

Psalm 19 - The Works and the Word of God.

Psalm 19 contains a profound (and moving) statement of the doctrine of divine revelation. And like the Bible's teaching elsewhere on the subject, it divides this revelation into two main categories: general revelation, which refers to the revelation of God in nature, and special revelation, in this case the revelation of God in Scripture. The first of these is discussed in verses 1-6, the second in verses 7 - 11. Then there is a concluding section in which the psalmist applies this revelation to himself (vv. 12-14).

In keeping with our theme this summer, the central expository idea could be expressed as:

Right worship carefully contemplates the revelation of the LORD in creation and Scripture which should inspire even greater adoration and renewed spiritual commitment in the believer.

I. General Revelation - The Revelation of God in Nature (vv.1-6)

I can imagine David (shepherd boy) focused on and pondering the heavens above him and being overwhelmed by the glory of God.

¹The heavens are telling of the glory of God; and their expanse is declaring the work of His hands.

The heavens, which contain the stars and sun, witness to the existence of their Creator. But more than that, they also witness to his "glory." The stars and sun are so glorious that the one who made them must be more glorious still. So complex a Universe demands a Creator who can do anything, who knows everything, and who is present everywhere.

Clearly this is a limited revelation. That is, it does not testify to God's moral qualities-attributes like justice, mercy, love, wrath, goodness, grace, and compassion. But the creation certainly testifies to God's existence and power. Indeed, this is exactly what the apostle Paul writes in Romans 1:20, in a passage that probably has the 19th psalm in mind, even though it is not directly quoted:

²⁰For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.

This is the meaning of *glory* in Psalm 19 – a revelation of God's existence and power so great that it should lead every human being on the face of the earth to seek God out, to thank him for bringing him or her into existence, and to worship him.

But that is not what we do. What Paul says in Romans 1 is that, apart from God's special intervention in our lives to save us, all human beings actually suppress the truth of God's general revelation, either denying his existence altogether or else erecting a lesser god, an idol, in the true God's place.

The Nature of This Testimony

We also have some profound statements about its nature and extent, Verses 2 and 3 say three things about it.

General Revelation is Continuous (v.2).

(after)

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²Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night reveals knowledge.

In other words, they are not an intermittent revelation, as if God were to send a prophet one year and then let

many silent years go by before sending another. The skies reveal the glory of God every single night of the week, every week of the year, year after year, and they've done this since their creation. There's never been a moment in the history the human race when the heavens were not testifying to us about God.

General Revelation is Abundant (v.2).

In the words of the psalm, it pours forth speech (v.2). This is stronger in the Hebrew text than it appears to be in the English, the image is that of a gushing spring...

Every individual part of nature testifies to its Creator, so that whatever part you happen to be looking at will pour forth knowledge. If you look at the stars, they testify to a God of great power who made them. If you study the human body, you will find that the body testifies to an all-wise Creator. The intricacies of the atom, the nature of light, etc... - all testify abundantly to the divine mind that lies behind them.

The more one looks, the more one investigates them by scientific means, the more the heavens gush forth knowledge. It is a defect in the modern scientific mind, not an achievement, that it has so much difficulty seeing this.

General Revelation is Universal (v.3-4).

It is known everywhere. Psalm 19 says of the skies and heavens,

³ *There is no speech, nor are there words; their voice is not heard.*

⁴ *Their line has gone out through all the earth, and their utterances to the end of the world.*

“There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard. Their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world (vv. 3-4a). (influence)

The Glory of the Sun (v. 4b-6).

In verses 4-6, David uses the sun as “a particular example” of the universal witness to God by the heavens

In them He has placed a tent for the sun, ⁵ Which is as a bridegroom coming out of his chamber; It rejoices as a strong man to run his course. ⁶ Its rising is from one end of the heavens, and its circuit to the other end of them; and there is nothing hidden from its heat.

Naturally David did not know all we know about the sun – how it is a ball of gases, chiefly hydrogen, burning itself up in a vast nuclear reaction, how it is so far away from earth that light radiating from its surface takes eight minutes to get here. Yet strangely, though knowing less about the sun than ourselves, David nevertheless praised God more. He knew that the sun is God's handiwork and it displays his glory.

Some scholars have imagined echoes of pagan hymns of worship of the stars and sun in Psalm 19, but nothing could be further from the psalm's intent. The first part of the psalm is not a hymn to nature. It does not deify creation. The psalmist is actually protesting against pagan worship. It is a hymn of praise to God, who has revealed himself in the glories of the universe. For the heavens are pointing to God, not themselves, and the sun, while glorious, only fulfills a function and follows a course prescribed for it by its divine maker.

