

## Outline of Doctrine of Knowledge of God

Intro: Sensible to discuss knowledge of God before objects of knowledge but not absolute requirement – can know things without understanding exactly why or how or method etc.

Hence can do ethics without understanding exactly what ethics is (but it helps to know, although be aware of limitations of this)

### ***I. The Objects of Knowledge***

God is supreme object (which God?) but can't know him in a vacuum.

#### **1. God, the covenant Lord**

Who is God? Lord. What does Lord mean?

##### **A. The Biblical Concept of Lordship**

###### **(1) Lordship and covenant**

Divine Lordship = covenant headship; lord-master relationship

###### **(2) Transcendence and immanence**

Implied by covenant; trans = cov headship; imm = cov involvement

###### **(3) Control, Authority, Presence**

Trans / head => control = sovereignty; authority = right to rule  
Imm => presence with his people

##### **B. Lordship and Knowledge**

Character of God affects how we know him.

###### **(1) Knowability and Incomprehensibility**

###### **a. Everyone knows God**

Because God is God, he is knowable and known to all; his nature as a transcendent and immanent God is to be knowable (one without the other would be unknowable)

Non-Christians appeal to limitations in human knowledge as excuse. But “If God is who the Scriptures say he is, there are no barriers to knowing him.”

###### **b. Limitations on our knowledge of God**

We don't know him like God does (incomprehensibility). Sin leads us to distort, misuse, flee from the truth. We are weak and immature and make mistakes. We are limited not infinite beings.

Frame presents discontinuities and continuities between God's knowledge and ours.

###### **(2) Knowing as a covenant relationship**

“Servant-knowledge”: about God as Lord, and subject to God as Lord.

**a. A Knowledge About God as Lord**

Knowledge that his Lordship involves control, authority and presence.

**b. A Knowledge Subject to God as Lord**

The process of knowledge is subject to God's control. God reveals what we know. Knowledge of God produces obedience; obedience to God leads to knowledge; obedience is knowledge and knowledge is obedience; thus obedience is the criterion of knowledge; therefore knowledge must be sought in an obedient way.

The truth of Scripture is the most certain knowledge that we have. It is criterion for all other knowledge. It is basic presupposition. Servant-knowledge means first asking what our Lord thinks about something before asking anything. Hence go to Bible first.

Knowledge exposed to God's presence. Know facts, skills, people. We know about God, we know how to obey God, and we know God (personally).

Excursus: Wisdom focuses on the 'how to' element of knowledge

**C. The Unbeliever's Knowledge**

The unbeliever both knows and does not know God.

Refutation of a number of possibilities.

Unbelievers know certain propositions about God but they lack the obedience and friendship with God required for full biblical knowledge. Their knowledge is more than propositional, for they know God as enemy.

Both rationalism and irrationalism are self-destructive; they don't work (p. 60-61). Christian apologist's role is to destroy them and replace them with the truth.

[cf. 'The alternatives are bankrupt']

**2. God and the World**

**A. The Covenant Law**

Knowing God's authority = knowing his rule.

Possible to classify epistemology as branch of ethics; ethics is concerned with applying God's rule to all of life; epistemology is concerned with applying God's rule to human thought. Thinking is a type of doing. Epistemology analyses the norms for belief; there are things we ought to believe; ways we ought to think; justifications we ought to accept; ethical "oughts".

**B. The World, Our Situation**

Knowing God's control = knowing his works in our world; creation, providence, redemption.

We can't know God without knowing the world, because he reveals himself in the world, whether in creation or Scripture or prophets or events or through eyes or ears (and nowhere else).

To know God obediently means knowing the world in which he wants us to obey him. Also, cannot know the world without knowing God.

**C. Ourselves**

Calvin said he was not sure whether knowledge of God or knowledge of self came first. Cannot know ourselves unless understand that we are in God's image. Cannot know God unless understand that we are his servants. No "purely objective" knowledge of God.

#### D. Relationships between Objects of Knowledge

##### (1) The Law and the World

###### a. The Law is necessary to understand the world

All knowledge subject to law, hence knowledge of world subject to law.

###### b. The World is necessary to understand the Law

The law was designed to be used in the world. Meaning of law includes its application to the world.

###### c. The non-Christian loses the facts and the law

because he has to deify either facts or law as ultimate standard or criteria. This doesn't work.

##### (2) The World and the Self

###### a. Self-Knowledge and Knowledge of the World are Correlative

We are part of the world.

###### b. Facts and their Interpretations are Inseparable

Fact = something in the world seen from God's point of view; interpretation = our understanding of it.

No such thing as fact somehow isolated from interpretation.

##### (3) The Law and the Self

The Law tells us of ourselves, and a study of ourselves reveals applications of the law.

#### E. Perspectives

Perspectives correspond to three questions asked in ethical situations: what is the situation? what are we doing about it? what does Scripture say?

Non-Christian ethics absolutises one of these perspectives at expense of the others (because it doesn't admit that God is creator of the world and Lord of the covenant with mankind); Christian ethics cannot do this.

### 3. God and our Studies

#### A. Theology

Theology: "the application of God's word by persons to all areas of life."

Different accounts of the concept of theology:

##### (1) Schleiermacher

Human feelings replaced Scripture as final authority for theology. Subjectivist.

