

VOLUME I

EXPLORING CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY

REVELATION, SCRIPTURE,
AND THE TRIUNE GOD

General Editors

**NATHAN D. HOLSTEEN
AND MICHAEL J. SVIGEL**

Part One: Douglas K. Blount, Nathan D. Holsteen,
Glenn R. Kreider, and Michael J. Svigel

Part Two: J. Scott Horrell,
with Nathan D. Holsteen and Michael J. Svigel



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INTRODUCTION

For some people, the word *doctrine* summons yawns of tedium, shudders of trepidation, or frowns of suspicion. Dogmatic preachers exasperate them, feuding denominations weary them, and droning scholars bore them.

When people hear the word *theology*, the condition sometimes worsens. They picture massive tomes packed with technical discussions, less-than-crucial data, and incomprehensible footnotes—unusable information to distract them from God rather than drawing them nearer.

Most people seeking to grow in their faith want practical principles, not theoretical concepts. They want to *know* God, not just know *about* Him.

Yet the fact is that we can't experience real spiritual growth without solid spiritual truth. We can't know the true God without knowing God truly.

In that case, where do we start? How do we begin to harvest in this fruitful field without getting caught in the tangled underbrush of mere opinions and idiosyncrasies? How can we sort through what seem like countless contradictory theories to find the essential truths necessary for strengthening and living out our faith?

Exploring Christian Theology will offer introductions, overviews, and reviews of key orthodox, protestant, evangelical tenets without belaboring details or broiling up debates. The three *ECT* volumes, compact but substantial, provide accessible and convenient summaries of major themes; they're intended as guidebooks for a church that, overall, is starving for the very doctrine it has too long avoided.

Each volume includes primary biblical texts, a history of each main teaching, relevant charts and graphs, practical implications, and suggestions for literature that you might want to have in your own library. One of our goals for this work is to offer help to those who haven't read much in the way of theology, so we've included a glossary of terms—the unusual and the significant. If at any point you see an unfamiliar word or wonder about a definition, consider taking a moment to check that list. In a similar vein, you can look at the table of contents for a straightforward and organized glimpse of what's to come.

Further, each part or section (e.g., this volume has two parts) can stand alone—be read or referenced on its own. Or you can study through all the sections related to one “region” of theology and walk away with a handle on its biblical, theological, historical, and practical dimensions. In other words, these books can be used in a number of ways, suitable to your particular needs or interests.

Exploring Christian Theology differs from other mini-theologies in that it strives to present a broad consensus, not a condensed systematic model of one evangelical teacher or protestant tradition. Thus you might use these volumes for discipleship, catechism, membership training, preview or review of doctrine, or personal reference. Like the evangelical movement itself, we seek to be orthodox and interdenominational within a classic consensus.

Treat each volume as a simple primer that supplements (not supplants) more detailed treatments of theology—that complements (not competes with) intermediate and advanced works. As such, regardless of denominational or confessional commitments, these books likewise can be used by ministry training programs, Bible colleges, or seminaries for students preparing to undertake in-depth study. Whatever your background, degree of interest, or level of expertise, we hope this volume won't be the end of a brief jaunt but the beginning of a lifelong journey into—or a helpful aid alongside your ongoing immersion in—the exciting world of Christian theology.

Nathan D. Holsteen and Michael J. Svigel
General Editors

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I (Mike) want to thank my daughter, Sophie, for helping with the Scripture Index, halfway through which, she said, "Aren't you glad you taught me how to read?" (Any errors are obviously her fault.)

I (Nathan) want to thank my wife, Janice, for her unflinching support. She is a rock of constancy in a topsy-turvy world, and a gift of God to me.

THE CHRISTIAN STORY IN FOUR ACTS

It's the opening night of a theater production. You're not in the audience but backstage. You're part of the crew (or at least you think you are). In this case, it's kind of hard to tell what you're supposed to be doing. The problem? There's no director and no script. Never has been. Just some stage lighting, sound equipment, a few set changes and backdrops, a bunch of props strewn around, and some random actors milling about on and offstage.

