

Dr. Robert A. Peterson, Revelation and Scripture, Session 6, Meaning of and Our Need for Revelation, External General Revelation, Psalm 19:1-6 and Romans 1:18-25

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This is Dr. Robert A. Peterson in his teaching on Revelation in Holy Scripture. This is session 6, Meaning of and Our Need for Revelation. External General Revelation, Psalm 19:1-6 and Romans 1:18-25.

Please pray with me. Gracious Father, we thank you that you chose to reveal yourself to humankind in general revelation and to your people in special revelation, especially in the incarnation of your Son and the preaching of the prophets of the Old Testament and apostles in the New and, most especially, in your written Word. We give you thanks, bless us, we pray, and our families, we ask through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Knowing God through Revelation. We want to look at the meaning of Revelation and then our need for Revelation.

A standard dictionary defines Revelation as “the disclosure or communication of knowledge, instructions, etc. by divine or supernatural means.” Oxford English Dictionary.

The English word revelation derives from the Latin *revelation*, which means to unveil, uncover, lay bare. The Vulgate uses this Latin word to translate the Greek *apokalypsis*, which means revelation disclosure. The New Testament commonly uses *apokalypsis* to point to the uncovering of previously hidden truths, especially about God and his plan.

The widespread Old Testament view that God has made himself known in his will to Israel stands behind this usage. This idea of Revelation runs so steadily through the Old and New Testaments that we're able to speak of a biblical concept of Revelation. God communicates himself in a variety of ways, often categorized as general and special revelation.

General revelation refers to God's self-disclosure to all persons at all times and places, showing who he is and making all people accountable. General revelation refers to God's self-disclosure to all people at all times and everywhere, showing who he is in part and making all people accountable to him as God. Special revelation

refers to God's self-disclosure to particular people at specific times and places, enabling them to enter into a redemptive relationship with him.

One more time, special revelation, as opposed to general, as distinguished from general revelation, refers to God's self-disclosure to particular people at specific times and specific places, enabling them to enter into a redemptive relationship with him. Thus, we say that special revelation is redemptive, but general revelation is not. More clarification will follow.

Millard Erikson's Christian Theology, pages 177 to 245, is helpful in the regard of distinguishing general and special revelation. Millard Erikson's Christian Theology, 177 to 245. Our need for revelation is twofold.

God is infinite, and we are finite. God is holy, and we are sinful. Our need for revelation, God is infinite, and we are finite.

God is the infinite creator, and we are his finite creatures. By infinite, we mean that God is unlimited. He's bounded, as it were, better defined by his own attributes.

So, he's not unlimited in the sense that he could become unholy or ignorant. He's perfect. He is unlimited in all of his perfections, which is a good way to say it.

Scripture points to this reality, specifically mentioning his power and understanding. Psalm 147.5, quote, Our Lord is great, vast in power. His understanding is infinite.

Our Lord is great, vast in power. His understanding is infinite. Psalm 147.5. Isaiah says, quote, The Lord is the everlasting God, the creator of the whole earth.

He never becomes faint or weary. There is no limit to his understanding. Isaiah 40.28. This infinite God is great beyond comparison.

He alone is the quote, high and exalted one. Isaiah 57.15. And there is no one like him. Compared to this great infinite God, we are very limited.

We would never learn knowledge of God or know him apart from his taking the initiative to communicate who he is to us. Thankfully, our infinite God generously reveals himself to us, his weak, finite creatures. Don't misunderstand.

Psalm 139 says we are wonderfully made, and so it is. But our point right now is that we are wonderfully made. The creator-creature distinction goes on forever.

On the new earth as resurrected holistic beings, 1 Corinthians 15 describes our resurrection bodies and persons as incorruptible, immortal, powerful, glorious, and spiritual, that is, controlled by the Holy Spirit in a way we cannot even understand.

And all of that is a description of the eternal life that we will enjoy on the new earth. Nevertheless, we will still be God's creatures.

Now, we are his; as far as believers go, we are his redeemed creatures who have eternal life in mortal bodies. Then, in the resurrection, we'll be redeemed creatures who have eternal life in immortal bodies. But our creaturely status is permanent.

Oh, it had a beginning; we were created, but it has no end. By contrast, of course, Psalm 90, from everlasting to everlasting, you are God. God has no beginning, and he has no end.

For two reasons, we need revelation. Our finitude is the first one. Over against an infinite God, who is unlimited in all his perfections, we are very limited.

