

God's Law for Modern Man

Chapter 3: Natural Law vs. Biblical Law

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The idea that civil governments are obligated to apply the Bible's moral case laws to modern society is viewed with alarm and disdain by the vast majority of Bible-believing Christians. Those who reject the abiding validity of the Old Testament moral case laws need to do two things. First, they must offer a biblical explanation as to why the moral case laws are no longer binding. Second, they must provide a biblical alternative. If a massive revival of Christianity occurred in America, and most of the people and political leaders were converted to Christ, how would America's judicial system be affected? How would America develop a biblical system of law without the guidance of the Old Testament moral case laws? A brief examination of some of the options offered by those who reject the Old Testament civil laws will show that those who reject these laws have not yet offered a biblical alternative.

One popular strategy is basically to ignore the whole question. Ultra-Dispensationalists teach that the earth and the nations therein belong to Satan. The earth is becoming progressively more evil over time, and the secret rapture is going to occur at any moment. Thus, the whole question of Christian civil government is irrelevant. Since the nations of the earth will never be converted to Christ and disciplined by His word, why waste time even discussing godly rule? This option must be rejected as unscriptural because it ignores Christ's great commission (Matt. 28:18ff.), and Christ's kingship over the nations (cf. Ps. 2). Christ commanded His church to disciple all *nations*. Through the preaching of the Gospel and the teaching of God's word, all nations are to be progressively brought under Christ's rule. Theologian A. A. Hodge reminds us of our responsibility as Christians: "It is our duty as far as lies in our power, immediately to organize human society and all its institutions and organs upon a distinctly Christian basis. Indifference or impartiality here between the law of the kingdom and the law of the world, or of its prince, the devil, is utter treason to the King of Righteousness. The Bible, the great statute-book of the kingdom, explicitly lays down principles which, when candidly applied, will regulate the action of every human being in all relations. There can be no compromise. The King said, with regard to all descriptions of moral agents in all spheres of activity, 'He that is not with me is against me.' If the national life in general is organized upon non-Christian principles, the churches which are embraced within the universal assimilating power of that nation will not be able to preserve their integrity."¹

The hyper-Dispensational answer to civil government and social problems is a flight from biblical responsibility and a rejection of the dominion mandate. "It is a modern heresy that holds that the law of God has no meaning nor any binding force for man today. It is an aspect of the influence of humanistic and evolutionary thought on the church, and it posits an evolving, developing god. This 'dispensational' god expressed himself in law in an earlier age, then later expressed himself by grace alone, and is now perhaps to express himself in still another way. But

¹ A. A. Hodge, *Evangelical Theology: Lectures on Doctrine* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1990 [1890]), p. 37.

this is not the God of Scripture, whose grace and law remain the same in every age, because He, as the sovereign and absolute Lord, changes not, nor does He need to change.”²

Christians who reject the Old Testament judicial law (including the moral case laws) and yet believe in the abiding validity of the Ten Commandments could attempt to develop a system of case laws based on the Decalogue. This raises the obvious question: which system of moral case laws is superior, that which is divinely inspired, perfect, just, and infallible, or that which is developed by sinful men and thus contains guesswork, errors, injustices and so on? The answer is obvious. This fact may explain why those who reject the judicial law as binding, yet embrace the Decalogue, have not even attempted to develop a detailed system of Christian civil law. This may also explain why those authors (e.g., Charles Colson) who are hostile to God’s judicial law system keep dipping into it for judicial ideas. There is no other place to go that *clearly* and *infallibly* reveals God’s will in these areas. The problem today is that Christians want to pick and choose from the judicial laws as they see fit. If a person likes a certain law (e.g., restitution), that law is accepted and discussed, but if a law or penalty appears harsh (i.e., death penalty for incorrigible teenagers) that law is rejected as for another time and place. Selective Dispensationalism is arbitrary and sinful. Only God has the authority to repeal His law. Therefore, if any judicial (civil) law is rejected, there must be clear exegetical reasons for its rejection.

The most popular option for those who reject the validity of the Old Testament judicial laws is to fall back on some sort of Christian natural law theory. Christian natural law theory proposes that God created in man and in the universe ethical principles which can be known by man. These principles are universal and binding on all men. Thus, general revelation and God’s common grace are all that nations need to rule justly. The idea that natural revelation *apart* from God’s judicial law is the standard for the civil laws of nations is unbiblical and irrational for several reasons.

