

Listening Guide

This Listening Guide is designed to help you ask questions and take notes on what you're learning. The process will accomplish two things: first, it will help process the information in the lecture by keeping your mind engaged with the material. Second, it will allow you to collect your notes in one place for a summary of the lesson's content. If you choose to do additional study or want to teach the material to others, you will have a thorough set of notes to guide you.

You may print these Listening Guide pages separately and complete the information as you read, listen to, or watch the lessons. Or as an alternative, you can fill in the fields in this digital version and save to your computer once you are finished.

I. Introduction

[1] *Theology proper*: the study of God himself

II. Revelation & Mysteries

[2] To understand who God is, we need to explore what God has disclosed about himself and what he's hidden.

A. Divine Revelation

1. Basic Concept

[3] *Divine Revelation*: God's self-disclosure, always given in human terms and most fully given in Christ.

- God has always revealed himself in human terms

[4] *Anthropomorphic Revelation*: God has disclosed himself in human form, or in ways that human beings can understand

[5] Types of anthropomorphic revelation in Scripture:

- *Human Characteristics* – Use of human qualities (eyes, ears, emotions, etc.) as metaphorical descriptions of God.
- *Social Structures* – Descriptions of God as the supreme King of creation, in terms similar to descriptions of human emperors.
- *Visible Appearances* – “theophanies,” such as God’s appearing as smoke, fire, or a heavenly cloud of glory (Colossians 1:15; 1 Timothy 1:17).
- *Abstract Qualities* – Descriptions of God using abstractions such as “just,” “holy,” and “powerful.”

[6] God has revealed himself most fully in Christ.

- Jesus is God’s supreme revelation of himself to the human race (Colossians 1:15).

2. Types

[7] Two types of God’s revelation:

General Revelation – God’s self-revelation to human beings through every experience of creation (Psalm 19).

- Jesus often drew theological lessons from general revelation, using nature and human activities to teach about God.
- Paul pointed Gentiles toward what they knew about God through reflection on nature and Greek poetry (Acts 14:17; 17:28).
- Romans 1-2 teaches that we can learn many things about God through our experiences of life in God’s creation: “God’s invisible qualities — his eternal power and divine nature — have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made” (Romans 1:20).

Natural theology: the ongoing attempt to learn about God through general revelation.

[8] Threefold strategy of medieval scholastics for pursuing natural theology:

- “The way of causation” (via causalitatis) – we can learn truths about God by observing the good things that God has created or “caused to be.”
- “The way of negation” (via negationis) – we can infer truths about God by contrasting him with the limitations and imperfections of creation.
- “The way of eminence” (via eminentiae) – we can infer truths about God by noting how God is always greater than his creation.

[9] Christians should be eager to search out everything we can learn about God through general revelation.

[10] Romans 1-2 presents some negative outlooks on general revelation as well.

[11] General revelation reveals “the wrath of God” rather than the way of his mercy and salvation (Romans 1:18; 1:25).

[12] Sinful people lie to themselves and to others about what God has revealed through his creation.

[13] Corrupt human hearts miss the truth about God disclosed in general revelation.

[14] *Special Revelation* – God’s self-disclosure through supernatural means (e.g., dreams, visions, auditions, Christ).

[15] Special revelation guides our attempts to understand general revelation and discloses the way of salvation.

[16] Jesus taught his followers to devote themselves to God's special revelation in Scripture (Mark 12:28-34).

[17] We can rely on Scripture to discern God's disclosures in both general revelation and special revelation throughout history.

B. Divine Mysteries

1. Basic Concept

[18] *Divine mysteries*: Innumerable, undisclosed truths about God that limit our understanding of God: “Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out!” (Romans 11:33)

[19] “There is infinitely more in God than we have any idea of; and what we do know, we know imperfectly” (Charles Hodge, Systematic Theology, Volume 1, Part 1, chapter 4).

[20] There's not a single thing about God that we understand fully.

[21] Two ways divine mysteries limit what we know about God:

Limited information

- We see only a “poor reflection” of the truth of God, as if we're looking “in a mirror” (1 Corinthians 13:12).
- If God hasn't revealed it, we can't know it.

Limited explanations

- Divine mysteries limit our ability to explain the logical coherence of much of what God has revealed about himself.
- The truth of any theological claim depends only on whether or not God has disclosed it in general or special revelation.

