



GENERAL REVELATION

PART 3: THE HUMAN CONSTITUTION

INTRODUCTION

- ▶ General revelation is most notable in the created order
- ▶ It provides a pervasive, continuous, and clear testimony of God's invisible attributes
- ▶ Mankind is rendered without excuse for their failure to pursue and worship God
- ▶ Nature, however, is not the only sphere in which God has left himself a testimony

“That there exists in the human mind and indeed by **natural instinct**, some sense of Deity, we hold to be beyond dispute, since God himself, to prevent any man from pretending ignorance, has endued **all men** with some idea of his Godhead, the memory of which he constantly renews and occasionally enlarges, that all to a man being **aware** that there is a God, and that he is their Maker, may be **condemned** by their own **conscience** when they neither worship him nor consecrate their lives to his service.”

- John Calvin

INTRODUCTION

- ▶ Thus, God has imprinted man with an innate understanding of God in his heart
- ▶ Nature and the human constitution work in complement
- ▶ The external and internal testimonies reveal to mankind a clear knowledge of God
- ▶ This brings them under divine accountability
- ▶ It also drives them to seek special revelation

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THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATION

- ▶ Genesis 1:26-27 lays the foundation for God's revelation of himself in the human constitution
- ▶ It helps us think about man's essential nature and function

“Then God said, ‘Let us make man as our image, according to our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.’ So God created man as his image; as God's image he created him; male and female he created them.”

- Genesis 1:26-27

THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATION

- ▶ The divine deliberation points to special intentionality
- ▶ Mankind is upheld as God's unique creation—his pinnacle creation
- ▶ He is created...
 - ...as **God's image** → Invested with authority to represent God
 - ...according to **God's likeness** → Imbued with divine communicable attributes
- ▶ Man's Fall into sin severely tarnished this divine imprint
- ▶ Nevertheless, the OT asserts that God's image and likeness are still present in fallen man (Gen 5:3; 9:6)

Two areas of human life where we see God's revelation expressed specifically in the human constitution

1. THE RELIGIOSITY OF MAN

- ▶ Man is a religious being
- ▶ He was created to worship God
- ▶ This natural inclination is evident in every society throughout all of human history
- ▶ As God's image, it's expected that man would have an innate awareness of God's existence
- ▶ The created world around him merely provides an external confirmation of the internal testimony present in his heart

“In **all cultures**, at **all times** and **places**, humans have believed in the existence of a **higher reality** than themselves, and even of something **higher** than the human race collectively.”

- Millard Erickson

1. THE RELIGIOSITY OF MAN

- ▶ Of course, man's rebellion against God has corrupted this knowledge
- ▶ Nevertheless, two things are clear:

1. Man maintains an **awareness of eternity**

Eternity is in his heart (Eccl 3:11)

Consciously or unconsciously, he is aware that there is life after death

2. Man **never lost his religiosity** after the Fall

He never **stopped** worshipping

He **redirected** his worship

“They **exchanged** the truth about God for a lie, and **worshipped** and **served** the creature rather than the Creator.”

- Romans 1:25

1. THE RELIGIOSITY OF MAN

“Certainly, if there is any quarter where it may be supposed that God is unknown, the most likely for such an instance to exist is among the dullest tribes farthest removed from civilization. But, as a heathen tells us, there is **no nation** so barbarous, **no race** so brutish, as not to be **imbued** with the conviction that **there is a God**. Even those who, in other respects seem to differ least from the lower animals, constantly retain some sense of **religion**; so thoroughly has this common conviction possessed the mind, so firmly is it stamped on the breasts of all men. Since, then there never has been, from the very first, any quarter of the globe, any city, any household even, without religion, this amounts to a **tacit confession** that a sense of Deity is **inscribed on every heart**. Nay, even **idolatry** is ample evidence of this fact. For we know how reluctant man is to lower himself, in order to set other creatures above him. Therefore, when he chooses to **worship** wood and stone rather than to be thought to have no God, it is evident how very **strong** this **impression of a Deity** must be; since it is more difficult to obliterate it from the mind of man, than to break down the feelings of his nature—these certainly being broken down, when, in opposition to his natural haughtiness, he spontaneously humbles himself before the meanest object as an act of reverence to God.”

