

**Dr. Robert A. Peterson, Revelation and Scripture,
Session 7, External General Revelation,
Romans 1:18-25 and John 1:3-9,
Internal General Revelation, Romans 1:32-2:12-16**

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This is Dr. Robert A. Peterson in his teaching on Revelation and Holy Scripture. This is session 7, External General Revelation, Romans 1:18-25 and John 1:3-9. Internal General Revelation, Romans 1:32 and 2:12-16.

We continue our study of God's general revelation in creation. I just did an exegesis of Romans 1:18 to 25. Now, let's look at the text that details this work and clarifies what I said.

Paul likewise speaks of external general revelation in Romans 1, where he tells of the world's need for the gospel. God is angry against the rebellion of those, quote, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. Verse 18, the truth of which Paul speaks, is God's revelation in creation.

“His invisible attributes, that is, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen and understood by what he has made.” In verse 20, Paul speaks of God's invisible qualities as clearly seen. He explains that God's character, specifically his eternal power and divine nature, are manifested through his creation.

Moreover, these attributes have been revealed since the creation of the world. Verse 20, putting this together for our doctrine of general revelation, we learn A, the mode of revelation is God's creation. B, the content is God's eternal power and divine nature, connoting that God is the creator and is awesome, powerful, and divine.

1:20. C, the timing of the revelation is constant, occurring ever since creation. D and D, the extent is universal, spreading as far as the creation does by implication, not by direct statement.

Paul's teaching on general revelation here is strikingly similar to that in Psalm 19. The major difference is that Psalm 19 speaks of general revelation in the context of the covenant people of God. That's a very good point because Psalm 19 and verse 7 speak of the law of the Lord.

And as a matter of fact, the name of God is switched from Elohim to Yahweh through that whole section that speaks of God's revelation in his word. Major difference is that Psalm 19 speaks of God's general revelation in the context of the covenant

people of God who have also received special revelation, the word of God. Psalm 19 is a Davidic Psalm praising God and relishing in his witness through his creation and his word.

The response of God's people to God's revelation includes worship, joy, reverence, wisdom, delight, confession, and prayer, as the end of Psalm 19 shows. The context is quite different in Romans 1, where Paul's teaching on general revelation shows that all people "are without excuse" and in need of the message of salvation. Verse 20.

How does this work? Paul explains that this revelation gets through to people so that they know that God is a powerful deity. Paul goes to great lengths to highlight this. The truth about God is known, evident, shown, clearly seen, and understood.

Verses 18 to 21. But humanity's response to it is to suppress the truth actively. Verse 18.

Although God makes his revelation known to them, they do not glorify him as God or show gratitude. Instead, their thinking became worthless, and their senseless hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images.

They exchanged the truth of God for a lie and worshiped and served what has been created instead of the creator, who is praised forever. Verses 21 to 23 and 25. Since the fall, humans on their own do not respond positively to God's external general revelation.

Although such revelation has been offered everywhere since the time of creation and although God makes it clear to all, sinners do not value this knowledge of God in creation as they ought. They continually suppress it. They do not give thanks to God or glorify him.

Instead, their thoughts became foolish, and their hearts darkened. They claim to be wise but, in reality, are foolish and practice sin. Verses 21 to 25.

As a result, God justly judges sinners. Verse 18. He reveals his wrath from heaven against all the unrighteousness and ungodliness of men and women.

He regards them, verse 20, as without excuse. He abandons humankind to idolatry—verse 23.

Moral depravity. 24 to 27. Epitomized by homosexual practice and a depraved mind.

Verse 28. Thus, Romans 1 reiterates much of Psalm 19's teaching on general revelation while adding two truths. First, general revelation is sufficiently clear to make us accountable to God.

Second, general revelation on its own does not lead sinners to faith in God. Sadly, ever since the fall, when blessed with clear truth about God, sinners resolutely suppress him and his truth. John 1, 3 through 9 is our third general revelation text.

