

Institutes of Theology | Session 15
Bibliology: The Knowledge of God
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Tom Pennington, Pastor-Teacher
Countryside Bible Church, Southlake, Texas

Well, we, as he said, are starting tonight and the semesters with the categories of systematic theology. Systematic theology is simply the systematizing of the truth of what the Scripture teaches. And one of the major categories is Bibliology: What does the Bible say about itself? And tonight, we start looking at the issue of revelation, that God has revealed himself. I want to start in John 3. Turn there with me. One of the most interesting interchanges in the New Testament was one that Jesus had with a man named Nicodemus. This was a man, you know, with great credentials. Verse 1 says he was a man of the Pharisees, and he was a ruler of the Jews. That is, he was one of the 70 men who sat on the governing council of Israel, the Sanhedrin. And this man was very knowledgeable, or at least so he thought, about spiritual things.

Look at verse 2, “This man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, ‘Rabbi, we know.’ What did he know? Well, he knew that Jesus' miracles were legitimate. You can see that in verse 2. He knew that God intended those miracles to authenticate Jesus as a teacher from God, and he knew therefore that he should listen to Jesus. He knew all of that. And yet, Jesus' response to him is interesting. You know what Jesus says to Nicodemus? With all of those credentials behind his name, Jesus told Nicodemus that his whole approach to knowledge, his epistemology—that is, how he knows what he knows—it was entirely wrong. Jesus told him that he first had to be born again. Verse 3, “Jesus answered and said to him, truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again [or born from above], he cannot see the kingdom of God.” Until Nicodemus experienced an inner spiritual transformation, he wasn't qualified to know or to say what was true. And Nicodemus, of course, goes on to prove Jesus very, very right because he doesn't get it.

Look at verse 4, Nicodemus said, How? “How can a man be born when he's old? He can't enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born, can he?” Now, there's a lot of debate about whether he really is talking about birth or whether he gets what Jesus is saying, that you need

spiritual rebirth, and he's saying, hey, you can't start over. There's no way to do that. There's a lot of debate about what he meant. But either way, he clearly didn't get what Jesus was saying. And down in verse 9, Nicodemus said to him, how can these things be? Notice Jesus' response to this man in verse 10. "Jesus answered and said to him, are you the teacher of Israel [the leading teacher in the nation] and you don't understand these things? Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak what we know and testify of what we have seen, and you do not accept our testimony. If I told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things?" He's basically saying, look, Nicodemus, you just, you don't get it, and you're not going to get it. God has revealed the truth to you, and without the new birth, you're not going to come to understand it.

That reminds us, as we begin tonight, that there are two basic approaches to the knowledge of God. The first of those is through our own efforts, and that can take a couple of common paths. One of them is emotional experience or mysticism. Another path that that can take is reason alone. 1 Corinthians 1:21 speaks of this approach of rationalism. "Since in the wisdom of God, the world through its wisdom did not come to know God, God was well pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe." The world can't get there by reason alone. There are a couple of serious problems with arriving at the knowledge of God through our own efforts. The first of those is the nature of God Himself. How could a finite mind like ours, through its own effort, come to know the infinite God of the universe? You might as well expect a paper doll to understand through its efforts the child who made it. The second problem with gaining a knowledge of God through our own efforts is ourselves, our own character. All our faculties, though made in the image of God, were terribly marred by the fall. We are not what we once were as humans. The Bible teaches instead that our knowledge of God and all spiritual realities comes not through reason alone or experience, but because God has chosen to make Himself known.

And that brings us to the second approach to the knowledge of God, and that is through revelation. And this is the only way anyone ever comes to know God. Revelation. Now, we use the word revelation to describe God's self-disclosure in the same sense that it's used in the title of the last book of the New Testament, the Revelation of Jesus Christ. The Greek word translated revelation in Revelation 1:1 is *apokalopsis*, and it means literally "an unveiling or a disclosure."

So when we speak of God's revelation, we mean God's drawing back the veil to show us Himself and His will. Or we could say that revelation is God's self-disclosure. Now, when we speak about God revealing Himself to those made in His image, God's self-disclosure or His revelation according to Scripture takes two forms. The first of those is general revelation. The second of those is special revelation. And we're going to look at those each in turn.

So, here is an overview, a comparison of these two forms of revelation. First of all, with general revelation, you see it's spelled out, explained in Psalm 19, the first six verses. We're going to go there in a few minutes. When we say general revelation, we're using the word, theologians are using the word, "general" in two senses. First of all, meaning the scope of its message is universal. It's general in that it reaches all peoples. And the content of its message is general in that it doesn't have as much specific content. It reveals only these large sweeping categories. That's general revelation.

Special revelation, you see that in Psalm 19, verses 7 through 11. And I preached a series of messages on Psalm 19, which sort of unveil these two aspects of God's revelation. But we're going to touch on just the first part of Psalm 19. But you see this special revelation in the second part of Psalm 19. And when we again use the word special, it's making the opposite point of general. It's describing that the scope of its message is limited, and the content of its message is specific. The scope is limited to those who read it, and particularly those whose minds the Holy Spirit opened to receive it. And it is specific in its content, and it tells us some very specific things about ourselves, and about God, and about how we can know him. So "special" then, when we say special revelation, we are primarily talking about God's self-revelation in Scripture, because even the other forms are revealed in the Scripture. The only reason we know about some of these other ways God spoke in the past is because they're revealed to us in the Scripture. So that's general and special.

Let's go first of all to general revelation. General revelation. And I want to start by considering in this category of general revelation, the messengers of general revelation. Where does general revelation come from? We'll consider the message in just a minute, but let's first look at the messengers. How does God reveal Himself in this general sense? First of all, he does so through creation.

You know, it is amazing what scientific advances have allowed us in the 21st century to see and understand about God and his creation. It wasn't until the 13th century that an Italian developed the art of grinding lenses and created the first eyeglass, which allowed magnification over one eye. We've all seen the little spectacle in the one eye. More than 300 years later, around 1600, Dutch lens grinders, a father and son, made the first microscope by placing two of those ground lenses in a tube. But what they discovered really was kind of a novelty for the next 100 years. It was in 1675 that a Dutch scientist made the first real microscope. He developed a new way to polish lenses. And through his simple microscope with a very good lens, he was the first in 1675 to see and describe bacteria, yeast, the life that was teeming in a single drop of water, and the circulation of blood corpuscles in capillaries. Fast forward to 1938—and then came the electron microscope. And then in 1981, two men invented the scanning electron microscope that allows three-dimensional images of objects down to the, down to the atomic level. And that's opened up a whole new level of information about God's creation to us.

Take, for example, the Alaskan krill. You may not have ever thought about the Alaskan krill. But it is a small crustacean that's typically about one and a half to two inches long. Just to give you some idea of the scope of the Alaskan krill, scientists tell us that just one species of krill has a biomass, you could take all of their body mass and put it together, has a biomass of 380 million tons. In other words, the biomass of one species of krill is greater than the biomass of all humans on the planet. That's how many krill there are in the ocean, just one species. So, I mean, how interested could God be in the details of a krill? You weren't interested until I just told you. This is the eye of a krill under a microscope. But examine the krill's eye under a 3D high magnification kind of microscope, and the detail and symmetry you discover is truly amazing. That's one tiny little creature made up, making up a mass of our ocean. It's astounding.

William Hendrickson writes, “Even without the benefit of such products of human invention as a microscope and telescope, even before that, men were able to reflect on the vastness of the universe, the fixed order of the heavenly bodies and their courses, the arrangement of the leaves around the stem, the cycle of newly created water works, the mystery of growth from seed to plant, not just any plant, but a particular kind of plant from which the seed originated, the thrill of the sunrise from faint rosy flush to majestic orb, the skill of birds in building their homes without ever having taken lessons in home building, the generous manner in which food is

supplied for all creatures, the adaptation of living creatures to their environment, for example, the flexible soles of the camel's feet to the soft desert sands, etc., etc., etc.” And he closes with this statement, “The evidence is overwhelming. It is overwhelming.” Now, as Hendrickson notes in that quote, the heavens have always been a powerful messenger of general revelation.

