

GENERAL REVELATION

1. The first source of general revelation is creation.

- a. Everything God made was originally very good.
 - (1) **Ge 1:31** 31 God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good.
 - (2) Everything created by God is good.
 - (a) **1 Ti 4:4** 4 Everything created by God is good....
- b. Like Job, we are to consider all aspects of creation as a whole.
 - (1) **Job 38:4-7** 4 Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding. 5 Who determined its measurements—surely you know! Or who stretched the line upon it? 6 On what were its bases sunk, or who laid its cornerstone, 7 when the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy? [Read Job 38-40.]
- c. We are to look at God's heavens and the work of his fingers.
 - (1) **Ps 8:3-4** 3 When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have set in place, 4 what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him?
- d. We are to bless God and recognize his greatness based on creation as a whole.
 - (1) **Ps 104:1-9** 1 Bless Yahweh, my soul! Yahweh my God, you are very great! You are clothed with splendor and majesty, 2 covering yourself with light as with a garment, stretching out the heavens like a tent. 3 He lays the beams of his chambers on the waters. He makes the clouds his chariot. He rides on the wings of the wind. 4 He makes his messengers winds, his ministers a flaming fire. 5 He set the earth on its foundations, so that it should never be moved. 6 You covered it with the deep as with a garment. The waters stood above the mountains. 7 At your rebuke they fled. At the sound of your thunder they took to flight. 8 The mountains rose, the valleys sank down to the place that you appointed for them. 9 You set a boundary that they may not pass, so that they might not again cover the earth. [Read Ps 104.]
- e. The earth is full of God's loyal love.
 - (1) **Ps 119:64** 64 The earth, Yahweh, is full of your loyal love.
- f. We are to consider the ways of the ant.
 - (1) **Pr 6:6-7** 6 Go to the ant, sluggard. Consider her ways and be wise. 7 Without having any chief, officer, or ruler, 8 she prepares her bread in summer and gathers her food in harvest.
 - (2) We are to look at the birds of the air and consider the lilies of the field.
 - (a) **Mt 6:26-29** 26 Look at the birds of the air. They neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? ...28 Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow. They neither toil nor spin, 29 yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.
- g. There are things in creation that are too wonderful for us, that we do not understand.
 - (1) **Pr 30:18-19** 18 Three things are too wonderful for me. Four I do not understand: 19 the way of an eagle in the sky, the way of a serpent on a rock, the way of a ship on the high seas, and the way of a man with a virgin.
- h. The whole creation is groaning in the pains of childbirth.

(1) **Ro 8:19-22** 19 The creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. 20 For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope 21 that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. 22 For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now.

i. We have lost sight of the great Provider.

(1) “The ancient Hebrews from whom the Bible came were a religious people. They thought in religious patterns, they spoke in religious phrases, they saw in every event the direct activity of God. If it rained, it was God who sent the rain. When crops were good, it was God who yielded the increase. But that is not our language, nor the pattern of our thought. We think in terms of law—chemical, natural law. When it rains we know it is the natural condensation of vapor. When crops are good we credit it to the fertilizer. An amazing thing has happened in our way of thinking. In a world that could not for one moment exist without the activity of God, we have conditioned our minds to a way of thinking that leaves no room for him. So many of our wants are provided by what seem natural and impersonal forces that we have lost sight of the great Provider in the midst of providence. Some of us who were brought up in the country and then later moved to the city remember how easy it was to get out of the habit of returning thanks at the table, partly because the food on it came not directly from the earth but from the grocery store. A physician in New York City said, ‘If you ask a child where milk comes from, he won’t think of saying “From a cow.” He will say “From a container.”’”¹

2. The second source of general revelation is conscience.

a. Men are in every way very religious.

(1) **Ac 17:22-23** 22 Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. 23 For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription: To the unknown god. What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you.

b. The work of the law is written on the hearts of all people.

(1) **Ro 2:14-15** 14 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. 15 They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also testifies, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them.

(a) We don’t need an officially promulgated law to know basic right and wrong.

(b) Our conscience testifies that there is a law we are obliged to follow and obey.

c. See *Conscience and Natural Law*.

3. General revelation proves the existence of God.

a. Day and night, the heavens declare the glory of God.