First, it implies that God has two ethical systems that are separate and distinct from each other. In reality, the Bible teaches that God has only *one* ethical standard. “The fact is that all of the Mosaic laws (in their moral demands, in distinction from their redemptive provisions) are reflected in general revelation; to put it another way, the moral obligations communicated through both means of divine communication are *identical* (Rom. 1:18-21, 25, 32; 2:14-15; 3:9, 19-20, 23). Scripture never suggests that God has *two sets* of ethical standards or two moral codes, the one (for Gentiles) being an abridgement of the other (for Jews). Rather, He has one set of commandments which are communicated to men in *two ways*: through Scripture and through nature (Ps. 19, cf. vs. 2-3 with 8-9). Accordingly, the Gentile nations (and rulers) are repeatedly condemned in Scripture for transgressing the moral standards which we find revealed in the law of Moses—and not simply the summary commands of the decalogue, but their case-law applications and details as well (e.g., Mk. 6:18).”³ “The first principle of the Shema Israel is thus, one God, one law. It is the declaration of an absolute moral order to which man must conform.... Because God is one, and truth is one, the one law has an inner coherence.... Instead of being strata of diverse origins and utility, the law of God is essentially one word, a unified whole.”⁴ Therefore, the natural revelation of God’s law should never be set in opposition to the special revelation of God’s law. John Calvin, John Knox, the early Presbyterians and the Puritans all

² R. J. Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law*, p. 2.

³ Greg Bahnsen, *Theonomy: An Informed Response*, Gary North, ed. (Tyler, TX: Institute for Christian Economics, 1991), p. 102.

⁴ R. J. Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law*, p. 18.

believed that God's law revealed in nature and in special revelation was one and the same law. But because of the effects of the fall upon both man and creation, these men focused their attention on special revelation as the only infallible way to understand the natural creation.

Second, it presupposes that general revelation was intended by God to function separately from special revelation. Even before the fall (before sin affected his consciousness and the natural revelation that appeared around him), Adam was still dependent upon God's special revelation. Adam was a covenant being who communicated with God on a daily basis before the fall. Van Til writes,

The revelation of the covenant to man in paradise was supernaturally mediated. This was naturally the case inasmuch as it pertained to man's historical task. Thus, the sense of obedience or disobedience involved in Adam's consciousness of himself, covenant-consciousness, envelopes creature-consciousness. In paradise Adam knew that as a creature of God it was natural and proper that he should keep the covenant that God had made with him. In this way it appears that man's proper self-consciousness depended even in paradise, upon his being in contact with both supernatural and natural revelation. God's natural revelation was within man as well as about him. Man's very constitution as a rational and moral being is itself revelational to man as the ethically responsible reactor to revelation. And natural revelation is itself incomplete. It needed from the outset to be supplemented with supernatural revelation about man's future. Thus the very idea of supernatural revelation is correlatively embodied in the idea of man's proper self-consciousness.⁵

Third, it ignores the effect of the fall upon the creation and man's nature. Man is even more dependent upon supernatural revelation after the fall than he was before. Jones writes,

Biblically, man's reason cannot autonomously discover law because man's reason has been damaged by the Fall, in that man's heart, the control center of his being which guides his reason, is in rebellion against his Creator (Rom. 1). Man since the Fall, is radically affected by Original Sin, which is nothing less than the desire to be his own god, determining good and evil for himself (Gen. 3); this, in the absence of regeneration (and even after regeneration not fully healed in this life), is the ruling motivation of his life. Moreover, nature itself is fallen and imperfect (Rom. 8:22); hence, even if man's reason were autonomous he could not hope to derive perfect laws from a fallen nature. But the problem in the real world is compounded by the fact that both man's reason and nature itself are fallen, realities which destroy his pretensions to know and proclaim naturally available principles of law.⁶

How is mankind supposed to develop a unified, coherent, just system of law from a fallen world? Without the word of God as a guide to define sin, crime, justice, evil and so on, how is man to decide what in nature is normative and what in nature is a perversion as a result of the fall? "The difficulty concerns how we are to select those aspects of natural behavior or those laws of nature (in the descriptive sense) which can legitimately serve as guides to moral behavior. For it is idle to pretend that we can extract a uniform message from nature. Are we, for instance, to model ourselves upon the peaceful habits of sheep or upon the internecine conflicts of ants? Is the egalitarianism of the beaver or the hierarchical life of the bee the proper exemplar

⁵ Cornelius Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1980 [1955]), pp. 90-91.