Turn with me to Psalm 19. Psalm 19. In the first half of this Psalm, we learn that every day and night, the sky above us declares the truth about God. It screams general revelation. In fact, in verses 1 to 6, we discover five characteristics of the message of general revelation. First of all, notice verse 1, “The heavens are telling of the glory of God, and their expanse is declaring the work of his hands.” Notice those two words, telling and declaring. What the writer tells us is that general revelation, the message about God, is explicit. It's proclaiming, it's declaring, specifically, the glory, the weightiness, the majesty of God.

Notice verse 2, “Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night reveals knowledge.” In other words, the witness of general revelation is constant. Any time of day, you want to look at the sky, you're going to be getting a message about God, about His greatness, about His glory. It's constant. Whether it's daytime or nighttime. In the daytime, obviously, the sun that dominates our lives gives us heat, makes things grow, brings evaporation to the water so that the hydrological cycle waters the earth. It's amazing. And then at night, you go out and see the moon and the stars, and it takes your breath away if you can see them without the city lights. The glory of God. It's constant, this message.

Notice verse 3. It's also silent. “There is no speech nor are there words”. Their voice isn't heard. In other words, it's not like there's somebody shouting out. It's there. It's silent testimony, a silent witness that you see all of the time. And verse 4 goes on to say, this is a universal witness. “Their line has gone out through all the earth and their utterances to the end of the world.” There is no place on this planet. There isn't a single point of reference on this planet where you don't see the testimony of God's general revelation in the heavens. And this is true about all of God's general revelation.

And in this case, it's illustrated in verse 4 down through verse 6 by the sun, which dominates our world. So the writer wants us to know, David wants us to understand and know, that this is what general revelation is like. It's explicit. It declares. It proclaims the glory of God. It's constant day

after day, night after night. It's silent in that you don't have to speak a certain language to get it. It's universal. It reaches every point on this planet, and it's illustrated, frankly, in so many ways. He chose the sun since he's choosing the heavens.

Now, Paul makes exactly the same point in Romans chapter 1. Turn there with me. Romans chapter 1 and look at verse 18. "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth and unrighteousness." Now, let me give you some context. Paul has had the introduction of this book in the first 17 verses. He gets to the main force of the letter in the verse I just read, verse 18 of chapter 1. The first section of this letter, the theme of the letter is the gospel of God. He's explaining the gospel he preached, and he says in verse 18, down through verse 32 of chapter 1, he says, let me tell you that those that we would call pagans, that is, those who do not claim to worship the God of the Bible, that pagans know so much about God, and therefore they rightly deserve, verse 18, God's wrath. So let me just give you a layout of this. You have a general summary in the last part of verse 18. "Men suppress the truth in unrighteousness." Men are willingly ignorant of God's person. They suppress the truth. They hold it down. They know it, but they just suppress it. We silence the truth that we know about God that's revealed in creation because we love our sin.

Listen, why is there evolution? It's because men hate the knowledge of the true God Who would hold them accountable. They want some other explanation so they can do what they want. They suppress the truth that's revealed. Now, in verses 19 to 23, Paul gives us a sort of detailed explanation of this. How can Paul say that someone without the scripture, somebody somewhere who's never heard the Book of Romans, who's never heard of the Bible, who's never heard of Jesus Christ, how can Paul say that someone without the scripture is still suppressing the truth? And he says, first of all, because God has revealed himself. Look at verse 19. "Because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them." God has clearly revealed Himself. When? Verse 20. "For since the creation of the world." That's when this witness, this revelation started. Since the very creation, since the beginning. What did God reveal about Himself? Look at how verse 20 continues. "For since the creation of the world, his invisible attributes, his eternal power and divine nature have been clearly seen." Paul argues here that God has made certain of his invisible attributes visible. How? Or which ones?

Well, let's step away from Romans 1 for a moment and just consider that. God's invisible attributes that are revealed in general revelation. Notice verse 20, "His eternal power." Now that's really referring to two separate invisible attributes of God that are shown. One in creation, one of those is His eternity. You say, how does creation show God's eternity? Well, guess what? You've been on this planet somewhere between maybe 18 years and 75 or 80, and yet there were lots of people here before you. You see, it's clear that the world has been here thousands of years, and the one generation follows another. Clearly, the one who made these things and sustained them, sustains them, is not susceptible to the same decay and death that the earth is, or it wouldn't be here. His eternity, also His eternal power. The obvious grandeur of the earth and the vastness of the heavens makes it clear that the One who made and sustains all these things must have power beyond our own and beyond our conception. His eternal power is shown. And I, you know, frankly, if you live in Dallas and most of you do, how can you doubt this when one of those supercell thunderstorms rolls through Dallas? You know what Job says? A thunderstorm is the fringes of His power. It's not even touching His power. We can see it in the creation.

But he also says not only His eternal power, but His divine nature, verse 20. In other words, we can look at the creation and understand that the One who made these things associates, or rather possesses qualities, that are normally associated with deity. In other words, it really means this. Man knows that there is a God. He knows that there is an eternal, immensely powerful supreme being who made all these things.

And you know what else it shows him? Creation shows him that God is a personal being and not a force. You say, how does creation show that? Well, listen to Paul in Acts 17, verse 28. "In Him we live and move and exist, as even some of your own poets have said, for we also are His children. Being then the children of God, we ought not to think that the divine nature is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and thought of man." You know what Paul is really arguing? He's saying, "Look around you. Look around you." God made man as the highest of his creation. And I mean, that's just obvious. Well think about it. That means God must be a personal being like us. He's not part of the, like the inanimate creation, and He's not even like the animals. If we're the highest, then we in some way reflect the God who made us the highest. He has to be a personal being like we are personal beings and relate to others. So we see his eternal power. We see his divine nature.

Now let's go back to Romans 1 again. We were there but let me just pick up my little outline I was showing you. First of all, I want you to see on this slide how God revealed Himself. How exactly did He reveal these invisible attributes? "His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature have been clearly seen." How are they clearly seen? "Being understood through what has been made." In other words, we see those invisible attributes by looking at the creation, looking at what God has made and what results from God's revelation and creation so that they are without excuse. They mean everybody, but that especially in context means pagans. Those who don't have the scripture, who don't claim to worship the God of the Bible, to use the analogy that's often used somewhere, living in a dark jungle somewhere, who's never seen or heard anything about the God of the Bible. They are without excuse. Because all of this is true for them.

When men refuse to acknowledge God and worship Him, men, it is not from lack of evidence. But it is rather, as one writer put it, from their irrational and resolute determination not to know Him. They suppress the truth. That's why the world is the way it is. You say, wait a minute, Tom. Are you saying that a guy somewhere who's never held a Bible, who's never heard a word of the truth that's in our Bibles, are you saying that that person and people like him or her around the world have the capacity to get this message of general revelation from creation? Look at verse 19 again. God made it what? "Evident to them." I've shared with you before one of my favorite book titles is John Blanchard. He wrote a book called Does God Believe in Atheists? Think about that for a moment. We normally say, you know, atheists don't believe in God. Well, God doesn't believe in atheists. Romans 1 is clear. God made it evident to them. So how did they get where they got? They suppressed the truth in unrighteousness. Each person has been given the capacity for receiving this general revelation.

