Translation and Accessibility of Scripture:** The example of William Tyndale underscores the importance of having Scripture available in the common language for individuals to understand and for sound theology to be established among lay people. *"because I had perceived by experience how it was impossible to establish the lay people in any truth, except the scriptures were plainly laid before their eyes in their mother tongue..."*
3. **The Ongoing Nature of Theology (*Semper Reformanda*):** Dr. Peterson emphasizes that while foundational doctrines remain, our theological understanding is always being refined and reformed according to God's Word. *"Our theology is grounded in what we currently know of God's word and is always being reformed. Semper reformanda, according to God's word, may it be so."*
4. **The Goal of Theology: Living it Out:** Theology is not merely an academic exercise but is meant to shape the life of the church and individual believers in all aspects. *"Theology is incomplete until it's lived out in the church."*

#### **Important Facts and Ideas:**

- The Reformation's *sola* slogans (*sola scriptura*, *sola gratia*, *sola fidei*, *Solus Christus*, *sola Deo Gloria*) are briefly explained.
- The Roman Catholic view of Scripture and Tradition is contrasted with the evangelical Protestant emphasis on *sola scriptura*.

- The Wesleyan Quadrilateral (Scripture, Tradition, Reason, Experience) is mentioned as another approach to theological sources.
- The importance of considering literary genre and historical context in biblical exegesis is highlighted.
- The biblical storyline (creation, fall, redemption, consummation) is presented as a crucial framework for biblical and systematic theology.
- The concept of freedom of the will is explored through a biblical theological lens, considering its different expressions across the biblical narrative.

### **Quotes for Emphasis:**

- *"Our goal is to deliberately and consistently exalt scripture over our reason, our tradition, and our experience."*
- *"All other sources are under scripture. That is exactly what sola scriptura means."*
- *"We should diverge from the church's historic stream of thought with great hesitancy and only when theologically convinced by sacred scripture and evident reason."*
- *"Our trials often improve our theology. As it is tested by struggles in our travels, our theology matures."*

### **Conclusion:**

Dr. Peterson's Session 4 provides a foundational understanding of how Christians know God and develop their theology. He offers a balanced perspective on the sources of theology, firmly establishing Scripture as the ultimate authority while acknowledging the valuable roles of tradition, reason, and experience when properly subordinated to God's Word. The session also introduces the essential elements of theological method and highlights the ongoing, community-oriented, and practically-focused nature of sound theological study.

## 4. Study Guide: Peterson, Revelation & Holy Scripture, Session 4, Knowing God and Sources of Theology

### Knowing God and Sources of Theology: A Study Guide

#### Quiz

1. Explain the meaning of *sola scriptura* as it was understood during the Reformation. What does it affirm about the Bible's role in theology and what does it *not* mean?
2. Describe the four primary sources that contribute to our theological understanding. Briefly explain the value and a potential limitation of at least two of these sources.
3. Why is tradition considered an important source for theology, even though it is subordinate to scripture? Give an example of how tradition can be beneficial in theological study.
4. In the context of theological study, what is the role of reason? How should reason function in relation to divine revelation according to the presented material?
5. How does personal experience influence our theological interpretation? What caution should be exercised when considering experience as a source of theological understanding?
6. Define the "Wesleyan quadrilateral." How does it differ from the approach to theological sources favored by the lecturer?
7. Outline the basic steps involved in the theological method described in the lecture. What is the purpose of following a sound theological method?
8. Explain the concept of the "hermeneutical spiral" as opposed to a "vicious hermeneutical circle." What does this analogy suggest about the process of biblical interpretation and theological development?
9. According to the lecture, what is the foundation of all good theology? Briefly describe two potential mistakes to avoid during theological exegesis.
10. Explain how the Gospel of John, despite not using the specific words "election" or "predestination," still conveys the concept of divine election. Provide one example from the text.

#### Answer Key

1. *Sola scriptura* during the Reformation affirmed that the Bible alone is the supreme authority for faith and practice. It does not mean that the Bible is the only source used in theology; rather, it means the Bible is the chief source and the ultimate standard by which all other sources (reason, tradition, experience) are judged.
2. The four primary sources of theology are scripture, tradition, reason, and experience. Scripture is the chief and supreme authority. Tradition provides historical interpretations and insights from the church's past but can err. Reason helps clarify concepts and analyze arguments but can forget mystery. Experience shapes our interpretation but can be unchecked.
3. Tradition is important because it provides the historical interpretations of scripture by countless Christians throughout history, including creeds and confessions. For example, engaging with historical viewpoints on the Lord's Supper (Roman Catholic, Lutheran, Reformed) helps us better understand the complexities of the issue as we form our own understanding.
4. Reason helps us reflect on revelation by clarifying concepts, questioning relationships, and analyzing arguments. According to the material, reason is essential in theological study, but it must always be subordinate to scripture and recognize the limits of human understanding when encountering divine mystery.
5. Personal experience, including our cultural background and life situations, inevitably influences how we interpret scripture. The caution is that our experience should not become the ultimate standard of truth; it must always be judged and potentially corrected by the authority of scripture.
6. The Wesleyan quadrilateral seeks to balance scripture, tradition, reason, and experience as co-equal sources of theological understanding. The lecturer favors acknowledging all four sources but deliberately and consistently subordinating tradition, reason, and experience to the supreme authority of holy scripture.
7. The theological method involves biblical exegesis (interpreting passages), biblical theology (tracing the Bible's storyline), historical theology (understanding past church teachings), systematic theology (creating a coherent whole of biblical teachings), and practical theology (applying theology to life). The purpose is to study theology in a thoughtful and comprehensive way, avoiding unsound methods or unintentional approaches.

