

From the Mind of God to the Mind of Man

1) How can we know about God?

- A) We learn about the world around us through the use of our senses. Observation, experimentation, and logical reasoning are the fundamental tools of science and learning.
- B) God, however, is spirit (John 4:24; John 1:18; 1 Tim 6:16). He cannot be observed or experimented on. He must reveal Himself if we are to know anything about Him.
- C) God is also personal (Gen 3:8–19; 1 Cor 2:10–12; Hos 11:8). As finite human beings, we cannot know what is in the mind of another person unless they tell us. It is the same with God. We cannot know what He is thinking or feeling unless He tells us.
 - (1) God is able to reveal Himself to us because we are made in His image (Gen 1:26–27). The image of God in man is essential to our ability to understand His self-revelation. This is a reason to reject the idea of God’s holiness meaning He is “wholly other.”

2) How does God reveal Himself to us?

- A) The act of God by which He makes Himself known to us is called “revelation.” There are two categories of divine revelation: general revelation and special revelation.

3) What is general revelation?

- A) General revelation is defined as God’s revelation of Himself to all people in all places at all times. God has revealed Himself in:
 - (1) Creation (Rom 1:18–23). Creation is the visible evidence of God’s invisible attributes. Although creation does not speak to us with an audible voice, everyone understands its message (Ps 19:1–6).
 - (2) Conscience (Rom 2:14–16). God has revealed Himself in the conscience of human beings, giving them an innate sense of right and wrong.
 - (3) Providence (Acts 14:14–17). God’s blessings testify to His existence. His goodness is found throughout the earth, and He “sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous” (Matt 5:45).

4) What does general revelation tell us about God?

- A) The content of general revelation can be summarized as follows:
 - God exists (Rom 1:20; Acts 14:17).
 - God is infinite (Rom 1:20).
 - God is powerful (Rom 1:20).
 - God has created the universe and everything in it (Ps 19:1–6).

- God is glorious (Ps 19:1–6).
- God is righteous (Ps 50:6; 97:6).
- God is moral and requires us to do what is right (Rom 2:14–16).
- God is good (Acts 14:14–17).

5) What are the implications of general revelation?

- A) *We are not born as blank slates.* We are designed beings (Gen 1:26). Knowledge of God and morality has been coded into our innermost being (Rom 2:15).
- B) *All men know that God exists.* Romans 1:18–21 emphasizes that God has clearly revealed Himself to all men. This is not merely an objective revelation that may or may not be subjectively received. Paul says, “They *knew* God” (v. 21)—this means that all men everywhere realize that God exists.
- C) *All men reject and distort the knowledge of God.* Instead of being thankful for God’s revelation and seeking Him, people “suppress” their knowledge of God and resist the truth (Rom 1:18, 21–32).
- D) *There are no “innocent” people in the world.* Everyone is responsible before God for their knowledge of His existence. Those who reject the truth of general revelation have truly rejected God.
- E) *Rejection of God breeds idolatry.* Man’s rejection of God’s general revelation explains the phenomenon of the various religions of the world (Acts 17:22–23). Man-made religions (which are forms of idolatry) do not represent man’s search for God; they represent man’s rejection of God!

6) What is special revelation?

- A) Special revelation is defined as God’s revelation of Himself to particular persons at specific times in different ways (cf. Heb 1:1). Here are some of the methods God has used in special revelation:

- (1) Miraculous Events—God directly and supernaturally interacting with the physical world.
- The plagues on Egypt (Exod 8:10, 22; 9:14–16; 10:2).
 - Water from the rock for Israel (Exod 17:1–7).
 - The miracles of Peter and John (Acts 3; 4:16).
- (2) Divine Speech—God revealing Himself through human language.
- Through angels (Gen 18; 19; Luke 1:26–37).
 - Through an audible voice (Gen 3:9–19; Exod 20:1–17; 1 Sam 3:1–7).
 - Through an animal (Num 22:28)!
 - Through dreams (Gen 28:12; Matt 1:20; 2:13; 2:19–22).
 - Through visions (Acts 9:10; 10:10–16; Rev 1).
 - Through prophets and men of God (Deut 18:15–22; Jer 1).
 - Through Scripture (2 Tim 3:16; 2 Pet 1:21).

(3) Visible Manifestations—God manifesting Himself in visible form.

(a) In fire (Exod 24:15–17; 40:34–38).

(b) In human form:

- to Abraham (Gen 18).
- to Jacob (Gen 32:24–30).
- to Joshua (Josh 5:13–15).

(4) The Incarnation—God’s Son coming to earth and taking on human flesh.

(a) In these last days, God has spoken to us through His only Son, Jesus Christ (Heb 1:1–2; John 1:18; Matt 11:27). If you want to know what God is like, consider Jesus. He is the Word of God in flesh (John 1:14).

7) What does special revelation tell us about God?

A) The main message of special revelation is the gospel. Mankind is fallen—we are sinners by nature and by deed (Eph 2:1–3; Rom 5:12). God so loved the world that He gave His only Son to die and pay the penalty for our sin (John 3:16). Those who repent of their sin and believe in Jesus Christ for their salvation will be saved from God’s judgment (Acts 2:38; 3:19; 8:37; 16:30–31).

8) What are the implications of special revelation?

A) *Special revelation is progressive.* Later revelation builds on earlier revelation. Each new revelation complements and supplements previous revelation, and there is never any contradiction between earlier and later revelation (although God’s direction in certain matters may change; cf. Mark 7:19).