Nevertheless, the audience fills the seats, the curtain opens, and the play begins. Of course, disaster ensues. Without a script, you have no characters, no story, no plot, no beginning, no climax, and no end. Without a director you have no way of knowing who's supposed to do what, and when. The random string of meaningless events that occurs onstage and off can't be called "artistic" even by the broadest, most free-spirited *artiste*. Disorder and chaos fill the theater, and pandemonium reigns.

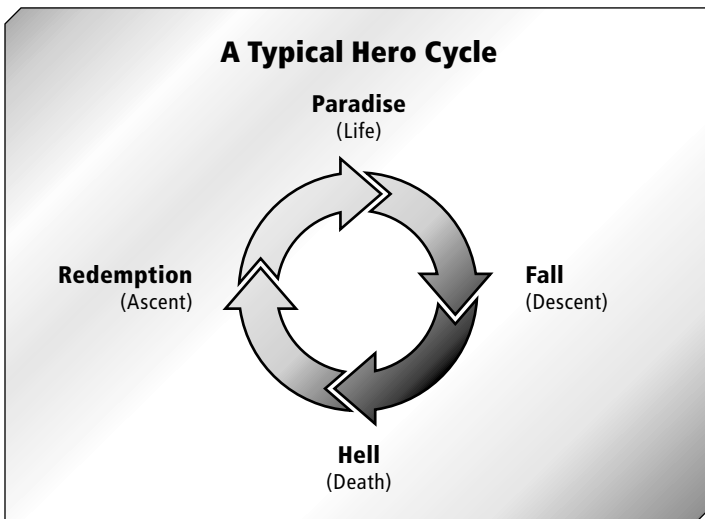
Nobody would attempt to put on a play, film a movie, or shoot an episode lacking outline, plot, story arc, and cast. In fact, no production can get even a producer's flashing yellow light without a fairly stable script, competent author, reliable director, and compelling cast to bring it all to life. Before the first action can begin, certain aspects need to be firmly established.

The same is true when it comes to examining the Bible's story from the backstage. That's exploring Christian theology. It's the story behind the story, the "documentary" shot from backstage, watching the Author conceive of the plot and characters, write the script, then

set the story into motion, himself stepping on stage at the right moment to take the leading role.

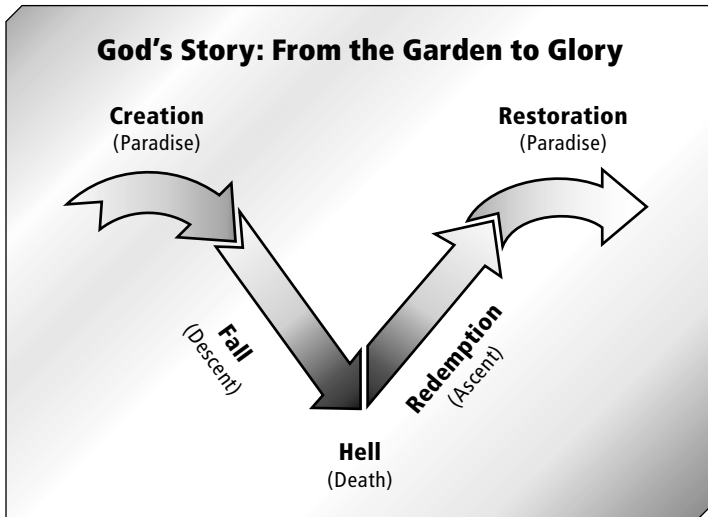
As we explore, we find that God’s story flows much like a classic “hero cycle,”¹ with which authors throughout history have gripped audiences by tapping into universal experiences—elements common to most or all individuals and cultures:

- an experience of personal conflict between good and evil
- frustration with the present world
- anxieties about the future
- a sense of a greater purpose and meaning
- the conviction that this world isn’t the way it’s supposed to be
- the hope that things will one day be better than they are



Our well-known stories of initiation, fall, struggle, testing, redemption, and ultimate victory put into words, portray on stage, or project on screen the unconscious realities we feel in our hearts. Our favorite movies or books are “favorites” because they touch on themes related to this cycle that resonates with our experiences. They “speak” to us, inviting us to enter into a larger story that transcends our lonely individualism and our deteriorating world.²

Reminiscent of the hero cycle (with some astonishing twists), the chronicle of the classic Christian faith is a captivating account that can be summed up in four acts: Creation, Fall, Redemption, and Restoration.



