

Why Do Most People Show Signs of Being Religious and Moral?

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[0 : 00] As we've gone through the first chapter of Jonah, as it stood out to you how it seems everyone on the ship but Jonah have shown signs of spiritual interest, even moral goodness, except Jonah, more than Jonah.

For example, when the storm struck, what did everybody on the ship besides Jonah do? They prayed.

Jonah slept. He never prayed. They showed signs of a troubled conscience. Those sailors, pagans, they were worried they might have offended one of their gods and we know they were not real but they thought they were and when that storm struck, they were afraid they might have offended one of their gods and he was going to get them.

That's one of the reasons why they prayed. But that didn't do any good so they cast lots and God worked through that to single Jonah out.

My point here is they showed signs of a troubled conscience but Jonah didn't. Jonah showed signs of having a calloused conscience, a hard heart.

[1 : 34] He showed no interest in the one true God that he did know. He's God's prophet. He showed no interest, at least recorded in chapter one, about his own relationship with God.

The sailors even showed concern for Jonah, a stranger, that the lot revealed he was the cause of the trouble.

But they showed concern for Jonah by trying to save his life even when Jonah told him himself, if you want the storm to stop, throw me overboard.

But Jonah didn't show any concern for anyone on the ship until God revealed that he was the cause of the storm and only then did Jonah tell them they could save their lives by throwing him overboard.

Now, the contrast I'm trying to show is these sailors, if you just read chapter one of Jonah and go by how their conduct, well, there's a whole lot more to admire in these sailors than there is in Jonah.

[2 : 50] Now, I want you to think with me for a minute. What made these sailors show such spiritual interest and even moral goodness?

Well, two things, two things on your outline in Roman numerals, God's natural law and common grace. I want us to think about these two things tonight and I want us to see how they explain why most people in this world are religious.

Most people in this world are religious. And most people in this world have what we'd call an innate sense of right and wrong.

We don't all, no one does everything that we know to be right and avoids, shuns doing everything we know to be wrong, but there is within people this innate understanding of basic right and wrong or even what we might call morality.

Let's pray and let's look at it. Dear God, help us tonight to see your hand everywhere in this world as we look at these concepts of natural law and how they're revealed in Scripture and common grace and how it's seen.

[4 : 22] Help us, Father, to open our eyes to just the way you work in every dimension of our lives.

in the people around us, in the things that are happening. And Lord, help us to learn to recognize the good and be appreciative to praise you and thank you and recognize that a lot of things come to us through your common grace.

And Lord, help us to be thankful for people, even unbelievers, through whom you work to bless our world and bless our individual lives.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. I've been looking forward to doing this at some point as we've been going through Romans or Jonah chapter 1. So tonight's tonight.

Natural law. Most Christian writers who write about ethics point to natural law to explain why most people have a basic understanding of right and wrong.

[5 : 32] The sailors on Jonah's ship probably had never heard of the Ten Commandments. Things like you shall not murder.

Yet they clearly demonstrate a commitment to the sanctity of human life by not throwing Jonah overboard when they were told he's the cause of the storm and he's the solution to the storm, to its ending.

Look at it. From Jonah 1 verses 12 and 13. He said to them, Pick me up and hurl me into the sea then the sea will quiet down for you for I know it's because of me that this great tempest has come upon you.

Nevertheless, the men rode hard to get back to dry land but they could not for the sea grew more and more tempestuous against them.

It was only when they saw we've got no choice. we either throw him overboard or die that they did it but they demonstrate a good understanding of the sacredness of human life.

[6 : 48] Look at it. Even in the prayer even when they know we've got to do this look at it. Therefore they called out to the Lord, O Lord, let us not perish for this man's life lay not on us innocent blood for you, O Lord, have done it as done as it pleased you.

As I said last Sunday, this may indicate that these men were already under conviction by God as he was working to save them as it turns out at the end. But even if that's true, they still show a God-given natural awareness that life is sacred.

The reformer, John Calvin, explains the actions of these sailors as an example of natural law. Look at what he says there. Now I haven't numbered or anything but you can follow along when you're outlined the scriptures and the quotes.

He says, there is by nature implanted in all an abhorrence of cruelty. Though these men had never known the doctrine of the law, they were yet so taught by nature that they knew that the blood of man is dear and precious in the sight of God.

Now I want you to look on this, on your sheet. The Bible clearly teaches this idea of natural law in many places. Some of the clearest statements are in Romans chapter 1 and 2.

[8 : 15] Look at Romans 2 first. God has written his law on people's hearts. Paul is writing, he says, for when the 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.

The point here is God's put his law on people's hearts. They have a basic, innate sense of right and wrong which at the end of all this discussion, Paul is saying, which is another reason why everybody who sins is condemned in their sin and rightly judged by God because we violate our own conscience when we do what we know is wrong or don't do what we know is right.

The next one in Romans 1, 19 and 20, God has given people a natural awareness of himself which is often called natural revelation or general revelation.

He says, for what can be known about God is plain to them because God has shown it to them for his invisible attributes, namely his eternal power and divine nature have been clearly perceived ever since the creation of the world and the things that have been made so that they are without excuse.

