

# The Revelation of the Gospel

## Introduction

### a. objectives

1. subject – God has revealed the promised saving gospel only through the Word of God, not nature
2. aim – to cause us to seek the true promise of God via the written Word empowered by the Spirit
3. passage – Romans 1:18-32

### b. outline

1. The Nature of General Revelation
2. The Failure of General Revelation
3. The Value of Special Revelation

### c. opening

1. a **reintroduction** to Chapter 20
  - a. this chapter addresses a **particularly unique issue** rising in the W which could/would have *devastating effects* on the propagation and value of the gospel (**i.e.** its extent)
  - b. specifically, the rise of reason and science (rationalism) leading men to think that they could “figure out” God: observing the natural world to “discover” God for themselves *and what he ought to be*
2. the first paragraph starts the chapter by stating a fundamental fact: God has announced, because of the broken covenant of works by Adam, a promise (in the gospel) of a “last” Adam who would come to accomplish all that the first Adam failed to do, and that all who are the recipients of this promise are connected to this Christ by repentance and faith
3. the second paragraph addresses the issue above *head-on*, with the **thesis** of the entire chapter: “this promise of Christ, and salvation by Him, is revealed only by the Word of God”
  - a. there is a *clear distinction* between *general revelation* (**i.e.** what God has revealed *generally* through what is made) vs. *special revelation* (**i.e.** the direct revelation of God regarding matters *beyond* what can be known of him through observation)

## I. The Nature of General Revelation

### Content

#### a. the reality of general revelation

“this promise of Christ, and salvation by him, is revealed only by the Word of God”

1. God has imbued *evidence* of his existence within the very framework of creation itself
  - a. not to be confused with pantheism (the belief that God exists “within” all that is created)
  - b. not to be confused with panatheism (the belief that God is the “soul” of all that is created)
  - c. rather, the observable reality that all of creation has the “fingerprints” of a Creator – that the physical world possesses observable and measurable evidences of a designer
  - d. **i.e.** a *general* revelation of God simply as a *general* sense of his handiwork (**Psalm 19:1**)

#### b. the duality of general revelation

1. the evidences of a Creator *in the physical universe*
  - a. all of those things in the creation itself that point not only to a *designer*, but to a Creator
  - b. **e.g.** the *millions* of factors that make Earth a habitable planet; the immutable physical laws like matter, motion, gravity, energy; the biological realities of life: DNA, cellular engines, etc.
2. the evidences of a Creator *in humanity, his highest creation*
  - a. all of those things in the *Imago Dei* which demonstrate having been created in the image of God
    1. **i.e.** the *uniqueness* of human beings vs. all other creatures, due to the *intimacy* of our formation
  - b. **e.g.** intelligence, emotion, volition, consciousness, mortality, morality, conscience, guilt/shame, language, creativity, culture, relationships, love, etc.

#### c. the result of general revelation

1. **meaning:** due to the *overwhelming evidence* of a Creator from the world around us *and in us*, *all human beings possess an inherent knowledge of the existence of God* (**Romans 1:19-20**)  
“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.”
  - a. or, there is *no such thing* as an “atheist” – by definition, due to the way that God created his world and us, all human beings “inherently know” (from their own nature) that there is a God
    1. **note:** many of the “nones” are lying – they still believe in God, just not “officially”

2. **implying**: any attempt to “convince” another person of the existence of God *using evidence* is a fool’s errand – **IOW**: always *start* from that **presupposition (Paul does!!)**

## II. The Failure of General Revelation

### Content

#### a. the suppression of general revelation

1. due to the *corrupting power of Adam’s sin* all (unregenerate) human beings will work to *suppress their inherent knowledge* of God (**Romans 1:18, 21**)  
“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth ... For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.”
2. because they *know* that a Creator, having established *physical laws*, has also established **moral laws** to govern their behavior (**i.e. the Law**) – in their *rebellion*, they must *reject* those laws
  - a. they will strive to suppress any *knowledge of God*, thus (they believe) suppressing his *demands* upon them – **i.e.** if *he’s* gone from our mind, we are “free” to act as we will
  - b. they will strive to suppress any *talk of God* by others, thus (they believe) suppressing their *conscience* – **i.e.** if we can get the church to “shut up” then we will be free to live without shame
  - c. they will strive to suppress any *boundaries*, to get as many *others* as possible to join them in their rebellious pursuits – **i.e.** the more who “agree”, the more likely that we are “right” (**Romans 1:32**)  
“Though they know God’s righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give [hearty] approval to those who practice them.”

