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The New Normal? *The Perversion of God's Moral Standard*

By M. A. Carling

Once upon a time in our country, the "normal" state of affairs concerning marriage was the union of one man with one woman. According to a new "situation comedy," the "New Normal" is something different. The premise of this "comedy" centers on the trials and tribulations of two homosexual males with successful careers who find that the only thing missing in their lives is a child. Since it is physically and naturally impossible for them to conceive, a single mother comes to the rescue and agrees to act as a surrogate. Hilarity ensues; homophobes are exposed; life is good again.

It seems more and more these days that Hollywood and the news media dictate to us what is "normal." How many shows today now contain at least one gay character? Slowly but surely Hollywood is planting the evil seed that gay, lesbian, transvestitism and other perversions are ok and should be embraced as "normal." Has the barrage of TV shows, commercials, school policies, denial of the rights of private businesses, etc., made you succumb to the "New Normal"?

Sadly, there are also many "new normals" in the world of Christianity. Has truth really gone out of style? Have we already come to the point where we look back with nostalgia to the way things used to be? Will we find ourselves making the following nine statements in reflection?

#1 I remember when the gospel had power to save men from their sin!

In this statement I am implying that many do not believe that the gospel has power to save. In their desire to be more pragmatic they pervert the true gospel by promoting a false gospel. What sayeth the scripture?

Rom. 1:16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: [why?] for it [the gospel] is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.

#2 I remember when the Lord Jesus Christ was the only hope for salvation!

Is it time to stop looking to the Lord Jesus Christ as the only saviour and hope for mankind? Is our hope in Muhammad, Buddah, or the Pope? What sayeth the scripture?

John 14:6 Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.

[The Greek of "I am" is Ἐγώ εἰμι, "I myself (and no one else) am..."]

Acts 4:12 Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.

Acts 16:31 ...Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved,...

1 Timothy 2:5 For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus;

#3 I remember when holiness wasn't an option!

Can we really live like the devil and still be saved because at some point in

our life we gave our heart to Jesus? Is it ok to live the so-called carnal Christian life? What sayeth the scripture?

Heb. 12:14 Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord:

#4 I remember when the scriptural call was to “repent and believe the gospel” instead of “God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life”!

What sayeth the scripture?

Mark 1:14-15 (14) Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, (15) And saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: [God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life? No!] repent ye, and believe the gospel.

Some might say of verse 15 that Jesus missed a perfect opportunity to urge His audience to give their hearts to Him. I guess some are not above correcting even our Lord.

#5 Is preaching the truth of the Word now outdated and so last century?

What sayeth the scripture?

2 Tim. 4:1-5 (1) I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; [Paul then exhorts Timothy with a string of five aor. imper. commands] (2) **Preach** the word; **be instant** in season, out of season; **reprove, rebuke, exhort** with all longsuffering and doctrine [why?]. (3) For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; (4) And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables. (5) But watch [pres. imper. “keep on watching”] thou in all things [Timothy], endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of [or fulfill] thy ministry.

#6 When did God change His mind concerning women pastors or women in leadership positions within the church?¹

This may be a sensitive issue for some, but not for a biblical Christian.

It all begins with the Fall in Gen. 3. It is here that we have the historical point at which sin entered the human race and significantly impacted creation.

What was the exact moment when sin entered into the human race? It was before the woman ate of the fruit. It grew through ignorance and seduction which caused the woman to doubt the Word of God, just after the forbidden fruit, and then finally seduced to act in open defiance of the Divine Command.

The Lord God established the headship of the man through the priority of the man’s creation and necessity of a headship in the Divine order. He later made the woman as an helpmeet for the man, a complement to the man or something that completes. In the temptation and Fall, it seems evident that all the serpent had to do was probe and push the man and the woman according to their natural, yet sinless tendencies. Their original righteousness was evidently fragile. There was either some failure on Adam’s part to carefully instruct his wife in the Word of God or failure on her part to carefully hear God’s Word. There were evidently some inherent characteristics in the woman’s personality which made her more susceptible to the temptation. She was prone to speak up while her husband was willing to let her. She felt that she needed to fill a void that Adam had passively provided.

