

Dr. Robert A. Peterson, Revelation and Scripture, Session 8, Internal General Revelation, Romans 2:12-16 and Ecclesiastes 3:11. General Revelation in Providence, Acts 14:14-18, and 17:22-29

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Our Father, we thank you that you are the speaking God, who, according to Hebrews 1:1 and 2, spoke both in Old Testament and New Testament times in your word. We thank you that your revelation is even bigger than that, that you revealed yourself in your creation and wrote your law on human hearts.

Bless us as we think about these things. Lead us in your way, and we pray through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

We just looked at Romans 2.12-16, which speaks of God having written his law on the human heart and even those without the Mosaic law, without the Bible, show the effects of that law in their sometimes doing what's right and sometimes doing what's wrong and their conscience having a part to play in that. As with the other exegesis of these key passages, I now go to the notes and summarize. God reveals himself in humanity.

God makes himself known in his creation, external general revelation outside of us in the world, God reveals himself. He also makes himself known in internal general revelation that is inside of us, in our very nature. Human nature is thus revelatory.

Human beings are not only creatures of God but revelations of God, as a matter of fact, in both senses. Because again, the guy in the cave trying to get away from external general revelation cannot because of his breath and his heartbeat and so forth; even if he feels his own body, he is an external general revelation from God. Likewise, Romans 1:32, which we saw, said that though they know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things, a whole list of sins, deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.

Then in chapter 2, Paul condemns the hypocrites who don't approve of things in others' lives but do the very things themselves. Romans 1:32 and then 2:12-16, Paul

teaches here that all human beings, saved and unsaved, have the requirements of the law written on their hearts. God reveals his moral demands within us.

This is internal general revelation. Romans 2:14-15, for when Gentiles who do not have the law, by nature, do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them.

This is according to Paul's gospel, Paul says, on the day of God's judgment, our inner secrets will be revealed in verse 16. Even before people know Christ or his word, they do by nature the things of the law, sometimes. Even though the Gentiles do not have to take commandments, God's requirements written on their hearts cause them to be a law to themselves.

They are internal general revelation. They have it, and they are it. They themselves are a sort of moral revelation of God.

Oh, it's immoral or amoral. No, it's not amoral. It's moral or immoral, alternately.

It's because we are moral beings. It's part of the image of God. The law works.

It expresses itself by passing judgment on our actions, using the internal meter that we have called a conscience. Our consciences work sometimes to accuse and sometimes to defend and excuse our actions. Presumably our consciences work in accordance with our internal moral principles to pass judgment on our behavior.

Romans 2:15. We all know God's moral requirements very well. We know that our sinful actions are wrong and worthy of God's judgment. 1:32. You see, although Paul doesn't talk about the law of God on the heart until Romans 2:14 and 15, it's already assumed in 1:32 when he says, though they know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die.

That speaks of the effects of the law written on the heart. How do they know God's righteous decree that the sins just listed in great detail, in a great big list, deserve death? Because of the law of God written on the heart. Thus, 1:32 of Romans presupposes 2:14 and 15.

What attributes of God are revealed in this way, in this means of internal general revelation? It's a very good question. This internal general revelation reveals God's attributes of holiness and justice and his work of judgment. Verse 32 of 1. This internal general revelation is known by all people and has implications for the passage.

It is suppressed and perverted so that people have a tendency to apply moral requirements in the judgment of others while excusing themselves for the same sins, as is evidenced in the hypocrisy of chapters 2, 1, through 3. Thus, there are similarities and differences between internal and external general revelation. The biggest similarity is they're both species of general revelation. Everybody is under the sun.

Everybody has a law of God written on their heart. They're also similar in that both of these revelations work. God's external general revelation gets to people, and so does his internal general revelation, as evidenced by the work of the human conscience.

No, you don't! Somebody says, offended that somebody wronged them. That's a result of a law of God written on their heart. They're different in this regard.

God's revelation in his creation outside of us shows his glory, beauty, power, and wisdom, but not his holiness. Emerson said that nature is red in teeth and claws. When the lion eats the antelope, is the lion sinning? No, it doesn't pertain.

Lions and antelopes are not made in the image of God. They don't have the law of God written on their heart. So, unlike external general revelation, internal general revelation reveals God's holiness, imperfectly since the fall, of course, his justice and his work of judgment.

God's works are creation, providence, redemption, and consummation, which includes judgment. One more passage, often neglected. Ecclesiastes, believe it or not, 311.