8. A vicious hermeneutical circle suggests that our existing beliefs completely control our interpretation without the possibility of improvement. In contrast, a hermeneutical spiral suggests that through consistent engagement with scripture and other sources under its authority, our understanding can gradually mature and become more accurate, spiraling towards the truth.
9. The foundation of all good theology is understanding the meaning of biblical passages through biblical exegesis, beginning with the author's intention. Two potential mistakes are reading into a passage a preconceived theme or doctrine that is not explicitly there, and focusing only on passages that explicitly instruct on theological issues while neglecting the theological substructure of ethical or narrative texts.
10. While the Gospel of John does not use the words "election" or "predestination," it conveys the concept through themes such as the Father giving people to the Son (John 17), the Son being the author of election by choosing his followers (John 15:16, 19), and the idea that people are identified as "sheep" or not before they believe (John 10), indicating a prior divine choice.

## Essay Format Questions

1. Discuss the implications of the doctrine of *sola scriptura* for contemporary theological study and practice. How should Christians balance the authority of scripture with the insights gained from tradition, reason, and experience in the 21st century?
2. Analyze the strengths and weaknesses of each of the four sources of theology (scripture, tradition, reason, experience). Provide specific examples to illustrate how each source can contribute to and potentially hinder a sound theological understanding.
3. Explain the interconnectedness of the various steps in the theological method (biblical exegesis, biblical theology, historical theology, systematic theology, and practical theology). How does each step build upon the others to contribute to a comprehensive and applicable theology?
4. Evaluate the analogy of the "hermeneutical spiral" as a model for biblical interpretation and theological development. How does it address the challenge of pre-existing biases and the potential for growth in understanding God's Word?

5. Consider the importance of both individual interpretation and the role of the church (past and present) in understanding scripture and developing theology. How can Christians cultivate a balanced approach that values both personal study and the wisdom of the broader Christian community?

## Glossary of Key Terms

- **Sola Scriptura:** Latin for "Scripture alone," the Protestant Reformation doctrine that the Bible is the supreme and ultimate authority for all Christian faith and practice.
- **Sola Gratia:** Latin for "grace alone," the Reformation doctrine that salvation is received by God's grace alone, not through any human merit or works.
- **Sola Fidei:** Latin for "faith alone," the Reformation doctrine that justification (being declared righteous before God) is by faith alone, apart from works of the law.
- **Solus Christus:** Latin for "Christ alone," the Reformation doctrine that Jesus Christ is the sole mediator between God and humanity, and the only way to salvation.
- **Soli Deo Gloria:** Latin for "glory to God alone," the Reformation principle that all glory belongs to God alone.
- **Tradition (Theological):** The accumulated teachings, practices, and interpretations of the Christian church throughout history.
- **Reason (Theological):** The human capacity for logical thought, analysis, and understanding, used in reflecting upon divine revelation.
- **Experience (Theological):** Personal encounters, cultural contexts, and life situations that influence an individual's understanding and interpretation of theology.
- **Wesleyan Quadrilateral:** A theological methodology popularized by John Wesley that considers scripture, tradition, reason, and experience as primary sources for theological understanding.
- **Theological Method:** The systematic process used in studying and developing theology, often involving steps like exegesis, biblical theology, historical theology, systematic theology, and practical theology.

- **Biblical Exegesis:** The careful and critical interpretation of biblical texts to understand their original meaning in their historical and literary context.
- **Biblical Theology:** The discipline that studies the unfolding story and themes of the Bible as a whole, tracing God's plan from creation to consummation.
- **Historical Theology:** The study of how Christian beliefs and doctrines have developed throughout church history.
- **Systematic Theology:** The discipline of organizing and synthesizing biblical truths into a coherent and comprehensive understanding of Christian doctrine.
- **Practical Theology:** The application of theological understanding to the life and ministry of the church and individual believers.
- **Hermeneutical Circle:** A view of interpretation where one's pre-understandings completely determine the interpretation of a text in a circular and potentially flawed way.
- **Hermeneutical Spiral:** A model of interpretation suggesting that through ongoing engagement with a text and critical reflection, understanding can progressively deepen and become more accurate.
- **Fallacy (Theological):** An error in reasoning or a false belief, such as the "word concept fallacy" which assumes a doctrine cannot exist without the explicit use of certain words.
- **Semper Reformanda:** Latin for "always reforming," a Reformation-era principle emphasizing that the church and its theology should continually be evaluated and reformed according to the Word of God.

