

## Paul and Natural Law

1 Timothy chapter 5. We are still there in the chapter. Verse 23, and then I will read 2.13.14. Oops, I gotta find the second next page. There we go.

Let us listen attentively to the word of God. 1 Timothy 5.23. No longer drink any water, but use a little wine for your stomach's sake and your frequent infirmities. Chapter 2.13.14. For Adam was first formed, then Eve.

And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived fell into transgression. Let us pray. Glorious Creator God above, you have made all things that we see and all the things that we don't see, both the visible and the invisible.

All things that are created are created by your hand, God Almighty, which is everything outside of you, for you are the only uncreated being in the universe. And as such, God, you have so designed these things that we call nature, the light of nature, natural revelation, general revelation. They are under your control and guided and so formed that men and women can know right from wrong and feel the guilt and yet flee from that knowledge.

It reminds us, Lord, that you are maker of all things and that everything has been stamped with your name on it such that all men are without excuse. Our Lord and Savior, may we learn this truth anew, perhaps in some details we've not thought about, to strengthen us in this time and day and age in which there's confusion, Lord, in the church, in which natural laws sometimes downplayed or even ignored. And we see, unfortunately, the consequences of that with the sexual revolution of the 60s onward.

Our Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, help us to this end to be encouraged and strengthened to know that, yes, the Bible is indeed important and sufficient for our faith, but it assumes and is built upon the natural truth, the natural revelation, and may we, Lord, stand firm upon that because it is from you as well. It is your truth, our Lord, and may we stand forever upon your truth in both books of yours. We pray these things by the blood of our Lord and Savior.

Amen. So, here in the midst of a letter about church officers, church functions like presbyteries, and family matters related to the church, right, widows, he's telling you what the church should and should not do with respect to widows, Paul writes about health concerns. This little verse here, I'm concerned about your body, your bodily health, Timothy.

How can that be? Is not the Bible a collection of special revelation about things not discoverable in everyday life, like salvation and Jesus? You're not going to see that outside the Word of God. What are the implications of Paul writing about everyday topics of health, like this and elsewhere? When I became Reformed in the 90s, I was attracted to their view of the Bible, of course, God's will, and the law that tended to turn the law, that is the Word of God, unfortunately into an instruction manual, it turned out. Some do turn the Bible into a medical manual, for example, even selling bread based upon the supposed ingredients found in the book of Ezekiel.

Ezekiel bread is still sold today. It's not my favorite, but I guess it's still there. And so while coming into the Reformed world, I ran across early on this confusion, turning the Bible to something that was not designed to be.

Others even turned God's Word into a mathematics book. I ran across this in the late 90s. I recall vividly reading an essay, which I kept for a long, long time, of course, after a couple of moves, I lost it, can't find it anymore, arguing about the law of identity, mathematical law of identity, from the way the Old Testament describes the erection of the temple, the building of the temple.

I can see in my mind's eye right now the page. If you want to know what that is, ask me after service. Because that way of thinking, unfortunately, is still around, although it's a very small minority.

Yet there are many instructions, of course, it's true, in details of our lives found in the Word of God. But there are also many other details missing in the Word of God and filled in, as it were, in different ways by different people in different times and circumstances, as we know in our own lives. More than that, there are many texts that explicitly mention revelation of various moral truths outside the Bible.

Jesus and the Apostles assume and argue from various things out in nature, in everyday life. This is known as the light of nature, as our confession describes it. So let's look at Paul's usage as a reminder that we can learn more and many important things and helpful things, even from unbelievers.

Like math, don't go to the Bible to learn your math principles. And medicine, without having to quote a Bible verse. That's the point.

But I want to cover two large themes in this category, the light of nature, what it teaches about God, and what it teaches about man. Nature teaches about God, that's the first point. Supernatural revelation, of course, the Bible, the Word of God, and our circles, we know the importance of it.

## **Nature Teaches About God**

It's there in our confession. We preach and talk about it, expect it. Our Lord God above, nevertheless, gave us another book that's sometimes ignored or forgotten or even undermined, but sometimes called the book of creation, the light of nature, natural revelation, or general revelation, as over and against special revelation or particular or unique revelation, the Bible.

