

By What Means God Is Made Known Unto Us (2)

Text: Belgic Confession 2; Psalm 19

In our previous study, we reviewed general revelation—God’s revealing of Himself through creation and providence, even to unevangelised pagans. It reveals His attributes such as wisdom, power, justice, and eternity, along with His works of creation, providence, and judgment. This revelation issues a call to all men everywhere to glorify and thank Him. However, there is a false view that general revelation can lead to salvation for those who never hear the gospel.

The Roman Catholic Church teaches, as stated in its catechism (Q. & A. 36), that God can be known with certainty by the natural light of human reason through the created world. Some Anabaptists held a similar view. The Amyraldians, following Moïse Amyraut, taught that though man is fallen, he retains a capacity to respond savingly to general revelation. According to them, man is not totally depraved but still has a spark of good allowing him to be saved by reflecting on creation and amending his conduct. The hymn-writer Philip Doddridge, known for “O Happy Day” and “Grace! ‘Tis a Charming Sound,” was an Amyraldian who believed virtuous pagans could be saved through natural revelation. This view persists in some today, such as Alan Clifford of the Norwich Reformed Church, who promotes the idea that general revelation can save when rightly used.

This position is rejected by the Reformed creeds. The *Westminster Confession of Faith* (10.4) states, “[M]en, not professing the Christian religion [cannot] be saved in any other way whatsoever [other than the preaching of the gospel], be they never so diligent to frame their lives according to the light of nature and the law of that religion they do profess; and to assert and maintain that they may is very pernicious and to be detested.” The *Scots Confession* of 1560 likewise declares, “[W]e utterly abhor the blasphemy [that salvation may be obtained through general revelation].”

Why General Revelation Cannot Save

Why then can general revelation not save? First, Scripture says faith comes only through hearing the gospel. Romans 10:14–15 declares, “How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him

whom they have not heard? *and how shall they hear without a preacher?*” The gospel must be heard to be believed. Creation does not declare that God became man in Jesus Christ, nor does it speak of the cross, or of justification, or of adoption. These truths are found only in special revelation.

Secondly, even if the content of salvation were present in nature (which it is not), man’s total depravity renders him incapable of responding to it. Without the Spirit’s regenerating grace, man is blind, loves darkness, and hates the light. He suppresses the truth in unrighteousness. As Jesus said in John 3:19, “men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.” Unaided reason does not lead pagans to God but to further rebellion.

Thirdly, the purpose of general revelation with respect to the unevangelised pagan is to render him inexcusable. Romans 1 teaches that God’s attributes are clearly seen in creation so that men are “without excuse.” The *Belgic Confession* (art. 2) says, “We know Him by two means: First, by the creation, preservation, and government of the universe, which is before our eyes as a most elegant book... Secondly, He makes Himself more clearly and fully known to us by His holy and divine Word.”

General revelation is necessary because without it, there is no ground for condemnation. On the last day, the heathen cannot plead ignorance. It is sufficient to leave them without excuse because God reveals enough to establish guilt. Thus, He is just in punishing even those who never heard the gospel because they suppress the truth revealed in nature and turn to idolatry.

The Superiority and Necessity of Scripture

For the church, this doctrine makes the necessity of missions plain: If pagans could be saved without the gospel, there would be no need for missionary effort. But God saves through preaching. Evangelism is essential because Christ is the only way, and faith in Him comes only through hearing the Word.

Belgic Confession article 2 compares creation and Scripture. The second paragraph states that God “makes Himself more clearly and fully known” by His holy Word. Scripture is not only *clearer* but *fuller* than creation. It contains the very words of God. It reveals Jesus Christ as the incarnate Son, the regenerating work of the Spirit, the covenant of grace, and the whole plan of redemption. It records creation, the flood, the exodus, Christ’s miracles, and the early church—none of which are revealed in nature.

Scripture is also more *perspicuous*. While nature reveals God clearly enough to condemn, the revelation is not sufficient to save, nor so plain that men can rightly interpret it in their fallen state. Pagan philosophers have failed to make coherent sense of the world. Cicero said, “I do not know of anything so absurd as not to have been said by some philosopher.” Plato believed in philosopher-kings, pederasty, and the abandonment of weak infants—ideas far from Christian ethics.

Scripture interprets creation. Without it, man misreads everything. The world is seen rightly only through Scripture. Calvin likened Scripture to spectacles that bring clarity to a blurred world. The Christian sees the lion as a symbol of Christ, the lily as purity, and the brokenness of creation—violence, suffering, and death—as results of the fall. Even mundane realities like work, marriage, and death gain meaning only when viewed through Scripture. Marriage, for instance, is revealed in Genesis as an institution from God picturing Christ and His church. Without this, the world treats marriage as a dissolvable contract. Homosexuality is viewed by the world as liberty, while Romans 1 calls it a judgment upon idolatry. Economic hardship and disasters are blamed on policy or climate change, but Scripture shows them as signs of the times, birth pangs before Christ’s return. The state too is instituted by God. Even when unjust, it is a servant for good (Rom. 13). Scripture, not political theory, explains government and why the move toward one-world government accords with prophecy about Antichrist. That is why Reformed churches promote Christian education—to teach children to interpret the world by *Scripture*.

Contemplating Creation Through Scripture

Creation is no less God’s handiwork for being misread. *Belgic Confession* article 2 says, “[T]he universe... is before our eyes as a most elegant book, wherein all creatures, great and small, are as so many characters leading us to contemplate the invisible things of God.” We must learn to *contemplate*. From atoms to galaxies, creation reveals God’s wisdom. Ministries like Answers in Genesis are helpful in this regard.

Psalm 139 reveals God’s glory in embryology. “I am fearfully and wonderfully made,” says David, reflecting on God’s care in shaping him in the womb. This gives medical professionals insight into God’s craftsmanship.

Psalm 8:3 says, “When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers...” Astronomy becomes reflection on divine glory. Psalm 19 contrasts the two books. Verses 1–6 declare, “The heavens declare the glory of God.” This witness is constant and universal. Then verses 7–11 shift to Scripture: “The law of the

Lord is perfect, converting the soul." Scripture gives joy, light, and life, and is more desirable than gold and sweeter than honey. Only it makes one wise unto salvation, as Paul told Timothy: "From a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus" (II Tim. 3:15).

Therefore, general revelation is real, necessary, clear, and sufficient to condemn – but not to save. Scripture alone gives the knowledge of Christ and of salvation. Through Scripture's spectacles, the Christian sees clearly and glorifies God.