##### (2) Hodge

Theology like science, formulating laws concerning the facts of Scripture.

No: the Bible is not facts, but interpretation; it is language. Too intellectualist. As if we have to reorder Scripture properly.

Objectivist.

**(3) A “Covenantal” Definition**

As above. Aim is to remedy defects in ourselves, not in Scripture (formally – Hodge, or materially – Schleiermacher)

No distinction between meaning and application. E.g. disagreements on “application” of 8<sup>th</sup> commandment are really disagreements on its meaning.

This distinction between application and meaning seems to have its roots in “objectivism” which likes the idea of a “pure” unapplied “meaning” as basis for application; but only basis for application is Scripture itself, not some man-made interpretation.

**B. Philosophy and Science**

**a. Philosophy**

Christian philosophy is done under the authority of Scripture; applying Scripture to philosophical questions. Philosophy may not rule over Scripture and Theology.

**b. Science**

Presuppose the truths of Scripture. Scientists who develop theories on the presupposition of autonomy ought to be called to account.

**C. Apologetics**

The application of Scripture to unbelief. Not a neutral basis for theology. “Neutral” reasoning is forbidden to us. “Reasoning, even with unbelievers, must be obedient and godly, as foolish as this may seem to the unbelieving mind.”

Theology provides presuppositions for apologetics.

**Appendix A. Perspectivalism**

Frame has argued that knowledge of God, world and self are interdependent and ultimately identical. Same knowledge, viewed from three different perspectives. But this will sound strange to some Reformed ears, who are used to giving a privileged status to God’s law. Yes, Scripture is supreme. But we come to know Scripture through knowing ourselves and the world. Then Scripture must correct our understandings of ourselves and the world. Hermeneutical circle.

**Appendix B. Encyclopedia**

Dutch thinkers like Kuyper and Dooyeweerd think that supreme problem of philosophy is categorising sciences properly in their relationships to one another, expecting only one proper way of doing so. Frame argues that there are many ways to cut the cake. Key thing is that Scripture is supreme over all.

**Appendix C. Meaning**

The “meaning of meaning”. Charles W. Morris, *Foundations of the Theory of Signs*.

**(1) Syntactic**

Meaning can mean ‘synonymous’, so can determine meaning just by ‘what you could put in the sentence instead’ but ultimately not that useful.

(2) **Semantic**

Meaning is object to which word refers. But this is too simplistic; words don't work like that.

(3) **Pragmatic**

a. **Behavioural**

All about situation and response for an expression; cf. stimulus/response. But doesn't correlate with meaning very well.

b. **Mental Image**

But presence of absence of mental image is independent of meaning.

c. **The Speaker's Intention**

Speakers don't always mean what they think they mean...

d. **The Understanding of the Original Audience**

Not very reliable guide to meaning

e. **Verification**

Only a guide for expressions which claim to state facts – can then go off and test them to get an idea of meaning. Can't verify religious statements.

f. **Use**

What job does this piece of language perform? That is its meaning (Wittgenstein). Prescriptive – how people *ought* to use it (Witt and Ryle). But need to know where to ground its use. Thus the meaning of an expression is its God-ordained use.

Thus asking for meaning of an expression is asking for help “using” the expression (meaning = application). Objective basis for application is text itself, not some other external meaning. Otherwise basis for application found in some external person's interpretation.

## Appendix D. Fact and Interpretation

When he talks about fact, he means “statements of fact”, and he means that all statements of facts are interpretations of fact. He doesn't mean that interpretations are the same as the events themselves.

## II. The Justification of Knowledge

How may a claim to knowledge be justified? What right have we to believe what we do?

### 4. The Problem of Justification

#### A. Does Knowledge Need Justification?

Knowledge of God = covenantal friendship. Includes “intellectual” knowledge about God. This is “justified true belief”. Can have true belief which is unjustified, e.g. astrologer who correctly predicts election result. Knowledge needs to be justified, but problem is that you can't always articulate justification for knowledge. Okay to “have a reason” for belief without being

able to “give a reason”. Epistemology not necessary for everyone’s walk with God. And absurd if it starts telling me I can’t really be sure if there is a tree outside the window. Can’t govern all my beliefs about everything. Instead needs to respect what I believe and build on it. Use: that we might become as conscious as possible of the reasons for believing what we believe.

## **B. Perspectives on Justification**

The three perspectives, normative, existential and situational are not parts of knowledge but describe the whole of knowledge in a certain way. Three perspectives on justification: normative - beliefs must conform with God’s laws of thought; situational - beliefs must conform with evidence from world; existential - beliefs must serve subject’s needs as needs defined by Scripture.

## **C. Ethics and Knowledge**

Epistemology a subdivision of ethics. Ethics concerned with the justification of all behaviour. Ethical thought must account for all three perspectives. In epistemology there is thus a moral pressure to believe justified beliefs. Two kinds of knowledge claims: those which assume godly ethical standards and those which do not.

## **D. Traditional Epistemologies**

Three tendencies, which interestingly reflect Frame’s three perspectives. Not surprising: any epistemology must justify subject (subjectivism), object (empiricism) and criterion (rationalism). Without God, end up having to deify one of these three perspectives at expense of others. Only cohere with God.

