

Revelation

The Bible teaches that man does not naturally want to know God, nor does he seek God (Rom 3:11-12). Not only does man not want to know God, but he cannot know God apart from God the Son choosing to reveal Him (Matt 11:27). After all, the secret things belong to the Lord (Deut 29:29). However, God, in His grace has chosen to communicate Himself with man (Heb 1:1-2). Scripture limits the ways in which God reveals Himself to two kinds: general (or natural) revelation and special (or direct) revelation.

General/Natural Revelation

God chose to disclose Himself in nature that that He created (Ps 19:1-6), as well as the conscience of man (Rom 1:18-21; 2:14-15). Through these two avenues of creation and conscience man gains an introductory knowledge of God.

So what are some ramifications we can learn from Romans 1:18-21? We learn that *all* people everywhere receive an elementary knowledge of God (v19). We also see His eternal, invisible attributes that are clearly seen in creation and that these invisible attributes tell man that God is an eternally powerful being (v19-20). Further, it shows that God requires man to respond to the information that he receives (v21). Yet, though man knows about God, he chooses not to be thankful or worshipful (v21). In the end, man's sinful heart consistently suppresses the truth (v18) and the results are that God is angry with man (v18) and man is without excuse (v20).

After penning chapter one of Romans, Paul furnishes a Jewish illustration. According to Romans 2:14-15, even pagans showed by their actions that they generally knew the difference between right and wrong. Though they did not have the Scriptures, their morality demonstrated that God had placed His law of right and wrong in their hearts. This inner law was the basis for operation of their conscience. It was then that their conscience either approved of their proper actions, or accused them of their wrong actions.

There is a great story of Helen Keller, the deaf, mute and blind woman who had absolutely no capacity to communicate, until Anne Sullivan spend hours upon hours, days upon days and months upon months to unlock communication. When Anne attempted to tell Helen Keller about God her amazing response was, "I already know about Him, I just didn't know His name." All men everywhere, by virtue of general revelation know of God's existence. It is only the foolish one who denies this (Ps 14:1).

Special/Direct Revelation

Special revelation is more supernatural than general revelation. General revelation is open to everyone, whereas, special revelation is more selective. This form of revelation is more supernatural than general revelation. Whereas general revelation is open to everyone, special revelation is more selective.

When we look at the historical record as revealed in Scripture we see several various ways in which God directly reveals Himself. There is the audible voice in the Garden of Eden, theophanies/angel of the Lord (Gen 16:7-14; Ex 3:2; 2 Sam 24:16; Zech 1:12), dreams (Gen 20:3, 6; 31:11-13, 24, 40-41; Joel 2:28) and visions (Isa 1:1; 6:1; Ez 1:3), prophet's preaching and writings (2 Sam 23:2; Zech 1:1), urim and thummim (Ex 28:30; Num 27:21; Deut 33:8; 1 Sam 28:6; Ezra 26:3), angels (Dan 9:20-21; Lk 2:10-11; Rev 1:1), the Incarnation (Jn 1:14; 14:9), and finally the Bible—revelation that is truthful (Jn 17:17), progressive (Heb 1:1), and purposeful (2 Tim 3:15-17).

Progress of Revelation

Here is where careful Bible study¹ is required in order to recognize the progressiveness, as well as the completeness, of Biblical revelation. A careful study of Scripture shows the different dispensations/ages in which God has interacted with mankind. Each revelation from God has been incomplete apart from the Incarnate Word and the Written Word of God. As time progressed, so did God's revelation. The New Testament is a more complete revelation of God, especially of Christ, than the Old Testament. The church is a mystery unrevealed in the OT (Eph 3:1-13). Furthermore, the kingdom of God that is spoken of in the OT is elucidated in Christ's kingdom parables during His earthly ministry. Paul knew more than John the Baptist, as the ministry of Christ was between their two ministries. God used to speak through prophets, then through His Son, but now and forever through His Word (Heb 1:1-3).

We must remember that revelation is partial, yet complete. The revelation God has given in the Bible is partial, as we still do not know everything about God's Person or plan. He still keeps secrets to Himself (Deut 29:29). John was not allowed to record everything that was revealed to him (Jn 21:25; Rev 10:4), nor could Paul share some utterances (2 Cor 12:4).

However, God's revelation is also complete in that it revealed enough for us to accomplish His purposes. According to the Apostle Peter, we have everything that we need for life and godliness (2 Pet 1:3). It is the inspired revelation of God that equips believers for every good work (2 Tim 3:16-17). This completeness not only speaks of sufficiency, but also of finality. The Christian cannot expect to find a new truth or further revelation needing to be added to the Bible. The apostle, John, gravely warns us not to look any further for revelation than to that already revealed in Scripture (Rev 22:18).

Recommended Resources:

The Revelation of God-John Frame
Systematic Theology-Wayne Grudem
Christian Theology-Millard Erickson
Basic Theology-Charles Ryrie
The Moody Handbook of Theology-Paul Enns
Unleashing God's Word in Your Life-John MacArthur

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¹ See article on hermeneutics here:

http://www.biblicalexpositor.org/site/outlines.asp?sec_id=180007636&secure=&lyear=0&dcat=Hermeneutics