⁶ Archie P. Jones, "Natural Law and Christian Resistance to Tyranny" in Gary North, ed., *Christianity and Civilization 2: The Theology of Christian Resistance* (Tyler, TX: Geneva Divinity School, 1983), p. 114.

for human society? Should we imitate the widespread polygamy of the animal kingdom, or is there some higher regularity of which this is no more than a misleading instance? In the light of these and similar questions, it becomes impossible to regard the maxim ‘follow nature’ as a substantive guide to conduct. Moreover, although these discrepancies in nature considerably reduce the value of natural-law doctrine from an epistemological point of view, the damage they do to it as a logical theory would seem fatal, for the nature in terms of which the norms of justice are defined turns out to be internally inconsistent.”⁷ The “natural” order after the fall says one thing to St. Thomas Aquinas and quite another thing to the Marquis de Sade. Apart from divine revelation and an understanding of the fall’s effect upon the created order, “nature” can be used to justify murder, fornication, theft, rape, aggressive warfare, homosexuality, anarchy, totalitarianism and so on.

Since man is both a covenant creature and a fallen creature, there can be in principle no ethical neutrality between regenerate and unregenerate man. While it is true that unregenerate men have a true knowledge of God (Rom. 1:18), it is a *suppressed* knowledge. It is also true that unsaved men have the *work* of the law written on their hearts (Rom. 2:15), but this does not mean that unbelievers *love* God’s law as a whole. Jones writes,

The Bible is clear that men have two basic religious philosophies: one, anti-Christian and worldly, and the other Christian and anti-worldly. These two religious philosophies take diametrically opposite views of God and His word. The worldly tradition of unbelievers makes them enemies of God, who see God’s word as utter foolishness and will not be subject to it. The Christian view fears God, sees Christ as the source of all wisdom and knowledge, and seeks to make every thought captive to Him.... The Bible condemns the ideas of autonomous reason, neutral or impartial thinking, and intellectual-moral common ground between Christians and pagans, and the acquisition and advocacy of Truth by pagans. This is not to say that pagans can learn nothing, or that Christians can learn nothing from pagans. The mind that seeks to replace God’s law with man’s law may admit the truth of *some* of God’s laws, but its enmity against the Lord, and its desire to be its own lord, will never let it admit the goodness and justice either of God’s law as a whole or of God’s law in its details.⁸

Thus the call by Christian scholars to reject God’s judicial Old Testament laws in favor of natural law is an implicit surrender to a pagan law order. There is no neutrality. Man cannot serve two diametrically opposed law systems at the same time. If Christians, in the name of neutrality, adopt natural law instead of biblical law, they will end up with pagan law. “Christian scholars have endlessly asserted the existence of neutral, ‘natural’ laws that can serve as the Church’s earthly hope of the ages, an agreeable middle way that will mitigate the conflict in history between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of man. The winner of such a naive quest will always be the kingdom of man. *Theoretical neutrality means man’s operational autonomy*: men do not have to consider what God requires or threatens in history.”⁹

Fourth, those who advocate independent natural law are giving it a role in society that Scripture does not sanction. When the apostle Paul discusses what unbelievers do by “nature,” he does not set forth some sort of natural law theory by which to formulate civil laws for society. He simply sets out to *condemn*, to render guilty before God, Gentiles who do not have special

⁷ Paul Edwards, ed., *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (New York, NY: MacMillan and the Free Press, 1967), 5:451.

⁸ Archie P. Jones, “Natural Law and Christian Resistance to Tyranny,” p. 115.