Let me give you a little example from ordinary life. Suppose that you're driving down the street and you come to a sign that says—and there's one right here on my route home and to the church every day—"School Zone, Speed Limit 20." All right? Now suppose you keep driving at 55 miles an hour and a policeman pulls you over. Now, you might be tempted to claim you didn't see the sign. What's the policeman going to say to you? Ignorance of the law is no excuse. You got behind the wheel of a car. If you're driving the car, you had all of this explained to you, you've taken the test, you're responsible to look at the signs and to obey them. And if you saw

that sign and you chose to ignore it, and God forbid you killed a child, you would be responsible for that child's death. Men, God has put up the sign. It's there. If people don't see it or they see it and they choose to ignore it, the fault is not God's, the fault is theirs.

So technically then, there are two parts of general revelation. There is God's external revelation of Himself in the creation, and there is God's internal gift or grant to each person of the capacity to see and understand that revelation. But here's the problem. Paul says that man has chosen to reject that revelation. Verse 18, "Men suppress [or they stifle] the truth that God has revealed. Why? Well, he explains it in two words. Notice, here's why. First of all, ungodliness. That describes a state of opposition to God. It's a refusal to recognize God's rightful claims on your life. That's why people suppress the truth and why God's wrath is revealed. It's also unrighteousness. That means that people love their sin and don't want to do what's right. They hate righteousness, so they don't want to acknowledge a God who has set up righteous claims on their life. James Montgomery Boyce put it this way, "In other words, the refusal to know God is based not so much on intellectual causes as on moral ones. That's the real issue. The truth is, creation screams about our God and his power and his goodness and his wisdom."

For example, consider our sun, which of course dominates our lives, and that's why David brings it up in Psalm 19. It's 93 million miles away. I mean, I'll just say that number, and it's like, what's 93 million? That's unimaginable, sort of incalculable, because we don't think in those terms. That's how far it is away. If it were any closer, our earth would be incinerated. If it went any farther away, our earth would turn into an ice ball. Or take the moon, for example. If it were any closer than the 240,000 miles that it is from the earth, its gravitational pull would cause the tides to engulf the entire earth with water twice a day. Or consider the human cell. Every cell in your body has more information than is on your computer. And most of the world's computers. Each cell is filled with tiny machines. It's amazing to see. Some of those little machines in each cell oversee assembly line production. Others of them transport materials around and throughout the cell. The complexity and the order speaks to the character of the One who made it. Like the song we sing, "There's not a plan or flower below, but makes thy glories known. Lord, how thy wonders are displayed, where'er I turn my eye, if I survey the ground I tread or gaze upon the sky." This is general revelation in creation.

So, what are the messengers of general revelation? First of all, there's creation. But there's another messenger, and that is providence. Turn with me to Matthew chapter 5. No, we're not doing the Beatitudes tonight. Matthew chapter five, verse 45, we'll get here one of these days. He says, let's get a running start, go back to verse 44. "I say to you, love your enemies, pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father." Now watch how God's described here, "Who is in heaven. For He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous."

You know what he's saying? He's saying, love your enemies, because God loves his enemies. And one of the ways God displays his love for his enemies is by doing good to them. I mean, imagine if our God wasn't like this. And you could drive down your street here in Texas in August, and you could see those that were evil, because all of their lawns would be crispy brown. And then you drive to the lawns of those who are righteous, and all of their lawns are this rich green, and everything's growing lush. God could do that, but God doesn't do that, because it's contrary to his nature. And in general revelation by his providence, how he orders life on this planet, he shows us something about himself, that he is good.

Turn to Acts 14. This is one of my favorite passages Acts 14. And we'll start, you'll notice in verse 8 that Paul arrives at Lystra, Timothy's hometown, and a man lame from birth listens to Paul's message, he's converted and healed. As a result of that, the people conclude that Paul and Barnabas are gods. Go down to verse 13. The priest of Zeus prepares to sacrifice to them, and in verse 14, they see the animals, they inquire what's going on, and they're shocked to discover they're about to have sacrifices made to them as gods. So they tear their outer garments, a common expression of grief or horror. And then in verses 15 to 17, we have one of two classic examples of Paul preaching to a pagan audience. (The other example, of course, is Acts 17 before Mars Hill. Now, with a pagan audience, you know, Paul often started with the synagogue. And when he went to the synagogue, preaching the gospel to the Jews and Gentile proselytes, since they believed, they already believed there was only one true and living God, the God of the Bible, Paul typically started by arguing from the Bible that Jesus is the Messiah that was promised.) But with a pagan audience, notice he starts with creation. Look at verse 15. And he said, God, "Men, why are you doing these things? We are also men of the same nature as you, and we preach the gospel to you, that you should turn from these vain things to a living God."

The true God is one. There is one living God. And notice he goes on to say in verse 15, that he “made heaven and earth and the sea and all that is in them.” That one true God created everything. You see, the starting point for the proclamation of the gospel to a pagan, and guys, increasingly our culture is pagan, and you're going to meet people like this who don't have a clue about who God is or that there is a God.

The starting point there is creation. Look around you. Obviously, someone made these things. He is the true God. By the way, that's why evolution is so dangerous, because it undermines the foundation of evangelism to pagans. One other comment before I leave this. By the way, guys, understand that evolution doesn't solve the question or doesn't really even answer the question of origins. It just postpones it. Where did the stuff come from, from which everything else came? You see, time doesn't make the impossible somehow possible. Given enough time, people think, well, how could it just happen?

I had a professor in seminary who said, “No, think about this.” He said, “If I told you that I was going to take the watch off of your wrist and I was going to break it down into its component parts and put it in a washing machine and start the washing machine, and I said to you, how many of you think that that watch can come together to form a complete and whole watch in five minutes? And of course, everybody rolls their eyes, nobody thinks that. “So what about five years?” No, not going to happen in five years. “What about five million years?” And guys are sitting there kind of scratching their heads going, “Well, you know, maybe in five million years.” Well, if it's not going to happen in that limited time, it's not going to happen in a long period of time. Why? Because there's only one point when all those elements will fit together. Only one point in time when all those elements will fit. They're going to get worn down in the washing machine. The same thing is true with the parts that supposedly came together in evolutionary theory. It's ridiculous.

Paul's second approach with his pagan audience is in verses 16 and 17, and that is God's providential goodness. Notice what he says. “In the generations gone by, he permitted all the nations to go their own ways, and yet [notice this] he did not leave Himself without witness.” Here's God's general revelation. What did he do in that he did good? He's talking about unbelievers now. “He did good, and He gave you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons.;

satisfying your hearts with food and gladness.” You see, this is our God. His common grace in providing and sustaining creation. And you know, many unbelievers actually believe this, because think about it. When they narrowly escape death, what does, what do even unbelievers say? “Oh, thank God. Yeah, that is God's goodness.”

So the messengers of general revelation, creation, and providence. The third messenger is conscience. Look at Romans chapter 1. Romans 1 again, verse 32, talking about pagans who have denied the reality of the true God and whom God has given over to their sin and ultimately to a reprobate mind. By the way, a reprobate mind, a depraved mind, verse 28, God gave them over to a depraved mind. A depraved mind isn't somebody who sins. All sinners sin, and they sin badly from the beginning. This is something different. What is this? This is verse 32, that when “they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but they give hearty approval to those who practice them.” In other words, a depraved mind is not when you sin. A depraved mind is when you say good is evil, and evil is good.

That's where we are in our culture, because we're becoming a pagan culture. But notice again what verse 32 says. God says all men know, pagans, know the ordinance of God. They know the regulations, the requirements of God. How do they know? How does the law speak to billions who have never read their Bible and never heard it read or taught? Turn over to Romans chapter 2, verse 14. “For when the Gentiles who do not have the written law do instinctively [or by nature] the things of the Law, these not having the [written] Law are a law of themselves. “In that,” here's the reason, verse 15. “In that, [Gentiles who don't have the Bible—don't have God's written Law] show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness, and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them.” You know what Paul's saying? He's saying that when those who've never seen the Law of God do the things written in the Law and acknowledge them to be right, they show, or they exhibit, or they give proof of the Law or specifically the work of the Law written in their hearts.