Because general means it's everywhere. Particular means it's there, contained in the Word of God. If you don't have the Word of God, you don't have that truth.

You don't have the gospel. You don't know about Jesus, for example. But we all have this general revelation, that's why it's called general, or natural, that's over and against the supernatural origins of the Word of God, the miracles, the Holy Spirit, and everything else.

That's the point of the adjectives there, describing revelation. And so this thing called natural revelation, assumed by the Word of God, even expressed at times in languages used called nature or natural, that is not against the Word of God. You may have been taught that, you may run across that, because you run across unbelievers, we live in such a paganized society compared to our grandparents, that many people simply say, oh I believe this by the light of nature, I believe this outside the Word of God, I believe this for this reason, that reason, and we take them at their word.

When a number of times we shouldn't. For example, they'll say, well I look at nature and I don't see God. So you can believe them, or you can believe the Word of God, which says, no, they look at creation and they see God, but they suppress the truth in unrighteousness.

And unfortunately we took their word for it, and at times you run around saying, well they really don't see it, so we try to work our way and try to convince them or change our way of ethics and thinking, and no, we shouldn't have changed anything. They're wrong. They're outright lying to you.

So natural revelation is not against supernatural revelation. The general revelation is not against the special revelation. They are both God's books, created and formed and fashioned by Him.

The text here, of course, assumes natural revelation by offering common medical advice, not exclusive in the Bible. Paul does not quote the Old Testament, in other words, saying, well here's the Word of Jesus, here's the Word of the Old Testament, this is why you should take a little wine to help your troubled stomach, but assumes and often does, as many of the texts do, approach to medicine that they had back then. It seemed to work, it works, use it.

Natural revelation, in other words, is God's truth found outside the Bible. It is necessary for daily living. You've got to know some kind of math to count your fingers if you're going to do any kind of work around the house when it comes to measuring or weighing things or pacing things off with your feet.

You don't need a Bible verse for that. You've got to be able to read. Nothing in the Bible is there designed to teach you to read or the principles of English and the like.

These are everyday things. That's what I mean by nature, not in the sense of I have to go look for a monkey, he doesn't teach me how to read, but that which is outside the Word of God, that which is also in our hearts, the law of God as we'll see in the text I read, is in our hearts, although defaced by sin, it's still there enough that they feel the guilt, and also externally by the way they act and the logic of the situation of what it means to be a man. So natural revelation is necessary, but not sufficient in the way the Bible is, because you cannot learn about redemption without the Bible.

That's the sufficiency of the Bible especially. So from this general or natural revelation, we find within it the law of God, written on the hearts, young and old. Non-Christians practice it to one degree or another, of course, more or less, making exceptions here, exceptions

there, but you can see the general pattern, and that's why over and over again, historically, you find out in the nations that they have a lot of similar laws.

And of course, many of these things are found in the Bible. The Bible makes them clearer, which is a good thing. So two important matters about general revelation, God and man, of God's existence, His law, and His judgments.

Of God's existence, of God's law, and of God's judgments. His existence, Romans 118, for the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who hold the truth in unrighteousness. Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has showed it unto them.

He's using emphatic words. He's repeating himself with some of the words. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even as eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse.

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. That's a mouthful, and if you go through that very carefully, we're gonna go through it somewhat carefully. That is, I can spend a lot more time in here.

We need to go to the other text. Paul starts with the Lord's wrath as what? Well, the wrath of God is revealed. It is known by all.

How or why? Because that which may be known of God is what? Manifest in them. Again, he's saying it again. It's clear revelation and truth outside the Bible.

That is, it's clear enough to bring culpable guilt. How or why? Because in verse 20 we read, the invisible things of God are what? Clearly seen. So it's revealed, it's manifested, it's clearly seen.

How many more ways does he need to say it? And lastly, verse 21, the revelation of God, His power, and His Godhead are also seen, but it's not enough that they knew God, because that when they knew God, verse 21, how can they know Him unless they have that actual revelation? He's not just making things up. They know God. Yet they did not glorify Him as God.