#### b. the inescapable nature of general revelation

1. **yet**: human beings are so “hard wired” to know of their Creator that they will *substitute* elements of the creation *for the God of that creation*
  - a. **e.g.** the world is filled with religion and “gods”; the attempt to “supplant” religion with science in the modern age has only *raised* the number of “spiritualities” now common in the race
  - b. **i.e.** humans *must worship something*, so they turn to worship *the Creation* (**Romans 1:22-23**)  
“Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.”
  - c. **IOW**: instead of taking *dominion* over these things (**cf. Gen. 1:28**), human corruption now relegates them to *worshipping* the things that now take dominion over them

#### c. the limitation of general revelation

“neither do the works of creation or providence, with the light of nature, make discovery of Christ, or of grace by Him, so much as in a general or obscure way ...”

1. **but**: even if human beings *truly desired* to know this God and have a *restored* relationship with him, *general revelation* is limited (at best) to reveal him to them because ...
2. human beings are corrupted by their connection to Adam and his Fall, and their ability to rightly understand *anything on their own* is severely handicapped
  - a. **e.g.** the regular “flip-flop” of scientific conclusions = the inability to *truly understand anything*
  - b. **i.e.** even if God *had* put the message of salvation into creation, the inherent corruption of the *mind* makes it impossible for humans to *fully and rightly understand the evidence before them*
  - c. **IMO**: the pursuit of *evidentialism* towards theism and faith struggles against this inability
3. what God has incorporated into the *physical world* is truncated before the message of the gospel
  - a. **i.e.** the creation was *originally formed* without the need for a gospel message – creation, before the Fall of Adam, was “good” in the sight of God – no “provision” of the saving plan of God was “built into” the created order since it was all good and perfect in the original
  - b. **i.e.** the gospel was *announced after* the Fall (**Genesis 3:15**), as a part of the Curse placed upon creation itself – the message of salvation was pronounced “over” a corrupted world, and this message *must stand apart* from the world in order to *not be corrupted by its corruption*

#### d. the intention of general revelation

1. the Created Order does not reveal the promise of God in the gospel – all it does is:
  - a. make human beings “*without excuse*” (**Romans 1:20**) before their Creator – because they inherently know there is a Creator, and that Creator has established *moral right* in the universe, their suppression of that knowledge puts them in a state of *condemnation* without excuse
    1. **i.e.** no man will be able to stand before God and say “I didn’t know ...”

### III. The Value of Special Revelation

#### Content

##### a. the need for special revelation

"... much less that men destitute of the revelation of Him by the promise or gospel, should be enabled thereby to attain saving faith or repentance"

1. the following can be implied from this final sentence of the paragraph
  - a. the Created Order will require a special revelation *unique from itself* for salvation
    1. this revelation is *spoken* by God, and all elements of it are *revealed by his Word*
    2. **i.e.** the Word of Creation (corrupted) → the Word of Promise (**Gen. 3:15**) → the Word of God (**Scripture; 2 Tim. 3:16**) → the Word himself (**logos; John 1:1, 14**)
  - b. this special revelation is the *only means* by which fallen humanity can come to understand *fully* the promise of God and the means of salvation (**i.e.** repentance and faith)
  - c. those who have *received* this special revelation must *pronounce* this message to others
    1. **LOW:** since we cannot rely on people coming to Jesus by simply "observing" us, we must *communicate* (in words) the essence of the promise and its requirements