What's the work of the Law? It's used only here in the New Testament. It means the substance of the Law or the requirement of the Law. Unbelievers know that you shouldn't lie to your friends. Unbelievers all over the world know it's not right to lie to your friends. Unbelievers all over the

world know that it's not right to cheat with your neighbor's wife. How do they know that? Because the substance of the Law is written on the heart. It's this universal awareness of the Law of God that C.S. Lewis used as the basis for his argument in "Mere Christianity." Every person is born with the substance or the basic requirements of God's Law indelibly imprinted on his heart. And his conscience uses that basic knowledge of God's Law to accuse or defend him. Now, it isn't perfect, we're going to talk about its weakness in just a moment. But it's there. Those are the messengers of general revelation.

What is the message of general revelation? What does general revelation reveal about God? Let's take each of those categories. First of all, with creation. With creation, every person who has ever lived from the tribal warrior in the most isolated jungle to the most educated citizens of the world's greatest cities, every person who's ever lived knows certain things about the one true God. And he knows it because of what he or she sees in creation. We saw it in Psalm 19. We saw it in Romans 1. What do they know? They know there's a God who created all things. They know that that God is eternal. They know that that God is all powerful. And they know that that God is a personal being. Every single person on this planet who has ever lived, or ever will live, or lives today knows those things about God. That's the message of Romans 1, specifically.

What about from Providence? Well, Matthew 5:45, we saw they learned from Providence the fact that God causes His rain to fall, that He's good and He universally loves all those made in his image. It's not just the good that get God's goodness. And as we saw in Acts 14, God is good and all-powerful to provide all of those good things and seasons and food and everything that we need.

What about from Conscience? What is the message of Conscience? Well, the message of Conscience in Romans 2 is that God is holy and righteous. He's written the substance of his Law on our hearts, and He's established those moral laws by which He rules the universe. And as Romans 1:32 says, they know what's right and wrong. They know the ordinance of God. When they do wrong, they know it's sin against that God. They know that because of their sin, God's judgment is coming. You say, "How do they know that?" They know it because of conscience. I think it was Charles Hodge who said that the conscience is but a faint echo of coming judgment. They know they wear the guilt, and they know that they deserve eternal death. That's what Paul

says in Romans 1-32. So from the light of general revelation, every man knows that God exists and that He is mighty, invisible, just, immortal, and that he's good. And they know that they deserve his judgment.

Now, what are the effects of general revelation? What results from God's general revelation? First of all, personal guilt. Now, don't misunderstand me. I don't mean the feeling of guilt. You know, "I feel guilty." That's not what I'm talking about. I'm talking about real personal guilt, legal guilt before God. Verse 20 of chapter 1, they are without excuse. Nobody has an excuse. Turn over to Romans 3. Look at verse 19. This is where Paul's indictment of humanity ends. This is the end of the bad news before he gets to the good news. Verse 19, now we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law. Who's under the Law? We just saw it in chapter 2. Everybody. They're either under the written Law, the Bible, or they're under the substance of the Law written on the heart. It speaks to those who are under the Law, so that every mouth may be closed and all the world may become accountable to God. There's the end result of general revelation, as well as special revelations we'll see in a moment. But general revelation, even for the pagan, chapter one, leads to this conclusion. Personal guilt before God.

By the way, this answers the question about the person living in a jungle somewhere who's never heard the gospel. Paul says he is without excuse, and he is personally guilty before God. He will be judged based on his rejection of the true God he saw in creation. And it is just as real a rejection as if he had heard the gospel. Because the message is clear. God made it evident to them, and they suppress that truth. So personal guilt.

Secondly, moral decline. In Romans 1, three times Paul says God gave them up or God gave them over. Verse 24, God gave them up to sexual sin. Verse 26, God gave them up to the widespread acceptance of homosexuality. Verse 28, God gave them up to a depraved mind where they start calling evil good and good evil. He removes the restraint against sin and allows sinners to pursue their depravity. This is what happens with general revelation.

And finally, God's wrath. Romans 1:18 says the wrath of God literally is being revealed from heaven right now. It's the wrath of abandonment that's in the rest of the chapter. When you see our country going from bad to worse, that's God's wrath. It's the wrath of abandonment. As we

become more pagan, He gives us over, He gives us over, He gives us over. In Romans chapter 1, verse 32 through chapter 2, verse 5, it's the wrath of eternal punishment on the day of judgment.

So, what about then the effects of general revelation? Here's how J.I. Packer puts it. "Human beings cannot entirely suppress their sense of God and His present and future judgment. God Himself will not let them do that. Some sense of right and wrong, as well as being accountable to a holy divine Judge, always remains." Let me stop there and say, guys, when you share the gospel with people, you have evidence that's already inside of them. They know all these things. They're just suppressing it. He goes on to say, "in our fallen world, all whose minds are not in some way impaired, who have full faculties, have a conscience that at some points directs them and from time to time condemns them, telling them that they ought to suffer for wrongs they have done. And when conscience speaks in these terms, it is in truth the voice of God." That's the message and the effects of general revelation.

That brings us to the weakness of general revelation. You see, God has given us an objective, valid revelation of Himself in creation, in providence, and in conscience. Whether anyone sees it, understands it, or believes it doesn't change the reality that it exists. However, there is a huge, or there are huge weaknesses with general revelation. First of all, because of the fall, man doesn't rightly interpret the message of general revelation. Man is left with no excuse, but it's also true that man's ability to see and understand general revelation was terribly marred by the fall. It's like having a bad cell phone signal. You know, there are areas probably on your drive, on your commute where you drop the signal. You're on a call and like every day, it, boom, drops out in that place. It's not that the person on the other end stopped talking. It's that you aren't getting the signal. That's how it is with general revelation. God hasn't stopped talking.

But people don't clearly perceive God's message in general revelation. Why? Because the created order is now under a curse. There are thorns and terribly destructive storms and earthquakes. There are famines. There are wars. The effects of the curse jumble the message of general revelation. But the more serious effect of the fall is on us. You see, man's sinfulness causes him to misinterpret God's general revelation. I mean, think about it. The theory of evolution came from unbelievers looking at what? General revelation. So, because of the fall, man doesn't rightly interpret the message. There's a second weakness, and that is the message of general revelation

does not include the gospel, so it cannot produce a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. That's why Paul tells us we have to tell people about Jesus. That's why we have a Missions Emphasis Sunday coming up this Sunday. Romans 10:14, "How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed, and how will they believe in him whom they've not heard, and how will they hear without a preacher?" Somebody to tell them. General revelation isn't enough. General revelation only condemns.

That's why we ought to reject ideas like D. James Kennedy's book, "The Gospel in the Stars." That's a position known as natural theology. It teaches that it's possible without relying on the Bible to come to a genuine knowledge of God on the basis of observation and reason alone. The most notable theologian in church history who was committed to this perspective was the Catholic theologian, Thomas Aquinas. The proofs of God's existence grow from a kind of natural theology. God has spoken through general revelation. That's true, but it has been rendered ineffective, the Bible tells us. General revelation is like a kind of divine billboard that can't be ignored. That's true. Boyce puts it this way. "There is enough evidence of God in a flower to lead a child as well as a scientist to worship. There is sufficient evidence in a tree, a pebble, a grain of sand, a fingerprint to make us glorify God and thank him."

But what's the problem? Well, John Calvin uses a great illustration of the weakness of general revelation. He likened man's ability to comprehend general revelation to someone like me who has to wear glasses. I don't really need them for distance, but I need them for reading up close. Many of you have glasses on. If you wear glasses or you wear contact lenses and you really need them to see, what happens when you take them off? The world has that sort of blurred Monet look to it. Has that sort of soft romantic look all the time where you can't distinguish things. It's, you see the world, but it's distorted. But when you put on your glasses, then everything comes in to focus. Now listen to what Calvin argued. He argued that for us to clearly see God's general revelation and understand it, we first have to put on what he called the spectacles of faith. In other words, what he was saying is this. The real benefit of general revelation is to the believer after he has come to faith. Because then we get it, we see it. It's like putting your glasses on. Nevertheless, it is still true that God has revealed Himself in general revelation through creation, providence and conscience.