In fact, they fled from Him and made up things in their own imagination and in a foolish heart ended up making and turning the things of creation into idols, right? The rest of the text describes them making creeping things and animals and the things of the earth and rocks, even dung beetles in Egypt, into gods. Which is another reminder, again, there are no atheists, just people who are vain in their imagination. Next we have Acts 17:20.

So that's the existence, there is a God. Acts 17:23, for as I pass by, this is Paul at Mars Hill, as I pass by and beheld your devotions, oh great thinking Greeks and philosophers of this day and age. This is where they like to have their social interactions and their social media, as it were, and talking back and forth about these things.

I found an altar, Paul says, an altar with this inscription, to the unknown God. They're covering all their bases. Whom therefore you ignorantly worship, Him declare I unto you.

God made the world and all the things therein, seeing that He is Lord of heaven and earth, dwells not in temple made with hands. Verse 28, he continues, and this is a quote. It's not clear sometimes, depending on how they use the punctuation in your translation, because the Greek doesn't have this kind of punctuation.

For in Him we live and move and have our being, as certain also of your own poets have said. For we are also His offspring. He's quoting, they think, three different philosopher poets.

That's what they were, typically. For as much then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that God is like unto gold or silver or stone, graven by art or man's devices. So he's arguing for, from a general revelation, from outside the Word of God, that there is this God, and He's greater than creation.

He has to be, because He made all things, and He's not material and earthly, like He needs a temple, or He needs the sacrifices and altars. You know this, even your own poets, your poet philosophers, say these things, because it's known enough, but they suppress the truth and unrighteousness. So God's existence.

Now of course, intermingled in those texts are multiple themes, like judgment, and we're going to get that in the third part. God's law, Romans 124 or 25, 26 and following, Romans 126 in particular. For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections, for even their women did change their natural use into that which was against, what? The Word of God, the Bible, a proof text? Against nature, against God's creation.

It's irrational to do the things they're doing. Now of course it's in the Bible, you can quote the Bible verse, that makes it all the more culpable for them when they hear it. You come to them and you read this text, they already know they're guilty, and you're going to bring more guilt, because you want to push them over the edge.

I speak as a man. So that they would repent. So this is miserable.

Even this 2,000 year old book tells me I'm wrong, my conscience tells me I'm wrong. I've got two witnesses now. So against nature, which means they know these things, which means there is the law of God, finding them guilty, that this is wrong and this is right, and they know it without the Bible.

And so I know we say the Bible is the source of all morality, and what we mean by that more precisely is the author of the Bible has given us the Word of God, but he also given us general revelation, and that revelation is here in this text, and the other text, the other text before that, saying without the Bible that there is a right and wrong, and you know what it is. That too is from God. He's the source of that knowledge.

They're both from him. Different forms, right? It's not written on the clouds in so many words, but it's on their heart. They know because they don't want it done to them.

It's the same God, the same author, although two sources, again from our perspective of revelation, the Bible and general revelation or natural revelation. Paul is saying they are morally culpable. At the end of the chapter, as you may recall, chapter 1 of Romans, it's a list of sins, of particular sins, not just, well yeah, I know I do bad things.

That's particular sins. Being filled with all unrighteousness. Okay, that's kind of broad.

Broad word, that's true. Fornication, that's specific. Wickedness, that's broad.

Covetousness, that's specific. Maliciousness, that's pretty specific. Full of envy.

Murder, deceit, whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, spiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things. That's specific and very broad. All kinds of things that we've designed today to do wickedness.

Disobedient to parents. And then we read, of course, at the end of that chapter, that they know these things and the judgment of God still do them and make excuses. Chapter 2 of Romans also continues on with this theme, that the whole world is guilty before God.

That's chapters 1, 2, and 3, more or less, of Romans. Who are the Gentiles which have not the law? Well, Paul's contradicting himself, right? Gentiles don't have the law, but he says, do by nature, there's that word again, the things contained in the law. So what he's contrasting is they don't have the written Mosaic law.