Act I: Creation

If a composer were to write a score for the Old Testament, what kind of musical motifs would he or she employ? Gentle harps and melodic strings? Majestic trumpets? Delightful woodwinds or pounding drums? Through whatever means, the theme would probably begin with a burst of symphonic grandeur, followed by a flourish of interwoven melodies signifying the creation of heaven and earth in glorious perfection.

As this bold overture resolved into a blissful ballad, however, a dark and ominous minor chord would slither into the melody, eventually turning the key from major to minor. Perhaps oboes and bassoons would replace flutes and piccolos; enter bass drums for xylophones; cellos and basses for violins and harps; tubas for trumpets. We'd hear harsh, discordant notes.

Even so, amid this cacophony, hints of the original beauty, majesty, and power would occasionally break through, promising to reemerge and, eventually, ultimately, to triumph.

What, in words, is the theme of the Old Testament? *The tragic fall of a perfect creation followed by judgment and the promise of final redemption.*

Genesis 1–2 stunningly depicts the original creation of the heavens, the earth, all living things, and humankind. The story begins not with competing deities or an absolute nothingness but with *God*: “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth” (Gen. 1:1). God, through His eternal Son and Spirit, created everything that exists—whether things in heaven or things on earth, “things . . . visible and invisible.”³ The triune God is the Author, Producer, Director, and leading Actor in the story of creation and redemption. And, as Master Storyteller, He has made himself known through His works (Ps. 19:1–2) and through His Word (2 Tim. 3:16). He both shows and tells His power, His plan, and His purpose. Simply put, the great and mighty God is knowable and has made himself known:

Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.⁴

As the crowning work of His creation, God made humans, male and female, co-regents over what He had made with a mandate to “be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it” (Gen. 1:28). God desired to share the stage of His production with creatures He formed from mud, transforming dust into stars (Ps. 8:3–6). They were created in the image of God—that is, reflecting His glory and character and destined to rule as His representatives over creation (Gen. 1:26–30). As God’s image-bearing envoys, humans were to work in the Paradise of Eden, cultivating it and ultimately extending its borders to cover the entire uncultivated earth (Gen. 2:7–25).

Act II: Fall

Alas, that state of pure innocence would not last. As intelligent creatures given free will, the first humans succumbed to temptation and turned their backs on their Creator, forfeiting their role as His rulers

over earth and falling victim to sin and death (Gen. 3). The blast wave of this disobedience resounds forward through all human history, its devastating effects illustrated in Genesis 4–11: murder, anarchy, destruction, and then rebellion against God. Everybody today will admit that something is wrong with the world and with the people in it. As Ecclesiastes says, “Surely there is not a righteous man on earth who does good and never sins” (7:20), and “The hearts of the sons of men are full of evil and insanity is in their hearts throughout their lives” (9:3 NASB).

Thus half of the story cycle is complete—from Paradise and life, through tragic fall, to an earthly state of living condemnation and then universal death.

Act III: Redemption

If we were to commission the same composer to score a New Testament sequel to the Old Testament part of the story, what kind of themes would we want? How does the continuation of His-story in the New Testament relate to its beginnings in the Old?

The sequel’s score would probably look like a mirror image of the initial themes. From darkness to light, from fall, judgment, and promises delayed to promises fulfilled, mercy and grace extended, and redemption realized. Discordant notes and chords would be replaced by a symphony of instruments and voices singing praises to our God and King. The nearly forgotten opening scenes of the prequel would be restored and then surpassed.

What, then, is the theme of the New Testament? *The long-awaited redemption of a fallen creation followed by the restoration and fulfillment of all God’s promises and purposes.*

God did not abandon humankind to hopelessness. Already in Genesis 3, after the fall of Adam and Eve, He pledged that the offspring of the woman would bruise the Serpent’s head, ultimately destroying sin and evil (v. 15). He then advanced His plan of redemption through the calling of Abraham (Gen. 12), to whom He promised that a particular offspring would mediate blessings to the world (Gen. 13:15; Gal. 3:15–16). After this promise passed from Abraham through Isaac and Jacob to the tribe of Judah, it then narrowed to the dynasty of King

David. In Isaiah's famous prophecy this same promise of a Redeemer is narrowed to an individual coming king, the Messiah:

The people who walk in darkness
Will see a great light;
Those who live in a dark land,
The light will shine on them. . . .
For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us;
And the government will rest on His shoulders;
And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.
There will be no end to the increase of His government or of
peace,
On the throne of David and over his kingdom,
To establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness
From then on and forevermore. (Isa. 9:2, 6–7 NASB)

The redemption plan continued to be revealed throughout the Old Testament Scriptures. Despite human failures—even of those to whom He'd given amazing guarantees of His presence and love—God remained faithful to His promises, ultimately sending the promised Offspring—His own divine Son (John 3:16).