So, how should we respond to general revelation? Let me give you four quick thoughts. Number one, worship and praise the one true God who has made Himself known. He's chosen to reveal Himself to every person on this planet. As we saw in Psalm 19, it's constant, it's universal, it's everywhere.

Secondly, choose to really see and consider God's general revelation. Guys, stop looking at your phone a moment and look up, or look down, or look in the mirror. Look somewhere where you see the glory of God revealed in His creation, and consider it, think about it. That's why it's there. You know, just as a point of how badly man misses the message, what does man think when he looks through a telescope and he sees all of the endless galaxies of space? What does he think? He thinks, oh, wow, I'm really small. He missed the whole point. The message is to show us how big and great God is. Don't be like an unbeliever. Consider God's general revelation.

Let it drive you, thirdly, to praise God for what He has graciously revealed about Himself to all people everywhere through general revelation. And you know, when you celebrate that, when you praise him for that, you're really praising the Lord Jesus Christ, because remember, it was through Christ, through the eternal Son, that God made all things, John 1, and without him, nothing was made that was made. You're really praising Christ as the, remember, our triune God, the Father originates the plan, the Son executes or accomplishes the plan, the Spirit perfects or completes the plan, brings it to its completion? Praise our God when you look at the general revelation. And then finally, thank God that He's also made Himself known in his special revelation.

You know, before it was discontinued back in the early 1990s, scientists connected with the SETI program, that is the Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence, were listening for potential meaningful contact with rational creatures living somewhere else in space. Well, the truth is, as Christians, we believe that's already happened. We have received a message from beyond space, a message from the eternal, infinite God. Listen to what Francis Schaeffer writes. I wish I had this on a slide, but I don't. This is what he writes, "There has always been communication before the creation of all else in the Trinity. And God has made man in His own image. And part of making man in His own image is that man is a verbalizer. Would it be unlikely that this personal God who is there and made man in his own image as a verbalizer in such a way that He can

communicate horizontally to other men on the basis of propositions and language? Is it unthinkable or even surprising that this personal God could or would communicate to man on the basis of propositions? The answer is no. I've never met an atheist who thought that this would be regarded as surprising within the Christian structure. If a personal God has made us to be language communicators, and that is obviously what man is, why then should it be surprising to think of Him speaking to Paul in Hebrew on the Damascus Road? Do we think God does not know Hebrew?" As Schaeffer says of God, "He is there, and He is not silent."

God has revealed Himself. He has spoken. And in addition to what we just were discovering in the last hour of God's revelation in general revelation, God has also spoken through what we call special revelation. Now, general revelation is natural. It's through creation, through providence, through conscience. But special revelation is supernatural. Revelation is special when God speaks to man either directly or through supernaturally chosen and empowered messengers. And scripture is a continuing constant record of God speaking to man like that. I want to show that to you. So I want to look at the flow of special revelation through the scripture. I want you to get a sense of how God revealed Himself throughout the flow of biblical history. So let's start then, of course, with special revelation in Old Testament history.

How did God specially, now we're not talking about general revelation in creation and providence and conscience. We're talking about special supernatural revelation. How did God reveal Himself in Old Testament history? Let's start with the period before the fall with Adam and Eve. Turn back to Genesis chapter 1. Genesis chapter 1 and look at verse 28. "God blessed them after He made Adam and Eve, male and female, and said to them, He said to them, be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it. And rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth. Then God said." So you see that immediately God is communicating with Adam and Eve.

Turn over to chapter 2 and look at verse 16. Now let's start at verse 15. "The Lord God took the man, put him into the Garden of Eden to cultivate and keep it. And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, from any tree of the Garden you may freely eat, but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you shall not eat, for in the day you eat from it, you will surely die." It was

God's practice to talk audibly, personally, with Adam and Eve. And during those exchanges, He apparently assumed the form of a man.

Go over to chapter 3, verse 8. After the fall, after their sin, 3 verse 8, "They heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the Garden in the cool of the day. And the man and his wife had hid themselves in the presence of the Lord among the trees of the Garden." So, God displayed Himself visibly, potentially as with the form of a man. I think this is a pre-incarnate appearance of the eternal Son. So, before the fall, God was speaking to man. But when sin entered the world, of course, the need for special revelation became even more acute. So, God now needed to speak about issues that He hadn't addressed before. Such as sin, and guilt, and depravity, and atonement, and forgiveness, and sacrifice, and substitution.

So, how does God reveal Himself specially after the fall? Well, God still spoke audibly for a time. You see that with Adam and Eve. You see that with Cain in Genesis chapter 4. You see it with Noah in Genesis chapter 6. So, at this point in human history, God is still speaking audibly as He did to Adam and Eve. That brings us, when you come to the end of Genesis 11, you come to the time of the patriarchs. And God began during the time of the patriarchs, beginning with Abraham in Genesis 12, He began as He had with Adam to reveal Himself in theophanies. That is, visible manifestations of Himself.

The word theophany comes from two words, theos, and the Greek word that means to appear. And so, a theophany is simply an appearance of God. I would argue that every visible manifestation in the Old Testament is of God, is God the son. Why? Because John 1:18 says that He is the one who has explained or exegeted God. I think that's broader than just the incarnation, although certainly the focus there is on the incarnation. The most frequent and fascinating theophany, or visible manifestation of God in the Old Testament, was a mysterious character called the Angel of the Lord. If you look at the passages where the Angel of the Lord appears, and they're more than the ones I have here, these are just examples. But if you look at where He appears, He's called the Angel of the Lord, but somewhere in the text, He's also called God. Again, I think you have an appearance of the second person of the Trinity interacting with humanity. During the time of the Patriarchs, God spoke for the first time in visions, several

different visions to the Patriarchs. And you see it in Job, which is a time period that is during the time of the Patriarchs.

Also in dreams. Now, there were two types of dreams in the Old Testament scriptures. There were dreams in which God spoke to the person as they were having this dream. And there were dreams that were more symbolic and filled with symbols that needed interpretation. You say, “What's the difference between vision and dreams?” In a vision, the emphasis is on what is heard. In a dream, it seems to be on what it is seen. A vision seems to be more of a trance-like state. A dream is just that, it's a dream. So, these are ways God chose to communicate during the time of the Patriarchs.

Now, there were 400 years of silence between Genesis 50 and Exodus 3, which brings us then to the time of Moses. Now, we still see God during the time of Moses reveal Himself in theophanies, such as the Angel of his Presence, the burning bush in Exodus 3, the pillar of cloud and fire. All of these were visible manifestations of God. But God's primary method of revelation in the time of Moses was Moses himself. Turn over to Numbers. Numbers chapter 12, and God Himself says this. Numbers chapter 12, this is one of my favorite, and it's not humorous in one sense. It's very serious. But it is humorous to think of, you know, what Moses, what Aaron and Miriam did. And, you know, God defends Moses, and He calls them over, you know, just like you do your kids. “Come here. God says, come here.” And He says this to them. Look at verse 6. “He said, ‘Hear now My words, is there a prophet among you? I, Yahweh, shall make Myself known to him in a vision. I shall speak to him in a dream. Not so with My servant Moses. He is faithful in all My household. With him, I speak mouth to mouth, even openly and not in dark sayings. And he beholds the form of Yahweh. Why then were you not afraid to speak against My servant, against Moses?’” This is how God revealed Himself during the time of Moses, and we're going to come back to that in a moment.