It is the most natural thing in the world for the psalm to turn from the revelation of God in nature, which all human beings possess, to that special revelation of God in Scripture, specifically given to the first to the Jews and now to us.

The specific revelation of God in the Scriptures is so superior to the general revelation of God in creation that the style of the poem quite naturally changes.

Most notably, *the name used for God changes*. In the first half the name is *El*. It occurs only once (v1). *El* (not even Elohim) is the most generic of all names for God. It is an appropriate name for One made known by the general revelation. In the second half of the psalm the name used for God is *Jehovah*. *Jehovah* is the covenant name revealed to Moses at the burning bush ("I am who I am," Exod. 3:14). It is appropriate for the special and specific revelation of God in Scripture. This name occurs seven times (vv. 7, 8, 9, 14), and the frequency serves to heighten the emotional tone of the poem's second half, for the God of creation is also the God of personal revelation to His people. The heavens declare God's glory, but the Scriptures tell us what God did so that we may share in that Glory.

I think C.S. Lewis rightly pointed out that the key line in this description is the last, which says that "nothing is hidden from [the sun's] heat" (v. 6). The line links the witness of the physical creation to the witness of the Word, for the scriptures are likewise penetrating, warming, and life-giving while also searching, testing, and purifying.

If we value the revelation of God in creation, we should cherish the written revelation of God in Scripture even more. David did. That's why the psalm goes on to speak of the value and beneficial functions of God's law.

II. Special Revelation - The Revelation of God in Scripture (vv. 7-11)

Words to be Obeyed (vv.7-9).

In verses 7-9 there are six parallel statements, and each contains three elements that are likewise parallel. There are six terms (or names) for the God's Word, six adjectives to describe attributes of the Word, and six statements of what God's Word does in the lives of those who receive it and obey it.

⁷ *The law of the LORD is perfect, restoring the soul;*

The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple.

⁸ *The precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart;*

The commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes.

⁹ *The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever;*

The judgments of the LORD are true; they are righteous altogether.

Let's look at the nouns first: law, testimony, precepts, commandment, fear, and judgements. These describe the Bible's multiple facets just as Psalm 119 also does.

"Law", literally *Torah*, is the most embracing term. It is not limited to specific legal commands, as our use of the word *law* is. The root meaning of the word is "instruction, direction, teaching." It has to do with everything God has revealed or says. Our best equivalent would be *Scripture* or *the Word of God*.

"Testimony" - means an aspect of truth attested by God himself, perhaps with the idea of this being a reminder. The Ten Commandments were known by this name (Ex. 25: 21), and they are the basis for God's law. But all of the scriptures are God's witness to us of who He is and what He has said and done, and what He wants us to be and to do. The witness God bears of Himself in the written Word is sure and reliable.

“Precepts”- These are God's detailed instructions concerning the practical matters of everyday life. For the Old Testament Jew, these statutes related to what they ate, how they dressed, how they kept clean, and so forth. God laid down certain basic laws and commandments, and the statutes applied them to specific situations.

“Commandment” - The word means “that which is appointed.” Because the Lord loves us, He commands us what to do and warns us what not to do, and how we respond is a matter of life or death (Deut.30: 15-20).

“Fear” - is not strictly a synonym for God’s Word, though it is used as such. It describes the Scriptures by the effect they produce in those who respond to the revelation. This is an unusual name for the Scriptures, but it reminds us that we cannot learn the Word of God unless we show reverence and respect for the God of the Word. To teach the Bible is to teach the fear of the Lord (34:11; Deut. 4:9-10).

(And we will soon see that the last verses of this psalm are an example this godly fear or reverence.)

“Judgments”- means *“ordinances”* or *“verdicts,”* that is, the divine evaluation of our thoughts and actions. It refers to the decisions of a judge.

Despite the slightly different shades of meaning, there is the one characteristic that these six terms have in common - They all portray the Bible as words to be obeyed. That is how David viewed the Bible, as the Word of God to be obeyed. Because it is the Word of God, it is to be received by us as authoritative, inerrant, and absolutely binding.

Training in Righteousness

In other words, it is because the Bible is God's law, testimony, precepts, commandment, fear, and judgments that it is perfect, sure, right, pure, clean, and true, which is what David says it is. And it's because it is like this that it can do the things that David also says it does.

We see same relationship in Paul's well-known description of the Bible in 2 Timothy 3:16:

¹⁶ *All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness;*

The combination of ideas in this verse indicates that it is because the Bible is “God-breathed,” as other books are not, that it is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training.

