



Pleasant Ridge Baptist Church

Five Solas

Scripture Alone: The Witness of Creation and Scripture

Psalm 19:1-14; Romans 1:18-22

10/28/2018

Main Point

God has revealed Himself both through nature and through Scripture because He wants His people to know and treasure Him.

Introduction

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

Share a time when you were in awe of nature and were moved to worship God.

Why do you think some people look at the world and deny a Creator?

Share about a time when God spoke to you in a profound way through His Word. Was there ever a time when you read a passage of Scripture and it gave you insight or wisdom at a critical time?

Psalm 19 might be best described as “God’s two books,” as it gives us the two primary ways that God reveals Himself to us: nature and Scripture. Though not equal in their revelation, studying both of these “books” is critical to our faith. Psalm 19 is a song of praise that illustrates for us how we might grow to treasure God more by studying His two “books.”

Understanding

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ PSALM 19:1-6.

What are some of the clues in nature that point us to the existence of a Creator?

What are some aspects of nature, if any, that might lead some people to believe that no Creator exists?

What about God do the heavens declare (vv. 1-2)? How often do they declare it?

The word “heavens” in verse 1 refers to the sky and all that we see in it—the sun, the moon, and the stars. David speaks as if the heavens are constantly speaking to us. Of course, it is not the heavens themselves that are speaking, but God. God is communicating His character to us through what He has made. David says the heavens declare “the glory of God” and reveal his “greatness” (vv. 1-2). This tells us that creation testifies that God is the highest being in existence.

How far has God’s testimony about Himself in creation traveled? Who has God revealed Himself to through nature (vv. 4-6)?

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ ROMANS 1:18-22.

How has “what can be known about God” been made plain to people?

What attributes of God does Paul say can be clearly seen from nature? Why is that important?

Paul says that God’s “eternal power” and “divine nature” can clearly be seen in creation. This is very similar to Psalm 19:1-2 where the heavens declare God’s glory and greatness. In other words Paul is echoing David in saying that God is ultimate and the one to whom we must give account.

Even though God’s glory can clearly be perceived in nature, why do people still deny His existence (v. 18, 21-23)?

Paul says people deny God because they “supress the truth by their unrighteousness.” In other words, its not just that they look at the created world and don’t see enough evidence of a Creator. Paul, like David, says the evidence of God’s eternal power and divine nature are stamped all over the world. There is no denying that the world is God’s handiwork. The reason people deny God is not because there is not enough evidence but because they don’t want to submit to God’s authority. They want to live for themselves, so they turn their back on God and set out to live life their way.

HAVE ONE VOLUNTEER READ PSALM 19:7-14.

Why do you think David transitions from praising God for revealing Himself in nature to praising God for revealing Himself in His Word? Which of these two “books” is the more reliable source?

The benefits that David lists in these verses that come from studying the Word of God are tremendous. Paul told Timothy that “every scripture is inspired by God and useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the person dedicated to God may be capable and equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:16–17). Both Paul and David speak of the Word of God as a sufficient source of wisdom, guidance, and truth. Nature is a wonderful testimony of the glory of God, but Scripture is a clearer and deeper revelation of who God is and how He wants us to live.

Make a short list of how David describes the Word of God and the benefits we receive from it in verses 7-10.

How can God’s instructions make the heart glad? How might God’s commandments give us “insight for life” (v. 8)?

How is there great reward in keeping God’s commandments (v. 11)? How does your answer to this question relate to the truth that we are saved by faith and not by works (Eph. 2:8-9)?

The lavish and varied ways David speaks of God’s Word are astounding. This tells us something very important about God—He is gracious and good. God’s eternal power and divine nature can be clearly seen in creation but that revelation actually makes us guilty before God for denying Him in our sin (Rom. 1:18–22). But the good news is that God chose to reveal Himself more fully to us in the Bible. We are stubborn and rebellious creatures, but God has given us an invaluable gift in the Bible—it reveals clearly to us both who God is and how He would have us live. Furthermore, at the very center of the Bible is the gospel—the good news about Jesus that tells us God saves us by grace and makes us able to obey Him from the heart.

Application

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

How might you use the beauty of nature to spread the gospel?

If God is revealing things about Himself through creation and created things, what might the implications be on our own creativity?

Why is only experiencing God in nature inadequate for salvation?

Pray

Pray that your group would worship God by studying His two “books.” Thank God for revealing Himself so clearly to us. Thank Him for the gift of the Bible. Ask God to help us trust His Word to grow us in our faith and obedience.

Commentary

PSALM 19:1-14

19:1. Although the heavens can refer to God’s dwelling place, here it is clarified by sky, which is what can be seen from the perspective of those who live on the earth. The “sky” is the same Hebrew word as the expanse that separated water from water in Gen 1:6-8. Creation is sometimes personified as a witness to God’s work among His people, particularly in the covenant relationship He has with them (Dt 4:26; 30:19; Isa 1:2). In this context one specific part of creation is personified as declaring and proclaiming a message. The parallelism between the glory of God and the work of His hands indicates that the objects of creation are demonstrations (or evidence) of God’s glory (50:6; 89:5-8; 97:6; Rm 1:19-20).