But during this time, God also spoke through miracles. Miracles performed by Moses, but through miracles. Turn over to Exodus chapter 9, the plagues on Egypt. God was speaking through those plagues. What was God saying? Look at Exodus 9, verse 13. “The Lord said to Moses, ‘Rise up early in the morning and stand before Pharaoh, and say to him, “Thus says Yahweh, the God of the Hebrews, let My people go that they may serve Me. For this time, I will

send all My plagues on you and your servants and your people [here was the message of these miracles], so that you may know that there is no one like Me in all the earth. [I love this, verse 15] For if by now, I had put forth My hand and struck you and your people with pestilence, you would have been cut off from the earth.] In other words, “Look, if I wanted to get rid of you, this is not a problem. But indeed, for this reason, I've allowed you to remain in order that I wanted to show you My power and in order to proclaim My name through all the earth.”” That is what God was communicating, through miracles.

And God also, through this time period, communicated—He revealed— through written revelation. I want you to turn to Exodus 19. Three months after their departure from the land of Egypt, the people of Israel arrived at Mount Sinai. Look at Exodus 19, verse 1. “In the third month, after the sons of Israel had gone out from the land of Egypt, on that very day, they came into the wilderness of Sinai.” Now, when they arrived at the foot of Mount Sinai, the first two days were spent in both physical and spiritual preparation. The third day that they were at Mount Sinai began with this awe-inspiring display. Look at chapter 19 and turn over to verse 16. “So, it came about on the third day, when it was morning, that there were thunder and lightning flashes and a thick cloud upon the mountain and a very loud trumpet sound, so that all the people who were in the camp trembled. Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain. Now, Mount Sinai was all in smoke, because Yahweh descended upon it in fire, and its smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain quaked violently. When the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke, and God answered him with thunder.”

This is an incredible event. Moses partially ascended the mountain, but God sent him back down to warn the people again not to cross the boundary that Moses has set. So picture there, you're at the foot of Mount Sinai. There's a thunderstorm on the top of the mountain. The mountain is blazing with fire. There's an earthquake, and there's this trumpet sound that gets louder and louder and louder, and then all of a sudden, it stops. And suddenly, all the people heard the voice of God. Look at Chapter 20, Verse 1. “Then God spoke all these words, saying,” In Deuteronomy, Chapter 5, Verse 4, Moses says, “Yahweh spoke to you face to face at the mountain from the midst of the fire.” Deuteronomy 5:22, “These words Yahweh spoke to all your

assembly at the mountain from the midst of the fire, of the cloud and of the thick gloom, with a great voice, and He added no more.”

Can you imagine what that would have been like? It's clear that something supernatural is going on this mountain. It's clear that God is there, and from that gloom, from that thunderstorm, God speaks with a loud voice what we call the Ten Commandments. The people, when the voice stopped, they asked Moses not to let that happen again and to be their intermediary. Look at (Exodus 20) verse 19. “They said to Moses, ‘Speak to us yourself and we will listen, but let not God speak to us or we will die.’” So Moses drew near the thick darkness where God's presence was manifested, and God told Moses His law.

Turn over to chapter 24. Look at chapter 24, verse 3. “Then Moses came and recounted to the people all the words of the Lord and all the ordinances.” So he went up there. God told him everything that he needed to know. “All the people,” Moses tells them, “the people answered one voice and all the words which the Lord has spoken, we will do.” Now, notice verse 4. “Moses wrote down all the words of the Lord.” He wrote them down. And then notice what happens in verse 7. “Then he took the book of the covenant, everything he wrote down, and he read it in the hearing of the people. And they said, ‘All that Yahweh has spoken, we will do, and we will be obedient.’” The book of the covenant is recorded, starting in chapter 20 verse 22 through chapter 24 verse 4. It's recorded here for us. Then Moses returned to the people, he related to them orally. And still on that third day, Moses recorded, as we saw in verse 4, “Moses recorded everything that God had spoken.” God Himself wrote the Ten Commandments on the two stone tablets.

Can you imagine when Moses went to bed that night? He had had a very, very long day for an 80-year-old man. Obviously, the Ten Commandments were very important. God audibly spoke to them, and then he wrote them on two stone tablets. But don't miss the bigger picture. Here's what I want you to get. What was God doing? Why did this have to be so fantastic? Why the storm? Why the furnace fire? Why the thunder? Why the earthquake? Why the dark gloom? Why the voice? That was clearly the voice of God speaking from out of the cloud because there was obviously no doubt in the minds of two million Israelites that God had spoken.

And from that point forward, Moses wrote, when he wrote what God said, guess what was in what Moses wrote? There were rules for who to accept as speaking for God moving forward in

the book of Deuteronomy. And you were to evaluate every person who claimed to speak for God against those rules. Deuteronomy 13 and Deuteronomy 18. And so everybody knew when God was speaking.

God also provided another way to speak to His people and direct them in the Old Testament under Moses, and that was the Urim and the Thummim. These were stones that were carried in the ephod of the High Priest, which the leaders could consult for direction. In addition, Moses also recorded other revelation and deposited in the Ark according to Deuteronomy 31. This likely refers to the Book of Deuteronomy, but there are of course other references that make it clear that he wrote the first four books of the Old Testament as well. And all of Moses' writings were deposited in the Ark of the Covenant.

Now, after Moses' death, something surprising happens. Joshua took the scroll that Moses had written on, and Joshua added to the scroll. Joshua 24:26. "Joshua wrote these words in the Book of the Law of God." Now, that's surprising, because Deuteronomy 4:2 said nobody was ever to add to those words. So, clearly, God authorized Joshua's additions. That's the time of Moses. Now, let's move forward, then, to the period of the Judges.

There are really only two points of revelation in the period of the Judges. There's the Angel of the Lord, who again appears, that mysterious, pre-incarnate appearance of Jesus Christ, as well as there is a dream given by God to a Midianite soldier. And so, you see God still revealing himself, even during the darkest period of Old Testament history.

That brings us then to the period of the prophets. And this is the predominant period of the Old Testament. This runs from the time of Samuel, all the way to the last prophet in the last book in our Old Testament, Malachi. Let's start, though, with Samuel. God spoke audibly to Samuel in 1 Samuel 3. You remember when he hears God speaking, and Eli doesn't believe him. Some of what God communicated to Samuel, he was to write down in a scroll, according to 1 Samuel 10:25, and deposit before the Lord. So he is now adding to the scrolls that are before the Lord as well, as a prophet. Now, for the rest of Old Testament history, God occasionally spoke audibly. He apparently spoke audibly to David, spoke audibly to Solomon.

By the way, let me just stop here and say, you know, those who are of a more mystical and particularly of a charismatic persuasion, think that this happened all the time, every day to

everybody, and that's why they think it's going to happen to them. Read the biblical history. It's simply not true. It was very rare, even in the times when God was doing it. Through dreams. Nebuchadnezzar and Daniel both received dreams. Sometimes, occasionally, God revealed His will even through the casting of lots. You can see it in Jonah. You can see it in Proverbs as well. Of course, there's a New Testament example in Acts 1. But mostly from Samuel on, God spoke to and through a string of prophets. Nathan, Ahijah, Shemiah, Elijah, Micaiah, Elisha. These are prophets that are listed in Samuel and Kings. I personally think that these men were writing prophets as well, and that what they wrote became the books in which they're mentioned. Samuel and Kings and Chronicles.

But from the 9th century BC to the 8th century BC, I'm sorry, let me say that again. From the 9th century BC to the 5th century BC, God also spoke to those called the writing prophets. They're called the writing prophets because we have books that bear their names. There are the major prophets, and that doesn't mean they're more important. It means they wrote longer works that required their own scroll. Isaiah, Jeremiah, and of course, Lamentations is included, and Ezekiel. Jeremiah wrote both Jeremiah and Lamentations, and Ezekiel. Those are the major prophets because they're longer. They require their own scroll. And then you have the minor prophets, not because they're less important, but because they're shorter, and all 12 of the minor prophets could be written on a single scroll. The writing prophets.

