

Progressive Revelation

Taken from Lesson #142 in the **Basic Exegesis Series** ([HTML](#)) ([PDF](#))

The concept of progressive revelation is, each additional truth builds upon, expands, and better explains that which was already taught. New revelation does not supercede, replace or nullify previous revelation, but it builds upon that which is past.

Because the Bible is written over several thousand years by 40 or so authors, we would expect it to have more of the feel of an anthology. However, the more the Bible is studied and understood, the more it will seem like a seamless novel, throughout which the same themes and characters progress logically and reasonably.

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1. It is important to note that, progressive revelation, properly understood, is, we are given the seeds of a doctrine, and, throughout human history, information is layered upon those seeds—information given to mankind in a variety of ways—until we have a complete set of fully realized doctrines.
2. God reveals Himself to mankind in various ways by various means over a period of about 4000 years (from the creation of Adam to the completion of the canon of Scripture in A.D. 100). **In the past God spoke to our ancestors at many different times and in many different ways through the prophets. In these last days He has spoken to us through His Son. God made His Son responsible for everything** (Heb. 1:1–2 God’s Word™).
3. The concept of progressive revelation is, each additional truth builds upon, expands, and better explains that which was already taught. New revelation does not supercede, replace or nullify previous revelation, but it builds upon that which is past.
4. God did not reveal Himself all at once. He did not sit down with Adam (or Noah or Abram) and say, “Start writing; I am going to tell you everything that you need to know about Me.” A little is revealed here in Genesis, some of which is explained further in the Law, or in the history of Israel, or in the psalms or prophets. Many of these doctrines are explained in their final form by Paul in his epistles. Some of these doctrines are developed after the fact, after the Scripture has been completed, building line upon line, Scripture upon Scripture (Isa. 28:9–10).
 - a. As an aside, we have reason to believe that, Abram (and possibly other Old Testament saints of this era) and before had a more well-defined concept of right and wrong, not all of which was recorded in the book of Genesis. God says, in Gen. 25:6 **“I will bless you because Abraham obeyed Me and completed the duties, commands, laws, and instructions I gave him.”**

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5. A good example of a doctrine that is revealed progressively is the doctrine of the Trinity, which is found throughout the Old and New Testaments, but never fully laid out or explained—not even by Paul. It is reasonable to suppose that we know, even better than Paul and John, about the Angelic Conflict (those of us who have studied this conflict). It is not that God is providing new revelation (He is not—Rev. 22:18–19); but that we are taking the revelation which He has given us and developing a complete theological understanding of our relationship to Him and our place on this earth. This is why theologians, 2000 years after the canon was closed, can develop a Systematic Theology (e.g., Chafer or Hodge) with spiritual information that is organized and categorized, even superior to that known by the saints in the 1st and 2nd centuries. And, even today, after hundreds or even thousands of books on systematic theology have been written, there are still pastors, teachers and theologians who are building upon these theological systems.
 - a. As an example, much of what R. B. Thieme, Jr. taught in the first 10–20 years of his ministry came right out of the pages of L. S. Chafer’s “Systematic Theology;” a theological set which Bob apparently returned to again and again in his teaching. However, Bob built upon this foundation that Chafer laid (which foundation was built upon the Bible), developing an updated theological vocabulary (much of which I and others use) along with some needed updates in theology. Bob did not receive additional revelation from God, which he hurriedly wrote down, but he took what he had learned from Dallas Theological Seminary and built upon that with additional studying of the Bible.
 - b. The foundation of divine knowledge is and always will be the Bible; but as we learn more, this logically leads us to a more complete system of doctrine.
 - c. Just as the final chapters of 2 Samuel lay fallow for 3000 years before they were properly explained, there are still great chunks of the Bible waiting for theologians to sink their teeth into, and to fully explain.
 - d. However, let me clearly state that, even though theology, which is based upon the Bible, can progress, this does not mean that there is any new revelation which occurs after the closing of the canon of Scripture (as per Mormons, Pentecostals, Jehovah Witnesses, etc.); and all that which is discovered and taught theologically is (1) in accordance to orthodox Christianity and (2) based upon the revelation in the Bible.
 - e. In other words, there is no legitimacy in some cult surfacing with new doctrines which contradict the foundation which has been laid by Christian theologians over the past 2000 years. Jesus is and always will be the Messiah of Israel and the Savior of mankind. Our salvation is based upon faith in Him and His substitutionary death on the cross. Spiritually is based upon naming our sins to God; and we advance in the spiritual life through knowledge of God’s Word.
 - f. Sometimes, what happens is, truth is rediscovered based on the Bible,

