



What it means to Know God



Introduction

As we continue our series on *What It Means to Know* God, we will investigate the claim that everyone unavoidably knows God, specifically, that:

1. The knowledge of God is inherent in every person
2. That God has never left himself without a witness to humans
3. That no rational creature can escape this witness
4. That God's face is before all people everywhere and all the time
5. That all people know God through nature
6. That creation itself is directly and clearly revelational of the creative and sustaining activity of God (Calvin)

Stephen Jay Gould

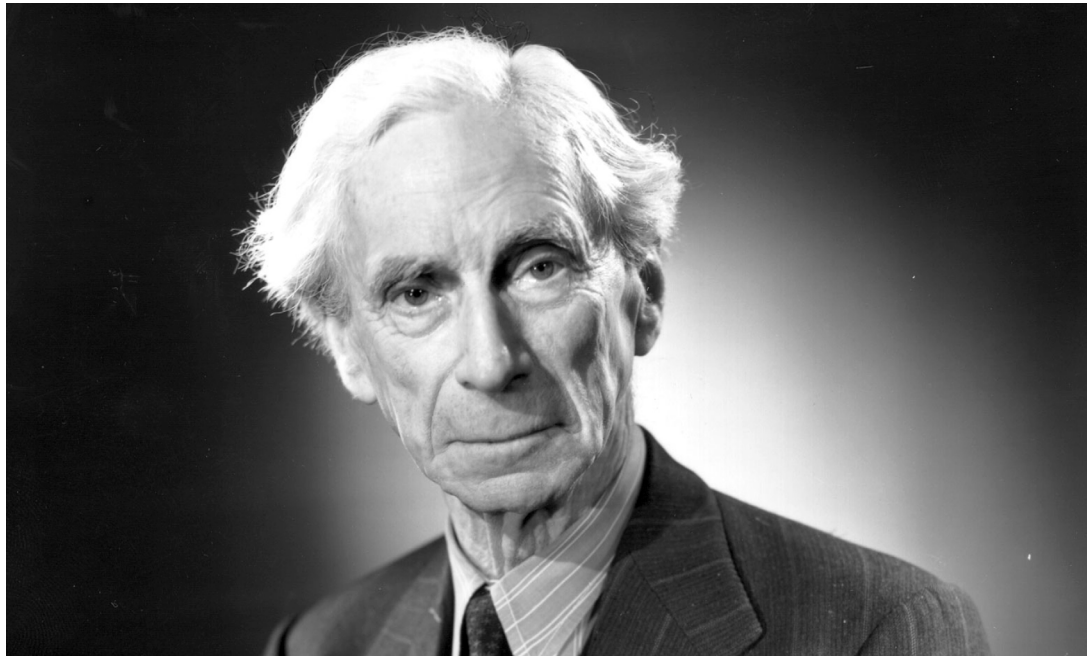
“No intervening spirit watches lovingly over the affairs of nature (though Newton’s clock-winding God might have set up the machinery at the beginning of time and then let it run). No vital forces propel evolutionary change. And whatever we think of God, his existence is not manifest in the products of nature.”



Stephen Jay Gould

Late Professor of Paleontology at Harvard University
1941-2002

The Roots of Knowledge



Bertrand Russell
1872-1970

“Whatever knowledge is attainable, must be attained by scientific methods; and what science cannot discover, mankind cannot know.”

The Heart of All Science



John C. Lennox

Emeritus Professor of Mathematics
Oxford University

In his book, *God's Undertaker*, Professor John Lennox claims that “at the heart of all science lies the conviction that the universe is orderly. Without this deep conviction science would not be possible.”

The Knowledge of God Through Creation

“The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night reveals knowledge. There is no speech, nor are there words, whose voice is not heard. Their measuring line goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. In them he has set a tent for the sun, which comes out like a bridegroom leaving his chamber, and, like a strong man, runs its course with joy. Its rising is from the end of the heavens, and its circuit to the end of them, and there is nothing hidden from its heat” (Ps. 19:1-6).