That's followed by 400 years of silence, from the last writing prophet of the Old Testament, Malachi, to the angel Gabriel's announcement to Zechariah and Mary of John the Baptist's birth. And that brings us then to special revelation in New Testament history. New Testament history.

New Testament revelation begins how? It begins with Gabriel. It begins with Gabriel's announcement of the birth of John the Baptist to Zechariah in the temple when he was in there for once in a lifetime opportunity to burn the incense before the Lord. And Gabriel appeared. That was the break in 400 years of silence as God now in a special way, a supernatural way reveals himself. Gabriel's visit was followed shortly in the New Testament by five supernatural dreams to Joseph and the wise men in that whole interchange that we've studied already in Matthew's Gospel.

Fast forward about 30 years. So 30 years later, in 26 AD., around that time, God began to speak through the last Old Testament prophet, a man named John the Baptist. In Luke chapter 3, verse 2, it says, “The word of the Lord came to John.” Same formula as appears so often in the Old Testament with the prophets. God also spoke audibly and directly from heaven about Jesus on three separate occasions, in Matthew 3 at Jesus' baptism, in Matthew 17 at the transfiguration, and in John 12 during the Passion Week. God spoke in all three occasions from heaven saying, “This is My Son, listen to Him.”

But by far the clearest, most profound revelation that God provides in the New Testament is through his Son. Look at John chapter 1. John chapter 1, “In the beginning [verse 1] was the Word.” The expression of God. “And the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” Verse 14, “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the Only Begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.” Now look at verse 18. The end of verse 17 tells us Who the Word was, Who this person was, that was with God and was God and became flesh. It was Jesus Christ, Jesus the Messiah. And then it says this of Him in verse 18, “No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten God [that's Jesus] Who is in the bosom of the Father [who enjoys a unique special relationship with the Father; He is a son by nature] He has explained Him.” Literally, He has exegeted God. He is the ultimate revelation of God.

How exactly did God reveal Himself through his son? Well, Jesus' work revealed God's work. Turn over to John 17. John 17 and verse 4. In the high priestly prayer, Jesus says, “I glorified you on the earth, having accomplished the work which you have given me to do.” His work, Jesus' work, revealed God's work, because it was in fact God's work. Jesus' Person manifested God's name and nature. If you're still in John 17, look at verse 6. “I have manifested your name [the truth about you, God] to the men whom you gave me out of the world.”

How did He manifest it? Through himself. Turn back to John 14. John 14 and verse 9, “Jesus said to Philip, have I been with you so long and have you not come to know Me, Philip? [Now watch this] He who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, show us the Father?” Jesus in His Person manifested, revealed God's Name and His nature.

That's why Colossians 1:15 says, Jesus “is the image of the invisible God.” Hebrews 1.3 says, “He is the radiance of his glory and the exact representation of his nature.” In addition, Jesus'

words revealed God's words. Look at, again, back in John 17, verse 8. Well, let's go to verse 7. "Now, they have come to know that everything you have given Me is from You. For the words which You gave Me, I have given to them. And they received them and truly understood that I came forth from You, and they believed that You sent Me." But turn over to Hebrews 1. Here is the ultimate expression of Jesus as God's ultimate revelation. Hebrews chapter 1 verse 1. "God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers and the prophets in many portions and in many ways [that's the Old Testament; it's all those ways we just looked at], in these last days has spoken to us in his Son." You see, Jesus is the ultimate revelation of God in human flesh.

One other way that God revealed Himself in New Testament history, and that is through Jesus' post ascension appearances. Jesus, after His ascension, appeared to Stephen at the end of his life in Acts chapter 7, just as he's being stoned to death. He appeared to Paul on the Damascus Road in Acts 9. He appeared to Peter in a vision or trancelike state in Acts 10. And He appeared and spoke to the Apostle John on the island of Patmos in Revelation 1. With that appearance and the subsequent writing of the last book of the New Testament, the book of Revelation, special revelation ceased in all its forms. Men, this book you hold in your hand is God's final word to you and to me. It's the summary of everything he's communicated.

So then let's look at a summary of the avenues then of special revelation. All we've learned as we look through the scripture, here are the avenues. First of all, there's the avenue of personal address where He speaks directly from heaven, a voice or a theophany, a visible appearance or a Christophany. That's simply a visible manifestation of the second person of the Trinity before His incarnation. Mechanical means like the lot or the Urim and the Thummim, the high priest breastplate, miracles, visions and dreams, angels, the incarnate son, and the written propositions of scripture. And that is how we know any of the rest of those. That's what I want you to see. Nothing in Numbers 1 through 6 that I just gave you, would you know anything about if it weren't revealed to us and recorded for us in the written revelation.

So ultimately, all special revelation culminates in that book you hold in your hand. Everything God has said that He wanted you to know, He has revealed to you and had His apostles and prophets record it in this book. Turn over to 1 Corinthians chapter 2. This is an amazing chapter on the Bible. It starts in verse 6. He's talking about the Bible all the way from verse 6 down

through verse 16. And he begins by talking about revelation, the very thing we've been talking about. Now this passage is complex, but Paul's intention here is clear. In verse 9, he wants you to know that, well, let's start at verse 6. "Yet we do not speak wisdom among those who are mature, wisdom however not of this age, nor the rulers of this age who are passing away. Or we do speak wisdom, rather. But we speak God's wisdom in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God predestined before the ages to our glory. The wisdom which none of the rulers of this age has understood. For if they had understood, they would not have crucified the Lord of Glory. But just as it is written, the things which eye has not seen nor ear has heard, which have not entered the heart of man, all that God has prepared for those who love Him."

When I was growing up, that verse was taken out of context all the time. Because it was quoted to say, you know, we don't really know what's coming. We'll read the next verse. "For to us, God revealed them through the Spirit." Paul's point is, look, the way he came to know this wisdom that he talks about in the previous verses was that God revealed it to him. It was revelation by his Spirit. How did he do that? Well, he was able to do that. For verse 10 goes on to say, the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. "For whom among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so, the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God." What he's saying in this is, "Look, the Spirit could reveal the mind of God to Paul and the other human authors because He is God." And therefore, He knows the mind of God. Just like you know, your mind knows you, and you know your mind. The Spirit knows the mind of God.

He goes on to say in verse 12, "Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Holy Spirit, Who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God. Which things we [and by here he doesn't mean you, he doesn't mean me, he means the apostles and prophets] also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words." What Paul is saying is this. Look, the only way we know all that God has prepared for us, the only way you know what God has for you is because God in His amazing goodness has revealed it to you. And He revealed it to you through men He handpicked—apostles and prophets—through whom He would reveal himself. And his Holy Spirit, who knows the mind of God, revealed the mind of God to the human authors. And the human authors, notice what he says, the thoughts of God, even the very words that the

authors used, were the thoughts of the Spirit, the thoughts of God, and were the very words the Spirit intended. That's revelation, that's inspiration. So revelation is God revealed it to us. Inspiration is He gave it to us by giving us through the Spirit the thoughts and the words of God. Paul's point is this, the thoughts and the words that are in the scripture were not ultimately those of the human authors, but the Spirit's thoughts and words. This is God's revelation to you.

How do you come to understand this book? He goes on to talk about illumination. The unregenerate mind can't grasp it. Verse 14, "A natural man doesn't accept the things of the Spirit of God for their foolishness to him; and he cannot [he lacks the power to] understand them because they're spiritually appraised. You have to have the Holy Spirit to really understand in a life-changing way the Holy Scriptures. You want to really know what the treasure you have in front of you there on the table is? Look at verse 16. "For who has known the mind of the Lord that he will instruct?" Wouldn't it be great to know the mind of God? To be instructed by God Himself? Notice how the verse ends. "But we have the mind of Christ." In this book, you have the mind of God. You have the instruction of God Himself. That's the treasure that we have.

