



“Getting to Know God”

Section 1: What Can We Know About Who God Is?



Unit 1.3: Real Talk About Revelation

I) Finding God’s Fingerprints

- In our quest to know the God of the universe, we need to celebrate the glorious truth that He not only wants to be known, but more importantly that He has left behind His fingerprints for us to find Him. However, since God is a transcendent being who stands outside of time and space and is too majestic for us to fully comprehend Him with limited human minds, He condescends to our level of understanding and gives us discernable information about Himself through **divine revelation**. More specifically, the two types of revelation God chose to disclose His existence and identity through are known as “**general**” and “**special**” revelation. General revelation is also referred to as “*natural*” or “*universal*,” and it is general truth revealed about God through nature. Special revelation is also referred to as “*supernatural*” or “*particular*,” and it is special truth revealed about God through special modes of communication. Another way to consider these channels of revelation is general revelation offers “*philosophical*” truth, and special revelation provides more “*propositional*” truth. In its simplest terms, general revelation comes from the *world* and special revelation comes from the *Word*.

II) Discovering Truth in Two Dimensions

- The one passage of Scripture that uniquely describes these two different dimensions of revealed truth is **Psalm 19**. In this psalm, King David begins in verses 1-6 by proclaiming the glory of God’s general revelation through nature. He states, “*The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork*” (V1), and that this glorious display in nature is a testimony that “*pours out speech*” (V 2a), “*reveals knowledge*” (V2b), and is a voice that takes words “*to the end of the world*” (V 4). Then, in verses 7-10 David shifts from focusing on God’s general revelation in nature to His special revelation in the Word. He says “*the law of the Lord is perfect*” (V7a) and then describes how God’s Word “*revives the soul*” (V 7b), is a *sure testimony* (V 7c), is truth that *rejoices the heart* (V 8a), is a *commandment that is pure and enlightening to the eyes* (V 8b), is *clean and leads to a right fear of the Lord* (V 9a), has *rules that are true and righteous* (9b), and that these rules are to be *desired more than gold* (V 10a), *enjoyed more than sweet honey from the honeycomb* (V 10b), *heeded as divine warnings* (10c), with the *offer of eternal rewards for those who keep them* (10d).

III) The Reality of Human Reason

- As we consider both dimensions of revelation, we must acknowledge that *all* human beings are exposed to general revelation through God’s creation. This revelation appeals to every human being through our God-given ability to use reason, and general revelation therefore gives us knowledge about God’s *glory, nature, identity, and moral demands*. In his book, *Abstract of Systematic Theology*, Southern Baptist theologian James Pettigru Boyce describes the following five ways general revelation appeals our human reason to make us aware of God’s nature and requirements (p. 47):
 - a) **Consciousness:** We think and learn about the existence of life and the reality around us through acquiring conscious, discernable knowledge.
 - b) **Observation:** We use our five senses to experience this reality and develop logical conclusions based on what we experience through those senses.
 - c) **Intuition:** We develop convictions about what is true and right based on the logic of our conclusions from observing of both objects and principles.
 - d) **Natural Disposition & Instincts:** We react with certain tendencies according to our disposition.
 - e) **Natural Events:** Each event points us towards goodness or evil and either desirable or disastrous consequences. These events can only be interpreted through our ability to reason with what we experience, whether our reason reveals what is true or leads us to believe what is false.

IV) A World Without Excuse

- Due to this undeniable truth that God has revealed His glory universally throughout creation and given us human reason to discern His existence, no human being will ever be excused from sinning against God's holiness at our day of judgement. In **Romans 1:18-23**, Paul explains that despite receiving this revelation throughout nature, human beings "*suppress the truth*" (**V 18**) that God has made "*plain to them*" (**V 19**), "*for his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made*" (**V 20a**). This means that we are all "*without excuse*" (**V 20b**). We can all know about the existence and identity of God through nature, but because of our sin we do not "*honor him as God or give thanks to him*" (**V 21**) and we are therefore in danger of facing eternal damnation. In other words, our sin leads us to worship creation instead of the Creator because we are born separated from God in a state of sinful depravity.

V) Specific Modes of a Special Message

- Special revelation is what God offers us in an act of unspeakable grace when He pulls the curtain back a little further to reveal specific truth in a special way. In *50 Core Truths of the Christian Faith*, Greg Allison states that, "*particular people at particular times and in particular places are recipients of special revelation by which they personally know God, His ways, and His will*" (p. 68). Allison then lists the following five specific modes of special revelation that God has used in history:
 - a) **Scripture:** The written Word leads to faith in Christ for salvation and equips believers for holiness.
 - b) **Historical Events:** Miraculous events reveal God's manifested power, righteousness, and will.
 - c) **Dreams and Visions:** Divine messages were given by God through dreams and visions to specific men like Abraham and Joseph to accomplish a specific purpose.
 - d) **Direct Divine Speech:** This mode of communication is what God used with Moses and a small list of other prophets and leaders to relay an important message and elicit a specific response.
 - e) **The Incarnation:** The incarnate Word is the supreme mode of special revelation, as Christ became a man and revealed the truth of God in human flesh, including His word, His works, and His nature.

VI) Revelation Leads to Transformation

- There are two important realities that we need to remember when discovering God's truth through general and special revelation. First, no one can be saved apart from the special revelation God offers through Jesus Christ. The purpose of every other mode of revelation is to point us to Christ and our need for a savior. Second, the ultimate gift of God's revelation is to know Him and have an eternal relationship with Him that leads to a total transformation of our *heads, hearts, and hands*. We need to actively pursue this holistic transformation and avoid the following abuses of God's revealed truth:
 - a) **Falsely claiming to have secret knowledge of God:** Revelation in God's Word is final and supreme
 - b) **Obsessing over personal experiences with God:** A relationship is more than just experiences
 - c) **Avoiding any personal experiences with God:** A relationship still must have personal experiences
 - d) **Worshiping creation over Creator:** What God offers should lead us to love Him and not His blessings
 - e) **Failing to share knowledge of God with others:** God commands that the gospel go out to everyone

VII) A Few Faithful Responses

- So, to pursue this transformation we must commit to the following faithful responses: (1) *Submit to His Word (2 Timothy 3:16)*; (2) *Trust His promises (2 Cor 1:20)*, (3) *Worship and praise His name (Psalm 103:1)*; (4) *Imitate His character (Galatians 5:22-23)*; (5) *Glorify His name (1 Cor 10:31)*; (6) *Obey His commands (John 15:14)*; (7) *Share His story (1 Peter 3:15-16)*; (8) *Rest in His grace (2 Cor 12:9)*; (9) *Be transformed by His truth (Romans 12:2)*; and (10) *Enjoy His presence (Psalm 16:11)*.

VIII) The Glory of Seeing God's Face

- Finally, we must remember that as we seek to know God through revelation, what we only know in part today, we will see in full at the end of the age (**1 Corinthians 13:12**). The height of glory will take place upon the return of Christ when as **Revelation 22:3-4** states, "³*No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him.* ⁴*They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads.*