19:2-3. Pour out is literally “gush” or “bubble up.” This phrase is most often used for springs or fountains of water. The significance of the term here seems to be that speech never ceases. The concept is intensified by the doubling of the terms day and night. The message goes out

all the time without ceasing. The paradox is that there is speech in verse 2, but there is no speech in verse 3. Although the same Hebrew term ('omer) appears in both verses, it is used differently. In the first instance it is equivalent to the message in verse 1; in the second instance it means "words." Therefore, it is a message with clearly defined content, but it is not communicated with the words of human language.

19:4-6. While verse 2 says that the message comes at all times, this verse adds that it also comes to all places. The word for "world" (Hb tevel) is not the usual word for earth (as in the first line), but it denotes dry land that is capable of sustaining life (9:8; 24:1)—in other words, the inhabited world. No one can escape the message either in time or in space, and everyone is accountable for the message (Rm 1:20). The focus turns from the more general heavens to the most obvious and spectacular object in them: the sun. It is also personified and compared to a groom and an athlete. These images are used together to convey the idea of youthful strength, a concept that is elsewhere associated with the sun, especially when it rises (Jdg 5:31). The fact that nothing is hidden from the sun reinforces the idea that the message of God's glory is as obvious as the most visible and powerful object in God's creation.

19:7-9. The shift of subject between verses 1-6 and verses 7-14 seems abrupt. However, the common element in both cases is God's revelation of Himself and His purposes to mankind. In the first part of the psalm, it is God's creation (general revelation), whereas in the second part, it is the words that God specifically communicated to His people (special revelation). Perfect is a term that is often used in relation to sacrifices that are acceptable to God because they are "unblemished" and "without defect" (Lv 1:3,10), but it can also refer to the perfect work of God (Dt 32:4). Renewing one's life means the restoration of strength or vitality (1 Ki 17:22; Lam 1:11). Making the eyes light up seems like an unusual idiom, but it makes a connection between light and truth, or more specifically knowledge and understanding of the truth (119:105,130; Pr 6:23). The fear of the Lord is the only subject in this list that involves human response to God's instruction rather than a synonym for it. The concept involves obedience to God with an attitude of humility and reverence (see notes at 76:7 and 103:17-18). Its inclusion further demonstrates the relationship between fearing Yahweh and the knowledge and understanding of His truth (Pr 1:7; 9:10).

19:10-11. Gold and honey were valuable commodities in the ancient world, but God's words are even more valuable (119:103,127). The warning and reward are both positive benefits of knowing God's instruction because they keep God's servants from straying off the path of righteousness and provide them with blessings (119:35; Pr 4:18).

19:12-13. Unintentional or hidden sins can represent those that occur with or without proper instruction. The question is rhetorical and assumes a negative answer. For this reason,

continual cleansing is required for these sins. Willful sins are different in that they must be avoided or else they lead to being “cut off” from God and His people (Num 15:30-31).

19:14. The final plea is that the psalmist’s speech and thinking reflect what is acceptable to God. The language of sacrifice is used to show that life should be lived as a sacrifice to God (Rm 12:1).

ROMANS 1:18-22

1:18 In v. 17 Paul wrote that in the gospel “a righteousness of God” is being revealed. Then he added that from heaven the “wrath of God” is being revealed. There is an essential relationship between God’s righteousness and his wrath. If God responded to wickedness with no more than a benign tolerance, his righteousness could be called into question. That which is right necessarily stands over against and defines by contrast that which is wrong. We recognize that divine wrath is not the same as human wrath, which normally is self-centered, vindictive, and intent on harming another. God’s wrath is his divine displeasure with sin. We call it “wrath” because it shares certain basic characteristics of human wrath. But because it is God’s wrath it can have none of the sinful qualities of its analogical counterpart. Berkeley calls it God’s “indignation” (MLB) while the NEB chooses the expression “divine retribution.”

Although the wrath of God is primarily eschatological, it is at the same time a present reality. The use of the present tense (apokalyptetai, “is being revealed”) indicates something that is taking place in the present. Furthermore, vv. 24-32 describe divine wrath as currently operative in the lives of the ungodly. That God’s wrath is present does not mean that it will not also be eschatological. God’s present wrath anticipates his final withdrawal from those who do not respond to his love.

The wrath of God is being revealed against every sort of “godlessness and wickedness.” C. Hodge takes these two terms to mean impiety toward God and unjustness toward humanity. Lack of respect for God leads to a lack of justice for people. History demonstrates that nations that forsake God lose their concern for the rights of the individual. To forsake God is to forsake his creatures. As a national policy, atheism grinds its people under the collective heel of “what’s best for society.”