God has made everything appropriate in its time. He has also put eternity in their hearts. But no one can discover the work of God.

No one can discover the work God has done from beginning to end. Something inside of us reaches out for eternal things. C.S. Lewis described this even as a boy.

He had this sense of a greater reality. It escaped him, but at times, he felt he was on the cusp of it. But it was elusive, and yet there it was.

And it produced joy, but then it faded, and like that, something inside of us reaches out for eternal things. However, as the end of the verse bears out, I want to do the ESV. What gain has the worker from his toil? I have seen the business that God has given to the children of man to be happy and busy with.

He's made everything beautiful in its time. Also, he's put eternity in the man's heart, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end. I

perceive that there's nothing better for them than to be joyful and to do good as long as they live.

Also, everyone should eat and drink and take pleasure in all his toil. This is God's gift to man. So, we have a sense of eternity within our hearts.

God has revealed himself to us in that way, and yet it's elusive. As the end of the verse points out, we're frustrated in our desire for the eternal because we cannot understand God's plan in its entirety. A note in the NIV Study Bible bears the quotation, quote God's beautiful but tantalizing world is too big for us, yet its satisfactions are too small.

Since we were made for eternity, the things of time cannot be fully and permanently satisfied. One more time, God's beautiful but tantalizing world is too big for us, yet its satisfactions are too small. Since we were made for eternity, the things of time cannot be fully and permanently satisfied.

NIV study Bible at Ecclesiastes 3:11. Actually, in doing this lecture and thinking about this right now, this verse may pertain to external general revelation as well. It doesn't deal with morality, that's for sure. It does deal with human awareness.

I guess it is where it belongs. Awareness of transcendence, a desire for eternity, but an inability to comprehend that of which we have a partial awareness. God reveals himself, oh, in his son and in his word and in miracles, and we'll see later on, in visions and all kinds of good things, in the casting of lots in the Old Testament.

That's special revelation given only some people sometimes in some places. But general revelation is always given to all people in all places. And we have three subcategories.

By the way, that's traditionally the case. Revelation in God's creation is so-called external general revelation. Big categories, general and special revelation.

Under general, in creation, in the human heart, in providence. We did the first two, external general revelation in creation, internal general revelation in the law written on the heart and the conscience, and then now God's revelation in providence or history. God's general revelation is made known in creation, conscience, and also providence.

God communicates many of his qualities by working providentially in history. Acts 14. It's Acts 14 and 17 that are the proof passages for this.

Acts 14, to get the context, we go back to verse 8. Now at Lystra, there was a man sitting who could not use his feet. He was crippled from birth and had never walked.

He listened to Paul speaking, and Paul, looking intently at him and seeing that he had faith to be made well, said in a loud voice, stand upright on your feet.

And he sprang up, blows my mind, no physical therapy, no trainer. And he sprang up and began walking. And when the crowd saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voices, saying in Lyconian, the gods have come down to us in the likeness of men.

I also taught for many years in two different evangelical seminaries. And sometimes, when we had a day of prayer, that kind of a thing, students would gather in groups, and many times, students of certain ethnicities would gather together and make sense. And although they could use English, if their first, if their mother tongue was another language, they would pray in that language.

And so it is here. These people could understand Paul and Barnabas not because Paul and Barnabas spoke Lyconian but because they didn't. They all spoke the common, ordinary Greek.

Koine Greek. But when these people got excited about this healing, they didn't exclaim in that language. They exclaimed in their mother tongue.

I'm a part of a ministry to Ukraine. We have two marvelous translators, Yana and Natasha, and their English is good. At times, Natasha has corrected my English.

I've written a number of books and so forth. Good grief. It's more like I'm reaching for a word, and she gives it to me.

She supplies it. Oh boy. But I asked Yana, who translated a course recently for me.

When you pray, what language can you pray in? She says, well, I can pray in English. What language do you pray in? She says Ukrainian. That makes sense.

It's your mother tongue. It's the tongue you learn first of all, as a child. The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men.

Barnabas they called Zeus. Why? He was older. I imagine him with a big manly beard, an older man.

He's the king of the gods. He's Zeus. Paul's the speaker, dude.

He's the big preacher, right? And Paul, they called him Hermes. If you switched your pantheons, it would have been Mercury because he was the chief speaker. And the priest of Zeus, you see, Paul and Barnabas did not understand Iconium, but they understood body language.

