

Natural Law - Does it Exist and is it Biblical?

I. The Purpose of this Study

1. Many philosophers, economists, and preachers teach that there is a "Natural Law" that is written into the hearts of men which enables them to know intuitively that certain things are right and wrong.
2. The purpose of this study is analyze the idea of the "Natural Law" from the scriptures and see to what extent it is true, and where is it false.

II. There is *natural law* in the sense of the laws of nature.

1. Natural law - Law n. - III. Scientific and philosophical uses. 17. a. In the sciences of observation, a theoretical principle deduced from particular facts, applicable to a defined group or class of phenomena, and expressible by the statement that a particular phenomenon always occurs if certain conditions be present. In the physical sciences, and occasionally in others, called more explicitly *law of nature* or **natural law**. The 'laws of nature', by those who first used the term in this sense, were viewed as commands imposed by the Deity upon matter, and even writers who do not accept this view often speak of them as 'obeyed' by the phenomena, or as agents by which the phenomena are produced.
2. Laws like the Law of Gravity, the Laws of Thermodynamics, and the Law of Biogenesis are all Natural Laws which God instituted when He created the universe.

III. But is there a *natural moral law* that all men know inherently?

1. Natural law - Law n. - ** Divine law. 9. The body of commandments which express the will of God with regard to the conduct of His intelligent creatures. Also (with a, the, and pl.) a particular commandment. a. *gen.* So *God's (Christ's law), the law of God*. b. as communicated by express revelation, esp. in the Bible. Hence *occas.* the Scriptures themselves. c. as implanted by nature in the human mind, or as capable of being demonstrated by reason. Formerly often *the law of nature* (now rarely, because of the frequency of that expression in sense 17), *law of kind*, **natural law**, *the law of reason*, etc. The expression *law of nature* (lex naturæ or naturalis, jus naturale) in Cicero, Seneca, and the Roman jurists, is ultimately derived from...Aristotle.
2. Is it true that God has implanted His law by nature in the human mind?
 - A. The answer is yes and no.
 - B. God has implanted His law in *some* human minds (the regenerate), but not in others (the unregenerate).
 - C. This will be proven in the remainder of this study.

IV. Verses that allegedly support the Natural Law theory

1. The verses that allegedly support the Natural Law idea in the Bible are taken out of context and do not refer to the unregenerate.
2. The Natural Law doctrine is derived from verses of scripture such as **Rom 2:14-15, Heb 8:10, Heb 10:16, Jer 31:33, Psa 37:31**.
3. These verses speak of a law written in the hearts of regenerate men, not all men in general.
 - A. The heart of man by nature is stony (**Eze 11:19; Eze 36:26**).
 - B. In regeneration, God gives his elect an heart of flesh (**Eze 11:19; Eze 36:26**) and writes His law on the fleshy tables of that new heart (**2Co 3:3**).

- C. With the law of God written on the new heart, the elect are able to keep God's statutes and judgments (**Eze 11:20; Eze 36:27**).
- 4. **Jer 31:33-34** is speaking of the New Covenant (the New Testament) that God would make with Israel who were representative of God's elect (**Isa 45:4**).
 - A. **Heb 8:10-12** and **Heb 10:16-17** are quoting **Jer 31:33-34** showing the fulfillment of it.
 - B. In the New Covenant, God gives the elect a new heart in regeneration and writes the law of God on it, and forgives their sins (**Heb 8:11-12 c/w Col 2:13**).
 - C. This is done for God's elect out of every nation, both Jews and Gentiles (**Rev 5:9**).
 - D. Therefore, the Gentiles in **Rom 2:14-15** are elect Gentiles to whom God gave a new heart with His law written thereon in regeneration.
 - i. **Rom 2:14-15** is not referring to all of the Gentiles, nor to all of mankind, but only to the elect among them.
 - ii. This is why they could do by nature the things in the written law of God without having it -- because it was written in their hearts -- which is not the case with the unregenerate (**Rom 3:9-18**).
 - iii. These Gentiles had a conscience which accused them of sin and excused them of things that were not sin (**Rom 2:15**).
 - iv. This shows that they were regenerate because the unregenerate have a defiled conscience (**Tit 1:15-16**).
 - E. Think about it -- if the law of God is written in the heart of every man at conception like the Natural Law doctrine states, then why would God make a new covenant in which He would write His laws in the hearts of His elect?
- 5. **Psa 37:31** is referring to *the righteous*, not to the unregenerate (**Psa 37:28-30**), and therefore is not a proof of the Natural Law written in all men's minds by nature.
- 6. *Therefore, the verses used to support the Natural Law actually disprove it because they only refer to the regenerate elect, not to all the human race.*

