

“The Book Everyone Can Read” God’s General Revelation

On November 23, 1654, the French scientist and philosopher, Blaise Pascal, wrote these words in his journal:

From about half-past ten in the evening until about half-past twelve, FIRE! God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob, not of the philosophers and scholars. Certitude. Feelings. Joy. Peace. This is eternal life, that they may know thee, the only true God, and the one whom Thou hast sent, Jesus Christ.

At thirty-one years of age the well known Pascal had been reading John 17 when the Spirit of God gripped his heart and he personally encountered Jesus Christ. Here we see that God’s Special Revelation in the Bible had been used to open up his spiritual eyes to the truth. This is not surprising since Paul writes that “faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.” (Rom. 10:17)

“The very meaning of the word ‘revelation’ from the Latin *revelatio*, is to ‘draw back the curtain,’ to reveal to us that which would have remained hidden had God not chosen to engage in the act of revelation.” -James Emery White, [A Mind For God](#)

Yet, it was General Revelation (God’s communication of Himself through nature) which prepared Pascal for the words of John 17, for “the more he studied nature the more evidence he saw of the Creator.” (Robert J. Morgan, [On This Day](#)) This man who paved the way for the invention of the barometer, the theories of probability, and who authored one of the classics of Christian literature, the *Pensées*, gave testimony from his own life that “the heavens declare the glory of God.” (Ps. 19:1)

“The Bible testifies to a twofold revelation of God; a revelation in nature round about us, in human consciousness, and in the providential government of the world; and a revelation embodied in the Bible as the Word of God.” -Louis Berkhof, [Systematic Theology](#), on General and Special Revelation.

Herein we find both the power and the extent of what theologians call General Revelation. This unveiling of God to mankind takes place universally through creation. Consider Romans 1:18-20:

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his 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.

Here the Apostle writes that God has shown to mankind this knowledge of Himself through “the things that have been made” and, as a result, men are “without excuse.” In other words, no one will be able to stand before God someday and claim, “God, I did not have a chance because I never heard your more specific revelation, I never heard your good news.” Why? Because all mankind has the witness of God in nature, namely

that He exists, that He is powerful, and something of his divine nature.

Is this General Revelation sufficient to tell someone about Jesus Christ and the way of salvation? No. Paul is clear that this must come through the gospel, the more specific word of God (Rom. 1:16; 10:14-17) How, then, can General Revelation render men unable to offer an excuse?

A potential answer arises from Acts 10 and the account of the Roman centurion, Cornelius. Though this man was not a Jew, nevertheless, he had responded to the revelation God had given to him. Luke writes there that he was “a devout man who feared God with all his household” (10:2). Though he had not come to see yet that Jesus was Messiah, God sent an angel to him who instructed him to send for Peter in Joppa. Peter then also received a vision which prepared him to visit Cornelius in Caesarea Maritima where he preached to the centurion and his household the good news of Jesus Christ (10:34ff.). Though this account is not included in Acts to address the issue of how men may be without excuse, it may just provide an example.

One way that men could be without excuse based on General Revelation, yet, it not be enough to save, is that if a person responds in faith to the witness of the true God in nature, it may very well be that God would make sure (as He did with Cornelius) that someone brings the good news to him. As such, on the day of judgment, God could render excuses invalid by affirming: “All you had to do was to respond in faith to my revelation in nature and I would have made sure that you heard the rest of the message about me, namely how to be saved. However, you did not even respond to that!”

General Revelation not only directs us to see that men are without excuse, it forms the basis for science. Since God reveals Himself in nature, one of the motivations for the fathers of modern science (men like Bacon, Boyle, and Newton) to engage in their studies was to show forth more of God’s splendor.

<p>“Science has much to teach us about the power and precision of God.” -Richard A. Swenson, M.D., <u>More Than Meets The Eye</u></p>

The biblical concept of General Revelation also reminds us that even though the Bible is our only ultimate source of truth and authority, it is not the only source of truth. We also learn, for example, through research, experimentation, observation, and experience. Though the Bible teaches us truth that can be applied to all situations and areas, it does not teach us all the truth there is to know.

Additionally, the biblical teaching on General Revelation is a reminder that we should not be surprised when men and women who are not Christians discover truths which are very helpful to mankind. Though only those who are regenerated will see the need for Christ and respond to Him in saving faith thus having their minds enlightened to Special Revelation (cf. John 3:3f.; Acts 16:14; 1 Cor. 2:14; Eph. 2:1-10; Titus 3:5), Christians otherwise have no corner on the market of truth. Yes, it is true that non-Christians most often will not ascribe the honor that God deserves for some new discovery in the world, yet, this does not make such legitimate findings any less true.

Finally, when we remember that all people are made in God's image (Gen. 1:26-28; James 3:9) and that God has bestowed His common grace on both the saved and unsaved (cf. Mt. 5:45), the Christian has a basis for understanding that all mankind through all history will discover and accomplish some amazing things! After all, creation is the book about God and His works that every person should be able to read.

“Common grace is the grace of God by which he gives people innumerable blessings that are not part of salvation.” –Wayne Grudem, Systematic Theology

Family Discussion:

1. What is the difference between General Revelation and Special Revelation?
2. Where is General Revelation taught in the Bible?
3. Name some reasons it is important for us to know about General Revelation.