When Zeus' priest started to sacrifice for them, they got the message real quick. The priest of Zeus, whose temple was at the entrance of the city, brought oxen and garlands to the gates and wanted to offer sacrifice to the crowds. But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of it and saw it, no doubt, they tore their garments and rushed out into the crowd shouting, men, why are you doing these things? You see, when Paul went to seminary at Tarsus Divinity School, he had courses on missions, of course.

Yes, I'm being ludicrous, but he never had a course on what you do when you're invited to a worship service, and you're the deity. In revulsion as good Jews, I hope they had spare clothes; they tore their robes. Men, why are you doing these things? We also are men.

We're mere mortals of like nature with you. And we bring you good news that you should turn from these vain things to a living God who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them. They affirm God's being the creator.

You say that's external general revelation, right? Yes, but it's more. In past generations, he allowed all the nations to walk in their own ways, yet he did not leave himself without witness. He allowed the nations to go in their own ways, that is, without whacking them, without condemning them with the condemnation they deserved.

He put up with them in order to give more time for the, well, for the Christ to come, for the gospel to be spread, and so forth. Yet God did not leave himself without witness. It's, again, it's litotes, denying the negative to affirm the positive.

God bore witness of himself, for he did well by giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness. Isn't God good? We all enjoy table fellowship. Even with these words, they scarcely restrain the people from offering sacrifice to them.

That would be so weird. Written summary, Acts 14:14 to 18. In Acts 14, Paul and Barnabas go to Lystra on the first missionary journey.

In Paul's words, a man lame from birth jumps up and begins to walk, verses 8 to 10. The people proclaim Paul and Barnabas to be the gods Hermes and Zeus, respectively. The apostles do not understand the Lycian tongue the people are speaking, but the body language of the priest of Zeus is unmistakable when he approaches them to sacrifice oxen.

In response, Paul and Barnabas tear their robes in revulsion and shout, this time from the Christian Standard Bible, people, why are you doing these things? We are

people also just like you. And we are proclaiming good news to you that you turn from these worthless things to the living God who made the heaven, the earth, the sea, and everything in them. In past generations, he allowed all the nations to go their own way.

Although he did not leave himself without a witness, he did what is good by giving you rain from heaven and fruitful seasons and filling you with food and your hearts with joy. Again, Romans 14:15 to 17. God, the creator, bears witness of himself in providence, not only in creation, not only in the law and the heart but in providence.

There's a general revelation from God in his ordering of life and history, verse 17. Specifically, he testifies himself in his providential acts of giving rain to grow crops and fruit to satisfy our physical, and don't leave out this, and emotional needs, verse 17. This reveals God's existence, his role as creator, which is explicit in verse 15, and his generosity.

That's what we mean by goodness as a theological term. The attribute of the goodness of God means his generosity. It's not. Goodness doesn't mean holiness, it doesn't mean goodness as opposed to badness.

I actually like the term generosity. Benevolence is another one commonly used. And his generosity, goodness, and benevolence to all people.

Notice that this is a general revelation. As Jesus said, the good Lord's Father shows his goodness by giving rain to the saved and unsaved farmer. The time of this revelation is continual, season after season implied.

And the extent of this revelation is worldwide. Wherever there is rain, food, and happiness implied, their God has manifested his generosity, his kindness, just don't think of saving kindness, but his goodness, his benevolence. He is a good God, and he gives good gifts to all people.

Not only the sky and the human heart with its moral indications but vegetables, fruit, food, fellowship, and joy. Act 17, likewise, is the other famous proof text for the revelation of God, the general revelation of God in history or providence. Context, Paul in Athens, 1716.

Now, while Paul was waiting for them, Silas and Timothy, at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him as he saw that the city was full of idols. So, he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons, and in the marketplace every day with those who happened to be there. Some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers also conversed with him, and some said, what does this babbler wish to say? Others said, he seemed to be a preacher of foreign divinities because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection.

In Acts, in 1 Corinthians 15, the Corinthians confessed Jesus' death and resurrection to be Christians, but they had a problem with the resurrection of the dead. The reason is they had seen corpses, and they assumed wrongly; this is a consensus of scholars of the Corinthian correspondence; they had assumed incorrectly that the resurrection would involve the raising of corpses, something like zombies, and they just couldn't handle that. No, Paul says, the key concept in resurrection is transformation.