⁹ Gary North, *Political Polytheism: The Myth of Pluralism* (Tyler, TX: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989), p. 640.

revelation. Paul says, “For there is no partiality with God. For as many as have sinned without law will also perish without law, and as many as have sinned in the law will be judged by the law” (Rom. 2:11-12). Paul answers the question: How are Gentiles, who do not have the *written* law, guilty? Paul argues that Gentiles, who though fallen, are created in the image of God and still have enough of the works of the law upon their heart and conscience to render them guilty before God. Paul does *not* argue that every detail of the law is discernible through natural revelation. Paul is not setting forth a method of social ethics apart from special revelation. In fact, Paul is careful to qualify his statement regarding the law that unbelievers do have. Note, that Paul says the “*work* of the law is written in their hearts” (Rom. 2:15). Murray writes, “Paul does not say that the law is written upon their hearts. He refrains from this form of a statement apparently for the same reason as in verse 14 he had said that the Gentiles ‘do the things of the law’ and not that they did or fulfilled the law. Such expressions as ‘fulfilling the law’ and ‘the law written upon the heart’ are reserved for a state of heart and mind far beyond that predicated of unbelieving Gentiles.”¹⁰

To argue that this passage teaches that unbelievers can develop a detailed, just, comprehensive judicial law system by simply following their conscience is not warranted. The Jews are guilty because they have broken God’s detailed written law, and the Gentiles are guilty for breaking the broad unwritten law that remains within. Paul goes on to say that Jews have a great advantage over Gentiles because “to them were committed the oracles of God” (Rom. 3:2). Why do Christian scholars argue that the detailed, perspicuous written law must be ignored in order that nations can develop a system of judicial law from a sin-fogged, piecemeal version of the same law? Could it be that Christians are embarrassed by God’s law? Many scholars are simply using natural law theory as an excuse to preserve human autonomy. Many Christians have been so influenced by Dispensational thinking and the myth of religious pluralism that given the choice between God’s law and man’s law, they choose the latter. Gary North concurs: “What Paul taught was this: all men have been given sufficient internal revelation of God—the image of God in man—to *condemn* them eternally. ‘Know thyself’ gets you into hell, not heaven. This light of internal revelation, through God’s restraining grace (‘common grace’), enables human society to function in history. God does not allow men to become totally consistent with their own covenant-breaking presuppositions. But to the extent that men become consistent with their covenant-breaking religions, they depart from this testimony of God’s ethical standards. Thus, natural law theory as a concept separated from the biblical revelation is like every other doctrine separated from revelation: wrong. The outline of autonomous law is wrong; the judicial content is also wrong.”¹¹

¹⁰ John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, pp. 74-75. Christian scholar John W. Robbins concurs: “Paul also says that men suppress the truth in unrighteousness; they refuse to glorify God; they are ingrates, fools, and do not like to retain God in their knowledge. He is describing the Gentiles, i.e., the natural law theorists among others. Now of course men do know some rudimentary principles of the law of God—the ‘work of the law;’ Paul teaches this in the second chapter of Romans. In fact, we may say on the basis of 1 Corinthians 11:7 that men can only lose the *imago dei* by ceasing to be men. As long as they are men and are the *imago dei*, they are responsible for their actions. Men cannot, however, construct [biblical] theories upon this rudimentary knowledge, for their intellects are depraved. The carnal mind is enmity against God, for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be (Romans 8:7). Could there be a better refutation of natural law theory than that? The Gentiles, Paul says, *performed* some of the deeds of the law, almost, as it were, by accident... While the Gentiles may perform the law, rather, some of the things commanded by the law, Paul does not say—he says the opposite—that they can expound the law.” (“Some Problems with Natural Law,” in Gary North, ed., *The Journal of Christian Reconstruction Symposium on Biblical Law*, [Vallecito, CA: Chalcedon, winter, 1975], 2:20).

¹¹ Gary North, *Political Polytheism: The Myth of Pluralism*, pp. 301-302.

Fifth, the death blow to natural law theory as an independent system of judicial law for nations comes from the clear teaching of the Bible: that all nations are obligated to obey God's written law. Although the written law was primarily addressed to God's covenant people, all nations are obligated to obey God's moral law and the moral case laws. "You shall have the *same* law for the stranger and for one from your own country; for I am the LORD your God" (Lev. 24:22). The command to have the same law is given in the midst of judicial laws (in the very next verse a man is executed for blasphemy). "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man" (Ecc. 12:13).

