

TTS Foundations – Session Seventeen / Eighteen: **“Who Has Spoken Through the Prophets” NOTES**

Welcome back to TTS Foundations!

Thanks for coming (and for your patience these past weeks).

Let’s get the boring stuff out the way first!

- **FIRST: About TTS itself.**
 - **Remember the website:**
 - Notes are provided every Monday.
 - Term details, directions, etc.
- **SECOND: Looking ahead...**
 - **The Sunday Foundations Sessions:**
 - Sun 24th Nov – S20 here at mine.
 - Sun 8th Dec – S21 here at mine.
 - **TTS Essentials:**
 - Wed 13th Nov – S8b at my house.
 - Wed 4th Dec – S9 at my house.
 - **TTS Virtues:**
 - Sun 17th Nov – at Gill’s house.

We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen. We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father; through him all things were made.

For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven, was incarnate from the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and was made man. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried. On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures; he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father, who with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets. Amen.

TODAY: “Who Has Spoken Through the Prophets” – on Scripture.

Who’s the ‘who’ here? Who’s the subject? The HS.

We’re still in the realm of Pneumatology.

- **Revealing the living Word by inspiring the written Word.**
 - “For Scripture is the school of the Holy Spirit, in which, as nothing is omitted that is both necessary and useful to know, so nothing is taught but what is expedient to know” [Calvin – Inst. III.XXI.3]
 - “One cannot separate the voice from the breath” [Luther].
 - “The Spirit rides in the chariot of Scripture” [Spurgeon]

LOOK: Ps 84

[1] On Revelation & Scripture

DISCUSS: What do you remember from our Doctrine of God sessions?

- The Government of God:
 - Sovereign over all things.
- The Incommunicable Attributes of God:
 - The Aseity of God
 - ‘From self’, independent, does not need us, etc.
 - The Transcendence of God
 - Incomprehensible, other, etc.
 - The Immutability of God
 - Cannot be changed or change himself, etc.
- I.e. the Creator / Creature Distinction:
 - God alone is unconditioned.
 - God alone is eternal.
 - God alone is self-existing.
 - **LOOK:** Ps 50:21

These attributes have been integral to western theology.

- BUT as theologians we’re concerned with *theos logia*.
 - These attributes, therefore, present us with a problem.
 - **DISCUSS:** Can you spot what it might be?
- God does not belong to the Created order.
 - God is ‘other’ – above and beyond all created categories.
 - **How, therefore, can we use created language to describe him at all?**

[1A] ‘Apophatic’ Theology

- From the Greek ἀπόφημι (*apophēmi*) – “to deny”.
 - Also called **the *via negativa***.
 - Often associated with the Eastern tradition.
 - **God defies creaturely description.**
 - Often associated with what God is *NOT*.
- Pseudo-Dionysius [c. 400s / 500s AD]
 - **LOOK:** Acts 17:34
 - Styled himself after Dionysius the Areopagite
 - Long held to be pseudonymous – Aquinas, etc.

- “Once more, ascending yet higher we maintain, that It is not soul, or mind, or endowed with the faculty of imagination, conjecture, reason, or understanding; nor is It any act of reason or understanding; nor can It be described by the reason or perceived by the understanding, since It is not number, or order, or greatness, or littleness, or equality, or inequality... [We] apply not unto It either affirmation or negation, inasmuch as It transcends all affirmation by being the perfect and unique Cause of all things, and transcends all negation by the pre-eminence of Its simple and absolute nature – free from every limitation and beyond them all” [*The Mystical Theology* V]
 - Note how P-D goes beyond even negation.
 - (Trueman: negs apply to negs, i.e. “not-not a body”!)

