“The Heavens Declare the Glory of God”:
The Limits of General Revelation

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The relationship between general and special revelation has long been discussed in the history of the church. Romans 1 is the critical NT text which treats the former. At the same time, Ps 19:1–6 is considered the OT locus classicus for the subject of general revelation. This psalm, in my opinion, has not always been used with care by those who have adopted a more inclusivistic soteriology. Based upon exegetical work on 19:2, and an investigation of this psalm as a literary unit, I will suggest some implications regarding the paramount question: what can be known about God from general and special revelation, especially in matters of salvation?

Beginning with Paul (Rom 10:18, which quotes Ps 19:4) to theologians of the present time, these verses stand at the center of most discussions about general revelation. Recently John Sanders, in his book, No Other Name, cites this passage, and Paul’s usage of it, to argue for an inclusivist position, believing that salvation can ensue from general revelation. Interestingly, Sanders does not quote from or refer to any part of Ps 19:7–11, the focus of which is special revelation. In so doing, he is rather selectively appealing to the biblical evidence, and uses Ps 19:2–6 as a proof text that he evidently does not fully understand. On the other hand, Clark Pinnock comes to the same conclusion as Sanders in his book, A Wideness in God’s Mercy, without any mention of Psalm 19. Pinnock avers,

Because of cosmic or general revelation, anyone can find God anywhere at anytime, because he has made himself and his revelation accessible to them.

He accuses Karl Barth of being Christomonistic, saying, “Barth could only see God reaching out to people in and through Jesus. To maintain this position, of course, he had to ignore a good deal of scriptural material.”

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