### **(1) Rationalism**

Main concern is certainty. Suspicious of sense experience. Want criteria. Plato’s forms – criteria for objects of our knowledge. They are *a priori*, presupposed in our analysis of experience. Proceed by deductive logic to find truths which are also certain.

Problems:

#### **a. Innate knowledge**

Sense experience plays a role in our coming to know laws of God in creation.

#### **b. Sensation**

Sense experience and rational criteria are equally fallible.

#### **c. Formalism**

If there is some kind of logic or innate criteria hard-wired into us, it doesn’t really help, because statements of logic can only be used to deduce more statements of logic etc.; stuff inside our heads can only tell us about stuff inside our heads. No better than subjectivism or empiricism.

#### **d. A Christian analysis**

Non-Christian rationalism seeks certainty outside God’s word; in seeking to provide certainty it must restrict scope to abstract truths which tell us nothing about the real world. Thus it becomes irrationalism.

#### **e. A Second Christian analysis**

Van Til: human thought seeks to relate unity to plurality in the world by abstracting from particulars to universals (e.g. welsch corgi, dog, living thing, being, thing...). But the more universal you get, the less you can make specific claims about the world. Thus get emptiness, scepticism and ignorance.

**f. The Paradox of Analysis**

If trying to gain knowledge of kangaroos, can say kangaroo = mammal, kangaroo = marsupial mammal, kangaroo = marsupial mammal found in Australia; but if demand absolute identity in equation, can only say kangaroo = kangaroo, no useful info. When we seek Godlike exhaustive infallible knowledge we are like to achieve only total ignorance. Rationalism begets irrationalism.

**(2) Empiricism**

The scientific method. Problems:

**a. Verification**

If you demand that you only accept things you can demonstrably verify, then you go wrong when you accept propositions about ancient history, nuclear particles, heaven and hell, etc. In these things we accept things on trust. Verification is sensible desire, but ridiculous to make it general requirement for knowledge.

**b. Verifiability**

If not verification, then perhaps verifiability should be ultimate criterion, i.e. someone, if not me, needs to be able to verify it for it to be knowledge. But problem is that often in order to prove verifiability you have to prove truth. And some propositions are verifiable without being true.

**c. Deception**

Our senses deceive us; hard to check out the facts.

**d. The Scientific Method**

Scientists generally don't observe directly but use instruments which are themselves theory-dependent. Science involves not just making observations but analysing and evaluating data. Science goes beyond reporting observations; it makes generalisations to the universe. Our sense experience is influenced by previous sense experience (and lots of other things). Data which contradicts theory is generally ignored or seen as problem to be explained by theory, rather than flat contradiction, until evidence becomes overwhelming.

**e. Empiricism too limited**

Consistent empiricism cannot make general claims, e.g.  $F=MA$  or "all men are mortal". Can't establish propositions of logic and maths on empirical basis. Empiricism cannot make any claims about the future, because nobody has sense-experienced the future. Empiricism cannot justify any statement about ethical values. Statements about the way things are do not imply any "ought". But epistemology is a subdivision of ethics, and knowledge is ethical, but empiricism cannot claim to be ethical, so empiricism cannot claim to justify knowledge.

**f. Knowledge of God**

Empiricists rule out knowledge of God because we cannot subject him to sense-experience. But Christians therefore rule out empiricism as general theory of knowledge.

**g. Facts**

Can we really know the world outside us empirically? No. Or, as some empiricists admit, can we only know our sense-experience? In that case, empiricism collapses into subjectivism.

**h. A Christian Analysis**

Actually, at most all that empiricism can do is tell us how things are, and (if we allow the unempirically derived laws of logic) we can deduce other things about how things are. So it doesn't really tell us anything useful. Hence rationalism becomes irrationalism: a bold plan for autonomously building the edifice of knowledge ends up in total knowledge.

**(3) Subjectivism**

Much to commend it. Proofs of propositions are "person-variable". Knowledge-claims are psychological states, and each of us evaluates those claims by a wide range of highly personal, individual criteria. Hence no knowledge of objective truth, only knowledge of my own experience that is based on my own internal criteria.

Problems:

**a. Inter-Subjective Truth**

Can't assert or argue subjectivism consistently; "everything is relative" is a non-relative statement etc. Irrationalism has reduced to rationalism.

**b. Consistency**

Subjectivist cannot live consistently with himself as only criterion of truth.

**c. Facts and criteria**

The subjectivist still has to deal with experience of the world and experience of rule (e.g. Bible). Can argue that its only his experience of it, but still has to deal with it. So has to be a subjectivist-rationalist or a subjectivist-empiricist or a subjectivist-Christian. So not really a distinct position.

**d. A Christian Analysis**

Subjectivist seeks to become own lord. But even within himself the true God reveals himself. Can't avoid his laws and his facts.

**(4) Combinations**

Plato and Kant. Adding zero to zero still makes zero.

## 5. Perspectives on Justification

### A. Normative Justification

Rationalism, empiricism and subjectivism each display a certain knowledge of the truth (though incomplete).

Christian epistemology will recognise need for criteria or standards, objectively publicly knowable facts and need for beliefs to meet own internal criteria. But Christian will recognise the lordship of God in the field of knowledge. He coordinates law, object and subject, and none conflicts with the others.