[1B] ‘Cataphatic’ Theology

- **DISCUSS:** What do you think of apophatic theology?
 - Do you think it’s the end of theology?
 - (If not, why not?)
- **We have to hold two truths in tension:**
 - **FIRST: the basic instinct of apophaticism is right.**
 - All creaturely language fails. (Rev + the ineffable.)
 - **SECOND: God’s in the business of speaking about God.**
 - “Then the LORD put out his hand and touched my mouth; and the LORD said to me, ‘Now I have put my words in your mouth’” [Jer 1:9] – incredible...
 - The Indescribable One has described himself.
- **This is the basic premise of Cataphatic Theology:**
 - From the Greek κατάφασις (*kataphasis*) – “affirmation”.
 - Also called the *via positiva*.
 - We can arrive at a sound knowledge of God through description and proposition.
 - The Indescribable One has described himself, and charges us with following his lead!
 - “Why then look for something when you have comprehended the incomprehensibility of what you are looking for, if not because you should not give up the search as long as you are making progress in your inquiry into things incomprehensible, and because you become better and better by looking for so great a good *which is both sought in order to be found and found in order to be sought? It is sought in order to be found all the more delightfully, and it is found in order to be sought all the more avidly*” [*De Trinitate* XV Prologue]

God makes the impossible task, possible – we can speak about him!

- **BUT NOTE:** this doesn’t apply to all human language, at all times.
 - ONLY when we abide in his own self-revelation. (2 Tim 3)
 - Exo 17 – Moses’ arms before the Amalekites.
- **AND ALSO:** it’s still an accommodation, a mediation.
 - Re: Luther and Exo 33 – the back of God.

“The LORD has made himself known...” [Ps 9:16]

Our God is a Revelator God!

This is what makes theology possible!

- “Dogmatics as an enquiry presupposes that the true content of Christian talk about God can be known by man. It makes this assumption as in and with the Church it believes in Jesus Christ as the revealing and reconciling address of God to man. ... In, with and under the human question, dogmatics speaks of the divine answer” [Barth – CD §1.2.1]
- (“If this is true, then the place from which the way of dogmatic knowledge is to be seen and understood can neither be a prior anthropological possibility nor a subsequent ecclesiastical reality, but only the present moment of the speaking and hearing of Jesus Christ himself, the divine creation of light in our hearts” [Barth – CD §2.2])

So God has revealed himself, and has made us his witnesses.

- **DISCUSS:** What does his revelation look like?
 - He’s revealed himself *generally*.
 - Nature, reason, conscience – re: Natural Theology.
 - But he’s also revealed himself *specially*:
 - The Word living – “*God became flesh and tabernacled amongst us*” [John 1]
 - The Word written – Scripture.

When we come to build our theology of Scripture together, this is where we must begin – with the impossibility of all theology, only made possible because of God’s free, gracious self-revelation through the Word (both living and written).

[2] On Scripture – An Introduction

Our aim is to build our theology of Scripture together.

- **DISCUSS:** What do you think are the possible challenges here?
 - I.e. What pitfalls might we face addressing this subject?

[2A] FIRST: the scope of the subject.

- Nature of Scripture / Authority / Perspicuity / History / Canon / Hermeneutics / Translations / Principles of Exegesis. (Etc.)
 - Piper: you can never ‘exhaust’ this subject.
 - Ryle: Come to Bible like a man digging for treasure!

[2B] SECOND: impoverished thinking about Scripture.

- **In academic circles:**
 - The Bible as mere historical text. (Socio-historical.)
 - *Caesar's Gallic War, Virgil's Aeneid, Homer's Odyssey.*
 - The Bible as sacred religious text. (Phenomenological.)
 - Comparable to the Upanishads, or the Qur'an, etc.
 - The Bible as spiritually inspiring. (Modernist.)
 - Categorically human, mythological, but instructive.
- **In Christian circles:**
 - The Bible as a rule of faith. (Roman Catholic.)
 - Alongside tradition and the magisterium.
 - The Bible as an increasingly unknown entity.
 - BRIN, SoTheology / ALSO: my own experiences!
 - The Bible as authoritative but safe.
 - "The matter is quite simple. The Bible is very easy to understand. But we Christians are a bunch of scheming swindlers. We pretend to be unable to understand it because we know very well that the minute we understand, we are obliged to act accordingly. Take any words in the New Testament and forget everything except pledging yourself to act accordingly. My God, you will say, if I do that my whole life will be ruined. How would I ever get on in the world?"
[Kierkegaard - *Journals*]¹
 - **We use it, we quote it, we revere it - and it just so happens to confirm everything we like.**
 - (Re: Barth and the divine 'Nein!' + Spurgeon's lion.)