Eve was seduced by the cunning of the serpent, but Adam, failing to act responsibly as the head of the relationship, acted willfully, and as the responsible head under God, was held primarily accountable by God.

What was Eve’s response to the question of the Lord God?

Gen. 3:13 And the LORD God said unto the woman, What is this that thou hast done? And the woman said, The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat.

The woman’s answer is evasive and blame–shifting, although she admits to being beguiled or deceived. She minimized her responsibility and claimed, in effect, “The devil made me do it!” This proneness to deception has far–reaching effects into our own time, even to the place of women in the church. Note the following deceptions: Mary Baker Eddy, founder of the cult known as Christian Science; Ellen G. White, co-founder of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Is there a New Testament commentary on Eve’s transgression?

1 Tim. 2:8-14 (8) I will therefore that men pray every where, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting. (9) In like manner also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with broided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array; (10) But (which becometh women professing godliness) with good works.

[In vs. (9) the term “modest” is construed with “behavior,” not “apparel.” Lit., Likewise women in manner of dress (or apparel) orderly, with modesty and sobriety to adorn themselves (referring to conduct), not with plaiting and gold or pearls or costly raiment, but in great contrast to that, what suits women professing reverence, such as good works. Thus, women ought to adorn themselves in suitable apparel and a modest and sober behaviour.]

(11) Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. [A woman, in silence, emph., let her keep on learning in all obedience, submission, or subordination] (12) But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence.

There are two distinct commands here: 1st, But to teach, emph., a woman, emph., I do not allow, (an absolute restriction). 2nd, Nor to govern or have authority over a man, but, in great contrast to this, to be in silence. Why is this? Are women incompetent?

(13) For Adam was first formed, then Eve. [Adam was the God ordained head of that relationship, not Eve. That headship and leadership extends into the church] (14) And Adam was not deceived, but the

woman being deceived was in the transgression. [Lit., but the woman having been deceived, a transgressor, emph., has become (perf. tense), a permanent state of being].

1 Cor. 14:33-35 [In the context of orderly worship] (33) For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints. (34) Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak [or to speak out]; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law. [The wording is emphatic prohibiting women from speaking out in the assembly. They are to remain silent, and not even ask questions. The wife is still under her husband's authority and headship, even in the context of the assembly.] (35) And if they will learn any thing, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church.

The Apostle Paul did not exempt business meetings in 1 Cor. 14 from the silence of the women. The principle seems to apply to all official or formal gatherings. The issue is not that the women are to be put down or shut up, but rather that the man's headship extends throughout the church relationship and the woman must submit and remain silent.

Titus 2:3-5 (3) The aged women likewise, that they be in behaviour as becometh holiness, not false accusers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things; (4) That they may teach the young women [i.e. teach by example] to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, (5) To be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed.

What conclusions can we make from these verses? 1) The men are to take the leadership in the church and its functions; 2) The women are not to be prominent or ostentatious in actions or clothing but conduct themselves in a subordinate sense and with good works; 3) Because of the woman's tendency to be led astray, as she was in the Fall, she is not to teach or lead in the sphere of the church's ministry. For a church to have women teachers or to have the women teach only the women and not the men, or teach only the children and not the men is still non con-

formity to the scriptural mandate in the context of the church; 4) The basis for the headship of the men and submission of the women does not derive from ecclesiastical tradition or religious chauvinism, but from the clear teaching of the Word of God. This is His mandate for the church, and is based on the order of creation, the nature of creation, and the circumstances of the fall.

In most modern churches, the women are in unscriptural positions of leadership and teaching because they have tried to fill a vacuum left by the irresponsibility of the men.

#7 When did it become acceptable to God to murder the unborn?