V. What moral laws *do* men know *naturally*?

- 1. The *natural man* doesn't naturally know to do good.
 - A. The *natural man* doesn't receive the things of the Spirit of God (**1Co 2:14**).
 - B. The carnal mind (natural man) is enmity against God and is not subject to the law of God (natural or revealed) (**Rom 8:7**).
 - i. God is good (**Mar 10:18**).
 - ii. God's law (natural or revealed) is good (**Rom 7:12; 1Ti 1:8**).
 - iii. Therefore, if the natural man is enmity (an enemy) against God who is good, and he is not subject to the law of God which is good, then he doesn't naturally know to do good.
 - iv. Not only doesn't the natural man know to do good, but he doesn't do good (**Rom 3:12**).
 - C. The *Natural Law* that all men have written in them is the *law of sin* in our members (**Rom 7:23**).
- 2. Let's search the scriptures and see which laws that all men know naturally.
 - A. Thou shalt not murder? Nope (**Rom 3:15**).
 - B. Thou shalt not lie? Nope (**Psa 58:3**).
 - C. Thou shalt seek God? Nope (**Rom 3:11**).

- D. Thou shalt do good? Nope (**Rom 3:12**).
 - E. Thou shalt speak kindly to people? Nope (**Rom 3:13**).
 - F. Thou shalt not curse? Nope (**Rom 3:14**).
 - G. Thou shalt respect other people's property and not damage it? Nope (**Rom 3:16**).
 - H. Thou shalt live in peace with thy neighbor? Nope (**Rom 3:17**).
 - I. Thou shalt be subject to the law of God? Nope (**Rom 8:7**).
 - J. Thou shalt not envy? Nope (**Jam 4:5**).
 - K. Thou shalt not lust? Nope (**Jam 4:5; Rom 7:7**).
3. But they still have a conscience to tell them what's right and wrong though, right? Nope (**Tit 1:15**).
 4. An examination of heathen Indian tribes such as the Aborigines, Inca, Aztec, Mayan, or American Indians without any Christian or Western influence will reveal that many of the "natural laws" such as "Thou shalt not kill" are not natural at all.
 5. God has set the world in men's hearts which prohibits them from finding out the law of God without first being regenerated and the word of God being revealed to them (**Ecc 3:11**).

VI. What *do* men know naturally?

1. There are things that men know naturally (**Jud 1:10**).
2. Nature teaches us some things.
 - A. Nature teaches us that men and women are sexually made for each other, and that sodomy is against nature (**Rom 1:26-27**).
 - B. Nature teaches us that it's shameful for a man to have long hair (**1Co 11:14**).
3. Sinners do some "good" things naturally because it's in their own self interest.
 - A. Jesus taught that sinners can love people *who love them* (**Luk 6:32**).
 - B. Sinners do good to people *who do good to them* (**Luk 6:33**).
 - C. Sinners lend money to people *to receive it back again* (**Luk 6:34**).
 - D. Doing things out of self interest is not proof that there is a "natural law" which causes all men to know right from wrong.
4. There is a such thing as *natural affection* which all men should have (**Rom 1:31**).
 - A. Sinners give good gifts to their children (**Mat 7:9-11**).
 - B. Caring for one's children and protecting them is natural for human beings.
 - C. But caring for one's children and protecting them is also natural for irrational sea monsters who don't have the law of God written in their hearts (**Lam 4:3**).
 - D. Therefore, this is not proof that there is a "natural law" which causes all men to know right from wrong.
 - i. Things which men know instinctually such as self-preservation and protection of children could be considered the Natural Law.
 - ii. But, to extrapolate from this that natural men have the moral law of God written in them is to contradict the word of God which says otherwise (**Rom 3:9-18; Eph 2:1-3**).
5. The true "Natural Law" which natural men operate by is the law of self-interest.
 - A. It is for this reason that Socialism and Communism have been, and always will be, miserable failures.
 - B. It is for this same reason that the free market, operating in a society where civil laws prohibiting acts of aggression (murder, theft, violence, and threats of violence) are enforced, produces the most goods, wealth, and highest standard of living possible.