The Knowledge of God Through Creation

“By awesome deeds you answer us with righteousness, O God of our salvation, the hope of all the ends of the earth and of the farthest seas; the one who by his strength established the mountains, being girded with might; who stills the roaring of the seas, the roaring of their waves, the tumult of the peoples, so that those who dwell at the ends of the earth are in awe at your signs. You make the going out of the morning and the evening to shout for joy” (Ps. 65:5-8).



How God's Word Comes To Us

- “How does the word of God come from God’s lips to our ears, minds, and hearts?” (John Frame).
- The three categories of revelation media God uses:
 1. **Events:** brought about by God’s controlling power
 2. **Words:** bear meaningful authority
 3. **Persons:** embody the personal presence of the Lord
- “Through all of the media of revelation, God expresses all the aspects of his lordship...Scripture treats all of God’s revelation as supremely powerful, authoritative, and personal.”
- “If we are to accept God’s revelation, we must accept what we hear and see through his media.”

General Revelation



R.C. Sproul
1939-2017

“Natural revelation is more frequently called *general revelation* for two reasons. The adjective *general* has reference both to **content** and **audience**. The content of natural revelation is general in the sense that the knowledge of God it yields is of a general sort...The content of natural revelation yields a knowledge of God-in-general.” The scope of the audience: “General revelation has been made manifest to all mankind; its audience is universal.”