When an embryo or fetus dies of its own accord within the womb, it is called a miscarriage and is usually followed by a spontaneous natural abortion. A voluntary abortion is the removal of an embryo or fetus from the uterus in order to end a pregnancy. So-called therapeutic abortion is the removal of a human fetus from the uterus prematurely, thereby destroying the life of that fetus. Reasons given for a therapeutic abortion include, 1) Because of the mother's physical or mental health, or 2) To prevent the birth of a deformed child, or 3) To prevent the birth of a child conceived as a result of rape or incest. Concerning the topic of abortion, I want to note three things:

In the first place, the Scriptures view conception as a gift from God. When Eve conceived and bare Cain, she considered that conception to be of God.

Genesis 4:1 And Adam knew Eve his wife; and she conceived, and bare Cain, and said, I have gotten a man from the LORD.

All four sons that Leah bore were looked upon as gifts of God.

Genesis 29:31-35 (31) And when the LORD saw that Leah was hated, he opened her womb: but Rachel was barren. (32) And Leah conceived, and bare a son, and she called his name Reuben: for she said, Surely the LORD hath looked upon my affliction; now therefore my husband will love me. (33) And she conceived again, and bare a son; and said,

Because the LORD hath heard that I was hated, he hath therefore given me this son also: and she called his name Simeon. (34) And she conceived again, and bare a son; and said, Now this time will my husband be joined unto me, because I have born him three sons: therefore was his name called Levi. (35) And she conceived again, and bare a son: and she said, Now will I praise the LORD: therefore she called his name Judah; and left bearing.

After Boaz married Ruth, the Scripture says,

Ruth 4:13 ...the LORD gave her conception, and she bare a son.

In the second place, the Scriptures teach that God has an intimate knowledge of every embryo and of every fetus.

Psalms 139:13 For thou hast possessed my reins: thou hast covered me in my mother's womb [or, you knitted me together in my mother's womb].

Jeremiah 1:5 Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations.

Isaiah 44:1-2a (1) Yet now hear, O Jacob my servant; and Israel, whom I have chosen: (2) Thus saith the LORD that made thee, and formed thee from the womb,...

Galatians 1:15 But when it pleased God, who separated me [Paul] from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace,

All of these passages teach us of the sovereign power and purposes of God in conception and embryological development.

In the third place, only God can produce human life, and only He must determine how and when that life should terminate. When man intervenes by destroying the embryo or fetus, he interferes with the only Creator of all life.

Exodus 20:13 Thou shalt not [absolutely not] kill. [or murder or slay with premeditation]

Exodus 21:22-25 (22) If men strive, and hurt a woman with child, so that her fruit depart from her, and yet no mischief follow: he shall be surely punished, according as the woman's husband will lay upon him; and he shall pay as the judges determine. (23) And if any mischief follow, then thou shalt give life for life,

The Scriptures clearly teach that the unlawful killing of one human being by another (called murder) is wrong. The Scriptures teach by example that unborn children are considered human beings. If both of these statements are true, then the Scriptures implicitly teach that abortion is murder.

#8 When did monogamy cease to be what God intended?

I want to note three things. In the first place, monogamy was clearly God's intent from the beginning.

Genesis 2:18, 22, 24-25 (18) And the LORD God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him [one who helps]. (22) And the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man. (24) Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh. (25) And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed.

Marriage is God's doing, not only because He created the woman with this design in mind, and brought her to her husband, but also because God spoke the design of marriage into existence. In the context of a question about divorce, Jesus confirmed this design,

Matthew 19:4-6 (4) And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, (5) And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh? (6) Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.

We can historically establish the existence of polygamy among the Hebrews

from Lamech, six generations from Adam, to about the time of the Babylonian exile. From the time of the exile, history is silent regarding the presence of polygamy among the Jews. By the time of the New Testament, polygamy appears to have been the exception and monogamy the norm even among the Gentiles and Romans. Admittedly, the picture blurs pretty quickly after Adam and Eve's first sin and expulsion from the Garden. By Genesis 4, you have Cain's son Lamech taking two wives. The patriarchs Abraham and Jacob themselves had multiple wives and concubines. Moses had more than one wife, as did Gideon, Elkanah and King David. Solomon had 700 wives and 300 concubines. How does one respond to this situation?

