

# PSALM 19

## THE TWO BOOKS OF GOD'S REVELATION

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PSALM 19, a psalm of David, tells about two books God has written—the world book (the book of nature) and the word book (the Bible).

### THE WORLD BOOK

The heavens are telling of the glory of God; and their expanse is declaring the work of His hands. Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night reveals knowledge. There is no speech, nor are there words; their voice is not heard. Their line has gone out through all the earth, and their utterances to the end of the world. In them He has placed a tent for the sun. Which is as a bridegroom coming out of his chamber; it rejoices as a strong man to run his course. Its rising is from one end of the heavens, and its circuit to the other end of them; and there is nothing hidden from its heat (vv. 1-6).

The first six verses extol the revelation of God in creation. The heavens themselves speak of the glory of God. In the daytime His creative power is known by the sun. The sun appears on schedule every morning and runs its course across the sky from east to west. It gives light necessary for life as we know it, just as God gives light revealed in nature which is necessary for man spiritually. The coming of night does not mean an end to His glory in nature, for the nighttime sky has the moon and the stars which also proclaim His glory. These works of creation do not speak words of human language; yet they speak loudly by their very existence, telling us of God's creative majesty.

What do we learn from God's book of nature? The best commentary on this is Romans 1: ". . . that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them.

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" (Romans 1:19, 20). From creation we can know that a Supreme Being exists. We can know a little about the attributes of the one we call God. We can know He is powerful, wise, and orderly. As Romans 1 continues, it is evident that some basic principles of morality can be known from the natural order of things. Certain things are deemed right or wrong for all cultures, even those without a knowledge of the Bible.

God's book of nature does not tell much about the will of God beyond this, but it does speak powerfully that God exists. How can anyone look at nature and say there is no God? How can anyone look at a newborn baby, a lovely flower in spring, the immense size of this universe, or the complexity of the human body and declare, "There is no God," is beyond comprehension.

One of my favorite books is *Masterpieces of Religious Verse*,<sup>1</sup> a marvelous collection of religious poetry. The first section contains poems about God, which is an appropriate beginning for the book. As the section on God begins with God in nature, the very first selection is 19:1-6. The book could not have begun in a more appropriate manner.

The truth that God's glory is revealed in nature is expressed well in a poem by Longfellow:

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<sup>1</sup>James Dalton Morrison, ed., *Masterpieces of Religious Verse* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1948).

And nature, the old nurse, took  
The child upon her knee,  
Saying, "Here is a story book  
My father hath writ for thee.  
Come, wander with me," she said,  
"In regions yet untrod  
And read what is still unread  
In the manuscripts of God."<sup>2</sup>

Several conclusions follow from the facts presented in 19:1-6. First, there are no real contradictions between scientific fact and the Bible properly interpreted. Second, inquiry in science is right and proper. It is an investigation of one of God's books. Third, God is our creator and worthy of our worship and adoration.

### THE WORD BOOK

The law of the Lord is perfect, restoring the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever; the judgments of the Lord are true; they are righteous altogether. They are more desirable than gold, yes, than much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and the drippings of the honeycomb. Moreover, by them Thy servant is warned; in keeping them there is great reward (vv. 7-11).

The second book of God's revelation to man is a word book, the Bible. Realize that when Psalm 19 was written, only a small portion of the Bible was complete. How much more so should we, with New Testaments in our hands, proclaim the greatness of God's written revelation?

First, according to these verses the Bible is perfect, sure, right, pure, true, and righteous altogether. The infallibility of His Word is evident from these descriptions. Second, these verses tell what the Bible does. It restores the soul, makes wise the simple, rejoices the heart, enlightens the eyes, warns man, and brings man a great reward. The all-sufficiency of the Bible is shown from these descriptions. Third, these verses tell what our attitude should be toward the Bible. The Bible should be much desired by us, more so than material wealth. It should be pleasing to us, more so than the taste of honey. And it should be kept or obeyed.

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<sup>2</sup>Henry W. Longfellow, "The Manuscripts of God," in Morrison, *Masterpieces*, 5.

### MAN'S RESPONSE

Who can discern his errors? Acquit me of hidden faults. Also keep back Thy servant from presumptuous sins; let them not rule over me; then I shall be blameless, and I shall be acquitted of great transgression. Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Thy sight, O Lord, my rock and my Redeemer (vv. 12-14).

If Psalm 19 had stopped before this final paragraph, it would have been incomplete in a sense. To be eloquent and poetic about God's glory in nature and in the Bible is not enough. The psalmist is balanced. He follows eloquence with the reality of man's responsibility. Verses 12 through 14 are, in essence, a prayer that David will respond properly to God's glorious revelation in nature and the Bible. Knowing about God's revelation and glory is not enough. Man must live in accordance with that knowledge.

