BC Article 2; Psalm 19; Rom. 1: 18-23; “How God is Known” I. General Revelation II. Special Revelation

Brothers and sisters in Christ, today we return to the Belgic Confession to consider how God has made Himself known to us. Now the skeptic would say that God cannot be truly known, but the Christian believes that God can be known in two ways. According to Paul in Rom. 1, there is no such thing as an atheist; there are only those who suppress the truth in unrighteousness. Every man is born with some innate knowledge of God, and it is only a fool who says that there is no God – because God can be seen in the world around us. Unbelievers are the rebels; we are the ones who have the truth on our side! As we saw last week, God is and He is knowable! In this article, we find that we can know God by 2 means. We know God by His General Revelation or creation and we know Him by His Special Revelation or the Bible. Although 80% of Americans say that God exists, only 20% of them believe in what the Bible says about God. In other words, the vast majority of people in the US have their own ideas about who God is. Today we will consider the God who has revealed Himself for His glory and our salvation.

**I. General Revelation**

So first, let’s consider how God has revealed Himself to us in General Revelation or in the creation. We saw this clearly last week as we considered Isaiah 40- we can look at the heavens and consider the depths of the sea. These prove God’s power- the maker of these must be infinite and mighty! The creation before our eyes is a beautiful book as our article says. Written with large and bright letters. Everywhere you look, you can see God’s handy work. Look at the first 3 verses of this Psalm. (1-3) This revelation has been made to all, and is seen by all. All creatures, great and small lead us to see the things of God, but not all will admit that God is clearly seen. As Rom. 1:19 says, what may be known about God is clearly displayed before all men. They, however, suppress the truth in unrighteousness. Although they knew God, they neither glorified Him as God nor gave thanks to Him, rather their hearts were darkened and they became fools. The creation makes plain that there is a God and creator. The heavens declare God’s glory, and all can see the heavens. This is so contrary to what many people, even Christians usually teach. They think that God cannot condemn those who have never heard the gospel because they were never given the opportunity to repent. Well, Romans 1 says that even if they never hear the gospel preached, they are still without excuse. The created order and the fact that man is created in God’s image leaves us without excuse. In the deepest part of our hearts, every man has knowledge that there must be a God. Their own conscience and the light of nature is enough to prove that there is a sovereign being who deserves praise. No one really believes in evolution consistently. Rather, they are suppressing the truth in unrighteousness.

BC article 2 then outlines 3 distinct areas in which God can be seen before our eyes. The Creation, Preservation, and Government of this world. First the creation and the created order. Day to day pours fourth speech. We cannot look at the trees, the mountains, and the animals without our heart rising up within us to praise our God. Even unregenerate man still enjoys the beauty of a sunrise and the grandeur of the mountains. Without God, there would be no beauty to behold. Without God, nothing that is would be! Every person knows that all these things could not come into existence by accident. Creation by God from nothing is the only way to account for all things. Every rock has God’s fingerprint on it; every flower contains the brush marks of our Lord. The heavens are an elegant preacher whose voice is heard and understood in every language. Mankind cannot open their eyes without being compelled to see Him. This is our Father’s World! O let me never forget! Added to the creation of everything, we also seeits preservation. According to God design and plan, every season follows in due time. As verse 6 says, the sun runs its course faithfully every day. Nothing is hidden from its heat. As God promised Noah in Genesis 8, as long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night will never cease. This time of year, our part of the earth tilts away from the sun ushering in colder temps- just as God ordained! According to God’s plan, animals, plants, and humans continue to live, bringing forth offspring according to their kind. As Hebrews 1 says, God upholds the universe by His power, and in Christ, all things are held together. This is called the providence of God. As LD 10 says, the providence of God is the almighty, everywhere present power by which He upholds, rules and governs all things according to His plan. It is so amazing how all things works together. The rains fall on the earth, feeding the plant and animals. The water evaporates and fills the skies before it falls again. The rivers run into the sea, yet the sea is never too full. Without His will, all creatures can neither move, nor be moved. And thirdly, we consider the government of all things. Even in the course of history, the rise and fall of nations are completely in His hand. All the affairs of man, God moves towards His goal and design. From the rule of Constantine to the reign of Hitler, nothing happened that God did not control. History is His Story! As Acts 17 says, God has made every man on the face of the earth, and God has determined every period, plot, and boundary for man’s entire dwelling place. All things are being moved to His good end.