According to Gregory Alan Thornbury,

"The answer begins by seeing that God always points His creation back to the primacy and perfection of the original design. Next, you have to read every book to the end, especially if it is the biblical context. And if you read the stories about the [people] referenced above, you'll quickly find that polygamy was an unmitigated sociological disaster that created heartbreak and sowed familial discord. By the time of the writing of Malachi, God's command to a thoroughly chastised nation was clear: covenantal monogamy was to be the norm."²

In the second place, not every thing recorded in the Bible is approved by God. Just because the Bible mentions a trait or act of an individual does not necessarily mean that the Bible endorsed such. The mentioning of Noah becoming drunk and disgracing himself is biblical but certainly not condoned. I would suggest to you that although God was not pleased with polygamy, He did two things: 1) God tolerated polygamy during the maturation of His people, and 2) He sought to regulate the evil practice even if He did not outright forbid it. God put in place monogamous marriage, but man within a short time became dissatisfied with one woman (Gen. 4: 19). Thus, God sought to regulate the polygamous practice.

Exodus 21:10 If he take him another wife; her food, her raiment, and her duty of marriage, shall he not diminish.

Deut. 17:14, 16-17 (14) When thou art come unto the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee, and shalt possess it, and shalt dwell therein, and shalt say, I will set a king over me, like as all the nations that are about me; (16) But he shall not multiply horses to himself, nor cause the people to return to Egypt, to the end that he should multiply horses: forasmuch as the LORD hath said unto you, Ye shall henceforth return no more that way. (17) Neither shall he multiply wives to himself, that his heart turn not away: neither shall he greatly multiply to himself silver and gold.

1 Tim. 3:2 A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife,...

In the third place, God never authorized polygamy. 2 Sam. 12 does not teach that God authorized polygamy.

2 Samuel 12:7-8 (7) And Nathan said to David, Thou art the man. Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, I anointed thee king over Israel, and I delivered thee out of the hand of Saul; (8) And I gave thee thy master's house, and thy master's wives into thy bosom, and gave thee the house of Israel and of Judah; and if that had been too little, I would moreover have given unto thee such and such things.

It is understood by some that the expression, "And I gave thee thy master's...wives into thy bosom..." means that God was pleased with one man and multiple women. If there weren't other statements or teachings in the Bible, one might conclude that God condoned the practice of multiple wives. Isn't it also possible that the statement in 2 Samuel means, in general, that God had given to David all that appertained to Saul and that the reference to Saul's women was the ultimate proof? The question still comes up however as to why God just didn't forbid polygamy all together. Is it possible that God used man's sin of polygamy in the unfolding of His eternal redemptive purpose?

Like Nebuchadnezzar, can we say that, "...all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing; and he [God] doeth according to his will in the army

of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?" (Dan. 4:35). Can we leave it to God's wisdom and purpose that He didn't forbid polygamy outright?

#9 When did a "Christian homosexual" stop being an oxymoron?

An oxymoron is a figure of speech producing an incongruous, or seemingly self contradictory effect, as in "cruel kindness" or "to make haste slowly" or a "Christian homosexual." Man was created in the image and likeness of God, and therefore possesses an inescapable, responsible moral quality and character. Man was also created as a sexual being, therefore, human sexuality in and of itself is not inherently or morally wrong. God ordained marriage (the union between one man and one woman) as the proper, exclusive, pure, responsible and fulfilling context for the sexual relationship. Concerning the oxymoron of a "Christian homosexual," I want to note three things.

In the first place, every human being is to glorify God in body and in spirit.

1 Cor. 10:31 Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.

In the realm of sexual relationships, all is to be done to the glory of God.

1 Cor. 6:9-11, 13, 15, 18-20 (9) Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, [one who lies with a male as with a female, a sodomite, a homosexual] (10) Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. (11) And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God. (13) Meats for the belly, and the belly for meats: but God shall destroy both it and them. Now the body is not for fornication, but for the Lord; and the Lord for the body. (15) Know ye not that your bodies are the members of Christ? shall I then take the members of Christ, and make them the members of an harlot?