Natural Revelation



John M. Frame

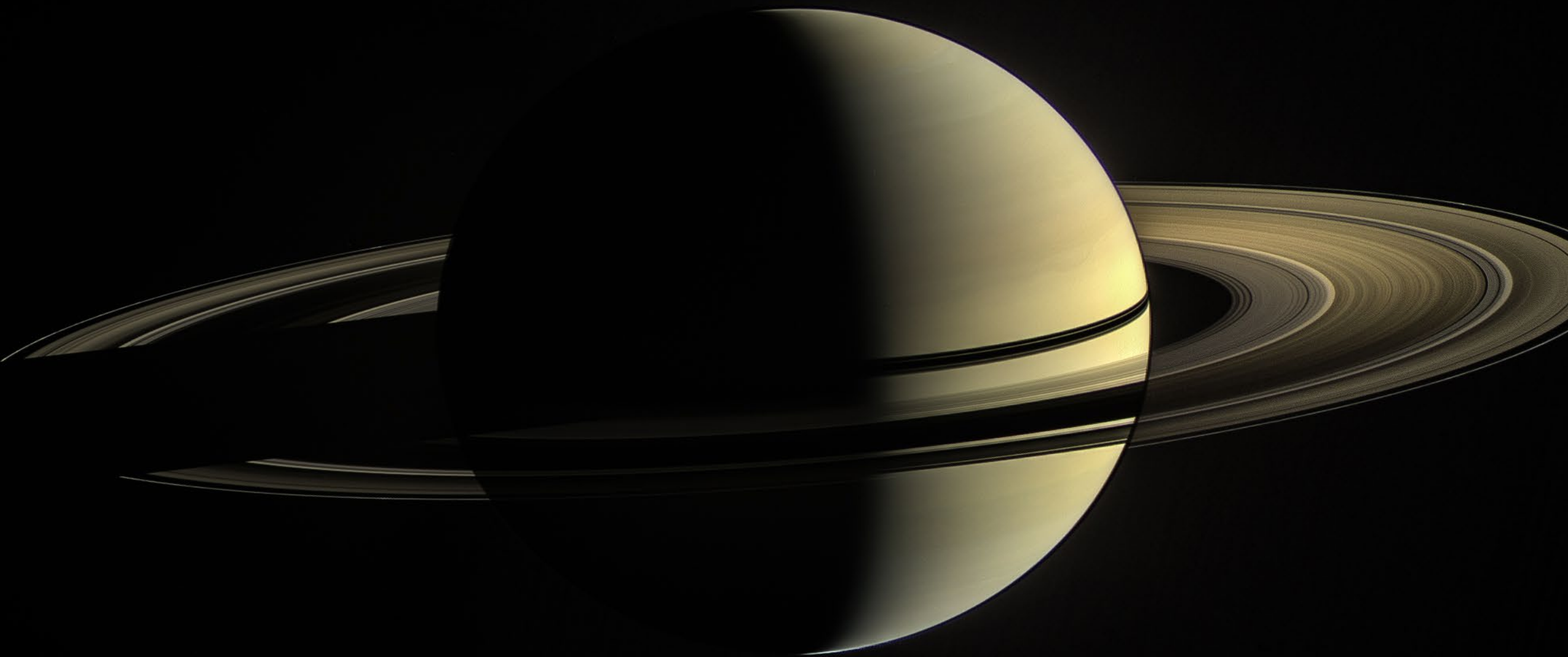
1939 -

Professor of Systematic Theology & Philosophy
Reformed Theological Seminary (Emeritus)

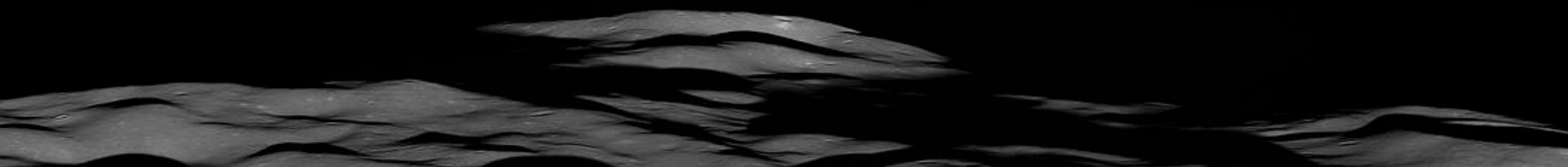
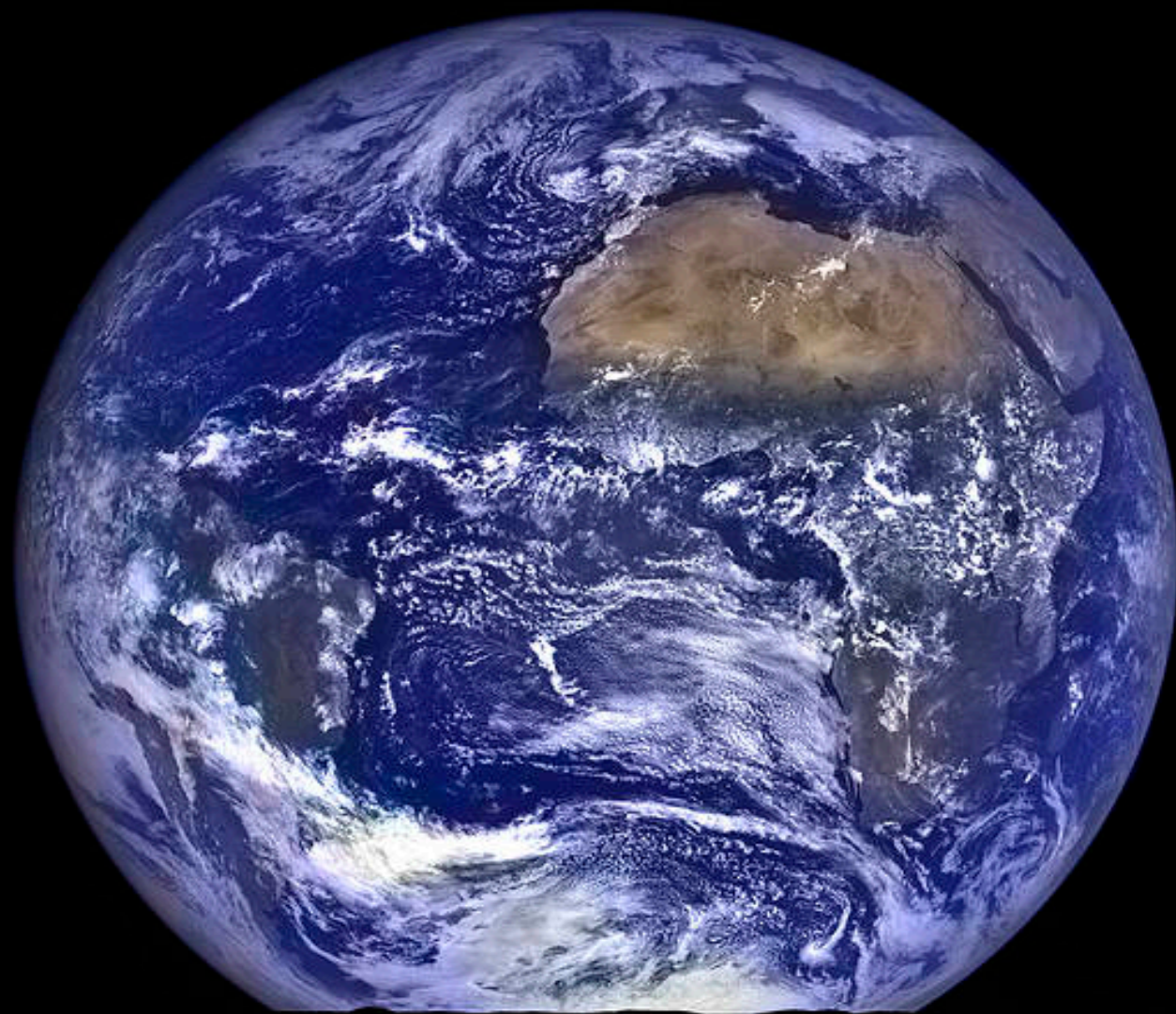
“Natural revelation is the knowledge that God conveys to human beings through nature. It is also called *general revelation* because it comes to all mankind and through all the experiences of human life.”