Secondly, we need revelation because God is holy, and we are not. In addition to being limited by finitude, we humans are sinful. Angels proclaim, quote, holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty.

His glory fills the earth, Isaiah 6:3. To this, Isaiah cries, woe is me, for I am undone, because I am a man of unclean lips, because my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts, Isaiah 6:5. God reveals his wrath, which is quoted against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of people, Romans 1:18. Indeed, fallen human beings quote, their thinking became worthless, and their senseless hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, Romans 1:21 and 22.

Limited by our finiteness and blinded by our sin, we would never succeed in knowing God or the truth about him. Apart from God's revelation, all human beings have misconceptions of him, but amazingly, he graciously made himself known to Adam and Eve and to every human being since. Although we are lost and have distorted knowledge of him, God reveals himself in this.

Revelation is, therefore, gracious. I give, I acknowledge help from my old friend David G Dunbar for some of these comments. We move now to knowing God through general revelation.

Our next heading is God reveals himself in creation. Knowing God through general revelation, as already stated, God discloses himself in both general and special revelation. In the latter, he makes himself known to particular people in particular times and places, as we said before.

In the former, general revelation, he makes himself known to all people in all times and places. There are three main forms of general revelation, which we will examine in turn, Lord willing.

Creation, humanity, and providence. God makes himself known in the world he has made, which includes human beings. God makes himself known in humanity by creating us in his image and by writing his law on the human heart from creation.

God makes himself known in providence or history, as we will see. So, under the heading of general revelation, we have revelation in creation, humanity, and providence. God reveals himself in creation.

We want to examine these passages: Psalm 19, Romans 1, and John 1. We won't look at them in some detail, so let us turn to Psalm 19. Psalm 19 speaks of God making himself known in his world, verses 1 through 6, and then in his word, in verses 7 and following. The Psalms 19:7 through 11, 12 through 14 conclude the psalm with a prayer.

Psalm 19, the heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork. Day-to-day pours out speech, and night-to-night reveals knowledge. There is no voice, nor are there words, whose voice is not heard.

Their voice goes out through the earth, and their words go to the end of the world. In them, he has set a tent for the sun, which comes out like a bridegroom leaving his chamber, and, like a strong man, runs its course with joy. Its rising is from one end of the heavens and its circuit to the end of them, and there's nothing hidden from its heat.

So, the psalm moves from general revelation in creation to special revelation in the Word of God. The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul. The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple.

The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart. The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever.

The rules of the Lord are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold. Sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb.

Moreover, your servant is warned by them. In keeping them, there is great reward. Our concern is especially with the first six verses, which describe this as really the Old Testament classical text, the *Textus classicus* for the doctrine of God's revelation in his world, in his creation.

The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork. This is a synonymous parallelism, and it tells us, using metaphor, that the heavens don't really speak. Oh, but they speak, as it were, figuratively.

They proclaim God's glory, his beauty, his magnificence. And the sky above, parallel to the heavens, proclaims his handiwork. God's creation of his world shows something of his greatness, his glory, and it bears witness to the fact that he is its maker.

Every Adam says, as it were, God made me, God made me. I spoke to you previously about a colleague who became a Christian apologist and taught in a seminary, who, as a young man, was so depressed he went out to a hillside to commit suicide. And as he looked out at the heavens, at the skies, at the Sun, at the beauty, and he lowered his eyes and saw the trees and the grass and the beauty of it all, and the order of it all, he was convinced there had to be an artificer to produce such beautiful work.

And indeed, he came to know the Lord, went on, studied, served, and helped many, many people in his lifetime. The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork. So this revelation takes place everywhere under the heavens, that is, everywhere.

It is universal, hence the name General Revelation. It is thus accessible to all people who can see or experience the heavens and God's creation. We might ask the question, when does this take place? And verse 2 answers for us.

Day-to-day pours out speech, the metaphor is extended, and night-to-night reveals knowledge. Every day, every night, all human beings, sinners and saints alike, are bombarded with the fact that God is a glorious being and that God is the Creator God of all that they see in his world. Primitive peoples, without access not only to the Bible but even to writing and a written language, have concepts of a deity or deities.