[2C] THIRD: Bible's influence is massive, which isn't always helpful.

- History, culture, art, music, common English tradition of law, etc.
 - Take (for example) the KJV's impact on our language:
 - Be fruitful and multiply / Am I my brother's keeper? / The mark of Cain / Coat of many colours / The fatted calf / Burning bush / A land flowing with milk and honey / Let my people go / An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth / The apple of his eye / I am escaped with the skin of my teeth / Leviathan / To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose / A voice crying in the wilderness / No peace for the wicked / See eye to eye / Cut off out of the land of the living / Can the leopard change his spots? / The parting of the ways / Man shall not live by bread alone / Get thee behind me Satan / The salt of the earth / Hide your light under a bushel / Turn the other cheek / Go the extra mile / Wolf in sheep's clothing / Sign of the times / Den of thieves / I wash my hands of it / Suffer the little children / the Prodigal son / physician heal thyself / cast the first stone / Jesus wept / Doubting Thomas / Road to Damascus / A law unto himself / Through a glass darkly / The root of all evil / Fight the good fight / Armageddon.
 - The Bible saturates the western world.
 - Its influence is truly global.

¹ Also Kierkegaard: "Dreadful it is to fall into the hands of the living God. Yes, it is even dreadful to be alone with the New Testament!"

The Bible is SO familiar, it's SO available, it's SO discussed, and it SO saturates our society – *we no longer know it as it really is.*

→→ [[CHINA VIDEO]] ←← // LOOK: Neh 8:5-12

DISCUSS: What are we missing?

In what follows, therefore, we could ask three questions:

1. How ought we to *approach* Scripture?
 - a. Nature, authority, etc.
 2. How ought we to *receive* Scripture?
 - a. On the canon – how + why did these books become one?
 3. How ought we to *use* Scripture?
 - a. Hermeneutics, exegesis, etc.
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[3] How Ought We To Approach Scripture?

So many modern approaches. So many models.

The conservative evangelical approach is dismissed today.

Surely the patristic authors weren't so 'simplistic'?

Of course, there were nuances. Yes, they were creative, and clever.

- **But they also regarded Scripture as the oracles of God:²**
 - "Look carefully into the Scriptures, which are the true utterances of the Holy Spirit. Observe that nothing of an unjust or counterfeit character is written in them" [Clement – *First Epistle XLV*]
 - "The word of truth is free, and carries its own authority, disdaining to fall under any skillful argument, or to endure the logical scrutiny of its hearers. But it would be believed for its own nobility, and for the confidence due to him who sends it" [Justin – *Fragments I*]
 - "[The books of Scripture] are fountains of salvation, that they who thirst may be satisfied with the living words they contain. In these alone is proclaimed the doctrine of godliness. Let no man add to these, neither let him take ought from these" [Athanasius – *Festal Letter XXXIX*]
 - "For concerning the divine and holy mysteries of the faith, not even a casual statement must be delivered without the Holy Scriptures; nor must we be drawn aside by mere plausibility and artifices of speech. Even to me, who tell thee these things, give not absolute credence, unless thou receive the proof of the things which I announce from the divine Scriptures. For this salvation which we believe depends not on ingenious reasoning, but on demonstration of the holy Scriptures" [Cyril of Jerusalem – *Catechesis IV.17*]
 - "I beg of you, my dear brother, to live among these books, to meditate upon them, to know nothing else, to seek nothing else. Does not such a life seem to you a foretaste of heaven here on earth?" [Jerome – *Letter LIII.X*]

² Also Augustine: the Scriptures "have the most eminent authority, and we trust them in all matters of which it is not expedient for us to be ignorant but which we are not capable of knowing for ourselves" [COG XI.3]

[3A] How did Jesus approach Scripture?