Hubble's Largest Galaxy Portrait



Cassini's view from orbit around Saturn on January 2, 2010





“General revelation penetrates every nook and cranny of the earth and is accessible to all people.”

- R.C. Sproul

General Revelation in Romans

“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because 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. 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. 1:18-23).



What Is Plain To See In Nature?

- “**That which is known about God** is evident within them; for God made it evident to them” (Rom. 1:19).
- “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” (Rom. 1:20).
- The Greek word for *evident* means “visible, clear, plainly to be seen, open, plain, known” (Arndt & Gingrich).
- “It is plain that the apostle is dealing with that which God makes manifest *to men* and is known by men from the work of creation, that is to say, from his observable handiwork” (John Murray).



What Is Plain To See In Nature?

- The invisible things Paul mentions are God's *eternal power* and *divinity* (Rom. 1:20).
- **God's Eternal Power:** It is not only God's power but His *eternal power*. So God's eternity, as well as His power, is in view here. "Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God" (Ps. 90:2).
- "The power of God is that ability and strength, whereby he can bring to pass whatsoever he pleases; whatsoever his infinite wisdom can direct, and whatsoever the infinite purity of his will can resolve" (Stephen Charnock).
- "My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose" (Is. 46:10b).



What Is Plain To See In Nature?

- **God's Divine Nature:** "Divinity does not specify one invisible attribute but the sum of the invisible perfections...It is a clear declaration to the effect that the visible creation as God's handiwork makes manifest the invisible perfections of God as its Creator, that from the things which are perceptible to the sense cognition of these invisible perfections is derived, and that thus a clear apprehension of God's perfections may be gained from his observable handiwork." (Murray).