2. Types

[22] Two types of divine mysteries:

Temporary – truths about God hidden from human beings for a time, then revealed at some later point in history.

- God has disclosed more and more about himself over time.
- The most dramatic unveiling of divine mysteries took place in the special revelation of Christ (Ephesians 1:9; 3:3; 6:19).
- Only when Christ returns in glory will he disclose every temporary mystery (1 Corinthians 13:12).

Permanent – truths about God that are beyond our comprehension (the incomprehensibility of God).

- We will never understand everything about anything about God (Isaiah 55:8-9).

III. Attributes & Works

A. Divine Attributes

[23] The study of divine attributes looks at who God is.

1. Basic Concept

[24] Divine attributes: The perfections of God's essence revealed through a variety of historical manifestations.

[25] "Essence" (essentia) refers to God's "being" or "substance" (substantia).

[26] The "essence" of something is the unchanging reality that underlies all of its outward, changing manifestations.

[27] Four important distinctions of God's essence:

- God's essence – what God is in himself.
- God's perfections or attributes – the qualities of God's essence.
- God's long-term historical manifestations – his disclosures of himself over long periods of time.
- God's short-term historical manifestations – his disclosures of himself in relatively short periods of time.

[28] "There is one Divine Essence which is called and which is God: eternal, without body, without parts, of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness, the Maker and Preserver of all things, visible and invisible" (Augsburg Confession, Article 1).

[29] Evangelicals insist that God has revealed some of the attributes of his divine essence.

[30] On occasion, biblical authors referred explicitly to God's eternal, essential perfections (Psalm 34:8; 1 Timothy 1:17).

[31] For the most part, the Scriptures portray God's attributes indirectly through:

- descriptions
- names and titles
- metaphors and similes
- actions

[32] God always manifests himself in ways that are true to who he is, but his attributes are not the same as his manifestations.

[33] We must be careful to maintain the distinctions between God's attributes and his long- and short-term historical manifestations.

[34] It's often difficult to distinguish between God's attributes and his long-term historical manifestations.

[35] God manifests himself in various ways in history, but his attributes have been true of him forever and will always be true of him forever.

2. Types

[36] Evangelicals typically refer to two types of God's attributes:

Incommunicable –perfections of God's essence that creation cannot share with him.

It's common for God's incommunicable attributes to be associated with the terms:

- eternal
- without body
- without parts
- infinite

The Scriptures don't call humans to imitate these attributes, but to worship and praise God for how different he is from us.

Communicable – God's eternal perfections that are shared with his creation.

Human beings have power, wisdom and goodness on a human scale.

Scripture commands us not simply to admire these divine attributes, but also to imitate them.

B. Divine Works

1. Basic Concept

[37] *Divine works*: How God works all things according to his eternal purposes.

- God works out every single event that ever has occurred and ever will occur (Ephesians 1:11).

[38] We should not limit God's works simply to those events that Scripture attributes exclusively to God.

- First Cause – God is the ultimate cause behind every event that occurs at every moment in history.

- Second causes – created beings or objects that perform real, but secondary roles in causing events to occur.

[39] In one way or another, God’s works include everything that occurs in history, whether he does them directly or indirectly.

[40] Divine works are according to God’s eternal purposes (Ephesians 1:11; Isaiah 46:10).

[41] God’s works always fulfill his eternal purposes.

2. Types

[42] Two types of divine works:

Creation – God is “the Maker ... of all things, visible and invisible” (Augsburg Confession, Article 1).

Traditional treatments of God’s work of creation emphasize:

- Fact – God created everything that exists.
- Variety – God created variety both in the physical and spiritual realms.
- Purpose – God first established the creation to fulfill his eternal purposes.

Providence – God is the “Preserver of all things, visible and invisible” (Augsburg Confession, Article 1).

“Providence” (providentia) – attending to something, or taking care of something.

[43] Creation is just as dependent on God now as it was at the very first moment of creation (Colossians 1:16-17).

[44] God’s work of providence can be summarized in three main ways:

- Fact – God preserves and sustains everything he has made.
- Variety – God interacts with different facets of creation in different ways.
- Purpose – God ensures that creation will fulfill his eternal purposes.

IV. Conclusion