You may ask the question, what good does all this General Revelation do? Can we come to a saving knowledge by simply looking at this world? Many people have asked; why is it necessary that I go to church? I worship God just as easily by spending Sunday morning in my garden instead of going to church. But by saying that you don’t need to go to church, you over emphasizes creation and under emphasizes your sin. We recognize that the creation is beautiful and good, but it is not sufficient. As Rom. 1 put it- all are left without excuse. Creation reveals there is a God- but saving knowledge cannot be found there. Added to this, because of man’s fall into sin, we no longer see this world clearly. We need something better, clearer. The creation only leaves every man without an excuse; this world shows us the God is powerful and we are in need; it is only in and through Jesus Christ that we find a remedy. In fact, if you use the forest as your sanctuary instead of going to church, you are only left open for destruction. It is only through preaching that the Spirit opens our eyes to see this creation clearly. Only in preaching do we find out who God is and how we might be saved. That is why we must come to worship- without worship; the creation condemns us and provides no escape. But creation is still a good and useful thing. Creation is God’s autobiography. We can learn about Him as we study this book. But unfortunately, our eyes are farsighted in our sin. We can’t make out the letters. In order to rightly read this book, we need the glasses of Scripture.

**II. Special Revelation**

Since we have come to the limits of General Revelation, we must push on and see the need for Special Revelation. If creation leaves us without excuse, then we need the Word to clear us of our guilt. We know and see our sins, but we need a cure. That cure is not found in creation. There is no “fountain of youth”- no gene therapy that will enable you to live forever. No, living in this world we will only find death. It is only in knowing Christ that we find life, and life everlasting! The creation shows us that God is; we need the Gospel to know what kind of God He is! In creation we find no mercy and grace. In creation we do not hear the name of God or the deliverance from sin. We may be created with a sense of Divinity, but something more must be given. Before the fall, General Revelation was sufficient, Adam was created with true knowledge. Now, after the fall, we need something more potent. We need knowledge and wisdom from on high. His Word is necessary for any and all salvation.

So Special Revelation is needed- the Word needs to be received and believed. As article 2 says, God makes Himself more clearly and fully known to us by His holy and Divine Word. His Word is necessary for us to receive life. Even the creation around us cannot be clearly understood without Scripture explaining to us that God has done all this. Since the fall of man, the glasses of Scripture are needed to give us a clear vision of God’s work in this world as Calvin would put it. Human reason has fallen. It is only human reason guided by Scripture that will clearly reveal to man His creator in this world. (Read7-11) The Law or the teaching of the LORD is perfect or complete. Creation is no longer perfect, it is fallen. It is under the curse because of our sins. Thorns and thistles abound. But, O, the teachings of God. The commands of the LORD- that is perfect. That revives the soul. This Word brings new life. These are to be desired more than gold and honey. Children, have you ever gone to see a 3D movie? What happens when you take off the glasses? It gets blurry. That is what we are like when we try to learn about God without reading His word! With the Bible in hand, the creation comes into focus. Even the words to describe God in this Psalm show us the need for the Word. When we have the creation alone, we should see that there is a God. Elohim- creator God like in verse 1. But in verse 7, when we receive the Word, then we come to know God as the LORD, Yahweh, the covenantal God. God makes Himself more clearly and fully know in His Word. By His Word we know Him not only as our creator, but now like verse 14 says, He is our Rock and our Redeemer. The LORD is more fully known in His Word, but also in His Word become flesh. It was by the Word that the world was made, and it is by the Word become flesh as the seed of the women that we have been redeemed. The knowledge that we receive from the Word is knowledge about Jesus Christ. In Christ, God has become our Redeemer. In Christ we are kept back from sins and blameless in the sight of God. In Christ there is true wisdom and knowledge. In this Psalm, the Word is said to revive, make wise, bring joy, and enlighten. This is expanded on in II Timothy 3 where Paul reminds Timothy that Scripture makes us wise unto Salvation. The Word is sufficient, able to accomplish this great task- to convert the heart. The reason why the sufficiency of Scripture has been so foundational to Reformed teaching is because God the Holy Spirit has chosen to work through this means and this means alone to change the heart of men. This contrasts with the Roman Catholic teaching of Scripture plus tradition and in contrast to the Anabaptist teaching of Scripture plus new revelation in the Spirit. So the necessity of Scriptures is provided by the Holy Spirit, and not on man. This Special Revelation was first given to the people of Israel of old, and has been passed down and is now contained in the canon of the Old and New Testament. It is the Spirit who has secured these things and guards this Word from being altered or tampered with. Now we know not only that God is, but what God has done for us as sinners. Scripture is God speaking to His people. Redemption is the theme of this Word. God’s love for us, so much that He gave up His Son for our sins. God’s Word reveals all that we need to know for our salvation. As John 20 says, these things are written so that you might believe. And by believing, we have eternal life.

As we close, we must be thankful that God is and that He is known! The heavens declare God’s Glory- His Word reveals grace and truth. God has revealed Himself for His glory and our salvation. Praise God that He has made Himself known to us today- and rejoice in the salvation we have received in the name of Jesus!