

Review of *A Biblical Case for Natural Law* by David VanDrunen. Grand Rapids, MI: Acton Institute, 2006. 75 pages. \$6.00.

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The civil sphere has become a magnet for uncivil types. Those we invest with authority and send to our capital cities assume an air of elevated status and behave as if moral standards do not ascend to that height. Some take extravagant trips and enjoy luxurious pleasures at taxpayers' expense; of whose money they simultaneously whittle away through oppressive taxation and inflation. They institute welfare programs and offer empty promises—so desirous are they of the reputation, “benefactors” (Luke 22:25)—but in so doing they virtually consign the poor to perpetual poverty. Our civil “servants” create educational institutions having as their most basic presupposition the denial of their Creator. In some, the turpitude exceeds all bounds, engaging in all sorts of illicit sexual escapades (adultery, prostitution, homosexuality). Many times they treat honest citizens who do not jump through all the bureaucratic hoops as hardened criminals, and yet merely slap the wrists of genuine hardened criminals—causing law-abiders to imprison themselves in their own homes as they bar up their doors and windows for protection. They take their constitutional oaths lightly, as legislators exempt themselves from the statutes they enact and judges believe themselves unfettered by constitutional limits. And then they make a big fuss whenever one dare investigate them about these practices!

Fixing our gaze upon that sphere, we are led to ask Philip's pessimistic question, Can anything good come from [enter a capital city here]? Being deprived of Christ and His life-giving Scriptures for so long, politicians have come to merit the label “corruption” as synonymous with their profession. The State, indeed, needs the Savior. Yet not all Christians regard this as self-evident. Though our Lord teaches the rise and fall of the sociopolitical sphere depends on its faithfulness to Christ (Ps. 2:10–12) and His Law (Prov. 29:18), David VanDrunen wants to make a case to the contrary. Let us examine this case.

I. CONCEPTUAL CONFUSION ABOUT NATURAL LAW

A. VanDrunen's Definition of Natural Law

VanDrunen begins his case by defining Natural Law. It is

the moral order inscribed in the world and especially in human nature, an order that is known to all people through their natural faculties (especially reason and/or conscience) even apart from supernatural divine revelation that binds morally the whole of the human race. (1)

Breaking this down into its constituent parts: Natural Law is (a) the moral order inscribed in God's creation (the world and human nature); (b) each person knows this moral order through their faculties (especially reason and/or conscience); (c) each person knows this moral order even if he or she never hears or reads a word from God; (d) this moral order obligates all.

B. Inadequacies of VanDrunen's Definition

1. Indistinguishable from Opponents' View of Nature

Though VanDrunen certainly has a right to define terms as he pleases, the definition he gives does not set his position against the anti-Natural Law (or Theonomic, or Sola Scripturic, or Calvinistic) position. As seen from the following quotations, all four parts of his definition are held by antagonists:

(a) The moral order inscribed in God’s creation (the world and human nature):

The work of the law is written on every man’s heart.¹

Because God created the heavens and the earth and all things therein, His law-order is inherent to all His Being and also to all created being.²

[Man] is God’s creation and creature and that every atom of his being has the law of God written into it.³

God has both manifested His law *in* them, and *to* them. All men everywhere have inherent in their being God’s law (Rom. 2:14–15); all men originally had and in some sense continue to have the witness of God’s law to them.⁴

The fact is that *all* of the Mosaic laws (in their moral demands, in distinction from their redemptive provisions) are reflected in general [i.e., natural] revelation.⁵

(b) Each person knows this moral order through their faculties (especially reason and/or conscience):

Paul teaches elsewhere that all human beings—even pagans who do not love God and do not have the advantage of the written oracles of God (cf. Rom. 3:1–2)—know the just requirements of God’s law. They know what the Creator requires of them. They know it from the created order (1:18–21) and from inward conscience, the “requirements of the law” being written upon their hearts (2:14–15). Paul characterizes them as knowing “God’s righteous decree” (1:32) and therefore being “without excuse” for refusing to live in a God-glorifying fashion (1:20–23).⁶

(c) Each person knows this moral order even if he or she never hears or reads a word from God:

The work of the law is written on every man’s heart. There is no escape. No man can plead ignorance (Rom. 2:11–14).⁷

God has both manifested His law *in* them, and *to* them. All men everywhere have inherent in their being God’s law (Rom. 2:14–15); all men originally had and in some sense continue to have the witness of God’s law to them.⁸

Of course, theonomy has little quarrel with those who maintain that general revelation convicts the unregenerate of sin.⁹

The fact is that *all* of the Mosaic laws (in their moral demands, in distinction from their redemptive provisions) are reflected in general [i.e., natural] revelation.¹⁰

(d) This moral order obligates all:

Paul taught that natural revelation condemned the pagan world for failing to glorify God properly and for idolatrously worshiping and serving the creature instead (Rom. 1:21, 23, 25).¹¹

¹ Gary North, “Common Grace, Eschatology, and Biblical Law,” in *The Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Tyler, TX: Dominion, 1987), 631.