God forbid. (18) Flee fornication. Every sin that a man doeth is without the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body. (19) What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? (20) For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.

1 Thess. 4:3-5, 7 (3) For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication [general sexual immorality]: (4) That every one of you should know how to possess his vessel [or control his own body] in sanctification [or holiness] and honour; (5) Not in the lust of concupiscence [or passion of lust], even as the Gentiles which know not God: (7) For God hath not called us unto uncleanness [impurity], but [or in great contrast to impurity, He has called us] unto holiness.

In the second place, God's moral standard concerning homosexuality was established in the Old Testament. Homosexuality was prohibited.

Leviticus 18:22-23, 30 [the whole chapter deals with prohibitions concerning sexual relationships] (22) Thou shalt not lie with mankind, as with womankind: [Why?] it is abomination [i.e., it is a disgusting thing]. (23) Neither shalt thou lie with any beast to defile thyself therewith: neither shall any woman stand before a beast to lie down thereto: [Why?] it is confusion [it is a violation of nature or divine order, a perversion] (30) Therefore shall ye keep mine ordinance, that ye commit not any one of these abominable customs, which were committed before you, and that ye defile not yourselves therein: I am the LORD your God.

How serious were these prohibitions?

Leviticus 20:13 If a man also lie with mankind, as he lieth with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination: they shall surely be put to death; their blood shall be upon them.

In the third place, the New Testament teaches that "males with males" and "females with females" is against nature and is unseemly.

Romans 1:18-27 (18) For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of

men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness; (19) Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. (20) 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: (21) Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. (22) Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, (23) And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things. (24) Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness [He left them to themselves] through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves: (25) Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen. (26) For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections [dishonorable passions]: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature: [Note that Paul uses a Grk word indicating "female" and not "women"] (27) And likewise also the men [or males], leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men [males with males] working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompence of their error which was meet.

1 Timothy 1:9-11 (9) Knowing this, that the law is not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and for sinners, for unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, (10) For whoremongers, for them that defile themselves with mankind, [one who lies with a male as with a female, a sodomite, a homosexual] for menstealers, for liars, for perjured persons, and if there be any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine; (11) According to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which was committed to my trust.

God does not teach us in His Word that morality is to be judged by consensus. Just because the majority stipulates that something is ok (like abortion or homosexuality), doesn't make it ok. It is the responsibility of every true Christian within the context, nurture

and discipline of the local New Testament church, to fight against societies' need to suppress the truth in unrighteousness. That which God told Solomon in 2Chron. 7:14 is still true for this country today: "If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land."

May we as a nation turn from accepting a perverted "New Normal," and beseech God to heal our land!

Ω

¹This article was developed from sermon notes in which I did not necessarily footnote some of my sources. I did borrow from Dr. Downing and his writings in various areas, but especially in statement #6.

²Gregory Alan Thornbury, *God's Plan for Marriage: Dealing with Old Testament Polygamy*, www.crosswalk.com/family/marriage/god-s-plans-for-marriage-dealing-with-old-testament-polygamy.html

Did God Hide Himself? Romans 1:21-32, Part 2

By Dr. Paul S. Nelson

This article is a continuation of an answer given to Richard Dawkins' indictment against God, "Why did God hide himself?"¹ Part 1 presented four biblical arguments derived from Rom. 1:18-20: the wrath of God is revealed (v. 18), the internal revelation of God (v.19), the external revelation of God (v.20), and the Creator-creature relationship (v.20). We continue with four more arguments developed from Rom. 1:21-32 and 2:14-17.

Revelation of the Justice of God

Natural revelation clearly discloses the ethical nature of God, i.e., his moral character and consistency. Rom. 1:18, 32 and 2:14-15 describe man as knowing the wrath of God against all ungodliness and unrighteousness, the judgment of God against sin, and God's moral law respectively. We have already dealt with God's wrath in Part 1.