John 1:3 through 9. Let me read 1 through 9. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him, nothing was made.

In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. There was a man sent from God whose name was John.

He came as a witness to bear witness about the light that all might believe through him. He was not the light but came to bear witness to the light. The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world.

This is part of the famous prologue to the Gospel of John, which introduces many of the themes of the fourth gospel. The major theme it introduces is the incarnation of the Son of God. That truth is not repeated in the rest of the gospel.

It is assumed. When John refers to the second person of the Trinity, he doesn't call him the Son. He speaks of his incarnation in verses 9 and 14 but doesn't use his name, Jesus Christ, until later on in this passage in verse 17.

Before then, he refers to the same person that is the second person of the Godhead, God the Son, who became Jesus in his human name, Christ the Messiah, in his incarnation, but John doesn't call him Jesus. Sometimes, we mean well, and we say that in the beginning, the words verse 1 and verse 14 became flesh, and we know that that's Jesus, so in the beginning, it was Jesus. The truth of the matter is that there is continuity between the Word and Jesus, but John doesn't say that he was Jesus.

As a matter of fact, both Joseph and Mary were told to name the baby Jesus. Jesus is not the name of the eternal Son of God in eternity past. It becomes his human name and is his name forevermore, and I'll say it again: there's a continuity of personhood between the eternal Son and the baby in the manger.

But John calls the second person the word and the light. He doesn't call him the Son or the Christ or Jesus in the first five verses of the gospel. In fact, in the first nine verses of the gospel.

It is not until verse 17 that we have the name Jesus Christ. In the beginning was the word. John refers to the first words of the Bible itself, the Hebrew Old Testament, which any Jew would know.

Any Christians with any contact with any Gentile with any contact with a synagogue would know it. In the beginning, God. John puts the word in the place of God in the first verse of the Bible of the Torah right out of the chute, implying the deity of the word even before he says the word was God.

In the beginning God created in the beginning was the word. The word occupies the place of God that God occupied in the first verse of the Bible. In the beginning, there was the word, and the word was with God.

Here we have the rudiments of the doctrine of the binity of two persons in the Godhead because the language speaks of the word being in the presence of God. We're further the matter gets further complicated by the next clause and the word was God. The word occupies God's place in Genesis 1.1. The word was in the presence of God, and now we're told the word was God.

By the way, the cultic translation of God is very wrong because the same word, theos, without the article, is used throughout this passage, and even the so-called Jehovah's Witness New World translation doesn't consistently translate it to God. They say a God in 1:1 because they deny the deity of Christ, and I might say the cults have many errors and that particular cult has many errors, some of which are silly not celebrating birthdays or Christmas. Some of them are fatal not accepting blood transfusions, but none of that stuff is damning but denying the deity of Christ is damning.

You say, why does it change who he is? Oh, it changes who I think he is, and if I put faith in the Archangel Michael, or the mere man Jesus, or the Archangel Michael again, which is the three ways that the JWs describe Jesus, the Son of God. He was the Archangel Michael, and by transference of his life principle into the man Jesus, whatever that means, there's no incarnation. And then, he wasn't raised physically, but by the transference of his life principle back to the Archangel Michael, he continues.

So, you have an angel, man, angel. Believing in any of those things does not save. Believing in the incarnate Son of God saves.

And as Luther is right, even a little bit of faith in him, a little bit of saving faith in him saves, but my goodness. No, John 1:6 uses the same word without the article, and no translation says there was a man sent from God, whose name was John. It's absurd.

And how about verse 12: to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God. No, not even the New World mistranslation does that. No, it's the same word, also without the article, and in those two places, in 12 and 6, as in one, you should translate the word was God.

Thus, there are two who are God, and the Bible never compromises the Jewish notion, the Old Testament notion, that there is one God, the unity of God. Thus, there are two within this one God, already in John 1.1. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, like Colossians 1 and Hebrews 1, Hebrews 1:2, Colossians 1:16. The Son, here called the Word, was the Father's agent in creation.