When God's Son was about to enter the redemption story, God sent the angel Gabriel to confirm that this child, born to a poor family from an insignificant village, was the One through whom the ancient promises would be fulfilled:

You will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name Him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David; and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His kingdom will have no end. (Luke 1:31–33 NASB)

As the plot unfolded, though, God's narrative took a world-shaking turn. Instead of following the cycle's upward path—the Hero passes through various trials, endures setbacks, and overcomes failures while pressing on toward His reward—God's Chosen One *retraced the descent*, surrendering His life to the executioner. The only being in human history who deserved never-ending life with God voluntarily suffered a brutal death (Phil. 2:5–8).

Even this ironic fate had been foretold in the prophecies of Isaiah:

Surely our griefs He Himself bore,
And our sorrows He carried;
Yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken,
Smitten of God, and afflicted.
But He was pierced through for our transgressions,
He was crushed for our iniquities;
The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him,
And by His scourging we are healed.
All of us like sheep have gone astray,
Each of us has turned to his own way;
But the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all
To fall on Him. (Isa. 53:4–6 NASB)

Nevertheless, for God's matchless Hero, death was not the end. Against all expectations—including those of His despairing followers—Jesus of Nazareth was raised from the grave and stepped out of the tomb more than alive—He was *glorified*. Having died in a mortal body susceptible to sickness, pain, and death, He was raised in a physical but immortal body, incapable of illness, impervious to hurt, and overflowing with eternal life.

Furthermore, through Jesus Christ, God began writing His-story's final chapter. Those people who became united with Christ by placing their faith in Him could now partake of His glory, sharing the Hero's reward, and surpassing even the original purpose for humankind that God had established ages ago in Eden.

The Hero's victorious reentrance into the halls of heaven opened a new chapter in God's unfolding drama. After the resurrected Savior's ascension, and prior to His in-the-end return as Judge and King, He sent His Spirit to stir the hearts of His former enemies and call them to His cause. Countless converts from every nation, tribe, people, and language have been and still are flocking to His side (Rev. 7:9–10). Through spiritual union with their King, this kingdom-in-the-making also experiences a shared spiritual communion in the church. Through this spiritual-physical community of the life-giving Spirit, centered on Jesus Christ's person and work and focused on the glory of God the Father, members of Christ's body grow in faith, hope, and love. Together they become more and more like Jesus their King, the Spirit

working in them to carry out the Father's redemptive mission in this still-fallen world.⁵

Act IV: Restoration

This brings us to the final resolution, the future restoration of the original creation. In the beginning, humans were expelled from Eden, unable to experience immortality in a Paradise free from suffering, frustration, fear, and death. At the present time God, through Christ and by the Spirit, is calling to himself a people who will participate in His drama's final chapter. When Jesus returns and renews all things, creation's groaning will be turned to glory as the entire earth is transformed into a new, even better Eden, and all those who've been united with Christ will be made like Him (1 John 3:2).

Revelation 21:3–4 describes the glorious coming reality:

Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them, and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away. (NASB)

Thus, between Genesis and Revelation—from the Garden to Glory—God's unparalleled story unfolds. Every person and event moves history and humanity *forward* toward a final goal—restoration. God's grand narrative of creation, fall, redemption, and restoration truly satisfies our restless longings for purpose and meaning and also fulfills our heart's desire for acceptance in meaningful relationship. Augustine once prayed, "You have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you."⁶