Now, they are flawed because of sin, because of Adam's sin and their own sins, but nevertheless, is there such a thing as a primitive people that is absolutely atheistic? I don't think so. They might worship God's creation, which in a strange way testifies to its greatness, but it is his creature, and it is not God. C.S. Lewis famously explained one of the results of his conversion was, now when he looked at the world, it was so much better because he no longer saw it as all there was, as he did when he was a pantheist, that is, the idea that God is everything and everything is part of God.

Now he saw the world as the product of the Creator God's work, and he marveled. He marveled. He especially enjoyed his time swimming, and I think it was when he had his devotions in the morning and went for a swim, and he loved the water and the sights and sounds and smells around him.

He rejoiced in God's good world. Verse 3 is possible of two translations; there's no speech nor their words; actually, explaining that it's a metaphor seems unnecessary, but poetry is poetry whose voice is not heard. Again, that translation, which is what the ESV does, would mean I'm merely speaking poetically here, I'm merely speaking

metaphorically, not literally, or it could be translated there's no speech nor their words where their voice is not heard.

That is, not only is the revelation of God in creation ongoing every day and every night, but it is universal. As a matter of fact, no matter how we translate verse 3, verses 4 through 6 testify to that very truth, the universality of general revelation. Verse 2 shows its constancy, the fact that it always goes on day and night.

4 through 6, speaking of the sun as the primary orb in the sky, the primary object of human observation, makes a circuit and thereby shows that God's revelation is everywhere. His revelation in creation. Their voice goes out through all the earth, their words to the end of the world.

That's a statement of universality. In them, he has sent a set a tent for the sun. Here comes a personification: the sun is pictured as a runner or a bridegroom.

In them, he has set a tent for the sun, which comes out like a bridegroom leaving his chamber, going to take his wife, and like a strong man, runs its course with joy. So, the sun comes out of his tent and begins his race across the skies as it were. It's rising; the sun's rising is from one end of the heavens and in the circuit to the end of them.

And there is nothing hidden from its heat. This is, again, so the biggest focus in terms of counting noses or the number of verses is not only the reality of God's revelation in his creation and its constancy but also its universality. Every human being is exposed to God's revelation in creation.

That is a live exegesis. Here are some notes setting forth the same thing. I do them by way of emphasis and completeness.

Psalms 19, 1 to 6, God reveals himself outside of us in creation, as Psalm 19 proclaims. He reveals himself inside of us in the law written on our hearts. He reveals himself outside of us, but it actually includes us.

Outside of us, including us, but not our insides, are the focus here. In his external general revelation, that's the terminology we use. God's revealing himself in his law written on the heart.

An aspect of the image of God is the internal general revelation. What we've been talking about so far with the sky and the sun and so forth is his external general revelation, his revelation outside of us, but it does include our bodies and minds and so forth. God reveals himself outside of us in creation, as Psalm 19 proclaims.

The heavens declare the glory of God, and the expanse proclaims the work of his hands. Christian Standard Bible. Maybe it'll be helpful to see a little different translation.

This is called external general revelation. The mode of this revelation is God's creation, which reveals some knowledge of the Creator. We have not yet summarized all of this knowledge.

We just began and said it shows his glory and the fact that he is the creator. The content of this creation is God's glory and handiwork, which implies that God exists and reveals he is awesome, powerful enough to make this creation, intelligent enough, that is brilliant, to make this very orderly creation. We know so much more than David did.

Whether we go macro and study the universe or micro and study the cell, the orderliness is astonishing. It points to an Orderer, to a Creator, a Maker. The timing of this creation is continuous.

Day after day, they pour out speech; night after night, they communicate knowledge. Verse two, the extent of this revelation is universal. Their message has gone out to the whole earth and their words to the ends of the world.

Verse four, this revelation's universality is epitomized by the Sun, which, quote, rises from one end of the heavens and circles to the other end. Close quote, verse six, Christian Standard Bible. External general revelation thus occurs everywhere, all the time, revealing God's existence and glory and the fact that he is the creator.

This is communicated regardless of human appropriation of this revelation, and Psalm 19 does not speak of the human appropriation of this revelation, but Romans 1 does. Romans 1 is a New Testament commentary, as it were, not specifically, but in a general sense. On Psalm 19 and other passages that could be cited in the Psalms, Isaiah and Job, for example, Romans 1 becomes more specific for us.