All things were made through him. John shows that language is indeed comprehensive by affirming the positive and denying the negative. In Colossians 1, he shows it's comprehensive by saying he made all things visible and invisible.

Those are comprehensive categories. There's no third category; you can see it, or you can't. And furthermore, he says, things in heaven and earth, that's again, an allusion to Genesis 1:1, but I'm in John 1, all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made.

Affirming the positive, denying the negative, the Son, the pre-incarnate Son, that is, the Word, keeping to John's terminology, the eternal Word, who is with the Father and is with the Father, was God's agent in creating everything that was created. He's the creator. Furthermore, here's where we get to the concept of general revelation, which is not always recognized, but it's here in verse 4, in him, the Word who was the Father's agent in creation was life.

The locus, the location of life, is always used; this word zoe in the fourth gospel, of eternal life, the eternal life, which was the source of the creation of every created thing, resided in the Word, in the Son, in the second person of the Trinity. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The eternal life resident in the eternal Word, which was a source of all created life, was the light of human beings.

It's an objective genitive, that is, light is an active word, and the meaning is the light shines on humankind. In the Word was the location of eternal life. The Word who made all things by virtue of this eternal life within him, and that eternal life in the Word, which was the source of creation, was the revelation of God to human beings.

John thus teaches general revelation in John 1:1 through 5. Furthermore, the light shines in the darkness. Of course, not only is Genesis 1, 1 referred to verbally in the first few words of John 1:1, the Septuagint, the Greek translation, has exactly this, NRK, in the beginning, but the creation is referred to here, which is the subject of Genesis 1 and 2, and also the language of light and darkness, where God creates the

light in Genesis 1:3. Here it's used metaphorically. So what I'm trying to say is that Genesis 1:1 and the following play a special part in this passage, actually in Colossians 1 as well.

But here, verbatim in the beginning, the concept of creation 1, 3, and then this language of light and darkness. In him was life, and that eternal life was the light of man. It was the revelation of God shining on human beings in the creation.

That light shines in the darkness. Here, the fall is introduced. The light is the general revelation of God in creation.

It shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it, is a better translation than understanding it because in the Gospel, the darkness is not trying to understand the light. It's trying to stamp out the light, as we see in chapter 3, for example, verses 19 through 21, which I won't read right now. And John's big exposition of the light of the world is John 9, where Jesus heals a man born blind.

I did say the major idea of the prologue is the incarnation. I want to briefly show it. John uses an inverted parallelism or chiasm here.

First, he refers to the eternal son as the word, verses 1 through 3. Then he calls him the light, at least by verse 7. And if he followed regular parallelism, then he would say the word became flesh, and the light came into the world, but he reverses those two. He's the word, 1:1 to 1:3. He's the light, verse 7. And then verse 9 says the light was coming into the world. And then verse 14 says the word became flesh.

So, it's A, B, B prime, A prime. The word, the light, incarnation in terms of light. I guess we could call it illumination.

The light was coming into the world, verse 9. And then, in verse 14, the word became flesh. The chiasm, the inverted parallelism, serves to tie the passage together in a bundle, as it were. And it gives the main focus of the prologue, which is the incarnation of the eternal son who is denominated the word and the light, speaking of his role as the revealer of God.

And what we've shown here in the first five verses is he revealed God even before he became a human being. So, it's no surprise that as the incarnate word, as the light of the world, he reveals God as the God-man. As a matter of fact, John's two big themes of Christology are many of them, but his two big are Christ, the incarnate word is the life-giver.

He gives eternal life as a gift. I give my sheep eternal life. They'll never perish.

No one can snatch them out of my hand, John 10:27 and following, 28 and following. And then he's the revealer of God. The words I speak to you are not my own, they're the words of the father who sent me.