David says the law of God does six things:

Being perfect, it restores the soul. “Restore” is the same word used in Psalm 23:3 and means “to revive, to give new life.” God's word is perfect, flawless, and complete. The connection between the law’s perfection and its ability to revive the soul is not easy to see at first glance, but it is found in the fact that being perfect means being so complete as to cover every aspect of life. It means that the Bible is not deficient in any way. It is an all-sufficient revelation. Therefore, no matter what our sins may have been or our problems are, the Bible is able to turn us from our sins, lead us through our problems, and both feed and enrich us so that we were able to enjoy the full benefits of spiritual life. Jesus testified to this when he told the devil, quoting from Deuteronomy 8:3,

“Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God” (Matt. 4:4).

The Word of God not only *has* life (Acts 7:3; Heb.4:12), but it *imparts* spiritual life to all who receive it (1 Peter 1:23), and it *sustains* life as well (119:25, 37, 40, 88, 107, 149, 156, 159).

Being sure, the law of God makes the simple wise. “*Sure*” means “*Trustworthy*”, and the reason why the testimony of the Lord is worthy of our trust is that it corresponds to reality. Through the Word, we become wise concerning salvation (2 Tim. 3:15) and in the principles of successful living (Prov.2; 8:33; 10:8). If we follow the directions of the Word of God, we will find salvation, contentment, joy, and eternal life. The one who is open enough to God's instructions to do that - will become wise. On the other hand, the one who thinks himself too wise to adhere to God's wisdom will show himself to be a fool. Paul elaborates on this in Romans 1:25, saying that one result of man's abandonment of the truth of God is that he is given over to what Paul calls “a lie”. Again, in 1 Corinthians 1:19-21 Paul shows that God has used the apparent foolishness of the gospel to confound the self-proclaimed wise people of this world.

¹⁹ *For it is written,*

*“I WILL DESTROY THE WISDOM OF THE WISE,
AND THE CLEVERNESS OF THE CLEVER I WILL SET ASIDE.”*

²⁰ *Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? ²¹ For 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.*

Being right, the law of God makes the heart rejoice. Here, *Right* does not mean correct as opposed to being wrong; it means straight as opposed to being crooked and is linked to the idea of righteousness. Verse 8 teaches that walking in a straight path or in an upright manner brings joy.

Being pure, the law of God gives light to the eyes. Think “radiant.” Literally, an object that is radiant or gives off light makes vision possible. Metaphorically, anything that illuminates a right life path enables us to walk in it without stumbling.

Psalms 119: 105 embraces these ideas when it says, “*Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.*”

God's commands are pure and lead to a pure life, if we obey them from the heart. The Bible is the *Holy Scriptures* (Rom. 1:2; 7:12; 2 Tim 3:15), and therefore His Word is “very pure” (119:40; Prov. 30:5). We are enlightened and learn God's truth when we obey what He says (John 7:17) and not just when we read it or study it (James 1:22-25).

Being clean, the law of God endures forever. It is the Word of God that is described as being clean and, because it is pure, enduring.

Corrupt things decay. That which is pure endures. Since the word of God is entirely pure, being without any deficiency, error, fault, or inadequacy, it along with the God who spoke it is the most enduring of all things. Jesus said, “until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished” (Matt. 5:18). He also said, “Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away” (Matt. 24:35).

Many people have a relative idea of truth today, believing that truth changes. That nothing is certain. But by contrast, the Bible teaches that truth is absolute and unchanging and that it is grounded in the character of God, who is likewise unchanging. Therefore a wise person will build his or her life upon it.

Being true and altogether righteous, the law of God warns the servant of God against sin and provides him with great reward. The last of these six statements does not follow the precise parallelism of the other five. Where we expect to read another statement about what the Bible does we find instead the words “and altogether righteous.” The parallelism is still there, however. It is just delayed. The psalmist introduces a personal evaluation of the ordinances of God, saying,

¹⁰ *They are more desirable than gold, yes, than much fine gold;
Sweeter also than honey and the drippings of the honeycomb.*

Only after this evaluation do we find the completion of the parallelism in a statement of two things the Scriptures do:

¹¹ *Moreover, by them Your servant is warned;
In keeping them there is great reward.*

Those two benefits are worth pursuing.

First, the one who knows the law is warned by it. Against what? Against sin and its harmful effects. And against the lies and errors of this world. We need such warnings, because the world about us is clever and pervasive, and there's nothing except the Bible to stand against its deceptions. John Bunyan had it right when he said of the Bible, “This book will keep you from sin, or sin will keep you from this Book.”

Second, the keeper of the law is rewarded. But notice how this is said. The text does not say that the one who obeys God commands *will be* rewarded, though that is certainly true. It says rather, “*in keeping them* there is great reward”. Though the world does not think so, the upright are actually blessed, goodness is itself joyous, and to be holy is to be content.