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which has been there all along. Just as the Old Testament manuscripts were set aside in some generations and rediscovered by later generations (2Kings 22), so it is with the teachings of the faith. What comes to mind is, in my grandparents' generation, there were huge number of people who had a real working knowledge of the Bible. Even reprobates and infidels knew the Bible and they would sometimes base arguments on the Bible. However, in my generation, I have known huge numbers of Christians whose knowledge of the Bible was based upon salvation (which they barely understood) and living a good, clean life. I even know a number of Christians who are liberals, and do not see any sort of contradiction between Christianity and their pagan-based political beliefs.

- i. As an aside, this lack of knowledge of the Word of God has destroyed our society and its thinking.
 - ii. Because our society does not know or understand Scripture, they believe in false teaching, like humanism, socialism, liberation theology and the worship of the earth (ancient Gaia worship which is today has morphed into *environmentalism*).
6. Isaiah gives the principle of progressive revelation in Isa. 28:9–10 **To whom will He teach knowledge, and to whom will He explain the message? Those who are weaned from the milk, those taken from the breast? For it is precept upon precept, precept upon precept, line upon line, line upon line, here a little, there a little.**
 7. Progressive revelation does not mean that, God reveals a truth on Tuesday that truth nullifies everything that He told us on Monday (e.g., what is taught in Islam). All that we learn progressively in the Bible is built upon what has come before, like a brick wall, being built upon successive brick rows. A brick on the 5th row of a brick wall does not negate the bricks below it, but depends upon them for its basis.
 8. The concept of dispensations does not negate or contradict the principles of progressive revelation. All that God promised Abraham and his seed will still be fulfilled. During the Church Age, Abraham's seed are temporarily set aside as a national entity, but there continues to be a reality and meaning connected to the Jewish people. For instance, the United States is blessed because God has promised that He would bless those who bless Israel and curse those who curse Israel (Gen. 12:1–3). Even though we live in the Church Age and the nation Israel is set aside, this does not nullify or set aside God's promises (like Gen. 12:1–3).
 - a. What nation do people of the world want to move to? The United States. This is, in part, because of our relationship to Israel and the Jewish people. Most of the people who move here do not understand or even know Gen. 12:1–3; they simply recognize the great blessings which are inherent in the United States.
 - b. What nations do people have little or no desire to go to? All of those nations who hate Israel (or the United States): Iran, Syria, or Jordan.

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When was the last time a member of your family spoke longingly of traveling to any of those countries? When have friends of yours said, “You know, we’re going to pack everything up and move to Syria to make our fortune”?