The timeless story also provides an ultimate answer to human injustice and inequality, as Christ's kingdom will be an eternal golden age of peace and prosperity for all (Isa. 11:1–9). Likewise, it offers vital, unshakable hope to those who now are hurting, and lonely, and lost. The concrete promises and detailed visions God has preserved for us throughout the Scriptures provide healing hope to those struggling with anxiety, fear, despair, and depression. When a person's gaze is

drawn from his or her temporary groaning to the certainty of future everlasting glory through resurrection and restoration, the words of the apostle Paul ring true:

I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now. And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body. For in hope we have been saved, but hope that is seen is not hope; for who hopes for what he already sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, with perseverance we wait eagerly for it. (Rom. 8:18–25 NASB)

The good news about God’s story is that anyone can become a part of it. Jesus of Nazareth is truly God in the flesh; He truly died and was raised from death, and He truly offers a new identity and new future for all who trust in Him alone for salvation. And those who embrace by faith the Hero of this story will have a share in the restoration of all things.

He who sits on the throne said, “Behold, I am making all things new.” And He said, “Write, for these words are faithful and true.” Then He said to me, “It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give to the one who thirsts from the spring of the water of life without cost. He who overcomes will inherit these things, and I will be his God and he will be My son. (Rev. 21:5–7 NASB)

You Are *Here*

This present volume’s two parts set the stage for God’s four-part drama. In stark contrast to the haphazard, disastrous “production” imagined at the opening of this chapter, His-story has script and crew, and no detail is random or left to chance. Now we’re introduced to

the Author, Producer, Director, and Lead Actor: the one true God in three persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

In Part One, “How Firm a Foundation: Revelation, Scripture, and Truth,” we will introduce the concept of God’s self-revelation through various means while focusing attention on Holy Scripture, His-story’s written script. In the process we’ll touch on the ground rules for exploring Christian theology—how to approach God’s revelation as we seek to believe and live rightly before Him. As the authoritative, unchangeable script of the drama’s past, present, and future acts, the Bible provides vital wisdom and guidance for us as we seek to discover our own role in His unfolding creation-and-redemption narrative.

In Part Two, “God in Three Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,” we meet the Writer, Producer, Director, and Star of the heavenly and earthly drama set forth in His living Word. Besides an exploration of God’s existence, character, and three-in-one nature, we also delve into the practical implications of Trinitarian belief today.

As we explore the biblical, theological, and historical foundations of our doctrines of revelation and Scripture (bibliology) and of the triune God (theology proper, Christology, and pneumatology), we’ll establish a solid foundation upon which to construct a Christian worldview acknowledging that all good things come to us from the Father, through the Son, and by the Spirit.

PART ONE

HOW FIRM A FOUNDATION

Revelation, Scripture, and Truth

**BY DOUGLAS K. BLOUNT, NATHAN D. HOLSTEEN,
GLENN R. KREIDER, AND MICHAEL J. SVIGEL**

HIGH-ALTITUDE SURVEY

From Agatha Christie’s matronly Jane Marple and urbane Hercule Poirot to Dashiell Hammett’s hardworking Continental Op and hard-boiled Sam Spade—not to mention Rex Stout’s irascible Nero Wolfe, Dorothy Sayers’ aristocratic Peter Wimsey, or G. K. Chesterton’s pious Father Brown—the last hundred years or so have seen some remarkable fictional detectives.

But none has been more remarkable than Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes. His ability to seize obscure clues and utilize apparently trivial facts, to form a map of deduction from a web of deception and thereby trap even the cleverest criminals, amazes Doyle’s reader as much as it does Holmes’ ever-faithful friend Dr. John Watson. “You know my method,” Holmes says. “It is founded upon the observation of trifles.”¹ Elsewhere he remarks, “It is, of course, a trifle, but there is nothing so important as trifles.”²

In case after case, this consulting detective manages to arrange a cluster of seemingly disconnected facts and items into a clear, coherent picture and solve the puzzle. However deep and difficult the mystery seems at an adventure’s beginning, Holmes not only discovers its solution, but in the end makes doing so appear easy—even *elementary*, one might say. His clients can confidently trust his ability to lead them to truth they don’t find on their own.