Psalms 19 stands out as a reminder of God's revelation in nature and in His Word, but the value of that revelation would be lost if it did not lead to greater spiritual reflection and commitment. Certainly believers can join in the praise of the Creator and marvel at the power of the Word, but that is not the main thrust of this psalm. All revelation demands a response, and so the climax of this psalm is reached in the psalmist's response.

III. **Psalmist's Response** (vv. 12-14).

¹² Who can discern *his* errors? Acquit me of hidden *faults*.

¹³ Also keep back Your servant from presumptuous *sins*;

Let them not rule over me; then I will be blameless,

And I shall be acquitted of great transgression.

Heart to Heart

Here the psalmist applies what he has been learning to himself. His response to God's self-revelation falls into two categories.

The first is *prayer* that God will forgive his sin and deliver him from additional transgressions. Sometimes we treat forgiveness lightly, asking God to forgive us but not really thinking that we are sinners, at least not serious sinners, and treating forgiveness almost as a basic human right. It is clear that David does not do this.

He is aware of sin's subtle nature and complexity, dividing it into categories: *errors*, which are wrongs innocently committed; *hidden faults*, that is, faults unknown to himself because they are so deeply ingrained in his personality, but certainly not hidden to God; and presumptuous sins, which are deliberate, willful sins. When David committed adultery and arranged to have Uriah murdered (2 Sam. 11-12), he sinned insolently with his eyes wide open and therefore could bring no sacrifice (Psalm 51: 16- 17). When he confessed his sins, God in His Grace forgave him (2 Sam.12:13), but David paid dearly for his transgressions. Unconfessed sins, even if committed ignorantly, can grow within the heart and begin to rule over us; and this can lead to our committing willful disobedience ("great transgression").

The psalmist also knows that he can never be fully aware of these sins in order to seek forgiveness unless God reveals their presence to him. The Word is a light (119:105) and a mirror (James 1:22-25) to help us see ourselves, search our hearts (Heb. 4:12), and recognize and acknowledge our sins. "By the law is the knowledge of sin" (Rom. 3:20; 7: 7-14).

¹⁴Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart
Be acceptable in Your sight,
O LORD, my rock and my Redeemer.

The second part of David's response to God's revelation of himself is an *appeal* to God as his Rock and Redeemer. The word translated "acceptable" refers to the priest's examination of the sacrifices to make sure they were without blemish. If the sacrifice wasn't acceptable to the Lord, the worshipper was not accepted by the Lord (Lev. 1:1-9; 22:17-25; Mal. 1:6-8).

The Word in the hand is fine; the Word in the head is better; but the Word in the heart is what transforms us and matures us in Christ (Psalm 119:11; Colossians 3:16-17). The words we speak begin with the thoughts in our heart (Matt. 12:33 – 37), so it's important that we meditate on God's word and God's works, the first two themes of Psalms 19. If we delight in God's word, we will naturally meditate on it and give expression of His truth with our lips, and this will help keep us from sin (119:9-16; 23-24, 47-48, 77-78, 97-99).

We are not only led to see ourselves as sinners when we study the Bible. The Bible also leads us to the One who is our only deliverer from sin. And, wonder of wonders, he is the same one who has revealed himself gloriously in the heavens.

The usage here refers to the "kinsman-redeemer" ("one who has the right to redeem") who could rescue a relative from difficult situations (Lev. 25:25-28; Num. 35:11- 34; Ruth; Isa. 43:14).

Jesus Is Our Redeemer (Gal. 3:13; 4:5; Titus 2:14; Heb. 9:12; 1Peter 1:18), and He became our "kinsmen" when he came in sinless human flesh to die for us on the cross. He's both Rock and Redeemer, for He not only paid the price to set us free, but he also keeps us safe.

The heavens tell us that He exists and He's all-powerful. The Bible shows that He is Our Redeemer from sin, that is, the one who is able to break sin's bonds and set us free, and that He is the rock upon which the redeemed can build and be kept from transgressions. But, unless we have a personal relationship with the Lord so that God is our Father and Jesus Is Our Redeemer, what we see in creation and what we read in the Bible will not do us much good.

David reveled in God's law, just as he obviously did in nature, and we should too. The revelation of God in nature is glorious; but glorious as it is, it cannot compare to the written revelation of God in His Word.

Do we *desire* His Word because it's precious to us (v.12), even more than wealth (v.10; 119:14, 72, 127, 162) or food (119:103; 1 Peter 2:2)?

Do we find satisfaction in “feeding on” God's word? (See Matt.4:4; Job 23:12; Jer. 15:16.)

Furthermore, do we *accept the warnings of the Word and act upon them*? To know the warning and not heed it is sin (James 4:17).

Do we *enjoy the blessing of the Lord* because we've obeyed His will?