² Rousas John Rushdoony, *Systematic Theology*, 2 vols. (Vallecito, CA: Ross House, 1994), 863.

³ Rushdoony, *Systematic*, 863.

⁴ Rushdoony, *Systematic*, 863.

⁵ Greg L. Bahnsen, “Westminster Seminary on Pluralism,” in *Theonomy: An Informed Response*, ed. Gary North (Tyler, TX: Institute for Christian Economics, 1991), 102.

⁶ Greg L. Bahnsen, “The Theonomic Reformed Approach to Law and Gospel” in *Five Views on Law and Gospel*, Counterpoints, ed. Stanley N. Gundry (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 109–110.

⁷ North, “Common Grace,” 631.

⁸ Rushdoony, *Systematic*, 863.

⁹ Gary DeMar, “Some Wings for Calvinism’s Modern Plane,” in *Informed*, 53.

¹⁰ Bahnsen, *Informed*, 102.

The moral obligations communicated through both means of divine communication [i.e., natural and special revelation] are *identical* (Rom. 1:18–21, 25, 32; 2:14–15; 3:9, 19–20, 23).¹²

God has both manifested His law *in* them, and *to* them. . . . Hence, Paul emphasizes the fact that all men are without excuse. There is total justice to God’s condemnation.¹³

VanDrunen’s theological opposition agrees with him that God does reveal Himself, and therefore His moral will, through nature; and that this revelation is known to, and binding on, everyone. Yet as the opposition clearly dislikes something in his doctrine, perhaps his definition lacks an ingredient of what he actually promotes.

2. *Missing Ingredient: Natural Law Separates Nature from God’s Word*

What Calvinists have required is the union of Scripture and nature.

Sinners must receive the Scriptures as God’s word, correcting their distorted perception of nature and history.¹⁴

It is this *independent* study of what we call “general [i.e., natural] revelation” that leads to anti-Christian conclusions.¹⁵

All the truths taught by the constitution of our nature or by religious experience, are recognized and authenticated in the Scriptures. This is a safeguard and a limit.¹⁶

For, since the human mind because of its feebleness can in no way attain to God unless it be aided and assisted by his Sacred Word, all mortals at that time—except for the Jews—because they were seeking God without the Word, had of necessity to stagger about in vanity and error.¹⁷

There is nothing in this universe on which human beings can have full and true information unless they take the Bible into account. We do not mean, of course, that one must go to the Bible rather than to the laboratory if one wishes to study the anatomy of the snake. But if one goes only to the laboratory and not also to the Bible one will not have a full or even true interpretation of the snake.¹⁸

What we find objectionable about Natural Law is not that man gains true knowledge of morality from nature, but rather the allowance, even advocacy, to follow nature without recourse to God’s Word. This is the missing ingredient in VanDrunen’s definition. This is the concept he often advances:¹⁹

¹¹ Bahnsen, *Informed*, 101.

¹² Bahnsen, *Informed*, 102.

¹³ Rushdoony, *Systematic*, 863.

¹⁴ Greg L. Bahnsen, *Van Til’s Apologetic: Readings and Analysis* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1998), 598.

¹⁵ Gary DeMar, “Fear of Flying: Clipping Theonomy’s Wings,” *Informed*, 72.

¹⁶ Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (repr., Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 1:15.

¹⁷ John Calvin, *Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion*, vols. 20 and 21 of *The Library of Christian Classics*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 1.6.4.

¹⁸ Van Til cited in Bahnsen, *Van Til’s*, 36.

¹⁹ He also uses the term to describe a philosophy advocating self-authoritative moral principles. Though he denies this, saying “natural law is in fact given by God and bears its authority from him” (7), in other publications I do not see him consistently carrying this out. But since he only briefly mentions this error in the book under review, I address it only briefly below. See my book, *The Will of God* (Eugene, OR: Resource, 2012), xxxv–xl, where this tendency of Natural Law is more thoroughly discussed, and where I interact with VanDrunen’s other works.