How does God's revelation in Scripture, his divine law, provide justification for knowledge of him?

#### (1) God's epistemological authority

God's lordship is comprehensive. He must prevail in any dispute about his truth or justice. He rejects the wisdom of the world and calls his people to a special wisdom that is sharply at odds with the world's values.

#### (2) Presuppositions

A presupposition is a "belief over which no other takes precedence" or "a basic commitment of the heart". It does not mean that it is chosen arbitrarily or without rational basis. The Christian presupposition is based on God's revelation. Every human being has a basic presupposition. The unbeliever's is complicated and contradictory (we saw that the unbeliever does know God; he presupposes both God's reality and his unreality); but the unbeliever's basic presupposition is unbelief.

#### (3) The oddness of religious language

Religious language seems to be different from normal language. Uttered with more certainty; not open to scientific tests; defining mark of community; strongly emotional.

Religious language expresses and applies presuppositional commitments.

#### (4) All knowing is theologizing

Scripture justifies all human knowledge. How? (a) Explicitly – e.g. belief that John 3:16 is true; (b) by deduction – e.g. doctrine of the Trinity; (c) by application – "don't cheat on your income tax", requiring knowledge of both 8<sup>th</sup> commandment and income tax, but still part of 8<sup>th</sup> commandment's meaning; (d) by coherence - "Sacramento is the capital of California" – justified because not vetoed by Scripture, unlike "man has evolved"; but "Escondido is the capital of California" is also not vetoed, yet false, hence coherence is necessary but not sufficient condition, although actually Scripture commands us to use all diligence to discover the truth and live by it, hence true beliefs about the capital of California are an application of Scripture. Thus Scripture is foundational for all belief, although not in the sense of providing a list of propositions from which all other propositions may be deduced.

#### (5) Scripture justifies itself

How can we justify our belief in Scripture itself if Scripture is ultimate justification for all human knowledge? By Scripture! There is nothing more reliable. Does this mean we should not use extrabiblical evidence to argue for biblical authority? No, but use of such evidence is subject to a biblical epistemology. Even in use of evidence, then, Scripture is justifying itself.

#### (6) Circularity

Circular arguments are usually considered fallacious. Problem?

**a. No alternative to circularity**

All systems are ultimately circular.

**b. Circularity restricted**

Circularity is only justified in an argument for the ultimate criterion of a system, not at every point. “Paul wrote 2 Tim because Paul wrote 2 Tim” is an unjustified circular argument, because broader and higher principles are available to establish its truth.

**c. Narrow and broad circles**

Distinguish narrow and broad circles. Narrow: “Scripture is the Word of God because it is the Word of God” or “Scripture is the Word of God because it says it is”. Broaden it by bringing more Biblical data into the argument, e.g. God says he wants to rule his people by his word, 2 Tim 3:16 and 2 Peter 1:21 identify the OT with that, Jesus appointed apostles to write authoritative words; then even broader, “Scripture is the Word of God because archaeology, history and philosophy verify its teachings.” Still circular because archaeology, history and philosophy rightly done presuppose the Christian world-view.

**d. Circularity and Persuasion**

How can a circular argument persuade? By displaying more vividly the meaning of the conclusion. By setting forth the conclusion with reasons why it should be accepted. Even the unbeliever, at some level, will recognise the truth of the conclusion (Romans 1). The unbeliever is made to think God’s way, and here God’s way is circularity.

**e. Competing Circularities**

Muslim claims Koran is true because it says it is; Christian claims same of Bible. How decide which is right? Only the Christian system will ultimately be coherent, and a circular argument demonstrates that coherence. The Muslim or non-Christian system will be inconsistent at some level, relying on Christian concepts at crucial points. A Muslim is made in image of God and will see the cogency of the Christian circle and implausibility of his own, at some level.

How do you argue with a paranoid person who thinks everyone is out to kill him? He will reinterpret everything as evidence for that. Faced with two circularities – his and yours. You don’t try and create middle “neutral” ground; instead you proclaim the truth, trusting that at some level the paranoid will realise that deep down he knows the truth of what you are saying.

**(7) Coherence**

Philosophers’ coherence theory of truth: that a system is true if it is internally consistent with itself. Yes God’s truth is coherent, but sometimes hard to identify – “apparent” contradictions in Scripture. This means can’t present God’s truth as axiomatic system with everything deducible. But Christian system is still more coherent and intelligible than anything else. Theological coherence must itself be defined by Scripture.

**(8) Certainty**

Not true that we therefore cannot be certain about anything. On the contrary, our presuppositions are the greatest certainties. And since all knowledge is in a sense derived from our presuppositions (4), all knowledge is certain. Don’t always feel certain, for following reasons:

**a. Sin**

We are not pure in our allegiance to the Lord, and our presupposition that his Word is true is always competing with the opposite, that it is false. Hence don't always feel certain about things.

**b. Ignorance**

Some Christians are not conscious of the implications of their faith. Honestly hold to Jesus as Lord as basic presupposition, but haven't worked it through to the point where they realise that certainty about knowledge is justified and they have no right to doubt.

**c. Limited knowledge**

Don't know the Bible well enough to know how to apply it to everything. Also there are some things we just don't know.

Role for probability? When we don't have certainty because of any of these factors, what we have is probability. Even unfallen Adam couldn't have known author of Hebrews, or the future. E.g. foolish to live in terror that an earthquake is about to destroy your house.