- i. The natural inclination of fallen men is to take whatever he wants.
 - ii. If the penalties for stealing and killing are sufficiently higher than the benefits of those acts, then the natural man acting in his self-interest will opt for the second best option: producing and trading.
 - iii. In order to get what he wants in a free society which enforces laws against aggression, the natural man will have to produce wealth by labor and then trade that wealth for something he deems more valuable.
 - iv. Every transaction in a free market is a benefit to both parties, else the transaction would not take place.
 - v. This system gives incentive to the natural man, who is really only concerned with his own self-interest, to work hard to produce goods or services as efficiently and as cheaply as possible so that he can sell them to others at the lowest possible price (because his competitor will undercut him otherwise) to obtain money or other goods which he esteems to be more valuable.
 - vi. When all members of society are doing this, the result is that the amount of goods and services continues to increase which causes prices to fall, and consequently the standard of living of all to improve.
- C. Therefore, the foundation of free-market economics is not the Natural Law which says that all men have the law of God written in their minds which teaches them to do good to their neighbor and not harm him, but rather it is the "natural law" of self-interest which is natural to all men.

VII. Why then do most men at most times appear to follow the *Natural Law* and seem to know it's wrong to murder, steal, rape, lie, etc?

- 1. First of all, God restrains men's wrath (**Psa 76:10**), else this world would be a living hell having **Rom 3:10-18** acted out by every unregenerate person all the time.
- 2. Most people are not Christians, nor regenerate (**Luk 13:23-24**), but they have been *influenced* by a Christian culture.

- A. The law of Moses, which was given to Israel, was made known to the nations as they came into contact with Israel (**Deu 4:5-6**).
 - i. Israel was the crossroads of the Middle East, and therefore many people would have come into contact with God's laws.
 - ii. The wisdom of Solomon, which came from the word of God (**Pro 2:6**), was known throughout all the earth (**1Ki 4:34**).
 - iii. Prior to the written law of God being given, the nations would have learned of the law of God as they came into contact with prophets such as Noah (**2Pe 2:5**) and Abraham (**Gen 20:7**).
 - iv. Therefore, the extent to which most men know the moral laws of God is due to the influence of the word of God held and disseminated by God's people.
- B. Christians are the salt of the earth and are as a preserving influence in the world (**Mat 5:13**).
 - i. A few righteous people can save a city or a nation from God's judgment (**Gen 18:32; Isa 1:9; Jer 5:1**).
 - ii. The wicked can vex the righteous and corrupt them (**2Pe 2:6-8; 1Co 15:33; Pro 22:24-25**).
 - iii. In a similar way, the righteous can positively influence the wicked.

- a. He that walketh with wise men shall be wise (**Pro 13:20**).
 - b. If trained up in the way they should go, children usually will not depart from it when they are old (**Pro 22:6**).
- C. Natural men can be conditioned to think and act in certain ways, both good and bad.
 - i. This doesn't mean that unregenerate men have a "Natural (moral) Law" written in their minds, anymore than it means that a dog has a Natural Law written in him that tells him it's wrong to poop on the carpet.
 - a. An irrational dog who naturally would think that it was perfectly acceptable to poop on the carpet can be trained to know that it is "wrong" to do so.
 - b. After sufficient training, the dog knows it's "wrong" to poop on the carpet, and when he does it he will hide or humble himself to try to escape the punishment for his rebellious act.
 - c. The dog's "conscience" and actions are completely owing to his conditioning, and have nothing whatsoever to do with a Natural Law written in his heart.
 - ii. In both unregenerate men and irrational dogs, the knowing of good and bad is the product of conditioning, not of a law written in their minds.
- D. Western countries were founded on Biblical principles and many of the remnants of it still remain.
 - i. In those societies, natural unregenerate men are trained and conditioned from early childhood to know right and wrong, whereby they develop consciences which convict them of such (just like the trained dog).
 - ii. Western culture has been riding on the coattails of the teachings of Christianity, even after it has long since rejected Christianity.
- E. An examination of history will show that when a society completely rejects God and Christianity, people will stop living by the "natural law", such as happened in the French and Bolshevik Revolutions.

VIII. What about people, such as the following, that were keeping the law of God before it was given to Moses and written down? Doesn't this prove that there is a "Natural Law" written in every person's heart?