Romans 1:18 to 25, once again, I want to work with the text before drawing the theology, the teaching out of the context of Romans 1. No sooner has Paul announced his theme, I believe there's universal agreement that the thematic statement of Romans occurs in Romans 1:16 and 17. After Paul's introduction in which he introduces himself as a servant of God, an apostle, speaks of Christ's deity and humanity, and then of Paul's desire to come to Rome and minister to them in chapter 1 of Romans 16 and 17, he states, plainly states, the theme of Romans. I'm not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes.

To the Jew first and also to the Greek, for in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, the righteous shall live by faith. I'm not ashamed of the gospel, which could mean by the literary figure Laetitiu, the affirmation of a strong positive by denying a negative. It could mean I'm not ashamed of the gospel, or it could mean I am spanking proud of the gospel.

It's possible. Either way, we get his message because the gospel is the power of God. That is an outrageous statement when you think about it.

A message is the power of God. A set of words is equated to an attribute of Almighty God, even his power. Well, yes, because the message is given by God, and he attaches his power to that message and saves sinners, transforms lives, gives them his Holy Spirit, and so forth.

I'm not ashamed of the gospel, for it's the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes. Paul really emphasizes the importance of faith. He does it right from the beginning of the epistle, including right here numerous times already in his purpose statement.

I suppose chapter 10 is the greatest place that he does it, but he does it here in the first part of the book in which he shows the need for justification and then God's provision of it and how one receives it, which is Romans 4, that is by faith. The gospel is God's power for salvation to every believer, to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. I think already from the first page of his gospel, as it were, he has in mind the situation in the Roman Church where Jews and Greeks are somewhat at odds, as chapter 14 bears witness and on into 15, and he wants to heal that and so he keeps talking about Jew and Gentile at almost every stage of his unfolding of the gospel message through the book.

For in the gospel, the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith. My understanding is it's that the same expression is used twice, two other times in the same context of 2nd Corinthians. I've lost a chapter, actually.

It is the triumphal entry chapter. Perhaps that's chapter 3. Yes, 2nd Corinthians 3, in which Paul says the gospel is a fragrance of life to life to believers and of death to death for unbelievers, and the meaning is the gospel, the picture is the returning victors who are leading some of their captives whom they have kept alive to present as trophies to the Emperor and to torment before they probably murder kill them and to those poor captives they smell the incense coming down on parade and it stinks. It's like a Super Bowl celebration or the last game of the World Series. One team is so high that the other team is just crawling off on their bellies.

They're so discouraged, the high and the low. It's an aroma of death to death, he says. That is, it's an aroma of very death.

It's an aroma of death indeed to the victors. Ah, it smells so sweet. It's a fragrance of life to life, of very life, of life indeed.

Similarly, here, I believe we should explain it: in the gospel, the righteousness of God is revealed from faith, from faith to faith, from concerning faith indeed, very faith, from faith, from first to last, some translations say. As it is written, and he quotes Habakkuk, the righteous shall live by faith. So, the theme of Romans is the good news, the gospel, which is a revelation of God's saving righteousness by faith in Christ.

But in verse 18, Paul doesn't begin to talk about God's saving righteousness. Instead, he talks about God's damning righteousness. For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth. It is not until 3:21 that Paul returns to his theme.

From 1:18 to 3:20, he digs a deep hole, and he shows that the whole world has fallen in the ditch and cannot save itself. It's only in 3:21. In other words, Paul thinks it is very important to establish the fact that people are sinners, that they are under God's wrath, and that they are in dire straits before he goes and then explains the gospel, which he introduced in the very thematic statement of 1:16 and 17, 3:21.

But now, the righteousness of God has been manifested. Apart from the law, it means law-keeping, although the law and the prophets bear witness to it, the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. I'll resist the temptation, which is a temptation of every Reformed theologian, to do more with Romans. I'm not supposed to be teaching Romans now completely, but rather God's revelation in creation, Romans 1:18 and following.

His theme is God's saving righteousness, but now he starts talking about God's judging righteousness. The wrath of God is revealed from heaven, Romans 1, 18, against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of people, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. What truth? What truth are we talking about? They suppress it, which means this truth in some way reaches them.

You can't suppress what you don't know. Oh, he explains, for what can be known about God is plain to them. Boy, Paul has their attention. What is he talking about? Because God has shown it to them.

Paul was claiming that God has revealed something, presumably something about himself, to human beings and that God is angry at them; the wrath of God is revealed from heaven because of their suppression of this knowledge, of this revelation, of this information that they receive from God. And here is his explanation. For, that is

an explanatory gar in Greek, it explains, because his invisible attributes have been clearly perceived.