**(9) Hierarchies of Norms**

**a. Nature and Scripture**

In some ways everything is normative, since God has revealed himself not only in Scripture but in creation. But not all revelation is on equal footing. Salvation found only in the gospel, not in natural revelation. Since it is written to correct us in our error, it must govern how we interpret other sources of revelation.

**b. Priority Structures within Scripture**

Within Scripture, some norms take precedence over others in particular situations.

**c. Priorities in our use of Scripture**

Cannot keep all of God's commandments simultaneously. God's positive commandments are to the church as a whole, not to individuals. Individuals work out their calling based on their gifts.

**B. Situational Justification**

Knowledge is justified not only by its adherence to God's laws of thought but also by its accord with the facts.

**(1) Facts and Norms**

All facts are norms and all norms are facts. No uninterpreted facts. Ought and is. Scripture will tell us how to make use of natural revelation.

**(2) Correspondence**

Ideas correspond with reality. Revelation breaks through into our internal thoughts, but gives us access to what is really out there.

**(3) Evidence as Justification for Faith**

We can gain knowledge of God through evidence of nature and history. Evidential arguments for existence of God obligate consent. But philosophers say that empirical arguments can never justify more than probable confidence in its conclusion. Same for Christian evidential argument? No:

**a. Selected Facts**

Every single piece of natural revelation points to God; far more than any other empirical argument can claim.

**b. Probability and Theism**

Concept of probability points to Theistic world; no concept in world of chance.

**c. Evidence and the Holy Spirit**

Holy Spirit is working through presentation of evidence to convict of truth and sin.

**d. Evidence and Presuppositions**

Their conscience is on our side.

**(4) Evidence and the Word**

**a. God's Word accompanies his Works**

Event + Explanation; examples

**b. God's Works Presuppose a Scriptural Context of Interpretation**

E.g. resurrection does not happen in a vacuum but in context of what OT promises about it.

**c. God's Works display the meaning of his Word**

The resurrection makes the Christian hope real. The cross shows what Is 53 and Ps 22 mean.

**d. God's Works prove the truth of his Word**

Scripture and history correspond. Circular argument, but not without its use.

**(5) Evidence and faith**

An argument cannot produce faith, but it warrants and justifies it. Evidence must be considered with a believing presupposition.

**C. Existential Justification**

No knowledge without a knower.

**(1) Knowledge and Life: Pragmatic Truth**

Knowledge is an ethically responsible orientation of the person to his experience. Existential question is "can I live with this belief?". The truth is what works. Only Christianity works.

**(2) Persuasion and Proof**

Proof needs to be suited to the needs of the hearer; haven't proved anything until you have persuaded the other person.

**(3) "Cognitive rest" – A Godly sense of satisfaction**

You know when you've found the truth because it works and feels right.

**(4) Knowledge, regeneration and sanctification**

True to say that Christian life is founded on doctrine, but also true the other way round. Won't be able to discern the truth if not living obediently.

**(5) "Seeing as" – existential and normative perspectives**

Spirit reveals the Word to us. He helps us to use and apply the Word. We might be seeking to explain away sin in our lives in some way, and the Spirit helps us to see sin for what it is.

**(6) A corporate existentialist perspective**

Corporate knowledge (of the church) affects individual knowledge.

**(7) Autonomy again?**

No: the Spirit will lead God's covenant person to the truth of his Word.

**D. Which perspective is ultimate?**

The three are equal. Scripture is not the same as the normative perspective; the normative perspective is Scripture applied to me in my situation. The situational is my situation viewed in the light of my interpretation of Scripture. The existential is me in my situation under Scripture.

**E. Justification in apologetics**

Surely we can't expect the unbeliever to accept this justification of knowledge. But what alternative is there?

### ***III. The Methods of Knowledge***

How do we obtain knowledge? Specific focus here on theology and apologetics, but these provide model for all disciplines.

#### **6. The Normative Perspective – The Use of Scripture**

Issues of hermeneutics for which JF is not qualified; nevertheless some issues have important bearings on our theological use of Scripture.

**A. Anti-Abstractionism**

Common concern is reading portions of Scripture in context. But there are many contexts. One is doctrinal context. Virtually every type of modern theology declares itself as anti-abstractionist – theology must be done in context. It is ultimately ambiguous. JF avoids using such language. (Long and complicated section!)

**B. Perspectivalism**

Arguments about logical priority in theology might be better served by thinking perspectivally, such that no perspective is logically prior to the others. E.g. central message of Scripture is defined by detailed particular messages and vice versa. One perspective on Scripture can't

exclude another, e.g. salvation or hope or liberation as key to understanding Scripture. Theology is relative to the absolute of Scripture.

### C. Contextual Exegesis

#### (1) Sentence-Level Exegesis

Better than abstract word studies.

#### (2) Multiple Contexts

#### (3) Proof Texts

Obviously can be abused, but basically a useful form of theological shorthand. Scripture can speak without the help of the exegete.

#### (4) Exemplarism

Be wary of using examples from Scripture to justify theology, but don't shy away from it.

#### (5) The richness of Scripture's meaning

The meaning of any text is the set of uses to which it is suited; not all may have been in the original writer's mind.