Rom. 1:32 tells us through natural revelation all men know the judgment of God. It is not a vague knowledge, but a fully sufficient knowledge. In the clause, "Who knowing the judgment of God," the apostle Paul uses an intensified form of the participle "knowing" (ἐπιγινόντες) which means to fully know². The phrase, "The judgment of God" refers to the judicial verdict of God and denotes what God has ordained as just. It is defined by the clause, "that they which commit such things are worthy of death."

Every man has a sense of deity by which he comprehends the punitive judgment of God and the consequence of his sin. Unbelievers know they are condemned before the bar of God's justice and deserve the sentence of death. Paul states that the unregenerate understand "they which commit such things are worthy of death." Man understands he is guilty before God and deserves to be punished with death. The context of vs.32 requires us to view death in its fullest sense, i.e., eternal death. "Such things" refers to the dark catalog of sins listed in vs. 29-31:

Romans 1:29-31 Being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers, (30) Backbiters, haters of God, spiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, (31) Without understanding, covenant breakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful:

Knowledge of the judgment of God is ineradicably embedded in the human conscience.³ The most depraved and degenerate of men are not destitute of understanding the righteous judgments of God. Man's sins are not committed in ignorance. We are clearly taught here that man is morally responsible for his sin, because he has a sufficient comprehension of the punitive justice of God.

Revelation of the Moral Law of God

Natural revelation also reveals God's moral law to every person. The apostle Paul affirms in Rom. 2:14-15, "the

works of the law are written in their heart." Every person's conscience bears witness to the moral character of God.

Romans 2:14-15 For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: (15) Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another;

In the above text, Paul observes that the Gentiles, who did not have the written law, "by nature" did the things contained in the law. "By nature" is a description of the natural constitution of man. The law is engraved on man's natural constitution. Although unregenerate man is a fallen creature and totally depraved, he is still a morally responsible creature because the law of God is embedded in his heart. Natural man is not devoid of God's moral law. This is the very basis of morality in a fallen and sinful world.

The expression "a law unto themselves" is somewhat misleading in today's vernacular. Today "a law unto themselves" denotes autonomy and not being subject to any authority. However, in Rom. 2:14, it means exactly the opposite. Man, by virtue of what is implanted in his nature, is continually confronted with the law of God. Man himself is the revealer of the moral character of God to himself. The fact that man "does the things contained in the law" and is "a law unto himself," demonstrates that the work of the law is written in his heart.

When Paul says, "the work of the law is written in their hearts," he is alluding to the Ten Commandments which were written in stone. The Ten Commandments are the codification of the moral law of God, and are the transcript of God's moral character. No person can escape this witness of God's moral character; it is indelibly inscribed upon his heart. Every man's conscience bears witness to the moral law of God.

Further we note that the law operates in the heart of man through the con-

science. Conscience is a function of the heart that discriminates between right and wrong. And God's law is the standard by which man discerns what is right and wrong. Human morality is not something that evolved, or based upon social consensus; it is indelibly inscribed upon the heart. The conscience is the evidence of man's indestructible moral nature and proof of the fact that God bears witness to himself in our hearts.⁴ Man has an inborn moral nature. If the work of the law were not written in the heart, then no conscience would exist, and man would be devoid of morality.

Suppression Presupposes Possession

Man's deliberate suppression of the knowledge of God presupposes possession of knowledge (1:18, 23-24, 28). You cannot suppress knowledge without first possessing it. The unbeliever's reaction to the clear revelation of God is to constantly suppress it. This again proves that natural man has a sufficient comprehension of God.

Unregenerate man rebels against the knowledge of God because it brings him face-to-face with his Creator and condemns him. He knows he is guilty before God and hates it. He loves darkness and hates the light, because his deeds are evil (John 3:19-20). Rom 1:18-32 explicitly teaches that natural man is hostile to the knowledge of God.

1. The unbeliever is so opposed to the truth that he actively seeks to suppress it. It is the epitome of his rebellion against God. Rom. 1:18 asserts that all unbelievers "hold the truth in unrighteousness." The Greek verb for "hold" is *κατεχόντων* and literally means to "hold down." It is a deliberate act of suppressing and repressing the truth of God. And it is done "in unrighteousness." The present tense of the verb "hold" denotes a continual act. The unregenerate are continually suppressing the truth in their wickedness. Truth is out in the open, but men, so to speak, put it in a box and sit on the lid, and "hold it down in unrighteousness."