On and on, those two themes reverberate. Jesus as life-giver, Jesus as the revealer of God. And what the prologue shows is not, as Bultmann claimed, contact with the mystery religions or something like that, Hellenistic philosophy.

No, it's Old Testament foundations in the creation account showing that the word is the revealer of God. He revealed God by the things he made, one three, general revelation, showing that the word is the Father's agent in creation. In other words, the word was the life giver before he became a man.

He gave life to all things in creation, John one three. The word was the light bearer, if you will, the revealer of God in the things that he had made one for. So, we're not surprised that the incarnate word is the revealer of God, the light of the world, and that he is the life-giver, the one who gives eternal life to everyone who believes in him.

Let me go to the notes again, following my pattern of exegesis first and then summarizing from the notes. The word who was with the Father before creation is the creator of everything. He is God, and eternal life within him is the source of all created life.

This life in the word that issued in creation is the light of men, John 1:4, God's revelation to people. This external general revelation continues to reveal God ever since the creation, verse five. Since the fall, presupposed with dimension of darkness, people fight God's revelation in creation, but they're not able to distinguish, to extinguish it.

To use Pauline language, they suppress it. To use Johannine language, they want to overcome it, they fight it. Since the fall, presupposed with a dimension of darkness, people and human beings fight God's revelation in creation, but they're not able to extinguish it.

The son of God is the true light, who gives light to everyone, verse nine. The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. Verse nine speaks of the incarnation of the son.

The true light was coming into the world by virtue of a Greek periphrastic instruction, was coming into the world, further describes the true light, tells what he did. And that makes so much sense, because then verse 10 says he was in the world. Verse nine says how he came into the world.

Verse 10 and 11 and 12 and 13 show the results of his being in the world. The results, sadly, are rejection, 10 and 11, and acceptance, 12 and 13. The son of God is the true light, who gives light to everyone, verse nine.

Although he creates everyone and gives truth to everyone, the world does not know him or receive him, verses 10 and 11. Of course, some people do, but John's point is that the major response to Jesus in the first 12 chapters, which involves the book of signs and Jesus revealing himself to the world, the major response is rejection. In chapter 13, he shuts the door to the upper room, shuts the door on the world, and now, instead of the world, it's the disciples, and he reveals himself to them in his farewell discourses, his great prayer, his death and resurrection, and that takes us to the end of the fourth gospel.

In brief, John adds to our understanding of general revelation. The son of God is the agent of God's self-disclosure. Revelation is continual.

Revelation is opposed by the world. Revelation cannot be extinguished by its opponents. That is our summary, both exegetical and verbal, of God's revelation and creation.

As I move through general revelation in its internal feature, the law of God in the heart, and in providence in the book of Acts chapters 14 and 17, then I will set forth a theology of general revelation, pulling these things together and helping us understand the timing, place, content, results of general revelation, but first we need to have more information. First, we need to go to the classical text for internal general revelation, and that is found in Romans 2:12 through 16. It's actually anticipated in 1:32, God gave human beings up to dishonorable passions, verse 28.

He gave them up to a debased mind, 1:28 of Romans 1. They were filled, verse 29, with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They're full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, slanders, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless, gasp.

What a list. And then here's an important verse for this internal general revelation. Though 1:32 of Romans, though they know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.

There's a distinct difference between the people described in the beginning of chapter two, the hypocrites, and those described in the last verse of Romans 1. The hypocrites do not encourage others to do the things that they do. Oh, they're hypocrites. They do the same things, but Paul was really mad at them.

He regards them as worse off because they criticize in others, they condemn in others the very things they do. Well, that's not what's going on in 1:32. In 1:32, and this is our the point of internal general revelation, although they know that those who do these things deserve death, how do they know that? It's because of the law of God written on the heart.

But my point right now is hypocrites condemn things in others and do them themselves, I'm bringing Paul, causing Paul's terrible appropriation of their behavior. 1:32, these sinners, they go for it. They don't criticize others.