#### (6) Text and *telos*

Purpose corresponds with meaning; emphasis on what text was intended to achieve in hearers. Not immediately achievable exegetically.

### D. Uses of Scripture

#### (1) Varieties of Biblical Language

What *in* Scripture is authoritative? Words, concepts, images, propositions?

Traditionally we say Scripture is authoritative in its propositional revelation. Corresponds with inerrancy. But lots of other types of revelation in Scripture e.g. command, promise, vow, threat, curse, question. All these have authority over us: questions must be answered, promises believed, threats heeded. So authority bigger than inerrancy. Propositional revelation is one perspective on whole of Scripture. Whole of Scripture is also command, question etc. Theology should thus not only seek to reflect propositional nature of Scripture but much more.

#### (2) Literary Forms

Does one genre take precedence over another? No each genre is a characteristic of parts of Scripture but also a perspective on the whole of Scripture; it's all narrative, law, poetry. So theology could take the form of poetry.

#### (3) Speech acts

Bible as speech act: achieving something in the hearer.

#### (4) Pictures, windows, and mirrors

Pratt: Scripture = picture = object of analysis as God's revelation; = window as way for us to see divine activity in history; = mirror as way of meeting our needs. Correspond to perspectives.

**(5) Areas of Application**

Applies to everything.

**E. Traditional Theological Programs**

These are not separate but related perspectively to one another.

**(1) Exegetical Theology**

Focus on Scripture as picture. Application of verses, passages, books. Yet all exegesis is theology and all theology is exegesis in this sense.

**(2) Biblical Theology**

Scripture as window. How God's plan worked out in history. Yet not to be thought of as exclusively giving us a window on history. Perspectives. Not true that Biblical theology is more biblical than systematic theology. Only the Bible itself is truly Biblical. Contains more than history.

**(3) Systematic Theology**

Mirror. Existential. Applying the whole Bible to people. I choose the topics. Relies on exegetical and biblical theology. Yet the other two rely on systematics too.

**(4) Practical Theology**

Concerned with communicating the word of God. What does the whole Bible say about that? But only a perspective.

**7. The Situational Perspective – Language as a Tool of Theology**

Bible translation is theology. Both concerned with applying Bible to people.

**A. Vagueness in Language**

Human language not precise.

**(1) Cutting the pie in different ways**

Different languages cut up the pie of reality in different ways.

**(2) Natural kinds**

Even in describing the natural world there is an arbitrariness in the way we decide whether two things are the same or different.

**(3) Family resemblance**

“Game” seems to describe a wide variety of things which share certain properties, but no “game” has all the properties at once. Cf. family resemblances. No member of the Blodgett family has all the Blodgett features at once. Therefore hard to say what “game” really is and when something becomes or ceases to be a game.

**(4) Meaning and use**

We all know what time is until someone asks us. Whilst precision is important in theology, it is wrong to demand a definition in order to be able to use a term.

**(5) Language changes**

Hard to be precise because language changes.

**(6) Abstraction**

Hard to be precise with abstract concretes.

**(7) Intentional vagueness**

“Stand roughly over there”; “I am seven years old”.

**B. Vagueness in Scripture**

Scripture contains vagueness, but this is not the same as error. God communicates in Scripture.

**C. Technical Terms**

Theologians use technical terms to minimise vagueness. Some terms have extrabiblical origin – not problematic. But still just application of Scripture. Seek to reflect the precision or vagueness of Scripture: no more or less.

**D. Metaphors, analogies, models**

You can compare anything with anything. But key is what you do with the comparison.

**E. Negation in Theology**

Useful tool. Doctrine of creation ex nihilo is refutation of pantheism and Platonic pre-existing substance. Sometimes “not” is better “not merely”.

**F. Contrast, variation, distribution**

More perspectives

**G. Systematic Ambiguity in Non-Orthodox Positions**

**H. Labels**

Important theological shorthand, but not always helpful.

**I. Morals on Vagueness**

Important to analyse possible ambiguity in theological language before passing judgment on someone else’s theological formulation.

**J. Language and Reality**

Philosophers are getting interested in language again because they’re wondering if the failure of the philosophical endeavour to find the meaning of life is due to a problem with language.

**K. Language and humanity**

Language is central to what it means to be human. Speaking truthfully is part of our responsibility before God.

**8. The Situational Perspective – Logic as a Tool of Theology**

Logic maligned in contemporary theology. Warnings not to use it to draw deductive inferences from Scripture. Calvin criticises not logic but intellectualism. Logic is a law of thought but subordinate to Scripture as the ultimate law of thought. Scripture warrants use of logic.

## A. What is logic?

### (1) The science of argument

Logic tells us whether or not an argument is valid. Concerned with validity and consistency (law of non-contradiction).

### (2) A hermeneutical tool

Responsible logic sets forth meaning of Scripture e.g. that embezzlement is wrong from 8<sup>th</sup> commandment.

### (3) A science of commitment

Moral obligation to obey logical conclusion. Logical necessity is a form of ethical necessity, which is ultimately a religious necessity. Logic is therefore a branch of ethics. So logic presupposes Christianity.

## B. The certainty of logic

What makes logic so certain? Possibilities:

### (1) Innate ideas

But what makes innate ideas so certain? Might be false.