Paul, first of all, you identify God's power with a message, which is a vivid picture, but that's not technically true. God's attributes are his attributes alone. Oh, but he is so attached to his power to this saving message that it is true to say, although it's not literally one of God's powers, that it is a powerful message indeed.

And now, how can you see God's invisible attributes? That's impossible. Well, he makes them visible through the things he has made. For his invisible attributes, and he tells us what they are here, namely, his eternal power and divine nature.

Psalm 19, his glory and the fact that he made a produced handiwork, that's his creator-hood, if you will, his creatorship. Here, God's invisible attributes, namely his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived. Human beings see these things.

Ever since the creation of the world, there's that Psalm 19 continuousness of the revelation in creation, in the things that have been made. Oh, wow. Ever since creation, God's power and the fact that he is God, his divine nature, and his very deity have been seen by humankind.

It's not merely saying these things are revealed, as Psalm 19 did. Now it speaks of humans receiving this revelation. God is angry at sinners because they suppress his truth.

What's he talking about? God made plain to them some of his attributes, here he mentions his power and his deity, in the things he has made ever since creation. They testify, back to the language of Psalm 19, about God. The upshot is that they are without excuse.

His wrath is revealed from heaven. Human beings are inexcusable because God has revealed himself to them in the world he has made. For although they knew God, does that mean they were saved? No.

We have to define, well, actually, any word in any context of any literature, but here, the knowing of God doesn't mean knowing our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, but rather, exactly as the context has told us, knowing God's existence and power and his deity, by virtue of the things he has made. Although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Here, something is added that is not, does not appear in Psalm 19, and that is human sin.

And we already have the idea introduced in the suppression, up in verse 18, which introduced this whole section. God's revelation gets through to sinners, but because they're sinners, they skew it, they suppress it, they twist it, and although that knowledge gets through to them and they're aware of God, as Calvin has said, there's a *sensus divinitatis*, there's an awareness of God. They do not worship God.

Oh, they might worship gods, but not the true and living God. Nothing is wrong with the revelation. God's radio station, GOD, beams out his gospel, not his gospel, but the revelation of God constantly, everywhere, to everyone.

But what is the problem? The problem is that our receivers are jammed, our radios are messed up, and we distort the message that comes from God. It is not the gospel. It concerns many attributes of God, but not his grace, not the forgiveness of sins, not the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Claiming to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. God's revelation and creation get through to human beings, but the result is not worship of God. The result is idolatry.

Not only so, but as in the works of the flesh in Galatians 5, we'll call them religious sins idolatry, and other such things. Let me see exactly what the other such things are. Idolatry and sorcery are mentioned in Galatians 5.20. So there, so here, religious sins of idolatry are joined with sexual sins.

Works of the flesh, now the works of the flesh, are evident. Sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, sexual sins, idolatry, sorcery, religious sins, we could call them. The rest of the list deals with interpersonal sins, which is exactly what was what predominated in the Galatians and which they needed the fruit of the Spirit to rectify, but I'm going to leave that alone.

I went there only for this purpose, to show not only in Romans 1 but in Galatians 5, Paul combines religious sins and sexual sins. There, it's sexual sins, largely heterosexual sexual sins. Here it is homosexual sexual sins that Paul has in mind.

Therefore, God gave them up in the lust of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie. Second time this exchange is mentioned. It is wicked.

Verse 23, exchanged the glory of God, the glory of the immortal God for images. 25, they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator who is blessed forever. Amen.

And the verses that follow speak of sexual sins, especially of a homosexual variety. You might have this question arising in your mind, which arises in mine: Why do Galatians 5 and Romans 1 combine religious sins? What an oxymoron that is with sexual sins. Because both of those areas, both of those types of sins speak of areas of aspects of human life that define us.

At the birth of a baby, we say, it's a girl, it's a boy. And so, Adam and Eve were also made not only male and female in his image, but God made them in his image, male and female he made them, and they were also made in his image. They were made for relationship with their maker.

We are gendered beings by birth, and we are religious beings; we're worshippers. Oh, we might worship the wrong stuff as the people in Romans 1 do, and we might sin sexually as well, but both of those touch our very identity as image bearers of God. In our next lecture, I will follow the same pattern and return to the notes and specify, clarify, and elucidate some of the principles that we just looked at in the text.

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