Turn over to the other familiar passage, 2 Timothy chapter 3. After he talks about false teachers that are going to come and going to destroy so much, he says, verse 13, listen, "Evil men and imposters, they're going to proceed from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. You, however [Timothy], instead of being like them, you continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you learned them, and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings [the Old Testament scriptures] which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith, which is in the Messiah Jesus."

And then he makes this astounding statement about the scripture. "All scripture [all *graphe*, all the Old and New Testament, because Paul himself refers to both Old and New Testament writings as scripture. He says] all scripture is [*theonustos*] is breathed out by God." You've been around Countryside any time at all, you've heard me say this, but every time I say it, it astounds me. I hope it astounds you. That book you hold in your hand claims to be words that are the product of the breath of God.

Right now, and for a couple of hours, I've been speaking to you words that are the product of my breath. Paul says this book and the very words in it are the product of the breath of God. It's

breathed out by God, and therefore “it is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness.” It's everything you need. Verse 15 for salvation, verse 17 for sanctification, and to be “equipped for every good work.” You don't need anything else. You don't need, you know, self-help books. You don't need Ted Talks on the internet. Know how to straighten your life out. Everything you need is right here. I'm not saying those things can't benefit you in some way. I'm just saying, don't get confused. It's not what you need.

Now let's be honest as we bring this in for a landing. If you had to choose between the experience, think about this, and I want you to be honest with me. If you had to choose between the experience of seeing God personally in all His glory and hearing God speak like they did at Mount Sinai, you imagine what that was like, hearing the thundering voice of God speak to Ten Commandments. If you had to choose between that, seeing God in all His glory, hearing God actually speak to you from heaven versus reading a book that's between 2,000 and 3,500 years old, which would you naturally tend to choose? The experience, of course you would. But did you ever think about this? That is not the best way for you to hear from God. How do I know that? I know that for 2 reasons.

First of all, the fact that God is all wise means that He always chooses the best means. I remember reading that years ago, struck with that, you know, the wisdom of God means that not only does God choose the best ends, but God always chooses the best means. That's true in your life. It's true with his revelation. You know what that means? That means that God isn't sitting here in the 21st century going, “Oh man, I wish I'd used videos.” I'm serious. Think about that. God's not wringing his hands in heaven going, I didn't know about the YouTube age. No, God decided in eternity past that the very best way for Him to communicate His truth to you was through words written in a book. That was God's wisdom.

There's another reason I know that an experience isn't the best, and that's because there's a man in the history of the church who experienced both, and he weighs in. Let's look at the experience first. Go back to Luke chapter 9. Luke chapter 9 verse 28. “Some eight days after these sayings, Jesus took along Peter and John and James and went up on the mountain to pray. And while he was praying, the appearance of his face became different, and his clothing became white and gleaming.” The idea is that there was flashing light, lightning. “And behold, two men were

talking with him, and they were Moses and Elijah, who appearing in glory were speaking about his departure, which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. Now Peter and his companions had been overcome with sleep, but when they were fully awake, they saw his glory and the two men standing with him. And as they were leaving him, Peter said to Jesus, Master, it is good for us to be here. Let us make three tabernacles, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah. Not realizing what he was saying.” I recognize that remark. “While he was saying this, a cloud formed and began to overshadow them, and they were afraid as they entered the cloud. Then a voice came out of the cloud saying, this is My Son, My Chosen One. Listen to him. And when the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone and they kept silent and reported to no one in those days any of the things which they had seen.” It was a terrifying moment, but it was an extraordinary experience.

Wouldn't you have loved to have been there? What would you give to have been there in that moment and to have seen the glory of Jesus Christ, like lightning? Peter says, no, you shouldn't. Turn back to 2 Peter. 2 Peter chapter 1, verse 16. Peter says, “We didn't follow cleverly devised tales, when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ [listen to this] we were eyewitnesses of his majesty.” He was there. He saw it. “For when He received honor and glory from God the Father, such an utterance as this was made to Him by the majestic glory, ‘This is My Beloved Son with whom I am well pleased.’ And we ourselves heard this utterance made from heaven when we were with him on the Holy Mountain.” Now watch verse 19. And I want you to notice in our text, the words in italics, they were added by the translators. And I think in this case, they don't make the meaning clearer. They obscure the meaning. Here's what he says. In response to that experience, he says, “We have the prophetic word, more sure.” In other words, what you hold in your hand is a lot better than the experience Peter had on the Mount of Transfiguration. “Which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place and keep on treasuring the book until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. But know this, first of all, that no prophecy in the scripture is of one's own interpretation.”

The word interpretation has the idea of origin. You didn't originate. It didn't originate in the heart of the writer of scripture. “For no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men carried along,” driven along. The word is used in the book of Acts when that ship that Paul's on that's going to suffer shipwreck is driven along by the wind when it no longer can control its

sails. The men were driven along like a ship by the wind, by the Holy Spirit, and they spoke from God.

So understand this, men. God decided in the eternity past that He would reveal himself. And He decided that the best, the wisest way for him to reveal Himself to you was through his written word that you have on the table there in front of you. In 1539, Martin Luther commenting on Psalm 119 said this. He says, “God wants to give you his spirit only through the external word.” I love that, the external word, meaning it's outside of you. It's not something subjective inside of you. He said in another place, “Let the man who would hear God speak read holy scripture.” John Piper commenting on this says this, “Luther called the Bible the external word to emphasize that it is objective, fixed, outside ourselves, and therefore unchanging. It is a book. Neither ecclesiastical hierarchy nor fanatical ecstasy can replace it or shape it. It is external like God. You can take it, or you can leave it, but you can't make it other than what it is. It is a book with fixed letters and words and sentences.” I love that. I don't have to wonder what God said. It's right there in words. Words determined by the Spirit, as men driven by the Spirit spoke from God. Here's how Robert Raymond puts it in his Systematic Theology. “Christians should be overwhelmed by the magnitude of this simple truth, that they take so much for granted, that the eternal God has deigned to share with us some of the truths that are on his mind. He condescends to elevate us poor, undeserving sinners by actually sharing with us a portion of what He knows.” Men don't ever take God's revelation for granted. As Schaeffer said, “He is there and [thank God] He is not silent. He has revealed Himself in general revelation to every human being who's ever existed. And in his goodness, he's given us a book that is.

And now I go back to the end of 1 Corinthians 2. You know how 1 Corinthians 2 ends? We have the mind of Christ right here between the covers of this book. What a gift. God help us to treasure it. Let's pray together.

Father, thank You for our time together tonight. Thank You for these men, for their diligence in reading and study, their commitment to be here at the end of a long day, their careful listening, their reckoning with these things. Lord, I pray that You would use their time here and our time here this evening in all of our hearts.

Lord, give us a fresh appreciation that You are a God who speaks, that You continually speak through Your creation, through Your providence as You provide good things to all the people on this planet, and through the conscience in which You make it clear that You are holy and righteous and that judgment is coming. But Father, if that's all we had, we would be miserable men because we wouldn't know how to know You. We wouldn't know how to overcome that guilt, that sense of future judgment that every human being has.

But Father, thank You for Your special revelation. Thank You that you've given us a book in which You tell us all of those things even more clearly that are revealed in general revelation. But, oh God, thank You that You also tell us the gospel. You tell us about Your love for mankind displayed in sending Your only Son into the world. His living a perfect life, His dying the death of all of those who deserve to die who would believe in Him so that you could forgive us. And you're raising Him from the dead, seating Him at your right hand until one day, you make all of His enemies a footstool for His feet.

Father, thank You that you have given us in this book Your mind. Forgive us, oh God, for having such an incredible treasure and for treating it so lightly. Give us a new and fresh resolve and appetite to pursue your truth. As a result of our time together tonight. Thank You, oh God, that You are a revealing God. We thank You and praise You in Jesus' name, amen.