Moses, in his sermon to the people before they entered the promised land, tells the people to carefully observe all of God's law. Why? Because Israel was to be an example to the surrounding pagan nations. "Therefore be careful to observe them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes, and say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.' For what great nation is there that has God so near to it, as the LORD our God is to us, for whatever reason we may call upon Him? And what great nation is there that has such statutes and righteous judgments as are in all this law which I set before you this day?" (Deut. 4:6-8). Calvin says regarding verse 8,

And for proof thereof, what is the cause that the heathen are so hardened in their own dotages [feebleness]? It is for that [because] they never knew God's law, and therefore they never compared the truth with the untruth. But when God's law cometh in place, then doth it appear that all the rest is but smoke: in so much that they which took themselves to be marvelous[ly] witty, are found to have been no better than besotted in their own beastliness. This is apparent. Wherefore let us mark well, that to discern that there is nothing but vanity in all worldly devises, we must know the Laws and ordinances of God. But if we rest upon men's laws, surely it is not possible for us to judge rightly. Then must we needs go first [need to go first] to God's school, and that will show us that when we have once profited under him, it will be enough. This is all our perfection. And on the other side we may despise all that is ever invented by man, seeing there is nothing but fondness and uncertainty in them. And that is the cause why Moses termeth them *rightful ordinances*. As if he should say, it is true indeed that other people have store[s] of ceremonies, store[s] of rules, and store[s] of Laws: but there is no right at all in them, all is awry, all is crooked. True it is that they perceive it not: and what is the cause thereof, but for that it is not possible for them to discern good from evil, without God's word which is the truth? Howsoever we fare, we cannot do the thing that is just or right, except we have first learned it at God's hand. And if we have been so far overseen as to allow our own doings, let us not go on still, for God will disallow every whit of it, because we must take all our rightness at his truth. In this case it is not for every man to bring his own weights and his own balance [Calvin here is referring to justice]: but we must hold ourselves to that which God hath uttered and doth utter.¹²

¹² John Calvin, *Sermons on Deuteronomy: Facsimile of 1583 Edition* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1987), p. 123. It should be noted that Calvin has made a number of statements that appear to contradict what he says regarding Israel's law in Deuteronomy. In his *Institutes* he writes, "I would have preferred to pass over this matter in utter silence if I were not aware that here many dangerously go astray. For there are some who deny that a commonwealth is duly framed which neglects the political system of Moses, and is ruled by the common law of nations. Let other men consider how perilous and seditious this notion is; it will be enough for me to have proved it false and foolish" (IV, XX, 14). Calvin says that the moral law is nothing else than a testimony of natural law and that various civil laws may be in accord with natural law yet contradict the Jewish law and each other (cf. IV, XX, 16). François Wendel writes, "One could cite numerous instances of this persistence of humanist tendencies. Whatever has since been said of it, Calvin retained the notion of natural law that he had acquired from the Stoics,

This statement is an unequivocal rejection of the medieval doctrine of natural law. Calvin says that if the heathen are to have right laws they must *first* go to God's word and think His thoughts after Him.

The fact that Israel received special revelation (i.e., the written law) from God proves the vast superiority of their law and justice system to those of the surrounding pagan nations. Because Israel received an infallible, precious, written revelation of God's law, they would be considered (if obedient) "a wise and understanding people" (Deut. 4:6) by the Gentiles. Why? Because the best that the Gentiles could hope to achieve through natural revelation would be a hit-or-miss, sin-obscured edition of the law revealed in Scripture. Thus, the whole idea of the written law being *only* for Israel, while the Gentile nations must look to natural law is unbiblical. As Isaiah the prophet says, "Listen to Me, My people; and give ear to Me, O My nation: for law will proceed from Me, and I will make My justice rest as a light of the peoples" (Isa. 51:4). If God had intended that the Gentile nations should receive their laws from nature after the coming of Christ (instead of from the written law), then surely God would have required the Gentile nations to do the same under the Old covenant. Yet the exact opposite is the case. God's law, including the judicial law, is repeatedly set forth as a light to the Gentile nations. Furthermore, as noted above, the attempt to place the law revealed in Scripture and the law revealed in nature in separate categories (one for Israel and one for Gentiles) assumes that God has two separate laws, when, in fact, there is only one law. "Such a blessed lamp as God's law (cf. Prov. 6:23) should not be put under a bushel but allowed to shine into the world so that other men would come to glorify God and serve Him. Consequently, the norm of the law should be seen as applying to those living outside the borders of Israel; otherwise God would be represented as having a double standard of judgment—something which He clearly forbids in His people and their judges (Deut. 25:13-16; Lev. 19:35-37)."¹³