That's what he's contrasting. They're not Jews, they're Gentiles. They don't have the special revelation that we have and the special gift that they had, the Jews, I say we, but the church, the Jewish church.

These, that is, what they do by nature that they know is contained in the law, these having not the law, the Gentiles, are a law unto themselves which show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts, the meanwhile, accusing or else excusing one another. That they make excuses tells you they know there's right and wrong and they are guilty even without a Bible verse written or spoken to them. They grew up in this world, even without Christian influence, and know right from wrong.

The Japanese, this culture is a good example. I've used them before because they're like the West, they're very prosperous, they're very advanced, and we kind of like something, we're kind of great to go to Japan, nice things, I can kind of get comfortable, but they're different, they're pagan, they have no Christian background. It's just not there, there's no influence, there's no history of it like ours.

But they can still do what? A lot of things without the Bible, a lot of good things, I speak as a man again, relative to, I'd rather be in a safe culture than a dangerous culture, even if both are pagan, right? Of course. The crime rate, in other words, is very low relative to other places. So, Romans 2.14, again, the point being, by nature, they know right and wrong, they know the law of God, even though they don't have the Mosaic law, they're not Jews, they're Gentiles.

And thirdly, God's judgment, it's a sub-point, right, the third sub-point. Romans 1.32, who knowing, what, the judgment of God, that they which commit such things, that was that long list of sins, verse 29 and 30, and 31, specific sins, are worthy of death. Not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them.

They're going to do it anyways, and they do it, what, collectively, pleasure with one another, it's a group effort, because we know humans are not just individuals, but individuals and community, and unfortunately, it's a wicked community that they are making. So that's what nature teaches, that is what general revelation tells the whole world about God, his existence, the judgments, and his law. Next, nature teaches about man.

Now you already know these go hand in hand, right, there's a God, man obviously exists, he exists as his creation, and therefore he has God's image stamped upon him, the truth therein, upon his heart.

## **Nature Teaches about Men**

Men know duty towards each other, right, nature teaches about man, teaches about man, and therefore as well as God's law, as God, as God's law, and God's law with respect to man, all three go together, and therefore man's duty to each other. And so Romans 30 and 31, there, Romans 30, for example, by negation, a number of sins are explicitly listed there, including sins against each other, they're not just sins of the heart against God, but disobedience to parents, for example, that's a sin against one another, it's a social sin, we would say.

And even without natural affection, we read in verse 31 of Romans, that those who are without natural affection are rebelling against God, so a lot of that's by negation, that they shouldn't be doing this, and by implication on the flip side, they should be having love towards one another, they should be obeying their parents, so they know that as well, not just the negative. Romans 1.5, we read, but if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, right, several verses up here in this chapter, he has denied the faith and is what, worse than an unbeliever. So here, Paul is comparing the Christians with the revelation of the word of God to the pagans, who don't have the revelation of the word of God, and saying, even they know they're supposed to take care of their own.

What kind of a Christian are you? How would they know, what's the implication behind that? There's a natural revelation, there's a natural law, that is God's law written in nature and in the heart of man, is what I mean by natural law. The Ten Commandments. They're not the opposite, they're the same.

So, with that contrast, we see that even the pagans follow nature, although inconsistently, of course, and never with repentant hearts towards Jesus Christ. That's the big difference. As I remind us once in a while, not to beat you over the head, but just to give this contrast, you've met unbelievers who can even act better than a Christian sometimes, in certain contexts.

You're like, they really do a good job taking care of their family. That's literally what Paul's saying here. But they're not doing it for the glory of God.

They're not doing a submission to Jesus Christ. They don't care about him, they probably hate him, and we know he hates them. They hate God, and they probably hate Christians, too.

That's kind of a strange conundrum we find ourselves in, because we're in a fallen world until we get to heaven. Man's duty to himself as well. Not just to one another, your family, your friends, your community, is the implication of those negative sins, right? Those sins listed there in Chapter 1. But with respect to himself.

Ephesians 5, 28. So ought men to love their wives, what? As their own bodies. He that loves his wife loves himself.

