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GOD'S REVELATION, OUR RESPONSE

Psalm 19

by

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Lesson 5: Psalms

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The late Bill Klem was one of major league baseball's best-known umpires. When he stood behind the plate, he was in charge of everything that mattered. He was the unquestioned authority; you didn't challenge his word. He had a way of looking contentious managers straight in the eye and backing them right into the dugout.

On one occasion, it was the ninth inning of a critical game. The batter hit the ball to left field and the runner on third broke for the plate with the potential winning run. The catcher crouched to make the tag. There was a fierce collision with the catcher, the runner, and the umpire all knocked to the ground. Everyone eagerly awaited the decision. In one dugout the players were screaming, "He's safe! He's safe!" In the other dugout they yelled, "He's out! He's out!" The fans were in a divided uproar.

In the midst of the noise and confusion, Bill Klem stood up, looked directly into the stands, raised his fist and exclaimed, "He ain't nothin' 'til I've called it!" Klem was *the* authority and nobody was going to take that away from him!

We live in a day of spiritual and moral confusion. Some claim, "This is the way to live!" Others counter, "No, this is the way!" Many more claim, "There is no one way to live; each person must choose his own way!" Philosophers, educators, sociologists, psychologists, politicians, and even pastors offer their speculations about how we should live. But what we need is not more *speculation*, but a sure word of authoritative *revelation* which tells us why we're on this planet and how we should live in light of that purpose.

What we need is a sure word from God. If the sovereign God has

spoken, then some may shout one thing and some another, but the only judgment that matters is what God declares. If God calls it, that settles it! We can only lay aside our speculations and submit to what He says.

In Psalm 19, David shows that God has spoken to us through His revelation in His world (19:1-6) and in His Word (19:7-11). He concludes by showing how we must respond (19:12-14).

Perhaps David wrote the psalm after arising for an early watch out in the Judean wilderness, where he tended sheep for his father and later hid from King Saul. As he sat in the early morning darkness, he was awed with the vastness of space and the immensity of God as he gazed into the starry sky. Soon the darkness gave way to the first rays of light and to a glorious sunrise. David, moved with the greatness of God, wrote this psalm which combines beautiful poetry with profound theology and the appropriate moral response. It shows God's general revelation in the heavens, God's specific revelation in the Scriptures, and David's response.

1. God has revealed Himself generally in His world (19:1-6).

"The heavens are telling of the glory of God; And their expanse is declaring the work of His hands" (19:1). The Scriptures plainly teach that the universe was created by God: "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth" (Gen. 1:1). "...by the word of God the heavens existed long ago and the earth was formed out of water and by water" (2 Pet. 3:5). Because you can learn something about an artist or architect by his work, we can know something about God by studying His creation. Even though creation was subjected to futility as a result of man's fall into sin (Rom. 8:20), we can still learn about God in a general way through creation.

In 19:1-6, David shows us three things concerning God's revelation in His creation:

- A. There is abundant evidence of God's glory in His creation (19:1, 2, 4a).

"Glory" comes from a word meaning "weight" or "worth." We see abundant evidence of God's weight or worth by looking at His creation, especially at the vastness and grandeur of the universe. Every day the sun in its splendor and every night the stars in their glory tell about the greater glory of the God who spoke them into existence.

If people choose to ignore God's revelation in His creation, it is not because of a lack of evidence: "Their line has gone out through all the earth" (Ps. 19:4). The message extends everywhere. If you live in this universe, you have clear testimony to the God who created it.

The reason people do not see the evidence is moral, not intellectual. As Paul put it, they "suppress the truth in unrighteousness." "For 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. For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God, or give thanks; but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures" (Rom. 1:18, 20-23).

The evidence is there. The problem is that people do not want to submit to God as Lord; they want to be their own lord.

- B. There is no need for an education to grasp the evidence.