Sixth, the moral case laws that are a part of Israel's judicial law are used by God as a guide to judge the heathen nations. If these laws applied *only* to Israel and not to the surrounding nations, why are whole nations destroyed by God for the violation of these laws? In Leviticus chapter 18, after a whole series of moral case laws dealing with sexual immorality, God declares: "Do not defile yourselves with any of these things; for by all these the nations are defiled, which I am casting out before you. For the land is defiled; therefore I visit the punishment of its iniquity upon it, and the land vomits out its inhabitants. You shall therefore keep My statutes and My judgments, and shall not commit any of these abominations, either any of your own nation or any stranger who sojourns among you, for all these abominations the men of the land have done, who were before you, and thus the land is defiled" (Lev. 18:24-27). If the pagan nations were judged by the moral case laws found in the judicial law, then those nations were subject to that law, for God obviously cannot judge a people for violating laws that do not apply to them.

The judgment of Sodom by God is further evidence that the moral case laws are universally binding on all nations at all times. Hundreds of years before the written law of God was given to Israel, Sodom was completely destroyed for violating God's law. Which law? Sodom was destroyed for violating what eventually would be classified as a moral case law: the prohibition against homosexuality (Lev. 18:22; 20:13). Thus, the heathen nations are just as obligated to keep the moral laws as they are the Ten Commandments, for "if there had been no

and did no more than accommodate it to Christian principles" (*Calvin: Origins and Development of His Religious Thought* [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker 1997 (1950)] p. 33).

¹³ Bahnsen, *Theonomy in Christian Ethics*, p. 342.

binding laws, there could have been no sin and hence no justified vengeance of God against the Sodomites.”¹⁴

Although it is true that the prohibition against homosexuality is repeated in the New Testament (as are a number of other case laws), that does not mean such cases are binding *only* because they are repeated. The apostles used the moral case laws to illustrate and prove various ethical points that needed to be made. That they freely used the moral case laws proves their abiding validity. Bahnsen writes,

In endorsing the Old Testament law, the New Testament never stops to make a special exception for the judicial laws. Indeed, when Jesus summarized the entire law, He quoted not from the ten commandments, but from two laws about love outside the decalogue (Matt. 22:37-39; cf. Deut. 6:5; Lev. 19:18), *Laws outside the decalogue were quoted as on a par with the ten commandments* (Mark 10:19). Even the lighter demands of the law were not to be left undone, said Jesus (Luke 11:42). Consequently, Jesus condemned the setting aside of the death penalty for incorrigible children (Matt. 15:4-5). Paul appealed to the extra-decalogical prohibition against incest (1 Cor. 5:1). The case law against homosexuality was upheld in the New Testament (1 Cor. 9:9; 1 Tim. 5:18). James applied the judicial law about prompt payment of one’s employees (5:4). The important New Testament injunctions about not avenging oneself, about going to an offending brother, and about caring for one’s enemies are all taken from the judicial laws of the Old Testament (Rom. 12:19; Matt. 18:15; Rom. 12:20; Matt. 5:44). You see, the New Testament cites the judicial laws of the Old Testament too often, and without apology or disclaimer, to accept at face value the bald claim of theonomic critics that these laws have been abolished by the work of Christ or the coming of the Holy Spirit. “Not one jot or tittle will pass away from the law until heaven and earth pass away” (Matt. 5:18).¹⁵

The common idea among Evangelicals that only those laws that are repeated in the New Testament are binding is arbitrary, for nowhere in the Bible are we told to *only* obey laws that are repeated in the New Testament. It is also absurd, for a number of important moral case laws are not repeated. Is bestiality permissible in the New covenant era? Of course not! “Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people” (Prov. 14:34).

Seventh, natural revelation is clearly inadequate for a detailed system of judicial law because there are further categories and distinctions that cannot be derived from nature. The Bible makes a distinction between sins that are not crimes (e.g., lust, not caring for the poor, getting drunk, lying that does not involve fraud, coveting, etc.) and sins that are crimes (e.g., homosexual behavior, adultery, bestiality, theft, rape, murder, manslaughter, fraud, etc.). Although nature is adequate to render people guilty before God, it cannot tell us what sins the state should punish with penal sanctions and what sins the state should ignore. One of the main reasons the rejection of biblical law and the embracing of secular humanism has resulted in statism is the simple fact that the state seeks to punish many activities (e.g., smoking, accidentally hurting kangaroo rats, etc.) that are, according to the Bible, outside the parameter of criminal law.