## 5. FAQs on Peterson, Revelation & Holy Scripture, Session 4, Knowing God and Sources of Theology, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

### Frequently Asked Questions on Knowing God and Sources of Theology

**1. What is the Reformation concept of *sola scriptura*, and what does it mean for the sources of theology?** *Sola scriptura*, a key tenet of the Reformation, means that Scripture alone is the ultimate authority for faith and practice. It does *not* mean that the Bible is the only resource used in theology. While we also utilize reason, experience, and tradition, *sola scriptura* asserts that Scripture is the chief source, holding the highest authority and judging all other sources. Our aim is to deliberately and consistently prioritize and exalt Scripture above our own reasoning, historical traditions, and personal experiences when developing our theological understanding.

**2. What are the four primary sources that contribute to our understanding of theology?** The four main sources that inform our theological development are Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience. Scripture is the preeminent source, uniquely inspired by God and the supreme authority. Tradition, the accumulated wisdom and teachings of the church throughout history, provides valuable insights and helps us avoid repeating past errors. Reason enables us to reflect on revelation, clarify concepts, analyze arguments, and understand the logical connections within theological frameworks. Experience, encompassing our personal faith journeys, cultural contexts, and life situations, inevitably plays a role in how we interpret Scripture.

**3. How should we understand the relationship between Scripture and the other sources of theology (tradition, reason, experience)?** While tradition, reason, and experience are all valuable and contribute to our theological understanding, they are subordinate to Scripture. Scripture serves as the ultimate standard by which all other sources must be evaluated and judged. These other sources are important for interpreting Scripture and can offer helpful perspectives, but they are not infallible and must always be in alignment with the teachings of God's Word. *Sola scriptura* implies that Scripture has the final say on matters of faith and practice.

**4. What role does tradition play in theological study, and why is it important?** Tradition is significant because it connects us to the historical understanding of Scripture and theological topics by Christians throughout the ages. It reveals how the church has interpreted the Bible and formulated doctrines in creeds, confessions, and other teachings. Engaging with tradition helps us learn from the insights of those who have come before us, correct false teachings that have arisen historically, and gain a broader perspective on doctrinal issues. Ignoring tradition entirely risks repeating past mistakes and neglecting valuable wisdom.

**5. Why are reason and experience considered sources of theology, and what are their inherent limitations?** Reason is essential for theological study as it allows us to process and understand God's revelation, clarify concepts, and construct coherent theological systems. We cannot engage with theology without using our minds. Experience also plays a role because our personal backgrounds, cultural contexts, and faith journeys influence how we perceive and interpret Scripture. However, both reason and experience have limitations. Reason can be flawed and may fail to grasp the mysteries of God, sometimes leading to an overreliance on human logic. Experience can be subjective and may be misinterpreted or given undue weight, potentially leading to theological errors if not carefully examined in light of Scripture.

**6. What is meant by "theological method," and what are its key components?**

Theological method refers to the process by which we study and develop our theology. A sound theological method involves several interwoven components, including biblical exegesis (interpreting specific Bible passages), biblical theology (tracing themes and the storyline throughout the entire Bible), historical theology (examining the theological thought of the past), systematic theology (synthesizing biblical and historical insights into a coherent whole), and practical theology (applying theological understanding to various aspects of church life and personal conduct). While there is a basic order to these elements, they are interconnected and should inform one another.

**7. How should our pre-existing beliefs and perspectives influence our interpretation of Scripture and development of theology?** We all approach Scripture with pre-existing beliefs and perspectives shaped by our backgrounds and experiences. While these perspectives can offer valuable insights, they should not become the primary interpretive keys. It is crucial to acknowledge our assumptions and to humbly listen to Scripture, allowing it to shape and, if necessary, reform our understanding. We should avoid reading our own ideas into the text or forcing Scripture to conform to our preconceived notions. A healthy approach involves recognizing our biases, seeking the illumination of the Holy Spirit, learning from the church's wisdom, and consistently submitting our perspectives to the authority of Scripture.

**8. What is the significance of biblical exegesis and biblical theology in constructing a sound theological framework?** Good theology fundamentally begins with sound biblical exegesis, which involves carefully interpreting the meaning of specific biblical passages, taking into account their literary genre, context, and historical setting. Building upon exegesis, biblical theology then traces the unfolding story and major themes of the entire Bible, from creation to new creation, highlighting how doctrines develop and connect within this grand narrative, culminating in the person and work of Christ. Grounding theology in thorough exegesis and being rooted in the overarching biblical narrative ensures that our theological conclusions are firmly based on the Word of God and are understood within its proper context.