2. In Rom. 1:21, we find unregenerate man refusing to acknowledge God. He refuses to show any kind of grati-

tude or thankfulness to God. Paul says, "They glorified him not as God, neither were thankful." Rather, they rebelliously engaged in futile reasoning to do away with God in their thoughts. They "became vain in their imaginations." "Vain in their imaginations" denotes futile speculation and worthless reasoning. The unbeliever obstinately exalts his reasoning against the knowledge of God (2 Cor. 10:5). His very intellect is constantly devising schemes by which he thinks he may overthrow God. He lives in a stupor of self-deception.

3. In Rom. 1:23, we find fallen man changing the glory of God revealed in creation into idols. Paul writes, "And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things." God originally created man to worship Him. He created man as a religious being. But fallen man has perverted his religious nature into the worship of idols. Although man has a general knowledge of the true God, he is wholly bent on perverting it.

When Paul addressed the Areopagus on Mars Hill, he began by stating, "I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious" (Acts 17:22). The Grk term for "superstitious" (*δαισιδαίμων-εστέρους*) means to be extremely religious (literally, fearers of supernatural spirits). He was alluding to the very constitution of man; man by nature is religious. Man has an innate sense of deity (*sensus divinitatus*). Athens was a city steeped in idolatry. It was said that there were more idols than people. Athens was a plethora of polytheistic gods and pantheistic conceptions of God. The presence of such a multitude of idols, temples and altars in Athens proved Paul's point – all men are religious. Paul says, "in all things" or "in every respect" you are very religious. The religious propensity of man's corrupt nature had lead them to seek after false gods, and grossly pervert the knowledge of God they possessed by natural revelation. Paul points out the absurdity of worshiping "the unknown God." They were ignorantly worshiping false gods. It was a deliberate suppression of the truth of God. *They changed*

the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things. Unregenerate man invents false religion in the form of idolatry because of his inherent religious nature.

4. In Rom. 1:25, Paul observes how unregenerate man changes the truth of God for a lie. The Grk word for "changed" (*μεταλλάσσω*) actually means to exchange, i.e., to exchange one thing for another. The unbeliever exchanges the natural revelation of God for a lie. The result is to worship creation rather than the Creator. Verse 25 is a reference to the pantheistic tendencies of man to ascribe the attributes of God to nature. The prime example today is secular science and the philosophy of evolution. Secular science ascribes divine attributes to nature such as the eternity of matter and the immutability of natural law. It is a religious philosophy that changes the truth of God into a lie.⁶ It is nothing more than a form of pantheism.

5. The natural revelation of God is obnoxious to the unbeliever. In Rom. 1:28 Paul states, "they did not like to retain God in their knowledge." Again, the Grk term *ἐπίγνωσις* is used for knowledge, which means full and sufficient knowledge. The Grk term for "retain" (*ἔχω*) means "to have" or "to hold." Unregenerate man cannot handle the truth. It is appalling to recognize the truth already revealed in natural revelation. They must reject it.

6. Ultimately man's revolt against the knowledge of God is his pursuit of immorality. Immorality is an expression of rebellion and hatred against the clear revelation of God. In suppressing the truth, natural man actively pursues immorality. When man rejects God, God gives them over to immorality (vs.28). In Rom. 1:28-31, Paul gives us a dark catalog of sins that describe the result of man's deliberate effort to suppress the knowledge of God.

Romans 1:28-31 And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not conven-

ient; (29) Being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers, (30) Backbiters, haters of God, spiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, (31) Without understanding, covenantbreakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful.

In summary, the reaction of natural man to the certain knowledge of God revealed in creation is rebellion. Sinful man actively, constantly and deliberately suppresses the truth of God. He seeks to re-define and interpret reality apart from God. He is buried in self-deception. But try as he may, it is impossible for man to escape the knowledge of God. The *sensus divinitatis* is indelibly inscribed upon his heart.