### (2) Convention

Logic reflects use of language. "All bachelors are unmarried" is self-evidently true because that's how we've defined bachelors. The predicate is included in the definition of the subject. Some people argue that logic is certain because it doesn't actually tell us anything that isn't included in its own definition. But self-evident definition is being challenged.

### (3) Triperspectivalism

Situational: Logic and mathematics describe very "obvious" truths about the world plus the (often not so obvious) implications of those truths. Normative: the way things happen in the world is evidence of underlying law. Existential: Life doesn't work without accepting logic; accepting logic presupposes the law-fact structure of the universe that was created as such by God.

## C. Biblical warrant for using logic in theology

Scripture contains logic; it requires logic for application; God is logical. Things that "by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture" are Scripture. Logic is a tool of theology alongside language, archaeology and history. It is fallible, but no more than the other tools.

## D. Limitations of Logic

These are limitations we can live with; they do not invalidate all of human thought.

Fallibility: system you build with logic is like any other science; it changes. Incompleteness: can't apply logic to everything. Proofs not enough. Apparent contradictions. Limitations of the principle of noncontradiction: only applies to unchanging things compared in certain respects. Technical terminology changes meanings. Law of excluded middle.

## E. Logical order

Lots of different types of logical order. Arguments about supralapsarianism and infralapsarianism seem to reflect commitments to different types of logical order but Frame

suggests each is a perspective on the truth. Just because we discover a way of formulating truth doesn't mean it itself reflects some underlying reality.

#### **F. Mutual implications among doctrines**

Interdependences.

#### **G. Burden of proof**

Important to establish where burden of proof lies in an argument.

##### **(1) Baptism**

Regarding paedobaptism, both sides agree that there was OT circumcision and that the NT is relatively silent about paedobaptism. Hence burden of proof either on the paedo to show NT evidence that paedobaptism should continue, or on credo to show NT evidence that it should cease. Because of assumed continuity of covenants, seems burden of proof is on credo to show that it does not continue.

##### **(2) Abortion**

Does the burden of proof lie with the pro-life who must prove that an unborn child is a person, or does it lie with the pro-choice who must prove that an unborn child is not a person? Because Scripture hints that unborn child has person characteristics, burden of proof is on pro-choice.

#### **H. Some argument types**

Deduction, induction, reductio ad absurdum, dilemma, a fortiori (from lesser to greater e.g. Rom 5:15), throwaway arguments, others... Examples and means of deciding whether argument is employed properly.

#### **I. Fallacies**

Irrelevant conclusion, threat of force, ad hominem, positive circumstantial ad hominem, negative circumstantial ad hominem, argument from silence or ignorance, appeal to pity, appeal to emotion, appeal to authority (wrong because it doesn't necessitate truth of conclusion), false cause, genetic fallacy, ambiguities of causality, confusions between multiple and single causation, complex question, equivocation, amphiboly, accent, composition, division, denying the antecedent, affirming the consequent.

### **9. The Situational Perspective – History, Science, and Philosophy as Tools of Theology**

#### **A. History**

Stuff happened in history. Three things of importance to Christians: history recorded in Scripture (= Biblical theology, already discussed); history of ancient world in which events of redemption took place, and the history of the church.

##### **(1) Ancient History – Archaeology**

Like language really. Used or abused.

##### **(2) Church History – Historical Theology**

###### **a. Tradition**

Continue the work of others before.

###### **b. Creeds**

Important to distinguish ourselves from others.

**c. Orthodoxy and heresy**

Creeds need to meet heresy.

**d. Progress in theology**

**e. Subscription**

**f. Confession and Theology**

**g. Church history and Historical Theology**

**h. Dogmatics**

**B. Science**

Science is a tool for helping us understand Scripture. Sometimes it will lead us to reconsider the truth of our interpretations of Scripture (not of Scripture itself) e.g. Galileo; discussion of creation in Gen 1,2 is a proper debate to be having. Science helps us apply the bible to situations e.g. medical ethics.

**C. Philosophy**

It can be very useful.

**10. The existential perspective – the qualifications of the theologian**

**A. The personalism of theology**

The theologian shares himself with his readers. Knowledge and obedience are linked closely. Theology must also be addressed to persons.

**B. The heart**

Don't just need situational skills to be a good theologian; need character.

**C. The Theologian's Character – the ethics of theology**

Too often theologians fail to show love, humility and genuine pursuit of truth. E.g. practice of taking an opponent's view in the worst possible sense, not best possible sense; concealing more controversial features of a position to appear orthodox – basically man-pleasing; presenting only the controversial points of an opponent's position; using vague language deliberately; failing to argue properly against another opinion; elevating minor differences to major ones; failing to be self-critical.

**D. The theologian's capacities – the skills of theology**

Which is primary – intellect, will or feeling? All are perspectives...

**(1) Reason**

Human ability or capacity for forming judgments and inferences; also forming *correct* judgments and inferences.

**(2) Perception and experience**

Involved in reasoning.

**(3) Emotion**

Bible has lots to say about emotions without defining emotion specifically. Serpent appealed to Eve's emotions as well as her intellect. Redemption neither increases nor decreases emotions but consecrates it to God as it does the intellect. Greek philosophy

tells us that the problem is that we need to subdue our emotions beneath the intellect. Bible tells us problem is not some part of us; it is us.