Another aspect of judicial law that cannot be derived from nature is penology. Although it is fairly obvious that certain crimes are more heinous than others (e.g., murder is worse than theft), how are civil authorities to determine equitable punishments for all the various crimes, apart from the details of the Bible’s civil law-code? Does nature teach restitution, a prison

¹⁴ Ibid, p. 354.

¹⁵ Bahnsen, *No Other Standard*, p. 99.

system or a system of physical torture? Can the conscience discern the penalty for manslaughter or fraud, or the seduction of an unmarried virgin? The result of rejecting the moral case laws and the specific penalties found in the civil law has been judicial chaos. History has proven that without the specific judicial guidelines for punishment found in the Old Testament law, civil magistrates have been arbitrary in both defining what constitutes a crime and meting out the punishment for various offenses. During the Middle Ages, punishment was often unduly harsh. Torturing and disemboweling a peasant for hunting in the king's forest is sadistic and not befitting the crime. In our day, many murderers are paroled after five years in prison. The idea that sinful men can decide for themselves what is a crime and what is a proper punishment for that crime is a recipe for societal disaster and statist tyranny. Gary North concurs:

In the modern world, we have experienced a huge increase in criminal activity. This has been the inevitable result of the West's steady abandonment of biblical penal sanctions. Western society has been in revolt against God's penal sanctions for many centuries. From the beginning, the West substituted public torture followed by capital punishment by an executioner in place of the Old Testament's requirement of execution by public stoning. Second, it substituted imprisonment for restitution to victims. Third, in the 1820's, the United States began to substitute the centralized state prison systems for local jails and public flogging, and these new institutions became the penal models for the whole Western world. Fourth, civil courts substituted life imprisonment for capital punishment. Fifth, judges substituted parole for the life imprisonment. By the early 1970's, for example, the median time served in prison for homicide in the State of Massachusetts was under three years. Step by step, the West began to subsidize the criminals at the expense of the victims, and all in the name of compassion.¹⁶

If Christians are going to be serious about discipling the nations, they must reject unscriptural natural law theories and learn to apply the Old Testament moral case laws to modern society. The current hostility of many within Reformed churches toward adopting the moral case laws for the nations¹⁷ is not based on sound exegesis, but rather on an acceptance of political polytheism. Natural law theory has been used as an *excuse* to avoid God's judicial law. By default most professing Christians have turned the making of civil law over to the humanists. "You would be surprised how many Christians still believe something dangerously close to Marcionism: not a two-god view, exactly, but a 'God-who-changed-all-His-rules' sort of view. They begin with accurate teaching that the ceremonial laws of the Old Testament were fulfilled by Christ, and therefore that the *unchanging principles* of worship are *applied differently* in the New Testament, but then they erroneously conclude that the whole Old Testament system of civil law was dropped by God, and *nothing biblical was put in its place*. In other words, God

¹⁶ Gary North, *Victims' Rights: The Biblical View of Civil Justice* (Tyler, TX: Institute for Christian Economics, 1970), p. 7.

¹⁷ "First comes personal faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior (not just Savior). Second comes Church renewal. There can be no successful reformation of society without first beginning a reformation of the Church. Third comes family renewal. This involves pulling your children out of public schools. Fourth comes local politics.... From there we go to state and national politics." (Gary North, *Political Polytheism*, p. 559). "Furthermore, it should be observed that these studies do not advocate the imposition of God's law *by force* upon a society, as though that would be a way to 'bring in the kingdom'. God's kingdom advances by means of the Great Commission—evangelism, preaching, and nurture in the word of God—and in the power of God's regenerating and sanctifying Spirit" (Bahnsen, *By This Standard*, p. 9).

created a sort of vacuum for State law.”¹⁸ In the current debate regarding God’s law, natural law is simply a smokescreen for autonomous law.

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¹⁸ Gary North, *Political Polytheism: The Myth of Pluralism*, p. 591.