The Reality of Man's Knowledge of God Asserted

Rom. 1:21 is a definitive statement of man's certain knowledge of God comprehended through the natural revelation described in vs. 19-20. The apostle Paul asserts "they knew God" (γινόντες). Indeed, all people have a general knowledge of God.⁷ All people not only know God exists, but know his divine attributes and character (1:20). All people know God as their Creator (1:20). All people know the moral character of God: his law (1:32), his justice (1:32), his wrath (1:18), their condemnation (1:32; 2:15) and a judgment day to come (2:16). Hence, all people possess sufficient knowledge of God to render them guilty without excuse. Whether they admit it or not doesn't change a thing.

Conclusion

God has sufficiently revealed himself to man. All people know God. If they didn't, then they would have a valid excuse. But Rom. 1:20 declares all men are "without an excuse." The Grk word for "excuse" is ἀναπολογία, which means without a defense. Before the tribunal of God, fallen man can never use the excuse that God did not reveal himself. God will hold all men accountable.

The hypothetical questions directed at God from atheists Bertrand Russell (Why didn't you give us more evidence?) and Richard Dawkins (Why did you take such pains to hide yourself?) attempt to make God culpable for not revealing himself. Nothing could be farther from the truth. It is a deliberate effort to suppress the clear revelation of God – to "hold down" the truth in unrighteousness. Every person possesses a sufficient knowledge of God. This reality is inescapable, and thus man is inexcusable.

Ω

¹ Paul S. Nelson, *PIRSpective*, Vol. 5, Issue 3, pp. 1-2.

² John Murray, *Epistle to the Romans*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., Reprinted 1977), pp. 50-53.

³ R.C.H. Lenski, *Romans* (Hendrickson Publishers, 1998), p. 124.

⁴ John Murray, *Epistle to the Romans*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., Reprinted 1977), p. 75.

⁵ A.T. Roberson, *Word Pictures*, Rom. 1:18.

⁶ Science is legitimate only if it assumes the absolute authority of Scripture for the interpretation of all created facts.

⁷ This does not refer to the salvific knowledge of God. The gospel of Jesus Christ is revealed to man only through special revelation.

Images from Church History



Robert Haldane
1764-1842

Robert Haldane was born in London, the son of James Haldane and his wife Katherine Duncan. His younger brother James Alexander Haldane was also a clergyman. Robert and James attended classes at Dundee Grammar School.

In 1780 Robert joined HMS Monarch of which his maternal uncle, Adam Duncan, was in command. In the following year he was transferred to HMS Foudroyant. He was on HMS Foudroyant under John Jervis during the night engagement in April 1782 with the French ship *Pégase* and greatly distinguished himself. Haldane was afterwards present at the relief of Gibraltar in September 1782. Some months later after the peace treaty of 1783 he left the Royal Navy.

In 1797 Haldane sold his castle, left the Church of Scotland and travelled around Scotland preaching. In December of that year he joined his brother and some others in the formation of the "Society for the Propagation of the Gospel at Home," in building chapels or "tabernacles" for congregations, in supporting missionaries, and in maintaining institutions for the education of young men to carry on the work of evangelization. He is said to have spent more than £70,000 in the course of the following twelve years (1798-1810). He also initiated a plan for evangelizing Africa by bringing over native children to be trained as Christian missionaries.

In 1816 Robert Haldane visited the continent, first at Geneva and afterwards in Montauban. He lectured and interviewed large numbers of theological students with remarkable effect; among them were César Malan, Frédéric Monod and Jean-Henri Merle d'Aubigné. This circle of men spread the revival of evangelical Protestant Christianity across the continent of Europe, impacting France, Germany and the Netherlands. Through conversion and missionary impetus the effects of this revival were felt as far off as Italy and Hungary.

Returning to Scotland in 1819, Haldane lived partly on his estate of Auchengray and partly in Edinburgh, and like his brother took an active part, chiefly through the press, in many of the religious controversies of the time.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_Haldane