For no man ever yet hated his own flesh, but nourishes it and cherishes it, even as the Lord of the church. That's the normal state of affairs. Again, for unbelievers, he says any man out there takes care of his body, makes sure he gets some kind of sleep, he's got to feed that belly, he avoids walking across busy streets because he doesn't want to die.

That's what he's talking about. They know this, again, without the Bible. Because God has written it on their hearts, although they're fallen into sin.

It's still enough there for them. And so that's what I mean by the light of nature. They know their duty with respect to themselves.

## **Nature Teaches the Church**

So this leads us, lastly, to the third point. Nature teaches the church. I had a question about this.

Was that a mistitle? Don't you mean nature teaches about the church? I said, no, think about it. What does nature teach? Natural things. Is the church natural or supernatural in origin? It's supernatural.

You would not know about the church without the Bible. Just like you wouldn't know about Christ, because Christ is the Lord of the church. It's the body of Christ.

And that's only found in the Word of God. So there's a good example of that kind of distinction between the supernatural revelation of the Word of God and the natural revelation that's all around us and in our hearts. That's where we learn about these things.

That's the sufficiency of the Bible, in particular. To live as a Christian in this world. So it's knowledge for the church.

So the nature teaches the church. The existence of the church. The existence of redemption and salvation in Christ Jesus.

That you are born again does not negate and undermine and therefore destroy natural revelation. Oh, we don't need it anymore. We've got the Bible.

We're done. I hope you see by now that's not the case. We must use both books of God's Word and God's works.

Sometimes it's described. God's Word, the Bible, and God's works, creation. The first example.

Women shouldn't rule or teach. There's the public office and this debate here in 1 Timothy. And it's not a supernatural truth.

That's why I used that as another verse here to read with 1 Timothy 5. There in verse 13 and 14. What does Paul do? He says in verse 11, And let a woman learn in silence with all submission. And I do not permit a woman to teach or have authority over a man, but to be in silence.

For Adam was first formed, then Eve. Where is he going? He's going to the beginning of all things, even before the fall, to the natural state of affairs before sin entered in. That's what he's doing.

So you can say, yeah, sure, he's quoting the Bible. You know, Genesis, where you have an actual description of creation and of Adam and Eve and of the fall. But it's in the context, not of, oh, this is a special revelation I got from Jesus Christ or the Holy Spirit or from Moses.

But rather, this is how God had designed things. This is what's built in to how we live. That's his argument.

Or what we'd say in systematic theology, an argument from nature. It's God's nature, of course. Never forget that.

And even in public assemblies, in 1 Corinthians 11, Paul argues from nature. Does not even nature itself teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a shame unto him? This is just Paul. I haven't gone through the rest of the apostles and Jesus and the Old Testament, showing all the different ways in which they appeal to things outside the word of God, but not appealing contrary to God himself, because it's still God's works.

It's still from God, that revelation. So, in other words, they're appealing to God in a different direction, if you want to think of it that way. So, the second example here, of course, is male and female differences.

And that, of course, strikes where the big debates we have right now are. Even in the churches, there's a debate about this, believe it or not. Male and female differences? Nah.

We should smash all stereotypes. I'm literally reading this right now from a denominational report in 2017. They didn't use the word smash, but we should, what was it? Excel or break or go beyond gender stereotypes.

I was just like, what am I reading? What? I don't know what you mean, because there are, of course, bad gender stereotypes, made-up stereotypes, but there are good ones. We know some of those good ones because we laugh at them. We understand there are differences between men and women.

That's why the jokes make sense, and we laugh at it, because we understand I am different and you are different as a woman and as a man, as a husband, as a wife. Not just the plumbing, but how you think. You're like, I don't understand how a woman thinks.

The woman's like, I don't understand how a man thinks. What's going on? Now, often they have a lot of thinking that's the same, but it's the differences that highlight and shows us there is this kind of a difference. Something is going on here.

And, of course, it's assumed all over the Bible, just like what else is assumed in the Bible. The difference between a child and an adult. It's not delineated anywhere in the Bible.