¹ H. W. Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages*, Kindle ed. (Baker Publishing Group, []), Kindle Locations 1145-1156).

- (1) **Ps 19:1-4** 1 The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork. 2 Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge. 3 There is no speech, nor are there words, whose voice is not heard. 4 Their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world.
- b. Our soul knows very well that God's works are wonderful.
 - (1) **Ps 139:13-14** 13 You formed my inward parts. You knitted me together in my mother's womb. 14 I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works. My soul knows it very well.
- c. God let the nations walk in their own ways, but he never left them without witness.
 - (1) **Acts 14:15-17** 15 Men [of Lystra], why are you doing these things? We [Paul and Barnabas] also are men, 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, the earth, the sea, and all that is in them. 16 In past generations he allowed all the nations to walk in their own ways. 17 Yet he did not leave himself without witness, for he did good by giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness.
 - (a) God gives all nations rains, fruitful seasons, food, and gladness.
- d. What can be know about God is plain to men.
 - (1) **Ro 1:19** 19 For what can be known about God is plain to [men], because God has shown it to them.
- e. God has endued all men with some idea of his Godhead.
 - (1) "That there exists in the human minds and indeed by natural instinct, some sense of Deity, we hold to be beyond dispute, since God himself, to prevent any man from pretending ignorance, has endued all men with some idea of his Godhead, the memory of which he constantly renews and occasionally enlarges, that all to a man being aware that there is a God, and that he is their Maker, may be condemned by their own conscience when they neither worship him nor consecrate their lives to his service."²
- f. Have you met a child who didn't immediately comprehend the idea that God made the world?
- g. See *The Existence of God*.

4. General revelation proves many other things about ourselves and our world.

- a. God invites us to explore and discover truth concerning creation.³
 - (1) See *Education*.
- b. General revelation includes analysis of the human condition through art, culture, economics, film, history, law, literature, politics, and science.
- c. Artists, philosophers, religious gurus, scientists, and writers can gain perceptive insights about ourselves and the world around us (i.e., Plato and Aristotle).
- d. The study of science, literature, music and other culture forms of revelation is not optional for Christian theologians.⁴

² J. Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 1997).

³ F. Schaeffer, *The God Who Is There*, in *The Complete Works*.

⁴ G. Kreider, *God with Us*, 172. See Herman Bavinck, *The Philosophy of Revelation* (1909).

- e. “We perish from want of wonder, not from want of wonders.”⁵
- f. The artistic products of man’s mind, particularly modern art, generally reveals man’s “lostness.”
- g. The trajectory of human philosophy, ending in nihilism and existentialism, generally reveals man’s lostness.
- h. That human society functions poorly without some sort of religious framework believed by the common man to be true generally reveals man’s need for God. History has no record of a totally atheistic civilization.
- i. The “manishness” of man generally reveals we are fundamentally different from animals, dissatisfied with just collecting food and making babies. We’re not satisfied with that.

5. General revelation is sufficient to condemn a person who rejects it.

- a. God makes his sun rise on the evil and the good.
 - (1) **Mt 5:44-45** 44 I [Jesus] say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 45 so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.
- b. God’s invisible attributes are clearly perceived in creation, so man is without excuse.
 - (1) **Ro 1:20** 20 [God’s] invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.
- c. Men suppress general revelation by their unrighteousness.
 - (1) **Ro 1:18** 18 The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.
- d. Men know of God, but they do not honor or give thanks to him.
 - (1) **Ro 1:21** 21 For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him.
- e. Men become fools when they reject general revelation.
 - (1) **Ro 1:21-22** ...But [men] became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. 22 Claiming to be wise, they became fools....
 - (2) See R. Dawkins’s explanation for the origin of life on earth.
 - (3) See N. D. Tyson’s explanation for the origin of life on earth.
 - (4) As N. Geisler says, “I Don’t Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist.”
- f. The rejection of general revelation always results in the worship of idols.
 - (1) **Ro 1:23** 23 ...And exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man, birds, animals, and creeping things.
 - (2) As creatures, we must worship someone or something.
- g. God’s general revelation if rejected brings just condemnation.
 - (1) “General revelation is sufficient to alert a man to his need of God and to condemn him if he rejects what he can learn through nature, but only faith in Christ is sufficient to save (Ac 4:12). If this does not seem fair, look at it this way: Suppose you knew of a student who needed \$400 to pay his school bill, and you gave him \$3 to help pay that debt (the \$3 being more than you could really afford). If he

