

Romans 1:19

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them.

Analysis

Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them.

Paul explains why suppression of truth is culpable: dioti to gnōston tou theou phaneron estin en autois (διότι τὸ γνωστὸν τοῦ θεοῦ φανερόν ἔστιν ἐν αὐτοῖς, 'because what may be known of God is manifest in them'). To gnōston (τὸ γνωστόν, what is knowable) indicates accessible, understandable knowledge. This is not exhaustive knowledge of God's character or salvific plan but sufficient revelation to render humanity accountable. Phaneron estin (φανερόν ἔστιν, is manifest/evident) means it is clear, visible, unmistakable.

En autois (ἐν αὐτοῖς, in them) could mean 'among them' or 'within them'—likely both. Humanity has internal moral awareness (conscience, Romans 2:14-15) and external natural revelation (v. 20). The reason: ho gar theos autois ephanerōsen (ὁ γὰρ θεὸς αὐτοῖς ἐφανέρωσεν, 'for God has shown it to them'). God is the active revealer; humans are passive recipients. This is general revelation—knowledge of God available to all through creation and conscience, distinct from special revelation (Scripture, Christ). General revelation makes humans culpable but does not save; only the gospel saves (v. 16).

Historical Context

Ancient paganism was not mere ignorance but idolatry—the exchange of truth for lies (v. 25). Philosophers like Plato, Aristotle, and Stoics acknowledged a supreme being or logos (reason) governing the cosmos, yet worship devolved into polytheism and immorality. Paul's argument in Romans 1 echoes Wisdom of Solomon 13-14 (a Second Temple Jewish text), which condemned Gentile idolatry as culpable suppression of natural knowledge of God. Paul universalizes this indictment, including Jews in chapter 2.

Related Passages

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Study Questions

1. What does 'what may be known of God' (τὸ γνωστὸν τοῦ Θεοῦ) through nature and conscience include and exclude?
2. How should natural revelation inform evangelism, apologetics, and cultural engagement with non-Christians?
3. If all people have some knowledge of God, why do they still need the gospel, and why is missions urgent?

Interlinear Text

διότι	τὸ	γνωστὸν	τοῦ	θεὸς	φανερόν	ἐστιν	ἐν
Because	G3588	that which may be known	G3588	God	manifest	is	in
G1360		G1110		G2316	G5318	G2076	G1722
αὐτοῖς	ό	γὰρ	θεὸς	αὐτοῖς	ἐφανέρωσεν		
it unto them	G3588	for	God	it unto them	hath shewed		
G846		G1063	G2316	G846	G5319		

Additional Cross-References

Romans 1:20 (References God): For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse:

Isaiah 40:26 (Parallel theme): Lift up your eyes on high, and behold who hath created these things, that bringeth out their host by number: he calleth them all by names by the greatness of his might, for that he is strong in power; not one faileth.

John 1:9 (Parallel theme): That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.

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