David asks, "Who can discern his errors?" (v. 12). He is aware of his failings, his sin. He feels the burden of sin in his life. One time a preacher was preaching on the burden of sin which unsaved people have on them, and a man in the audience was skeptical of the message. He asked the preacher, "You say that unsaved people carry a weight of sin. I feel nothing. How heavy is sin? Is it ten pounds? Eighty pounds?" The preacher asked the man, "If you laid four hundred pounds on a corpse, would it feel the load?" "No. A corpse is dead and can't feel the burden," he said. Likewise, the disposition that feels no weight of sin shows that one is dead—dead in sin. The psalmist was not dead in sin, though, for he was aware of his sins. He knew that sin is so extensive that a person probably cannot discern all of his errors.

David also prays, "Acquit me of hidden faults" (v. 12). We can, and do, sin in ways that are hidden to self. Some actions seem insignificant to us, but they are sins before God. We are often unaware of our sins because we are not as sensitive to righteousness as we should be. Sometimes our sins are hidden to us because we are too busy looking at the sins of others.

In a village in Scotland was a half-witted man who wore a strange coat with large, colorful patches on the front. When asked about them, he would say that they were the sins of his neighbors. He would point to various patches and tell of the errors of others. Their sins were easy to see.

On the back was a small patch. "That is my sin," he would say. "It's small, and I can't see it."<sup>3</sup> The half-witted man was wiser than some realized.

David's confession of hidden sins in Psalm 19, then, is a statement of humility rather than pride. Instead of David's saying, "I haven't done anything wrong," he admits, "I have done more wrong than even I myself am aware of." Someone has said, "The deadliest of sins is the consciousness of no sin." David avoids that danger by confessing the multitude of his sins and also his hidden faults.

David also prays, "Keep back Thy servant from presumptuous sins" (v. 13). All sins are of equal value in that sin is sin, and sin, any sin, any type of sin, will condemn us, stain us, mar our souls, and cause us to be lost. As John Bunyan said, "One leak will sink a ship; and one sin will destroy a sinner." But in the Bible, we realize that there are degrees of sinning. In this psalm, David speaks of "great transgression" (v. 13). Some sins are weightier transgressions of God's will than other sins.

Defiant sin is sinning with a high hand, deliberately, blatantly, or presumptuously. Such sin is more serious than unintentional sin and is discussed with no reference to an atoning sacrifice. David refers to this type of sin in verse 13. It is the sin of outright rebellion against God. It is the attitude of one who shakes his fist at God. David is praying that he will never slip to the terrible depth of one who sins presumptuously against God.

David also prays, "Let them not rule over me" (v. 13). He does not want sin to dominate his life. He knows that he will slip and fall, but the direction of his life needs to be away from sin and toward God. He wants to be "blameless" and "acquitted" or innocent of transgression. Do we have a similar sensitivity about our sinfulness? Or do we sin and say, "God will forgive. That is His business"?

John Chrysostom got into a lot of conflict with the government, especially due to his preaching against immorality in high places. The emperor was wondering how he could get Chrysostom to give in to him. How could he threaten and scare him? Should he put him in a dungeon? "No," he was advised. "That will not bother Chrysostom.

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<sup>3</sup>G. B. F. Hallock, *Five Thousand Best Modern Illustrations* (New York: Richard R. Smith, 1927), 655.

He will welcome the peace and quiet as an opportunity to commune with his God and pray." Should the emperor execute him? "No," he was told. "He will be glad to die, for he believes he will go to be with his Lord." "What can I do?" the emperor asked. He was told that nothing would cause Chrysostom to feel pain unless they could get him to sin against his Lord. He was afraid of nothing except sinning against God.<sup>4</sup>

Do we have such a sensitivity against sin? Or do we sin as if it does not matter that much? God will forgive anyway, right? David not only prays for forgiveness for past sins, but he begs God's aid in avoiding future sin. Josh Billings has a wise statement along this line: "It is much easier to repent of sins that we have committed than to repent of those we intend to commit."

Finally, David not only prays that he may avoid sin, but also he prays that his life will be pleasing to God. The righteousness for which God strives is not merely negative, but also is positive. It is not only an outward righteousness of acceptable words and deeds, but also an inward righteousness of pure thoughts and motives: "Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Thy sight, O Lord, my rock and my Redeemer" (v. 14).

## CONCLUSION

Psalm 19 tells of the two books of God's revelation: the book of nature or creation and God's written revelation, the Bible. Based upon God's revelation of His attributes and His will to man, man has a duty to God on the negative side, to avoid sin, and on the positive side, to be acceptable to God in outward deeds and inward thoughts.

An excellent New Testament parallel is James 1:23, 24: "For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was." God's revelation confronts us with our sins and weaknesses. We must not only be aware of God's greatness and man's finitude, we must do something about our faults. Otherwise, merely seeing ourselves in light of God's revelation is useless.

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 282. On the noble life of Chrysostom, see Philip Schaff, ed. "Prolegomena," *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, n.p., 1889; reprint, Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1978), vol. 9, 3-23.