- **LOOK:** Matt 4:1-11
 - *"It is written..."* [v4/6/7/10]
 - (1) Authoritative, final.
 - (2) Memorised, cherished.
 - *"... by every word that comes from the mouth of God"* [v4]
 - Sufficient.
 - *"Away with you, Satan! For it is written..."* [v10]
 - Spiritually living and useful – e.g. resisting Satan.
 - BUT ALSO – Mark 14:26, hallel psalm (113-118).
- **LOOK:** Matt 22:23-46
 - *"You are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God"* [v29]
 - (1) Holds them accountable for lack of knowledge.
 - (2) Associates Scripture with God's power.
 - *"... have you not read what was said to you by God..."* [v31]
 - Scripture as perpetual oracle of God.
 - *"... they were astounded at his teaching"* [v33]
 - A worker approved! Re: 2 Tim 3.
 - Capable of bringing out from the storehouse treasures new and old – cf. Luke 24:27.
 - *"And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question..."* [v35]
 - Casuistry – applied teaching, re: young man, cf. Lk 18.
 - *"David said by the Spirit..."* [v43]
 - Authorship both human and HS.
 - *"If David thus calls him Lord..."* [v45]
 - Ultimately testifies concerning him – cf. John 5:39.
- **The ultimate summary of Jesus' approach:**
 - *"The Scriptures cannot be broken"* [John 10:35]
 - Scripture is authoritative, final, sufficient, alive, divine and human.
 - Scripture is to be cherished, to be memorised, to be used, to be engaged with, to be applied.
 - **DISCUSS:** Do you think Jesus' approach differs from what is common today?

[3B] How did the Apostles approach Scripture? – In Peter

- **LOOK:** 2 Pet 1:20-21 / 2 Pet 3:1-2 / 2 Pet 3:14-16
- **DISCUSS:** What's the significance of these passages?
 - [a] Shows us early views of Pauline corpus.
 - [b] Scripture did NOT just mean OT.
 - [c] Nature of Scripture:
 - 2 Pet 1:20 – dismissing need to engage? No, re: Paul.
 - 2 Pet 1:21 / 3:1-2 – instead, affirming its true nature.
 - **A pneumatological utterance of God himself.**
 - “So Scripture, gathering up the otherwise confused knowledge of God in our minds, having dispersed our dullness, clearly shows us the true God. This, therefore, is a special gift, where God, to instruct the Church, not merely uses mute teachers but also opens his own most hallowed lips” [Inst. I.VI.1]
 - **DISCUSS:** What's the significance of this?
 - Verbal plenary (full) inspiration. Two consequences:
 - (1) Scriptures possess divine authority.
 - (2) Divine authority expressed through humanity – i.e. it's not dictation.

[3C] How did the Apostles approach Scripture? – In Paul

- **LOOK:** 2 Tim 3:14-17
 - **DISCUSS:** What's the significance of this?
- **Two important Greek words:**
 - θεόπνευστος – *theopneustos*, God-breathed (v.16).
 - Scripture is **supremely authoritative**.
 - The supreme court!
 - Infallible – authorial intention incapable of error.
 - Inerrant – authorial intention not possessive of error.
 - ἐξαρτίζω – *exartizō* (eggs-ar-teedz-oh), equipped (v.17).
 - Scripture is **supremely sufficient**.
 - Perfect, finished.
 - *Sola Scriptura* – “Thus saith the Lord!”
- **The Reformed confessions are helpful commentaries here:**
 - Authority:
 - “The authority of the Holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed, and obeyed, dependeth not on the testimony of any man, or Church; but wholly open God (who is truth itself) author thereof” [West. Conf. I.4 (1647)]

- Necessity & Sufficiency:
 - “The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man’s salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture” [I.6 (1647)]
- Perspicuity:
 - “All things in Scripture are not alike plain in themselves, nor alike clear unto all: yet those things which are necessary to be known, believed, and observed for salvation, are so clearly expounded, and opened in some place of Scripture or another, that not only the learned, but the unlearned... may attain unto a sufficient understanding of them” [I.7]

[4] How Ought We To Receive Scripture?