So, when Paul mentions resurrection, Plato and Aristotle believed in the immortality of the soul, but not in resurrection, that was just a, oh, decrepit bodies being raised, oh, that's horrible. And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus saying, may we know what this new teaching is you are presenting? For you bring some strange things to our ears. We wish to know, therefore, what these things mean.

Now, all the Athenians and foreigners who live there would spend their time in nothing except telling or hearing something new. We come right close to our text now. Paul addresses the Areopagus.

So, Paul, standing in the middle of the Areopagus, said, men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious, for as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I also found an altar with this inscription, to the unknown God. What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. The God who made the world and everything in it, being the Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything.

And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, that they should seek God and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us, for he quotes from one of their heathen poets, one of their pagan poets; in him we live and move and have our being, as even some of your own poets have said, for we are indeed his offspring. The quotations are thought to be from Epimenides.

The first one is unsure, but we think that the second is from Aratus. That one is more certain. Being then God's offspring, we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of man.

In the times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed. And of this, he has given us assurance to all by raising him from the dead. Now, when they heard of the

resurrection of the dead, some mocked, but others said, we will hear you again about this.

So, Paul went out from their midst, but some men joined him and believed, among whom also were Dionysius the Areopagite, a woman named Damaris, and others with them. So, Paul had spoken in the synagogue in Athens, but he also spoke to the Athenians in the marketplace, in a place where the philosophers would go to philosophize, and as Luke tells us in Acts here, to hear something new. Paul affirms that God gives all humankind life, breath, and everything else.

Once again, God's being creator is foundational to his revelation in creation, conscience, and providence. He made it from one man, and it's a reference to Adam, every nation of mankind to live on the earth, the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place. The Lord, in his providence, directed ethnicities, movements of people, the establishment of nations and states, and so forth, and here's the purpose that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him, and find him.

And then he quotes their own writers to say that he is imminent, and we are his creatures. And then of course, he again, he began and ends with a denunciation of idolatry, and then he preaches Christ and the resurrection, and that sets them off.

Once again, I follow the pattern of now reading some notes. On the very same passage. In Acts 17, Paul addresses the Athenians and notices that among their countless idols, I've seen a report of thousands of idols as you walk down the street, is an altar to an unknown God.

Eckhart Schnabel, a New Testament scholar, has two big volumes on Paul's missionary journeys, and he catalogs every idol in every city. It is an amazing work of scholarship. Oh, it is just amazing.

The numbers of them. Some were pornographic. Oh, just woven into the fabric of life.

So, basically, every person in the Roman Empire was an idolater. Or you'd be regarded as not a good citizen. Oh, so the Thessalonians turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God.

No wonder they were persecuted. Anyway, among their countless idols is an altar to an unknown God. Paul declares to them the one living and true God, of whom they are ignorant.

Verse 23, Acts 17. The God who made the world and everything in it. He is the Lord of heaven and earth and, therefore, cannot be confined to a temple.

His creatures cannot control or manipulate him, for he himself gives everyone life and breath and all things. Acts 17:24, 25. God is not only the creator of all; he also sustains his creation, including humanity, including humanity.

His common grace, his benevolence and kindness to saved and unsaved alike, blesses us with life, breath, and all good gifts. James 1, every good and perfect gift comes down from the creator of the lights. The father of lights.

Which speaks of God as the creator of the heavenly orbs. Following the power of Genesis 1, Paul moves from the creation of the heavens and earth to that of men and women. Humanity is one because all are descended from God's first man, Adam.

God plans for human beings, in general, to subdue and care for the earth. He also has particular plans for each nation. Appointing the quote times and boundaries of where they live.

Acts 17:26. Note God's purpose in doing this quote, that they might seek God and perhaps they might reach out and find him. Close quote verse 27.

God makes human beings know him, and he is close to all of us. In fact, we depend on him for life, whether or not we realize it. Verses 27 and 28.

God reveals himself in his providential ordering of the nation's times and locations so that they might seek and find him. This concludes our exegesis and treatment of God's general revelation in creation, conscience, and providence. In our next lecture, we will pursue a theology of general revelation and seek to bring some of these things together, including trying to answer questions such as, can a person be saved through this means? And if not, what is the relation of this general revelation to the Christian missionary enterprise? Important questions indeed. Providence, Acts chapter 14, verses 14 to 18, and chapter 17, verses 22 through 29.

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