B) *General revelation as revealed in creation is subservient to special revelation.* The Bible and creation (nature) do not stand as two equally authoritative sources of revelation. The Bible sets itself apart from creation in authority and importance by what it claims about itself (2 Tim 3:16). This means we must interpret creation through the lens of Scripture, not the other way around. Our observations and conclusions about the natural world must be in harmony with God’s Word.¹

C) *General revelation as revealed in our conscience is subservient to special revelation.* The human conscience can become hardened to sin and “seared” to the point where it is no longer sensitive to wrong doing (1 Tim 4:2). Thus people can sin and yet feel no sense of guilt. A cannibalistic society will have many people whose consciences are hardened to the evil of murder. Modern American society shows very little sensitivity to lying, disrespect for parental authority, and sexual immorality.

¹ Mike Rowe, “God’s Two Books: Are General and Special Revelation Equal?” Web blog post. *God&Neighbor*, 8 Feb 2013. Web. 11 Nov 2016.

9) Are the heathen lost?

- A) The biblical answer to this question is clear: all human beings are born in sin (Ps 51:5; 58:3) and are “by nature the children of wrath” (Eph 2:3). For “just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned” (Rom 5:12 NIV). Paul, speaking explicitly about those who have only general revelation, says they are “without excuse” (Rom 1:20). Likewise, he adds, “All who sin apart from the law will perish apart from the law, and all who sin under the law will be judged by the law” (Rom 2:12 NIV). Summing up his conclusion for the whole section, Paul pronounces, “There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom 3:22–23 NIV).

10) What about those who don't have the Bible?

- A) Those who have no written record of God's law still have in their conscience an understanding of God's moral standards (Rom 1:32; 2:14–15). They will be held accountable for the truth they know (Rom 2:12).

11) Is it fair to condemn those who have not heard the gospel?

- A) Yes, it is just to condemn those who have never received God's special revelation. God has revealed Himself in creation, conscience, and providence, and yet fallen humanity has universally rejected that light (Rom 3:10–18). God is not obligated to give them any more light, since they have turned from the light they have (Rom 1:18).
- (1) Suppose someone is lost in the darkness of a dense jungle, and suddenly they see a shaft of light in the distance. What should they do? Obviously, they should go toward it. If they turn away from that light and become forever lost in darkness, they have only themselves to blame. The Scriptures say, “This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil” (John 3:19).
 - (2) Even though God is not obligated to give light to those who reject general revelation, He seems to do so anyway. Even the king of Sodom had the privilege of encountering Abraham and Melchizedek (Gen 14) before his fiery end.

12) Are the truths of general revelation enough for someone to be saved?

- A) There is no recorded instance in the Bible of someone being saved apart from some kind of special revelation. While there are instances where the amount of special revelation involved is very small (Rom 4:3), there is always more than what is known from general revelation.
- B) The Bible's emphasis concerning this question is on the response of the individual. If an unbeliever responds to general revelation and truly seeks God, God will provide the special revelation sufficient for salvation (Acts 8:26–40). After God led Peter to the Gentile Cornelius, Peter declared, “I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism [Jew vs. Gentile] but accepts men from every nation who fear Him and do what is right” (Acts 10:34–35 NIV). The writer of Hebrews tells us that those who seek, find: “He rewards those who earnestly seek Him” (Heb 11:6 NIV).

- (1) Some believe that a sinner can be saved apart from any special revelation. Their argument is as follows: if rejecting general revelation is enough to condemn you, then believing it is enough to save you. For an excellent article contrasting these two views, see “Heathen, Salvation of” in *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics* by Norman L. Geisler.

13) Do people have to know about Christ in order to be saved?

- A) The Bible records that Abraham was saved apart from any knowledge of Christ (Gen 15:6). After Christ’s death, the record of people being saved always centers on Jesus and His sacrifice on the cross (Acts 2:22–47; 8:35; 10:38–45; 16:31). This appears to indicate that what people need to *consciously* know and believe in order to be saved has changed—it now includes the person and work of Jesus Christ.
- B) It should be emphasized, however, that Christ is and always has been the only way of salvation. Those who were saved before His death were justified on the basis of His future sacrifice on the cross. Their salvation depended on His atonement, even though they may not have had personal knowledge of Him. As we noted in the previous question, if an unbeliever responds to general revelation and truly seeks God, God will provide the special revelation sufficient for salvation (Acts 8:26–40).
 - (1) Those who believe that a person can be saved apart from special revelation do not agree with this view. They don’t believe that explicit knowledge of the incarnate Jesus is necessary for salvation. See chapter 13 of *Handbook of Christian Apologetics* by Peter Kreeft and Ronald K. Tacelli for an explanation of this viewpoint.

14) What about those who are unable to hear the gospel?

- A) This question is often raised when considering the destiny of those who die in infancy. There are several indications in Scripture that people are not considered morally responsible before a certain age, which we call “the age of accountability.”
 - (1) Moses said, “And the little ones that you said would be taken captive, your children who do not yet know good from bad—they will enter the land” (Deut 1:39 NIV). “Even with the Hebrew idea of corporate responsibility, these children were not held responsible for the sins of Israel.”³
 - (2) “In the messianic prophecy in Isaiah 7, there are two references to the time when the boy “knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right” (vv. 15–16). Underlying these statements is the apparent fact that prior to a certain point in life, there is no moral responsibility, because there is no awareness of right and wrong.”⁴

² Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), p. 654.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 654.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 655.

- B) In the case of a mentally handicapped person, the age of accountability may never come. These individuals will not be held responsible for something they are unable to understand or comprehend.

15) Will people be saved from every nation?

- A) The Bible assures us that there will be “a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people, and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb” (Rev 7:9). However, that does not mean the percentage of people saved will be the same from all countries. Who is saved depends on who believes, and that will vary from place to place.