It is a silent witness (19:3). You don't have to be literate

to grasp God's general revelation. It speaks with unwritten words to everyone alike. In fact, being educated in the speculations of proud men may hinder you from grasping the simplicity of God's revelation of Himself in creation.

I saw a film about a couple who went to Papua New Guinea to take the gospel to a primitive, illiterate tribe. They learned the language and began to tell the story of the Bible, starting in Genesis. When they told these tribesmen the story of creation, the missionaries mentioned that in their own country (America), many people believed that human beings descended from apes. These simple, uneducated people responded in mocking laughter by exclaiming, "That's stupid!" Anyone should be able to look at the awesomeness and complexity of creation and conclude that there is a Creator.

- C. There are several attributes of God revealed in the heavens.

David is writing a poem or song, not a scientific or theological treatise, so he is not comprehensive or systematic. But we can draw out at least five things about God from Psalm 19:1-6:

(1) God is infinite in His power. The next time you step outside on a starry night and look up into the sky, think about the fact our galaxy, the Milky Way, contains more than 100 billion stars. And there are probably at least 100 billion other galaxies in the universe, each with billions of stars!

Imagine that the thickness of the page in your Bible is 93 million miles, the distance to our sun. The distance to the nearest star (4 1/2 light years) would be 71 feet. The diameter of our own galaxy (100,000 light years) would be 310 miles. The edge of the known universe would be

31 million miles on the same scale! God spoke this universe into existence! What does that tell you about His power and infinitude?

(2) God is consistent and faithful. Just as the sun faithfully and consistently rises in the east every morning and sets in the west every evening, so God is faithful and consistent. You can count on Him to keep His Word. He never fails.

(3) God is radiant in His splendor. David poetically compares the sun to a bridegroom coming out of his bridal chamber, radiant with exuberance and joy. The sun rising in the eastern sky is just a finite picture of the radiance of the infinite God who alone dwells in unapproachable light and on whose splendor no mortal can look.

(4) God is consistently strong (19:5b). Just as the sun consistently runs its course daily and gives off its life-sustaining warmth, so God is consistently strong. If the sun varied just a few degrees in its temperature, it would either melt the polar ice caps and flood much of the world or cause an ice age on the earth. God is consistently strong like the sun.

(5) God is omnipresent and omniscient. Just as the sun's rays shine everywhere upon the earth and nothing is hid from its heat (especially in the Middle East, where David wrote), so God is. He searches you out and knows all that there is to know about you, so that there is no escaping Him.

Let's draw *three applications*:

*1. Let God's creation humble you in His presence. The Bible is clear that the sinful tendency of the fallen human race is proudly to exalt ourselves, to think that we are like God. But the clear truth is, we are not like God. He

alone is the Almighty Creator. Try speaking anything into existence, let alone the entire universe, and you will see that, compared to God, you are nothing! This means that you cannot use God for your own ends. God doesn't exist to make you happy as you pursue your selfish goals. He is the sovereign of the universe, who alone is great. We need to humble ourselves and submit to our awesome Creator!

*2. Don't let modern evolutionary theories infect your thinking. Evolution is a religious faith that enables proud men to act as their own gods. It is almost always presented as fact, not theory, even though evolutionists cannot explain how the complexities of the natural world came to be, except through incredible odds (even given billions of years) and through attributing exceptional intelligence either to lower forms of life or to "Mother Nature," which mystically and powerfully has equipped our world with amazing things! But there is no such thing as Mother Nature; there is only Father God, the Creator!

If I had time, I could give you many ludicrous examples, but one must suffice. Dr. Lewis Thomas, distinguished medical doctor and author of several scientific books, in his book, *Late Night Thoughts on Listening to Mahler's Ninth Symphony* (in *Reader's Digest* [4/84], pp. 131-132) tells about an amazing beetle which depends upon the mimosa tree for breeding. The female, as Thomas describes it, has three consecutive thoughts, always in the right order. First, she looks for a mimosa tree; no other variety will do. Next, she crawls out on a limb, cuts a slit, and deposits her eggs. Third, since this beetle's larvae can't survive in live wood, she goes back up the limb a foot or so and cuts a neat girdle through the bark all around the limb. This takes her about eight hours. The limb thus dies and falls off, allowing her young to survive.