- John Calvin

1. THE RELIGIOSITY OF MAN

ACTS 17:ff The Premiere Biblical Illustration

- ▶ Paul noted that the Athenians were “very religious in all respects”
- ▶ They had erected numerous altars to their deities
- ▶ One altar caught Paul’s attention: “To the unknown God”
- ▶ Paul used this as a launching point for exposing the fact that the Athenians, for all their religiosity, had never come to know the true God
- ▶ Though their attempts at worshipping God had never hit the mark, their efforts had uncovered a significant truth about them...

...they were searching for God

- ▶ Despite the myriad of deities they **did** worship, they had a sense that they were missing **something**, so they erected an alter to an “unknown” god

1. THE RELIGIOSITY OF MAN

ACTS 17:ff The Premiere Biblical Illustration

- ▶ Man, like the Athenians, has an awareness of God
- ▶ He does not want to worship the true God
- ▶ But he wants to worship—he **needs** to worship
- ▶ And this provides clear testimony of God's existence

2. THE MORALITY OF MAN

- ▶ Human beings are naturally moral creatures
- ▶ They perceive a sense of right and wrong
- ▶ They tend to judge their actions based on a set of moral principles
- ▶ The universality of human morality has been observed even among secular rationalist philosophers
- ▶ Immanuel Kant noted in his *Critique of Practical Reason* that humanity's moral imperatives seem to require...
 - ...the concept of life after death
 - ...the necessity of a divine lawgiver
- ▶ The classic “moral argument” for God's existence has its limitations as an apologetic tool
- ▶ But it does point to something inherent in man himself—**morality**

2. THE MORALITY OF MAN

- ▶ Of course, there is no “universal morality”
- ▶ Morality plainly looks different from culture to culture and shifts as time progresses
- ▶ Yet man is still **conscious** of right and wrong, however he might determine them
- ▶ The existence of morality **itself**, regardless of its varied expressions, points to something inherent in the constitution of man

2. THE MORALITY OF MAN

ROMANS 2:14-15 PRINCIPLE PASSAGE

- ▶ Paul's overall argument is to demonstrate his first major premise—that all mankind has sinned and fallen short of God's glory (3:23)
- ▶ Chapter 1 concerns man's guilt for rejecting God's clear testimony of himself in creation (1:18-32)
- ▶ His next concern is to demonstrate the failure of humanity to obey God's law
- ▶ The Jews naturally come under intense scrutiny—they were recipients of the Mosaic Law
- ▶ Their failure to keep the law exposed their sinful condition
- ▶ In 2:14-15, Paul means to clarify that Gentiles are in no way exempt from condemnation
- ▶ Though they were never recipients of "the law", they have a "law to themselves"

2. THE MORALITY OF MAN

ROMANS 2:14-15 PRINCIPLE PASSAGE

For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them.

- ▶ Paul is referring to a basic guiding moral principle of every and any culture
- ▶ “Requirements of the law”—love others, obey parents, refrain from robbery, murder, false testimony, etc.
- ▶ These all find expression even in pagan societies
- ▶ In fact, they were codified as far back as the old Babylonian empire
- ▶ Paul keys in on the Greek tradition of “natural law”—an unwritten moral sense of right and wrong
- ▶ The Greeks used this in a positive sense, but Paul uses it in the negative

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- ▶ He uses the “natural law” to demonstrate their guilt
- ▶ Gentiles cannot claim to be lawless and therefore inculpable
- ▶ They have a law to themselves wherein the **requirements** of the law are written on the heart
- ▶ Their conscience testifies against them when they violate this law

“These Gentiles, while not possessing **the** law of Moses, nevertheless have access to knowledge of God’s will for them. By applying to Gentiles a term reserved in this context for Jews (“law”), Paul pursues his policy of putting Jews and Gentiles on the same footing.”

- Douglas Moo