They egg others on. Sin and misery are like company, according to 1:32. Romans two. Therefore, you have no excuse, oh man, every one of you who judges for in passing judgment on another, you condemn yourself because you, the judge, practice the very same things.

We know that the judgment of God rightly falls on those who practice such things. So Paul condemns both overt sinners who eggs others on and hypocritical sinners who condemn others and do the very things. Do you suppose, oh man, you who judge those who practice such things, and yet do them yourself, that you will escape the judgment of God? Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? But because of your hard and impenitent heart, you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath, when God's righteous judgment will be revealed.

Paul cites an Old Testament concept. Psalm 62:12, for example, is a place that sets it forth. Jesus does the same thing.

God will render to each one according to his works. Salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, and Christ alone. Judgment consistently is based upon deeds or works, which reveal whether a person has believed in Christ or not.

Faith is invisible. James says, show me your faith without works, James 2, and I will show you my faith by my works. Well, only the second is possible.

You cannot show faith without works. You can claim to believe, but the claim is either justified or shown to be falsified by life, deeds, or works. In any case, the textus classicus for internal general revelation, external general revelation is in God's world and creation.

By the way, it includes human beings. Here's a person who hates God. I want to get away from God.

He goes into a cave and goes far enough back in that there's no light. Aha! I'm going to get away from this external general revelation stuff. God can't catch me in here.

I don't see any sun, stars, moon, light, sky. Aha! In the quietness of the cave, unfortunately, he hears his own heart beating. He himself is the external general revelation of God.

Yes, even his heart within his body, considered part of his body is external general revelation because it's not speaking about the law of God, the morality of God written on the human heart as part of the image of God. Ephesians 2:22 to 24. 12 through 16 of Romans 2 deserve a detailed exegesis.

For all who have sinned without the law will also perish without the law. And all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law. Notice the result is condemnation both ways.

Gentiles who sin are condemned. Jews who sinned are actually up for greater condemnation, Paul says, but not here. Verse 13, for it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified.

Is Paul teaching justification by works? It's impossible. It is impossible. And evangelical scholars disagree as to the meaning of the verses I skipped, which are summarized even in verse 13.

John Murray, Tom Schreiner, and other good people say the doers of the law speak of those who have been saved freely by God's grace, who then obey God. Doug Moo, whose commentary on Romans is my favorite, and I agree with him on almost everything except this point, says no, no, that's true theology, but it's not the right exegesis of the verses that I skipped. I skipped 7 through 10 or of this summary of 7 through 10 in verse 13.

Rather, it's giving an impossible standard that nobody can attain. In either case, we need to distinguish between exegesis and theology. The verses don't mean both things, all right? Only one exegesis is right.

Either Moo is right, and 2:7 to 10, and 2:13 are saying if people did keep the law, then they would be saved that way, but nobody does, as Paul clarifies later. Or is this exegesis right? As a matter of fact, there are people by God's grace, saved by God's grace alone, who do seek glory, honor, and immortality by the grace of God, but regardless, only one of those exegesis is correct.

They can't both be right, but the theology of both is correct. The standard is impossible, and it is true that good works don't save, but those whom God saves do good works. Not only does James say it, but Paul says it.

He says it a number of times in Titus. He says it in Ephesians 2, 8 through 10. So, the truth is not what is debatable.

The exegesis is debatable, but regardless of that, the point still stands, that is, this notion of internal general revelation. Verse 14, for when Gentiles, who do not have the law, it means of Moses, the Torah, by nature do what the law requires. They are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law.

Twice, he says they don't have the Mosaic law. Nevertheless, by nature, God gave them a sense of morality, and sometimes they did the right thing. Most primitive peoples do not condone murder or taking their neighbor's wife.

Oh, they have twisted moral codes, I understand. And in some tribes, deceit is valued as a virtue, and so forth. I mean, there's weird stuff going on.