[9 : 44] God has made himself known through nature, through his creation. Everybody has this sense there is a creator.

Things just don't happen. There had to be a cause. Wayne Grudem does a good job of explaining the Bible's teaching about natural law.

He says, I must affirm that people can indeed know something of God's moral laws apart from the Bible. Even without the specific moral teachings of the Bible, human beings have consciences that give them an inward sense of right and wrong.

In addition, people are able to observe the way many other people act and the way everything functions in the world and then they can reason about those observations and draw conclusions about human nature and about the right and wrong actions that are appropriate to human nature.

The set of moral conclusions resulting from this type of study is known as natural law. Things we see, things we observe, we can reason.

[10:59] Now, he's not saying and certainly the Bible doesn't talk about our perceptions, our reasonings are infallible. that sometimes lead us to the wrong conclusion.

But nonetheless, there's some things that we just observe, we see how it works, how it doesn't work, we can figure things out. That's a God-given ability.

Now, what these scriptures in Grudem describe about natural law and natural revelation explain why most unbelievers, like the sailors there in Jonah 1, why most people demonstrate some kind of interest in religion, people are religious and an ability to act morally good at times.

When unbelievers act in such good ways, we need to understand and think about it in a positive way, they are following their God-given inclinations.

That's a God-given gift to everyone, including us. What God has done through natural law, through our conscience, through an awareness of His presence through nature, that's what keeps people from being any worse than they are.

[12:25] That gives order to society. Even in prisons. People are not as bad as they could possibly be. You know, what was it, last year, year before last, the riots at Bishopville when about nine or eleven men were killed, they just went wild.

Why doesn't that happen every day? God has put restraints within most people, even in the worst environments.

that is God's working, that is God's grace. And we need to be thankful to God and we need to be thankful for unbelievers who treat us like these sailors treated Jonah.

They're blessings to everyone. But natural law and natural revelation are not sufficient to save anyone. It's as good what God has done in this world, this general revelation.

this doing something within people, putting it on your heart, putting it on your conscience about right and wrong. But it's not what leads people to salvation.

[13:40] God's general revelation of Himself in nature makes people aware that He's real, that He's there, but people don't naturally submit to and worship Him as their creator.

Look at Romans 1, the next verse, 21 through 23. Fallen sinful people naturally choose to worship some aspect of creation rather than the creator.

He says, For although they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks to Him, but became futile in their thinking and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.

And He's just, that's just a representative list. He could talk about and exchange the glory of the immortal God for images resembling technology or whatever else you want to put in there for today. Paul's point in Romans 1 is to show that all people reject the true God. All people live for themselves and all people deserve the harmful effects of sin that result and Paul talks about a lot of that if you read the rest of Romans chapter 1.

[15:07] The sailors on Jonah's ship have many positive qualities, but they're still sinners in need of a Savior. They have rejected the true revelation of God that He gave in nature.

And they're not worshiping the Creator. They're calling on their false gods, the many, everything they've heard of probably. No doubt in that storm they were calling on gods of wind and water and all this kind of stuff.

They, they act, give them their due, they act better than God's man Jonah in chapter 1. But in spite of all these good things I've said, they are still in need of God's salvation because they are spiritually dead in their spiritual, in their sinful condition.

Now here's where I want us to get more personal. That applies to our morally good family members and friends who do not have a relationship with Christ. You may know in your family, in your immediate family, you may have some good friends that are not Christians, but they are good moral people in a general way.

Maybe better than you. I mean, you're honest. They're just better than you. And you think, aren't they good enough?

[16:39] And the Bible is real clear. No, they're not. We're all sinners by nature and by choice. Even the best of people.

We all come into this world. We don't, nothing happens. We come into this world spiritually dead and separated from God. Paul explains the reality of every person born into this world from Romans 1, 18 through chapter 3, verse 20.

I want you to look at the beginning part of Romans 3, verse 9. He says, For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin.

That's what he's been talking about from 1, 18 to that point. As it is written, none is righteous, no, not one. No one understands. No one seeks for God.

All have turned aside. Together they have become worthless. No one does good, not even one. Not your good friend. Not your family member.

[17 : 43] Not you. Not me. In and of ourselves. In terms of fulfilling God's commandments. Then in verse 20, For by works of the law, no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.

There are many benefits of natural law, of what God has done that we've been looking at. But it's not sufficient to save or control human behavior.

Let's look now at this idea of common grace. We can describe the virtue of the sailors on the ship with Jonah as an example of God's common grace.

Look, here's two definitions from Wayne Grudem and Timothy Keller. Common grace is the grace of God by which he gives people innumerable blessings that are not a part of salvation.

Keller says the doctrine of common grace is the teaching that God bestows gifts of wisdom, moral insight, goodness, and beauty across humanity regardless of race or religious belief.

[18 : 58] And this is what, this is found in scripture in just simple ways. Look at what Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount. He said, but I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.

God shows his common grace to all people, the good and the bad and those in between. Paul said something similar in a sermon to Gentiles in Acts 14.