Carl F.H. Henry & John Calvin

- **Henry:** “Man can indeed know the God of creation and created reality – not exhaustively, to be sure, but nonetheless truly. Yet as sinner, he frustrates the divine revelation that penetrates into his very mind and conscience, and in significant respects also dilutes and even **suppresses** the revelation in created reality.”
- **Calvin:** “Herein appears the shameful ingratitude of men. Though they have in their own persons a factory where innumerable operations of God are carried on, and a magazine stored with treasures of inestimable value – instead of bursting forth in his praise, as they are bound to do, they, on the contrary, are more inflated and swelled with pride. They feel how wonderfully God is working in them



Carl F.H. Henry & John Calvin

and their own experience tells them of the vast variety of gifts which they owe to his liberality. Whether they will or not, they cannot but know that these are proofs of his Godhead, and yet they inwardly **suppress** them...Can any thing be more detestable than this madness in man, who, finding God a hundred times both in his body and his soul, makes his excellence in this respect a pretext for denying that there is a God?...Substituting nature as the architect of the universe, he **suppresses** the name of God.”

Mediate Knowledge

“The method of knowing here is not the immediate apprehension of the inner being of God. Nature provides no transcendental direct perception of God. The knowledge is mediate, or inferential, indicating the rational power to deduce the necessary existence of the invisible from the perception of the visible.”

Mediate knowledge is not the direct result of intuition or perception but is obtained by means of inference or testimony (OED).



R.C. Sproul



Complex Reasoning Unnecessary

“The revelation of God in nature is mediate, but it is so manifest and so clear that it does not necessitate a complex theoretical reasoning process that could be achieved only by a group of geniuses. If God’s general revelation is in fact “general,” in that it is plain enough for all to see clearly without complicated cosmological argumentation, then it may even be said to be self-evident. The revelation is clear enough for an unskilled and illiterate person to perceive it. In this sense it may be said that if we but open our eyes, the revelation of God in nature is “immediate” with respect to time.”

- R.C. Sproul



What Has God Revealed?

- In Romans 1, both in verses 17 and 18, Paul uses the word ***apokalypso***, which means “uncover, reveal, disclose, bring to light, especially of divine revelation.” The *righteousness of God* (provided in the gospel) is revealed and the *wrath of God* is revealed.
- “For in it [the gospel] the righteousness of God is **revealed** from faith to faith...” (Rom. 1:17).
- “For the wrath of God is **revealed** from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men...” (Rom. 1:18).
- “Wrath is the holy revulsion of God’s being against that which is the contradiction of his holiness” (John Murray).



Suppressing the Truth

- “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who **suppress the truth in unrighteousness**” (Rom. 1:18).
- What does the Apostle Paul mean when he indicates that there are people “who **suppress the truth** in unrighteousness”?
- The Greek word in our text means to “hold back, withhold, to check, restrain, control, bridle” (Liddell & Scott). It is defined as “hold down, suppress” in Arndt and Gingrich’s Greek lexicon.
- From *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament* (illustrated from the papyri and other non-literary sources), we learn that the word means “hold back, detain, or restrain.”



Suppressing the Truth

- The word also has this meaning in at least two other texts in the New Testament: (1) “...the multitudes were searching for Him, and came to Him [Jesus], and **tried to keep** [restrain] **Him** from going away from them” (Lk. 4:42). This points to attempted action. (2) “...whom [Onesimus] I [Paul] wished **to keep** [restrain] with me” (Phlm. 13).
- This is a present active participle, meaning the people indicated **continue** in the process of suppressing the truth. “It speaks about the *efforts* of the ungodly to suppress the truth” (Hendriksen).
- This truth is “**evident** within them” (vs. 19); God’s attributes, His power and divine nature, “have been **clearly seen**” (vs. 20), and the text says “they **knew God**” (vs. 21).



Conclusion

“Although natural revelation does not consist of literal divine words, it is an infallible *medium* of such divine words. As such, natural revelation conveys to us God’s power, authority, and presence. There is therefore no room for human autonomy in dealing with God’s natural revelation. We may interpret the creation only by thinking God’s thoughts after him. And this means that when we analyze the creation, we must listen to the words of God in other media, such as the written Word, if we are to understand nature as he made it to be. It is never right for us to try to interpret nature or history autonomously. As John Calvin said, we are to understand the natural world through the ‘spectacles’ of Scripture.”

- John Frame