In civilized society, there's probably weirder stuff going on. But sometimes, people without the law do the right thing. Paul says when they do that, they are a law to themselves.

They are a revelation of God to themselves and other people. Here's a couple. They're unsaved.

They are part of the famous group of nuns, N-O-N-E-S. No religious commitment whatsoever, and yet they love each other. They're faithful to each other.

Neither one runs around as unfaithful to any other partner. Furthermore, they love their kids, and they train them, spend time with them, love them, and correct them. There will be blessings in that marriage and in that home because it is God's world, and God's principles are true.

And without them even knowing it, they are a revelation of God's principles of commitment in marriage, of training up children, to be respectful and good citizens, and so forth. You see, when Gentiles who do not have the law of Moses by nature do what the law requires, yeah, the law of Moses requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law of Moses. They show that the work of the law of Moses is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them.

And this will all come to light, in the sense that on the day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus, He goes on to lambaste the Jews who have the law and who are hypocrites. They don't obey the law.

They accuse the Gentiles of doing bad things, and they do the same things. At least in their hearts and sometimes outwardly. Gentiles who don't have the word of God sometimes do what the word of God expects.

They don't give God the glory. They don't even know they're doing what God wants them to do, although in a sense, they do, and that's part of the point of the passage. But they don't overtly give God credit.

Oh, I'm being faithful to my partner because God said, thou shall not commit adultery. And Jesus said you should not even commit adultery in your heart. No, that's not what's going on.

Instinctively, because of the law of God written on their hearts, they're faithful to their spouses because it works. It makes their marriage better. Their love life is better than if they ran around.

Ah, the Gentiles show the work of the law is written on their hearts. This is an internal, general revelation. This is not just for saints.

Everybody, all sinners. Adam and Eve had it before the fall, and after the fall, human beings still get the revelation and creation, and they still get the revelation of God, the law of God written into their hearts. That means we were created, Ephesians 4, 22 to 24, in original holiness and righteousness.

Adam and Eve were not innocent beings. They were holy beings in fellowship with the holy God. That is, humanity is moral, is a moral component.

Now, in the fall, we're immoral, and that's what it means when it says. We have this conscience. Conscience is kind of a measure, a measure, a barometer, a thermometer that goes with the law of God in the heart, and sometimes it says, good, good, yes.

Other times, it says, no, no, it smites us. Now, it's complicated. It's possible to so abuse your conscience so that it doesn't work anymore, but it still works some of the time for everybody, and sometimes our consciousness says yes, and sometimes it says no.

However, the great theologian Jiminy Cricket is not to be ensconced in one's creed because it is not true you should always let your conscience be your guide. It's only good if it suits you. Even that can be tricky.

At the end of Romans 14, whatever is not of faith is a sin, so Calvin says the legalists can get to the place where if you think drinking water is a sin, then it's a sin, and it

would be. Drinking water, that's right. Anything that's not of faith is a sin, and that's ridiculous.

I understand, but it would be sin, and the antidote would be to educate the conscience and say drinking water is not sin, and maybe some other things the legalists are into, which is not my point right now. Anyway, God has written his law on human hearts, and we instinctively know right from wrong. Oh, C.S. Lewis helps us here.

We're really good at this in certain situations. Now, we're not so good at it always when we do what is wrong, and we rationalize it. Well, everybody's doing, oh, nobody's going to see me.

I'm not going to hurt anybody, but let somebody else transgress on my turf. Let them sin against me, and man, my conscience, it goes crazy. The alarm sounds.

Who do you think you are? What are you doing? You don't know who I, you know, oh my word. That is, our conscience is very sensitized toward infractions against us. Not so much when we sit against others, but God has revealed himself in the human heart, and that is as much his revelation as is his revelation in creation and its general.

Every human heart now has the law of God written on it. Sinners do different things with it, and when we come back in our next lecture, we will again follow the pattern and read a summary to clarify and codify some of these things.

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