We know there's a difference of mentality, of insights, of wisdom, of bodily strength, of maturity, of emotional control, a lack of self-control in that matter. That's why parents have got to back it up. You don't need a Bible verse for that.

We live in that world. We take care of our kids. We follow the good traditions, of course, and should undermine it, although the Bible can still assist in that department, of course.

And so these practical differences have been manifested in different societies, of course, in different ways, in different degrees, although not infinitely flexible so that the woman is now a man and the man is now a woman. That's where we are today. Just like there are curse words, and they're different in every society, but there's still a category of curse word.

And so there are men and women who, although express these things somewhat differently, express it enough that we can recognize, even in a different foreign culture, that's how a woman would typically act in that particular circumstance, and that's how a man should act. Or shouldn't act. Or even to the point of different jobs fit different male and females differently, of course.

Muscle jobs, that makes sense, and therefore predispositions that fit that muscular job. The aggression, for example, that's one of the more well-known ones. And we adjust accordingly for that.

Why is it? Ask yourself. We heard about this at Sunday prayer time. Why is it those poor young boys, age 18 or 16 to 28, pay so much for insurance compared to women? Because they're a bunch of bigots, and they don't want to break stereotypes like they should be breaking stereotypes.

Well, isn't that interesting? So are we living in a society that's lying to itself, collectively, to the point of bringing danger and harm upon our kids? Wow, that's really, she's really our boy, he's really a girl. Let's cut him up. And here we have long-standing policy, because it's

based on actuary tables, there's math behind it, because there's a known pattern, that the boy, the young man, will get in more car accidents and danger, etc.

And we all know why. They got that aggression, they got that testosterone that women do not have. That's just all there is to it.

And the church is confused about this. That's just where we are, unfortunately. That's why I'm preaching this sermon, partly.

To protect you from this confusion around us, that you know right from wrong, don't let the world gaslight you. You're the crazy person, you think a man's a man, a woman's a woman, they should act and think differently, in private and in public? You're crazy. No, you are crazy, and you are dangerous, and you're destroying our family, our churches as well.

Well, I should wind this down. Embrace common sense. That's one way to say it.

Or, I think even better, sanctified common sense. We still have the Word of God. It's clearly here, telling us, for example, in chapter 2, that the woman's sin was different than the man's sin.

There are female sins, as it were, and male sins. Although there are also a lot of sins that we have in common. We're not used to thinking that way.

And I think, partly because of how much we've been inundated with this, but the common sense tells us this. It's here in the Word of God. Jesus sits there and says, well, let's talk about the women, let's talk about the men.

Paul, what's wrong with you? That's how the world would look at it. We shouldn't. We should take the Bible and say, yes, I'm not crazy.

I know there's difference. I've seen these patterns. It's usually pattern analysis.

It's a good rule of thumb. Not infallible, but good. It covers a lot, in fact, if you think about it.

So, the Book of Redemption, that is the Bible. And the Book of Creation, that is everything outside it. Are here for our good, brothers and sisters.

And the two should never be pitted against each other this way. Close your ears to the naysayers who would undermine what God has given us in our common sense and what we see with our lives and our eyes around us. Against the truth of nature and all that we know intuitively.

And always turn your eyes upon our Father for more grace and strength. For He is the author of both revelations. To follow His will by Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Let us pray. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, we would not know about you as the Triune God without the supernatural revelation of the Bible. But we did know in our heart of hearts that you were God.

That you were Creator of all things. And that you were displeased with your creation. Hence, destructive floods, hurricanes and the like.

These things, God Almighty, are not natural insofar as they were not designed this way originally. Until sin came along and destroyed this creation. And so, Lord, even so, with the fallenness of this creation, we see Paul appealing to nature over and over again.

Because it's still sufficiently clear, our God. But, of course, it's not sufficiently clear to give us salvation. We pray and ask, God, that your Spirit be upon all of us.

That all of us here would indeed embrace Christ Jesus, our Lord and Savior. And repent and flee, our God. And help us to follow your will as revealed both in the Word of God and in the works of God.

For your name's sake we pray. Amen.