Also, as “lucky evolution” would have it, the mimosa tree, if left unpruned, has a life expectancy of 25 to 30 years. But if pruned, which the beetle’s cutting accomplishes, the tree will live for a century or so! Pretty smart of the beetles, huh!

Thomas thinks so. He muses, “How did these three linked thoughts emerge together in her evolution? Is this mindless behavior, or is it possible for the tiny brain of a beetle to contain thoughts and bits of awareness exactly like ours, just three microscopic thoughts popping into her mind, always in the right order? And how did the mimosa tree enter the picture in its evolution?” His conclusion: “It is good for us to have around such creatures as this insect and its partner tree, for they keep reminding us how little we know about nature.”

I would counter, “How little we know about God!” Don’t let evolutionary garbage cloud your awe of the Creator who designed such an intricate creation! That’s the third application:

*3. Worship God in His creation. Don’t worship the creation, but let your study of the many facets of the created world direct you beyond itself to worship the infinite God who designed it all.

Thus God has revealed Himself generally in His creation. David only uses the name “God” (Hebrew, “El,” God’s creator name) once in 19:1-6. But in 19:7-14 he uses “Yahweh” (“Lord,” the personal covenant name of the God of Israel), seven times. We can know God in a general sense as the Almighty Creator through His creation, but we can know Him personally in a much fuller and perfect way through His Word.

2. God has revealed Himself specifically in His Word

(19:7-11).

In a beautiful section of Hebrew parallelism, David (19:7-9) enumerates six synonyms for God's Word followed by six descriptive adjectives, followed by six verbs. The first four verbs describe the effects of God's Word on people; the last two describe the inherent qualities of God's Word. Having thus described God's Word, David shows (19:10-11) why God's Word is to be desired. I must limit myself to five facts about God's Word:

A. God's Word is authoritative.

Note the nouns: law, testimony, precepts, commandment, fear (the response produced in the sensitive reader), judgments. These words imply authority. God doesn't timidly tap us on the shoulder and say, "Excuse me, but may I suggest that you consider incorporating my point of view with your own?" He doesn't mumble when He tells us how we are to live! He didn't give us "Ten Hints on How to be Happy." God speaks, and we had better listen!

We live in a culture that despises authority. I often hear Christians excuse disobedience by saying, "We're not under the law!" But read your New Testament! All ten commandments, except the Sabbath, are repeated, accompanied by some awfully scary threats if we disobey (e.g., Matt. 7:23; Gal. 5:19-21). We defy God's authoritative Word to our own peril!

B. God's Word is abundantly adequate.

It is sufficient for all the needs of the human soul. God's Word is "perfect, restoring the soul." As Paul says, Scripture will make the man of God perfect (or adequate) for every good work (2 Tim. 3:17). The Word makes "wise the simple." The word "simple" shows us

that to receive God's wisdom, we must humble ourselves by setting aside proud human wisdom. The wisdom from God's Word shows us how our infinitely wise Creator has ordained for us to live a blessed life, as seen in the next phrase:

"Rejoicing the heart." God's Word is not a burden to take away your fun, but a blessing to give you real joy in every circumstance of life if you follow it. It "enlightens the eyes," so that we do not stumble and hurt ourselves in the many traps Satan has set for us. God's Word is better than fine gold or honey, and in keeping it there is great reward (19:10-11). We ought to desire God's Word more than money or a good meal, since it has value not only for this life, but for the life to come.

God's Word is abundantly adequate to meet every need of every hurting human heart. Why is the Christian world running headlong after the godless advice of modern psychology when we have such a sufficient source of wisdom from our loving Creator?