Delving Into the Deep Things of God

Now, as you begin the first part of this book, you’re embarking on a kind of adventure in search of truth. In studying theology, we, like

many detectives, concern ourselves with mysteries; in fact, we concern ourselves with what the apostle Paul calls “the deep things of God” (1 Cor. 2:10 NIV). Happily for us, though, understanding these mysteries—and piecing together the puzzles before us—won’t depend on *our* skills at sifting clues or analyzing data. We won’t need to rely on our own wits or lean on our own understanding (Prov. 3:5). For reasons we’ll discuss later, if we were to depend on our own abilities for knowledge of God, we’d have no hope of knowing Him—and thus, given the nature of eternal life (see John 17:3), no ultimate hope.

Like Holmes’ clients, we have a ready and reliable Guide to lead us to the truth we seek. But unlike theirs, ours is no mere human—it is God himself. His very Spirit, whom Jesus called “the Spirit of truth,”³ guides us and opens our eyes to the truth—to that which *is*.

This doesn’t mean we shelve our mind, shift into neutral, and simply coast to the theological finish line. Christ called His followers to love God with our whole being (Matt. 22:37–40), which clearly includes our mind. Rather than excusing us from the hard work of thinking carefully about the deep things of God, the point is that, insofar as we come to understand, the credit belongs not to us but to His Spirit. Moreover, while we could not, if left to our own devices, fathom God’s mysteries, He has not left us alone. On the contrary, Jesus promised He and the Father would send us the Spirit to “teach [us] all things” (John 14:26) and “guide [us] into all the truth” (16:13).

God Is Knowable . . . *and* Has Made Himself Known

In doing theology, then, we don’t need to worry about our inadequacies. Not because we ourselves are adequate to the task but because our hope of success rests not in ourselves but in God’s willingness to make himself known to those who seek Him (Heb. 11:6). And God has done so in a number of ways!

First, as Paul wrote to the church in Rome (Rom. 1:19–20), God has made himself known—that is, revealed himself—in His creation. David said the heavens themselves testify to God’s glory (Ps. 19:1). This is what we often call “general revelation,” revelation of God that’s generally accessible to all people at all times. Sadly, however, what God has clearly revealed in creation has become obscure to us.

Here the problem lies not with that revelation but with our grasp of it. By behaving badly, humanity—like those who scorch their eyes by staring at the sun—has become blinded to what God has made known. Such behavior, characterized by a refusal to trust and obey God, is what the Bible refers to as *sin*.

Even though our sin has blinded us to what creation makes evident about Him—“his eternal power and divine nature” (Rom. 1:20)—God nonetheless has revealed himself further through other means: angels, miracles, divine manifestations, the words of His prophets, and, most conspicuously, by His written Word, the Bible. We often refer to these special acts and effects as “special revelation”—revelation given to particular people at particular times.

The Inspired Word of God

Unlike any other book, the Bible comprises texts from many different human authors spread over centuries and across numerous cultural contexts. Yet the writers who penned those texts were moved by the Holy Spirit so that in these works they spoke God’s words and not merely their own (2 Peter 1:19–21). Thus, each biblical text has two authors: God (the divine author) and the one God used to pen His words (the human author). The Bible’s source, then, is simultaneously human and divine.

So the words the human author (e.g., Moses or Matthew or Jonah or John) wrote down are the very words of God himself. In describing the Bible as “inspired,” Christians make this point: We do not mean only—or even primarily—that the authors God chose were mentally inspired. We mean that Scripture’s *very words* are God’s words. And, in maintaining “verbal plenary inspiration,” we affirm that *each and every word* of the Bible is inspired. A succinct basis for this doctrine is found in Paul’s declaration to his understudy Timothy: “All Scripture is breathed out by God” (2 Tim. 3:16).

This means that whatever the Bible affirms, God affirms. God cannot speak falsely; the Bible cannot speak falsely. This teaching, called the “inerrancy” of Scripture, has been the overwhelming view of the Christian church throughout its history and today finds its clearest articulation in the orthodox, protestant, evangelical tradition.

Faith-Full Theological Thinking

In “The Sussex Vampire,” Sherlock Holmes receives a plea for counsel from Bob Ferguson, an Englishman whose Peruvian wife has become dangerously ill after being discovered in the bizarre, apparently murderous act of sucking blood from their infant son’s throat. “What can I do?” Ferguson asks. “How am I to go to the police with such a story?” As seems reasonable, he fears for her sanity. “Is it madness, Mr. Holmes? Is it something in the blood?”