The people of whom Paul spoke were those who by their wicked and sinful lives “suppress the truth.” Truth cannot be changed, but it can be held down or stifled. Wickedness “denies ... truth its full scope” (Knox). We will learn in the verses that follow that God has revealed to all

humans something of his eternal power and nature. Yet people refuse to believe, and as a result their understanding is darkened. To turn willfully against God is to move from light into darkness. The blindness that follows is self-imposed.

1:19–20 Verses 19 and 20 tell why the wrath of God is being revealed. God, in his creation, has provided sufficient evidence of himself to hold accountable all who reject that revelation. What can be known of God is perfectly clear. God himself made it plain. Theologians call this natural revelation (as distinguished from special revelation). Attempts by the medieval church to prove the existence of God on the basis of creation are commonly held to fall short of their goal. There is no doubt, however, that creation is the work of a Creator. To demand some sort of absolute proof of God's existence is simply an indication of the recalcitrant nature of fallen humanity.

Verse 20 explains that certain invisible attributes of God have been clearly perceived since the world began, specifically, his "eternal power and divine nature."⁸ They are understood from what has been made. The NEB says they are "visible ... to the eye of reason."⁹ God has revealed himself in nature in such a way as to hold all people responsible. They are "without excuse." Seeing the beauty and complexity of creation carries with it the responsibility of acknowledging the Creator both as powerful and as living above the natural order. Disbelief requires an act of rebellion against common sense. It displays fallen humanity's fatal bias against God. Although the created order cannot force a person to believe, it does leave the recipient responsible for not believing.

The text says that people are without a defense for their unwillingness to believe. The Greek word translated "without excuse" (anapologtous) suggests that from a legal standpoint people had been stripped of any defense. The age-old question about the salvation of the "heathen" is clearly answered in this verse. Nature holds people responsible to believe in a God of eternal power. The question of what may or may not constitute the minimum requirements for salvation is not dealt with here. To rebel against God's self-revelation in nature is to incur the results of that rebellion. Things visible call for a power that is invisible. The idea that matter has always existed is an impossible premise for the logical mind. The view that behind the visible world there must exist an invisible Being is far more reasonable. So those who do not believe are without excuse.

1:21–23 We can reasonably expect that knowing God should lead to honoring him as God and giving thanks. But by nature people neither give him glory for who he is nor give him thanks for what he has done. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus spoke of sun and rain benefitting both the righteous and the unrighteous (Matt 5:45; cf. Acts 14:17). God gives to all the basic requirements for life irrespective of their relationship to him. The proper response should be

gratitude. But people choose to ignore God and come up with their own version of reality. By rejecting the knowledge of the true God, religion is born. F. J. Leenhardt calls it “the triumph of gods over God.” That line of foolish speculation leads to futility. Paul said that “their misguided minds are plunged into darkness.”¹³ To turn from the light of revelation is to head into darkness. Sin inevitably results in a darkening of some aspect of human existence. In a moral universe it is impossible to turn from the truth of God and not suffer the consequences. Ignorance is the result of a choice. People who do not “know” God are those who have made that choice. Understanding God requires a moral decision, not additional information.

In rejecting the knowledge of God available in creation, people claimed to be wiser than God (v. 22). Self-deification lies at the heart of human rebellion. But although they claimed to be wise, they became fools. One cannot turn from knowledge with impunity. The rejection of truth marks the rebel as a fool. There are two contrasts here—light and darkness, wisdom and foolishness.

People participated in an unfortunate exchange. Their “wisdom” led them to barter the majesty of the immortal God for “images made to look like mortal man” (v. 23). In fact, they even exchanged the glory of God for images of birds, beasts, and creatures that crawl along the ground.¹⁷ This threefold classification (cf. Gen 1:20–25) as well as terms such as “image” (Gen 1:26) suggest strongly that Paul was describing the wickedness of humans in terms of the Genesis account of the fall of Adam and Eve. The worship of gods in the form of animals was common in the pagan world. In the ancient Near East people worshiped such animals as bulls, jackals, hawks, and serpents.¹⁹ Paul’s denunciation brings to mind Ps 106:20 (“They exchanged their glory for an image of a bull”), which alludes to the Israelites’ worship of the golden calf at Sinai (Exod 32).

Although God is “immortal” (aphtharton), humans are only “mortal” (phtharton). To exchange the one who exists outside of creation, not subject to its inevitable demise, for that which at the very moment is caught in the process of decay indicates the abysmal ignorance of fallen humans. In Deut 4:16–18 God prohibited the Israelites from making images shaped like a man, any animal on earth, or any creature that moved along the ground. Paul used these same categories to describe the flight of sinners away from the knowledge of God. This decline from idols shaped like humans, to images of beasts, and even to creeping things shows that a debased mind gravitates to the lowest possible level.

Robert H. Mounce, *Romans*, vol. 27, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1995), 76–80.