⁵ G. K. Chesterton.

returned it to you, asking sarcastically what good that little bit would do toward a \$400 debt, would you feel any obligation at all to give him \$100 the next day if you received a large gift in the mail? Undoubtedly not. But if he gratefully took the \$3 you offered, you would be anxious to help him further as soon as you were able. Just so, God's general revelation if rejected brings just condemnation; but if accepted, then He will bring the further necessary message of the gospel in order that that man might be saved (Ac 10:3-6)."⁶

6. To be saved, general revelation isn't enough. Special revelation is needed.

- a. We are to proclaim what pagans worship as unknown.
 - (1) **Ac 17:22-23** 22 Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. 23 For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription: To the unknown god. What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you.
- b. Faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the message of Messiah.
 - (1) **Ro 10:14-17** 14 How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? 15 And how are they to preach unless they are sent? ... 17 So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Messiah.

7. If one responds positively to general revelation, God will provide special revelation.

- a. God shows no partiality in providing special revelation.
 - (1) **Ac 10:34-35** 34 So Peter opened his mouth and said: Truly I understand that God shows no partiality, 35 but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him.
- b. Based on general revelation, man is able to seek and feel their way toward God.
 - (1) **Ac 17:24-27** 24 The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, 25 nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, because he himself gives to all mankind life, breath, and everything. 26 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, 27 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, 28 for, 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.
 - (a) God is not far from each one of us. In him we live, move, and have our being. We are his offspring.
- c. God now commands all people everywhere to change their minds about him.
 - (1) **Ac 17:30** 30 The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to change their minds....
- d. God's kindness and patience is meant to lead us to a change of mind.
 - (1) **Ro 2:4** 4 Do you presume on the riches of his kindness, forbearance, and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to a change of mind?

⁶ C. C. Ryrie, *A Survey of Bible Doctrine*, Kindle ed. (Moody, []), 37-38.

- e. At the moment of God-consciousness, what one does with general revelation is all important. If a child is negative to God at the moment he first becomes aware of God through general revelation, his heart is hardened just a little. But if a child is positive to God at the moment he first becomes aware of God through general revelation, his heart is softened just a little, and the Father begins to draw him. There is something inside each of us that chooses to go positive or negative toward God at various points throughout our lives. It starts when we are a child.
(1) **Jn 6:44** 44 No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day.

8. General and special revelation always agree.

- a. The affirmations of Scripture are demonstrated in the world around us.
(1) “[T]hat an assertion is in the pages of a leather-covered book does not necessarily make it valid. Instead, the Bible states reality as it exists in the universe, as God has made it and as he governs it. We would expect, therefore, the affirmations of Scripture to be demonstrated in the world around us.”⁷
- b. “All truth is God’s truth.” However, not all man believes to be true is true.

⁷ H. W. Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages*, Kindle ed. (Baker Publishing Group, []), Kindle Locations 1107-1109.

“The Spacious Firmament on High” (1712) | Joseph Addison

The Spacious Firmament on high,
With all the blue Ethereal Sky,
And spangled Heav’ns, a Shining Frame,
Their great Original proclaim:
Th’ unwearied Sun, from day to day,
Does his Creator’s Pow’r display,
And publishes to every Land
The Work of an Almighty Hand.

Soon as the Evening Shades prevail,
The Moon takes up the wondrous Tale,
And nightly to the list’ning Earth
Repeats the Story of her Birth:
Whilst all the Stars that round her burn,
And all the Planets, in their turn,
Confirm the Tidings as they rowl,
And spread the Truth from Pole to Pole.

What though, in solemn Silence, all
Move round the dark terrestrial Ball?
What tho’ nor real Voice nor Sound
Amid their radiant Orbs be found?
In Reason’s Ear they all rejoice,
And utter forth a glorious Voice,
For ever singing, as they shine,
The Hand that made us is Divine.

Notes