The detective immediately takes command. “I can assure you,” he says, “that I am very far from being at my wits’ end, and that I am confident we shall find some solution.”⁴

True to his word, Holmes arrives at Ferguson’s home, interviews the principals, and resolves the matter in a single evening. He determines that Mrs. Ferguson was in fact saving, not killing, her son. The culprit turns out to be another member of the household, a deranged older son jealous of the infant; he’d injected poison into the baby’s neck. Mrs. Ferguson, upon discovering the stricken child, was sucking poison from the wound when her husband found her. Shock from his reaction, together with the effects of ingesting some of the poison, incapacitated her.

The truth about the “vampire” was not what it had initially seemed; Mr. Ferguson learned that his wife had been doing the opposite of what he’d thought. Likewise, in charting a course for understanding theology, we’ll turn out to be doing exactly the opposite of what one might expect us to do.

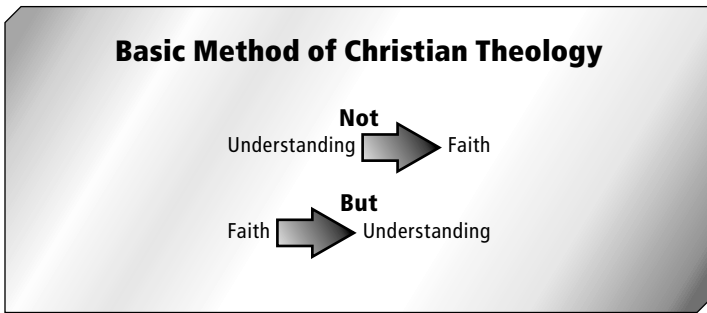
Our culture, obsessed with the scientific method, would have us believe that reason must precede faith. Not so fast. As Hebrews 11:3 says, “By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God.” Don’t miss this: *We don’t reason our way into belief; rather, by faith, we understand.* It’s by faith that we’re able to perceive the truth and attain accurate understanding.

Inerrancy Inferred From Inspiration

1. God speaks truthfully. (Num. 23:19; Ps. 31:5; Isa. 65:16; Titus 1:2; Heb. 6:18)
2. Therefore, God’s words are true. (Ps. 119:160; John 17:17)
3. God spoke His words through Scripture. (Acts 1:16; Rom. 1:2)
4. Scripture is the written Word of God. (John 10:35; 2 Peter 1:19 [cf. Rom. 16:26])
5. Therefore, Scripture is true.

In the eleventh century, Anselm of Canterbury classically articulated the theologian's task:

Lord, I acknowledge and I thank thee that thou hast created me in this thine image, in order that I may be mindful of thee, may conceive of thee, and love thee; but that image has been so consumed and wasted away by vices, and obscured by the smoke of wrong-doing, that it cannot achieve that for which it was made, except thou renew it, and create it anew. I do not endeavor, O Lord, to penetrate thy sublimity, for in no wise do I compare my understanding with that; but I long to understand in some degree thy truth, which my heart believes and loves. *For I do not seek to understand that I may believe, but I believe in order to understand.* For this also I believe—that unless I believed, I should not understand (italics added).⁵



Not the method some expect. To some it even seems counterintuitive. We might think theologians would employ the best of human reason—through philosophy, science, history, experience—to capture the truth about God in order to then believe it with a strong confidence in the outcome of that reasoned pursuit. However, what God has made known about himself, His creation, and His plan of redemption—that is, God's revelation—becomes clear only in a context of belief. *Faith comes before understanding.* Yes, in the context of faith and with a commitment to faith, we draw on reason as a means to *better* understand revelation, but the engine that drives the train is faith, which ultimately is fueled by God himself (Rom. 10:17; Eph. 2:8).

If this point still seems obscure, don't despair. It'll become clearer as we proceed—exploring Christian theology not by means of reason

seeking faith but by faith seeking understanding. And unlike Mr. Ferguson, whose wife's right actions looked so wrong, we won't need to consult a master detective to make sense of the task. We'll let Scripture solve this dilemma for us.

Trust in the LORD with all your heart,
and do not lean on your own understanding.
In all your ways acknowledge him,
and he will make straight your paths.

(Proverbs 3:5–6)