- c. People come here to the United States because of the prosperity, but God draws them here so that they may have a better chance to understand Him. There is little or nothing being taught about God in Syrian, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, etc.
 - d. As an aside, this does not mean that the United States always acts sensibly as a nation. Even though our actions and intentions in Iraq and Afghanistan are noble, for the most part, we have deliberately impeded evangelization in those countries (which was not our approach in Japan, South Korea, or the Philippines). As a part of the degenerate path that we are on, we will be encouraging soldiers to express their homosexuality but not their Christianity. And it makes little sense to argue that suppressing the expression of Christianity shows respect for the Muslim nations where we are, at the same time, to argue for the repeal of “Don’t ask, don’t tell.” Those trends simply reveal Satanic thought creeping into our military.
9. Many examples of progressive revelation were given in the previous lesson. We just took a look at the seeds of doctrines found in the first 14 chapters of Genesis, and we saw how these doctrines were built upon their foundation laid in Genesis.
10. There is a sense in which progressive revelation is personal. That is, when you are saved, you understood barely a thimbleful of doctrine. Jesus Christ died for your sins, you believe in Him and you are saved. You heard that, you believed that, but then, since then, you have learned more and more about the Christian faith. For instance, you have learned that in order to grow, this takes the confession of your sins to God—which provides the filling of the Holy Spirit—coupled with the learning of Bible doctrine. No one just automatically grows as a Christian after they are saved.
- a. As an aside, this is an area which perturbs innumerable Christians. They are saved, they go to some legalistic church each Sunday, and they try really hard to be good, so when you tell them that they have not progressed one iota spiritually, this offends them.
 - b. They point to 2Cor. 5:21 and say, “**If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature;**” and then note that they have stopped getting drunk, they have stopped chasing women, and they have settled down to a respectable life with a wife and children. They equate this to spiritual maturity. It is not.
 - c. What has happened is, they went from a point where they ignored or defied the laws of divine establishment (which are for believers and unbelievers) and have begun to learn and follow the laws of divine establishment ([lessons #108–109](#)).
 - d. Every person, believer or not, will have a better life if they follow the laws of divine establishment. For instance, if you are some layabout dope smoker, and you quit dope and start working hard, this is in accordance

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- with the laws of divine establishment. You will have a better life as a result. That is totally unrelated to becoming a believer in Jesus Christ. Furthermore, such a change of behavior is not Christian growth. It is a good thing for you and society, but it is not Christian growth.
- e. So, a better life is not necessarily a result of becoming a Christian; a better life can often result from self-regulated behavior and adherence to the laws of divine establishment.
 - f. This is why Mormons, some of whom are saved and some of whom are not, are very nice people to be around and people that you will often personally like. It is not that they are growing Christians; it is that they adhere to the laws of divine establishment.
11. Back to our topic: implied in progressive revelation is, there is an order in which things happen in human history, and our understanding of theology is built progressively upon that timetable.
- a. This is one of the reasons I have been fascinated about the Old Testament and have chosen to spend most of my time exegeting it.
 - b. Christians have boiled their faith down, in many cases, to a 5 page pamphlet which is mostly a description of moral behavior.
 - c. However, our faith is not based entirely upon the New Testament (I am using *faith* in the sense of our understanding of Christianity). Our faith has an historical basis, and that history ought not be ignored.
12. Progressive revelation is found within the New Testament. The Apostles did not know all there was to know on day one of Pentecost. At that point in time, they taught the gospel, primarily, and how this was based upon what was found in the Old Testament.
13. To sum up, progressive revelation simply means that God reveals Himself, to a limited degree, in the Bible, at a point in time, and later reveals more and more of Himself as time moves forward. Similarly, we learn more and more about our relationship to God, progressively in the Bible and progressively in our lives.

Again, progressive revelation means that, each additional truth builds upon, expands, and better explains that which was already taught. New revelation does not supercede, replace or nullify previous revelation, but builds upon that which is past.

Progressive revelation is integral to God's plan. Otherwise, He would have revealed Himself all at once and, at salvation, we would know all that we need to know.

Other articles on this topic, which appear to be reasonable:

<http://www.eldrbarry.net/clas/gb/b12progres.pdf>

http://www.scionofzion.com/progressive_revelation.htm (They bring in many examples of modern-day cults that believe in continued revelations from God)

http://maranathabiblesociety.org/progressive_revelation

My listing of these sites is not an endorsement of their entirety; only of the information on this particular topic.

Progressive revelation is also personal. The moment you are saved, you do not understand everything that there is to know about Christianity. You learn more and more, beginning with the foundation of faith in Christ, and building upon that. At no time will we learn some maxim of theology which contradicts the basic tenets of the faith (however, you may, from time to time, learn spiritual information which will cause you to set aside some previously held personal beliefs which were incorrect).

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