Emotions play part in decisions. Sometimes unhelpful to follow feelings, but not always. Emotions and reason need to go together otherwise no “cognitive rest”.

Belief is a kind of feeling about a proposition.

Reason, perceiving and feeling are normative, situational and existential perspectives.

Don't stifle emotions in theology.

(People do theology, not intellects.)

**(4) Imagination**

Imagination is an important tool in setting out hypotheses to be tested by Scripture. Nearly a perspective (except it deals with things which are not).

**(5) Will**

Knowing and doing are one.

**(6) Habits, skills**

Habits are choices that we are accustomed to making. Useful habits are skills. Presuppositions are habits of knowledge. Skills in knowledge are called wisdom in Scripture. Wisdom is “knowing how” not “knowing that”. Wisdom and propositional knowledge are perspectively related.

**(7) Intuition**

All justification of knowledge ends up with “I just know”.

**11. Method in Apologetics**

**A. Defensive Apologetics**

Responding to objections against the faith. Unbeliever needs new circumstances, facts and system. Existential, situational and normative.

**(1) The Normative Perspective**

Need the system of Scripture. Key is to have presuppositions and to obey them; don't have to explicitly acknowledge them (since they will confuse most people) unless challenged. Invite the unbeliever to inhabit the Christian worldview. This is its best argument. Invite unbeliever to try to derive absurdities. If we can't answer a question, we say so, and show that we walk by faith in God's word rather than by autonomous ability to have all the answers.

**(2) The situational perspective**

Reformed presuppositionalists are weak at analysing the evidence. We have seen it is a valid thing to do, but recognise its limits. You can use evidentialist arguments whilst recognising non-neutrality of evidence.

**(3) The existential perspective**

Seek to persuade as well as prove. Apologists will prepare because Christ is their Lord (1 Pet 3:15).

## **B. Offensive Apologetics**

Having asked the unbeliever to inhabit the Christian worldview, the second step in Van Til's apologetic is to suggest that the believer and unbeliever inhabit the unbeliever's worldview together and take it to its conclusions. But how can a believer accept an unbeliever's presuppositions? Can't totally – would involve accepting all their arguments and refutations of the Christian's position. No, the believer accepts certain fundamental premises of the unbeliever's system for the sake of argument. But still thinking as a Christian. So really the believer is telling the unbeliever how their premises look to them as a Christian.

### **(1) Normative Perspective – Scripture versus dialectic**

When attacked for basing worldview on faith, not reason, believer is right to turn it back on unbeliever, who also bases worldview on faith, and for no good reason. Show them that their rationalism is irrationalistic, and their irrationalism is rationalistic, and that both are parasitic on Christianity.

### **(2) Situational perspective – the errors of unbelief**

Point out unclarities, factual errors, logical errors

### **(3) Existential perspective – points of contact**

Not neutral points of contact – there are no such things. But commonness of interest. If an unbeliever believes something which happens to be true, use it.

## **Appendix E. Evaluating Theological Writings**

A list of criteria by which to evaluate theological writings:

1. Scripturality: is it either deduced from or consistent with scripture?
2. Truth: is it true even if not found in Scripture?
3. Cogency: properly argued?
4. Edification
5. Godliness
6. Importance
7. Clarity
8. Profundity: does it deal with real important questions or just superficial ones?
9. Form and style: appropriate?

Following criteria are wrong and not to be employed:

10. Emphasis (6, A). No such thing as a single normative emphasis. Emphasis only wrong if it falls into category 1-9.
11. Comparability: Resemblances to other poorly regarded work is irrelevant.
12. Terminology: can't criticise terminology unless it commits errors in categories 1-9.

## **Appendix F. How to write a Theological Paper**

1. Choose a topic with care.
2. Understand your sources: outline important texts.
3. Go back and write down interesting things.
4. Ask questions about sources.
5. Formulate critical perspective on sources.
6. Organise notes according to topic.
7. What do I want to tell my audience on the basis of my research?
8. Be self-critical.
9. Decide on an audience.
10. Decide on a format and style.
11. Produce it.

Pray throughout.

### **Appendix G. Maxims for theologians and apologists**

62 points of application. Useful summary of implications of book.

### **Appendix H. Review of George Lindbeck's *The Nature of Doctrine***

### **Appendix I. The New Reformed Epistemology**

Comparison of DKG with another book, *Faith and Reason* edited by Plantinga and Wolterstorff.

Main theme is attempt to answer the “evidentialist challenge to religious belief.” Evidentialism rejected as illegitimate. They argue that it is based on a discredited theory called “classical foundationalism” which distinguishes nonbasic and basic beliefs. Religious belief not basic, since not obvious. Must be demonstrated from basic beliefs. But, they argue, foundationalism is false, because impossible to find enough propositions to form the foundation from which all other nonbasic beliefs may be derived. And why should Christian belief be excluded from basic beliefs – as real as sense perception.

Instead, Wolterstorff offers alternative criticism: a person is rationally justified in believing a certain proposition that he does believe unless he has adequate reason to cease from believing. Innocent till proved guilty.

etc.

### **Appendix J. An ontological clarification**

Clarifies that perspectives are distinct yet everything is normative, situational and existential, on different levels.