- 1. It is argued by Natural Law proponents that society had a sense of justice and would have killed Cain for killing Abel (**Gen 4:14-16**).
 - A. There are several problems with using this as an example of the Natural Law.
 - B. Firstly, the fact that the first offspring of Adam and Eve killed his brother is hardly proof of the Natural Law (**Gen 4:8**).
 - i. Cain was a natural man (**1Jo 3:12**), who was *by nature a child of wrath* (**Eph 2:3**), who was acting out his *nature* of being swift to shed blood (**Rom 3:15**).
 - ii. If the Natural Law which said "Thou shalt not kill" was written in Cain's heart, then why did he not show any remorse for killing Abel? (**Gen 4:8-14**)
 - iii. Cain was grieved at his punishment, not because he had broken God's law.
 - C. Secondly, *vengeance* is against God's law (**Rom 12:19**), so the fact that men would have killed Cain if they found him is certainly not an example of Natural Law (God's law written on the hearts of natural men).

- D. Thirdly, God's law was given to men prior to the law of Moses, though it wasn't yet written down; so even if Cain knew that it was wrong to kill Abel, that doesn't prove that the law of God was written on his wicked heart.
 - i. God spoke in time past by the prophets (**Heb 1:1**).
 - ii. Abel was a prophet (**Mat 23:34-35**) and therefore would have prophesied to the people of his day (his family).
 - iii. Abel offered his sacrifice by faith (**Heb 11:4**).
 - a. Faith comes by the word of God (**Rom 10:17**).
 - b. Therefore, Abel had received God's word, being a prophet.
 - c. Therefore, Cain could have known it was wrong to murder without the law of God being written on his heart.
 - iv. Noah was a preacher of righteousness (**2Pe 2:5**) who would have therefore preached God's commandments to the people of his day.
 - v. Abraham was a prophet (**Gen 20:7**) who would have passed God's word down to his posterity.
- 2. Pharaoh knew it was wrong to have Abram's wife without having the written law of God (**Gen 12:18-20**).
 - A. There are at least a couple of possibilities to explain this.
 - B. Pharaoh could have learned of God's law against adultery from it being repeated by those who heard it from one of God's prophets such as Abel, Noah, or Abraham (see previous point).
 - C. Pharaoh could have been a regenerate child of God and had the law of God written on his heart like Isaac (**Gal 4:28-29 c/w Heb 8:10**).
- 3. The son's of Jacob knew that fornication was wrong (**Gen 34:7**); Joseph knew that adultery was wrong (**Gen 39:9**); Joseph's brothers knew stealing was wrong (**Gen 44:8**), all without having the written law of God.
 - A. Jacob's sons could have known that fornication, adultery, and theft were wrong for at least a couple of reasons.
 - B. First of all, God spoke directly to their father Jacob (**Gen 32:28-30**).
 - i. Jacob blessed the sons of Joseph and worshipped God by faith (**Heb 11:21**).
 - a. Faith comes by the word of God (**Rom 10:17**).
 - b. Therefore, Jacob was given God's word before it was written down.
 - ii. Fathers were to teach their children God's word (**Deu 6:6-7**).
 - iii. Therefore, Jacob's children could have learned these things from him who learned them from his fathers, Isaac and Abraham, and from God himself.
 - C. Secondly, Jacob's sons were the fathers of the twelve tribes of Israel.
 - i. Many of them were most likely regenerate, as Isaac was (**Gal 4:28-29**).
 - ii. Joseph was clearly regenerate, being an obvious type of Christ.
 - iii. Therefore, they would have had the law of God written on their hearts in the new birth (**Heb 8:10**) and would have known these things innately.
- 4. The Hebrew midwives knew that murder was wrong without having the written law of God, and they disobeyed the order of the king to kill the Hebrew baby boys (**Exo 1:15-17**).
 - A. The Hebrew midwives *feared God* (**Exo 1:17**).
 - B. The natural man doesn't fear God (**Rom 3:18**).
 - C. Therefore, the midwives were regenerate and had the law of God written on their hearts (**Heb 8:10**).

D. This is therefore not an example of the Natural Law being written on the heart of the natural man.

IX. Summary

1. There are Natural Laws of science which God ordained at Creation.
2. There is a Natural Law within mankind (and animals) which teaches us to instinctually act in self-preservation and protection of family.
3. But there is not a Natural Law, in the sense of the moral laws of God, written in the hearts of mankind in general which enables them to know right and wrong and to choose to do right, because they are *by nature* the children of wrath.
4. There is a Natural Law written in the hearts of the regenerate elect which enables them to know right and wrong and be pricked in their conscience when they do wrong.
5. Because of the restraining hand of God, the wide dissemination of the Bible, and the influence of Christianity on Western society, most people have been trained and conditioned to know the law of God and to conform their actions to it to some extent, and therefore *appear* to have the Natural Law written in their hearts.