C. God's Word is accurate.

Note the adjectives: "perfect" (complete, having integrity); "sure" (a solid foundation for life); "right" (mapping out a straight course); "pure" (no unwholesome elements); "clean" (free from impurity; it will cleanse us from sin); and "true" (total dependability). If there is any seeming error in God's Word, it is due to our limited knowledge, not to God's mistake. Thus, you can entrust your life to following God's Word and you won't be led astray. As Calvin points out, "A man's life cannot be ordered aright unless it is framed according to the law of God."

D. God's Word is absolute.

It "endures forever"; it is "altogether righteous." It applies in every culture in every age to every person. God's standards are not relative and shifting. We aren't to be tossed around by every wind of doctrine in our day, but rather to live by God's unchanging standards, revealed in His Word.

E. God's Word is abrasive.

By God's Word, His "servant is warned" (19:11). God doesn't always pat me on the head and say "nice boy." His Word often scrapes against my sinful grain and says, "That is wrong and you had better stop doing it!" God's Word confronts us. But it does so for our benefit. Thus, God's revelation always demands a response. So David concludes,

3. We must respond by facing our sin and submitting to God's revelation (19:12-14).

David's response to God's revelation was to face his own sin and call out to God for His help in overcoming it. The Bible is not given for speculation, but for application. David mentions three types of sin:

- A. Hidden sins (19:12). Sin is so much a part of us that we don't even realize much of our own sin. God has to reveal them and deal with them in us.
- B. Willful sins (19:13). This is outright disobedience. There are times when you know what God wants you to do and you act like a defiant child and say, "I will not!" David doesn't want either kind of sin to dominate his life, and so he prays that God would deliver him.
- C. Sins of word and thought (19:14). David is aware that sin lies deeper than our outward actions, and so he prays that the words of his mouth and the meditation of his

heart would be acceptable to God. God's Word searches our innermost being and shows us wrong thoughts which are the source of wrong words and wrong deeds. "The word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart" (Heb. 4:12).

If David, who calls himself here God's servant, whom God called a man after His own heart, knew that he was so inclined toward sin as to pray this, how much more must we constantly confront ourselves with God's Word and call out to Him for purity in the inner being! We've got to let God's revelation shine into the inner recesses of our heart and scour away the sin which we so often try to hide.

Conclusion

Because God has spoken in His world and in His Word, we must respond by facing our sin and submitting to God's revelation.

Perhaps the thought of God as the awesome, Almighty Creator and of His authoritative Word makes you want to run from Him. But notice that David responds to God as "my rock and my redeemer" (19:14). He did not say "my accuser and my judge," but "my rock and my redeemer." A rock refers to a place of refuge, where a sinner can run for protection and rest. A redeemer refers to one who has protected or rescued another from bondage and slavery by paying a required price. "My" means that David had fled personally to God for redemption.

God wants to be to you a rock of refuge and your redeemer who rescues you from bondage to sin and death. He paid the price to rescue you from bondage to sin by sending His only begotten Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. He died in your place, so that God's

judgment for your sins fell upon Him. God is now free to forgive and accept you if you will accept the pardon He offers in His Son. Instead of being the God who accuses and condemns you, He can now be the God who forgives you and welcomes you to take refuge in Him.

God's world shows us how awesome He is. God's Word shows us how we can be right with Him and how we can live a truly blessed life. Our response should be to face our sin and submit to the living and true God who has made Himself known through His world and His Word. He alone is the umpire who calls the plays. Make sure you're safe in Him!

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Does the Bible allow for so-called "theistic evolution"?
2. How can we harmonize David's extolling of God's law with Paul's saying that we are not under the law?
3. If "all truth is God's truth" then why can't we benefit from the insights of modern psychology?
4. How can a person who is not a reader benefit from God's Word? Must every Christian become a Bible scholar?

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