He said, in past generations he allowed all nations to walk in their own ways. Talking about God. Yet he did not leave himself without witness for he did good by giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness.

God's common grace. It's everywhere. Tim Keller uses James 117 to elaborate on this idea. I think he does a great job. James 117 says, for every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights.

He goes on to say, that is, God is ultimately enabling every act, listen to this, every act of goodness, wisdom, justice, and beauty, no matter who does it.

[20 : 30] Isaiah 45.1 speaks of Cyrus, a pagan king whom God anoints and uses for world leadership. Isaiah 28.23-29 tells us that when a farmer is fruitful, it is God who has been teaching him to do so.

That means that all good and great artistic expressions, skillful farming, effective governments, and scientific advances are God's gifts to the human race.

They are undeserved, gifts of God's mercy and grace that are also common. That is, they are distributed to any and all. There is no indication that the monarch or the farmer mentioned in Isaiah embraced God by faith.

Now, I want to emphasize this next sentence. Common grace does not regenerate the heart, save the soul, or create a personal covenant relationship with God.

Understand. Yet, without it, the world would be an intolerable place to live. It is wonderful expression of God's love to all people.

[21 : 36] The eyes of all look to you, this is Psalm 145, and you give them their food in due season. You open your hand, you satisfy the desire of every living thing.

All of our lives, we have seen evidence of God's common grace in big ways, well-known ways, and in more personal ways.

The New York City firefighters and policemen who raced up the stairway of the Twin Towers on September the 11th, 2001, they raced up those stairways to save countless lives, knowing that in all likelihood they would lose their own in the process.

The dedicated men and women in the emergency room, at Cannon, Easley, St. Francis, General, Greenville Memorial, these people in the ER, when we or our family members are rushed there with

serious, life-threatening emergencies, that's God's grace, God's common grace in action. All the people in all these emergency rooms are not Christians. All the people who went up those steps at the World Trade Center were not Christians. Maybe most of them were not, but they did, and they do today, much good that we profit from.

[23 : 15] We all have unbelieving people in our lives that we're thankful for. We all have had unbelieving doctors, teachers, coaches, neighbors, maybe even parents or grandparents, that God used to bless us in countless ways.

That was God's common grace. Whenever we benefit from such virtue, nobility, and unbelievers, we need to thank God because it's coming from Him.

It's a part of His common grace. And we also need to thank those people. We can make it even more personal right now if we think about it. In this room, there's a lot of people on medication, keeping your blood pressure in check, keeping your arteries flowing.

We've got people on medication for all kinds of things. I'm talking about good things right now. Most likely, most of the people involved in the research of those drugs, the development of those drugs, the distribution of those drugs, were not Christians.

But you're reaping the benefits of that stuff right now that flows through your body. That's God's common grace. It's everywhere.

[24 : 54] And we need to acknowledge it. And we need to be thankful. And we as Christians, we need to be challenged to respond to what we have received, God's special saving grace in our own lives.

When we see this in everybody else, we need to look at it as, well, I've received God's special saving grace. So I, of all people, need to be more thankful and cooperate with God as He works in our lives to enable us to be more godly, more Christ-like, more loving, need, meeting of other people.

What do you think? Any thoughts on this stuff? Yeah. Yeah. It's, I mean, it's just amazed me. I've read Jonah. I've heard the story all my life when I was a kid like you did. I've read it a bunch of times. I preached through it one time a long time ago. But I've just read through Jonah 1 and just thought about that.

The good guys in Jonah 1 are the sailors, the pagans. Everything about them shines brighter, than anything about Jonah in chapter 1. And all you can rack that up to, all you can do is ask God's example of God's natural law at work in them.

[26 : 27] God's common grace. God's common grace. But then when you start thinking about it, we benefit from God's common grace every day of our lives.

And I think that's just another thing to thank Him for. And I think it can help us be more appreciative of unbelievers and the things they do for us.

I'll be real honest with you. If I start having chest pains tonight and I go to the emergency room, I'm not going to ask and I'm not going to care if they're Christians. I don't care if they're atheists or Muslims or Hindus or what not, if they can do something to prevent me from having a heart attack, I'm going to thank God and I'm going to thank them.

Aren't you? Everything. Everything. Yeah.

Yeah. Yeah. We don't, we're going to have to have crooked sticks that we hope draw some straight lines, aren't we?

[27 : 43] And that's what common grace is. In fact, I read something somebody said about some of the things in Jonah. That's just a good example of God using crooked sticks to draw straight lines.

And we see it everywhere. And we need to be thankful and we don't need to sit on the sidelines like that. I lost some respect for some Christian leaders who sat on the sideline and said, well, we just weren't going to vote this last time because they didn't like Trump or Hillary.

I didn't like either one of them, but I voted for the, what I thought was the lesser of two evils because one of them is going to be president. So I think we just can't stick your head in the sand. You got to recognize God's in control of it all.

And God works through awful people. Always has, always will. And just be thankful for what he does and look to him and pray that he'll change people.

Pray that he'll work good from bad. Dogsong of faut singe gay Means E weather throughoutrique ■■■■■■ is a more than threeGM