BUT NOTE:

“As for you, continue in what you have learned and firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it, and how from childhood you have known the sacred writings that are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus” [2 Tim 3:14-15]

- **Our theology of Scripture must connect with two doctrines:**
 - Pneumatology – school of the HS, inspiration etc.
 - Ecclesiology –
 - “[The] Church of the living God, the pillar and bulwark of the truth” [1 Tim 3:15]
 - “For my part, I should not believe the gospel except as moved by the authority of the Catholic Church” [Augustine – *Contra Epistolam Manichaei* V.6]
 - “The authority of the Church is an introduction through which we are prepared for faith in the Gospel” [Calvin Inst. I.VII.3]

The people of God are a people of the Word – you cannot receive the Scriptures without having received from the Church.

- The ultimate proof of this is in your hands.
 - **DISCUSS:** What do you know about the canon?
 - (Re: DVC – fax machine from heaven.)
 - **DISCUSS:** Why do you think it might be important?
 - (1) Church history is a good thing.
 - (2) Shines a spotlight on the ‘enginery’ of three key doctrines – pneumatology, ecclesiology, and scripture.

[3A] The Old Testament Canon

- **DISCUSS:** What do you know about the OT canon / apocrypha?
 - Different terms employed:
 - ἀπόκρυφος [*apokryphos* obscure] – from verb to hide.
 - Deutero-Canonical – from *deutero*, or ‘second’.
 - **Protestants have 39 books, but other traditions differ:**
 - Found in RC, Greek and Slavonic Bibles – Tobit / Judith / Additions to Esther / Wisdom of Solomon / Ecclesiasticus / Baruch / Letter to Jeremiah / Additions to Daniel (Prayer of Azariah; Susanna; Bel and the Dragon) / 1 & Maccabees.
 - Found in Greek and Slavonic Bibles – 1 Esdras / Prayer of Manasseh / Ps 151 / 3 Maccabees / 2 Esdras.
 - In Appendix to Greek Bible – 4 Maccabees.
- **The OT Canon is a Complex Issue:**
 - **LOOK:** Jude 1:14-15
 - Clement of Rome quotes from Judith [*First Epistle* LV]
 - Polycarp quoted from Tobit [*Epistle to Philipppians* X]
 - For each book there’s a history.
 - There’s also lots left unsaid in the historical record.
- **Does this mean we should regard the DC as inspired?**
 - (1) Jesus never used the DC, nor the apostles besides Jude.
 - Even Jude’s use is similar to Paul in Acts 17.
 - (2) The Jewish community was broadly opposed to the DC.
 - The Tanakh (e.g. *Torah, Nevi'im, and Ketuvim*) has 24 books, matching our 39, with minor prophets as one.
 - Josephus has 22 books, possibly with Ruth in Judges and Lamentations in Jeremiah [*Against Apion* I.41].
 - The Qumran community held the Tanakh as immutable until prophets and Messiah [1 QS 9.11].
 - (3) The DC texts themselves sometimes seem to dispute it.
 - The 24-book limit – 2 Esdras 14:45-46.
 - The ceasing of the prophets – 1 Macc 9:27, 2 Bar 85.
 - (4) The DC texts contain unbecoming internal errors.
 - Cf. Whitaker’s *Disputations on Holy Scripture*.
 - (5) The earliest patristic statements differed on the DC.
 - The Byrennios List [c. 100AD] excludes all but 1 Esdras.
 - The canon of Melito of Sardis [c. 180AD] excludes all but Wisdom and Esdras.

- (6) Many later, major patristic figures also differed.
 - Athanasius rejected all but Baruch.
 - Jerome rejected Wisdom, Sirach, Judith, and Tobit.
 - Synod of Carthage [397AD] rejected all but Tobit, Judith, 1&2 Esdras, and 1&2 Maccabees.
- **However, this is no reason to dismiss them entirely:**
 - “There are other books besides these not indeed included in the canon, but appointed by the fathers to be read by those who newly join us, and who wish for instruction in the word of godliness” [Athanasius – *Festal Letter XXXIX*]
 - “The books of the Apocrypha, as Jerome says, are read by the Church for examples of life and instruction in behaviour, but the church does not use them to establish any doctrine” [39 Articles VI]

[3B] The New Testament Canon

- **We have nothing quite so complex with the NT:**
 - From the 2nd Cent, Irenaeus spoke of the ‘four-fold Gospel’.
 - Muratorian Fragment [c170AD] – almost identical.
 - As for rest of NT:
 - Pauline texts were almost universally acknowledged.
 - Some debate over 1 Clement and Shepherd.
 - Some lingering debate over Hebrews, 1 + 2 Pet, Rev.
- **What was the Church’s criteria? Bruce Metzger:**
 - (1) The *regula fidei* – the rule of faith.
 - Received, catholic orthodoxy. (E.g. Incarnation.)
 - (2) Apostolicity. (Re: Shepherd.)
 - Or association with – e.g. Mark and Luke.
 - (3) Acceptance and use.
 - “This was, of course, based on the principle that a book that had enjoyed acceptance by many churches over a long period of time was in a stronger position than one accepted by only a few churches, and then only recently” [*The Canon of the NT*, p. 253]
- **BUT the remarkable thing is the eerie consensus...**
 - **LOOK: John 14:26**
 - “The fact that the NT writings were preserved is itself a testimony to the *de facto* canonical authority which they exercised more or less from the first. In short, the NT canon was not so much decreed as *acknowledged*. The NT writings were hailed as canonical in recognition of the authority they had been exercising from the first and in steadily widening circles since then. It is not the church that determines the gospel, but the gospel which determines the church” [James Dunn]

[3C] On the Roman Catholic Objection

- **BUT Dunn's quote hints at an important objection.**
 - A collection of authoritative of books – OR an authoritative collection of books?
 - RC's – the canon is the undoing of *Sola Scriptura*.
 - **DISCUSS: how would we reply?**
 - (1) The HS is Lord of the Church.
 - Once again – we need a healthy ecclesiology here.
 - Without a magisterial, catholic Church, the canon is impossible.
 - “For among the many excellent gifts with which God has adorned the human race, it is a singular privilege that he deigns to consecrate to himself the mouths and tongues of men in order that his voice may resound in them. ... Many are led either by pride, dislike, or rivalry to the conviction that they can profit enough from a private reading and meditation; hence they despise public assemblies and deem preaching superfluous. ... This is like blotting out the face of God which shines upon us in teaching” [Inst. IV.I.V]
 - (2) Scripture validates (and goes before) the act of canon.
 - E.g. John 14, 2 Pet 3.
 - (3) We're not atheists, so the canon 'isn't NOT' theological.
 - The theological premise, “*Thus saith the Lord*” (which is the essence of SS), still theo/logically precedes the historical fact of the canon.
 - (4) The RCC still suffers from the same 'flaw'.
 - I.e. how do we know about a magisterium?
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→→ **[[CONCLUSION]]** →→

[5] Conclusion

Three final observations.

FIRST: *the Scriptures are a work of the Triune God, and our use of them is a participation in the Triune life of God.*

- He loves to hear his own Word spoken back at him.
 - Through the Spirit who inspired the written Word and united us to the living Word.

SECOND: *the Triune God has placed his Spirit-inspired Word into the hands of his Spirit-filled people, and promises to use IT to speak through THEM.*

- **LOOK:** Ps 119:11 / 25 / 28 / 105 / 162
 - “The teaching of the wise is a fountain of life” [Ps 14]
 - “Let him who speaks, speak as though God himself is speaking” [1 Pet 4:11]

THIRD: *the Triune God has made the Scriptures necessary, authoritative, sufficient, and perspicuous – but he’s also made them KIND.*

- God tells our story. Accommodates our weaknesses. Provides us with the tools. “His eye is on the sparrow”
 - The Word living becomes Immanuel both in his incarnation by the Spirit and by his inspired witness through the Spirit.