The appropriateness of natural law as the moral standard for the civil kingdom becomes all the more important in light of the fact that, in a certain sense, Scripture is not the appropriate moral standard for the civil kingdom. (38)

The moral instruction given in Scripture cannot be taken simply as the moral standard for the world at large. The purpose of Scripture's moral instruction is to regulate and define the lifestyle of God's redeemed covenant people. (39)

Christians cannot rightly appeal to the moral lifestyle set forth in Scripture as directly applicable to non-Christians. (40)

Natural law is the moral standard that governs life in the civil kingdom. Scripture is the sacred text given to God's covenant people whom he has redeemed from sin. . . . Given its character, therefore, Scripture is not given as a common moral standard that provides ethical imperatives to all people regardless of their religious standing. (53)

So he *demand*s that those in the civil arena and unbelievers (in whatever arena) be guided by nature independently from Scripture. In the spiritual arena, he seems merely to *allow* it (57, 67).

Consequently, a more accurate definition of Natural Law that describes how adherents mostly use the term, and describes what antagonists find distasteful, would be:

Natural Law is the moral order inscribed in the world and especially in human nature, an order that is known to all people through their natural faculties (especially reason and/or conscience) even apart from supernatural divine revelation that binds morally the whole of the human race, *and in some contexts needs not, and other contexts must not, be interpreted by God's Word.*

To this fuller definition I think VanDrunen would subscribe.

II. PROMOTION OF A CORRUPTED ETHIC

A. VanDrunen on Why Natural Law Obligates

Chapter 2 explains why Natural Law is obligatory. God is a moral being, ruling over creation, and He created man in His moral image with the commission to rule over His creation. "In Genesis 1," VanDrunen says, "God rules over all things supremely, and this is precisely what man, as his image-bearer, was to do" (13). And the instructions on how to rule God imprinted on man's very being: "The image of God carried along with it a natural law, a law inherent to human nature and directing human beings to fulfill their royal commission in righteousness and holiness" (14).

Yet inasmuch as this amounts to man looking in himself for direction, some may object that life finds direction independently from God's instruction—a theory no Christian can allow. But VanDrunen wants to assure us that Natural Law is not a self-authoritative moral system:

By arguing that the reality of natural law is grounded in God's own nature and the creation of human beings in the divine image, I hope to demonstrate that appealing to natural law should not be taken as an appeal to human autonomy but ultimately to the authority of God the Creator. (4)

As a true follower of God, he does not seek to remove God from His throne. Indeed, by the title of his book we can gather as much: he advances *A BIBLICAL Case for Natural Law*.

And neither does VanDrunen ignore the Fall, as natural ethicists have tended to do. The second half of chapter 2 discusses sin's effects on Natural Law. Pointing to verses like Genesis 6:5, "every intent of the thoughts of [man's] heart was only evil continually," and Ephesians 2:1, human beings are "dead in

... trespasses and sins,” VanDrunen notes the “radical wickedness of fallen human nature” (15). The image of God he recognizes as badly disfigured. As Romans 1 shows, unregenerate man now perverts God’s revelation through nature. This causes VanDrunen to write: “Sinful human beings will constantly pervert and reject the teaching of natural law” (40), and “human moral reasoning is indeed radically corrupt” (4).

But he warns us against dismissing the doctrine on this account. Three factors should lead us to conclude that Natural Law is still a viable moral guide. First, he reminds us that “fallen human beings continue to be the image of God, however corrupted this image now is” (16). Genesis 9:6 and James 3:9 surely support this view. Second, Paul’s universal condemnation of men in Romans 1:18–32 assumes it. “God can judge *all* people and not just those with access to biblical revelation, because God’s general revelation in nature confronts every person” (17). Third, Romans 2:14–15 explicitly affirms Natural Law’s continued existence. Even unbelieving Gentiles “show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness.” So VanDrunen concludes that man is still obligated to Natural Law since it “continues to exist in the fallen world and that all people continue to have true knowledge of moral righteousness because of it” (22).

B. Predicament of the Theologian

1. VanDrunen Oversimplifies Biblical Anthropology

The Bible presents a more complex anthropology than VanDrunen teaches. In one sense, he is right to speak of all men *knowing* from nature God’s moral law—if they had no knowledge of it they could not be condemned for violating it. But to leave the matter here greatly oversimplifies the situation. In a more profound sense fallen men do not know it because they suppress this knowledge (Rom. 1:18). The true revelation that comes to them from nature gets processed through their sinful minds (Col. 1:21), wherein they regurgitate a corrupt interpretation of that revelation. Paul made this point to the Athenians who recognized the truth that in God we live and move and have our being (Acts 17:28), but who then sinfully ascribed this truth to the deity Zeus not Yahweh! “They exchanged the truth about God for a lie” (Rom. 1:25). We err, then, to talk of unbelievers simply as having moral knowledge. If unbelievers do not fear God (Ps. 36:1; Rom. 3:18), then they have not the beginning of knowledge (Prov. 1:7). Since they convince themselves that they do not know God’s truth, Paul can label “times of *ignorance*” (Acts 17:30) those periods and places where natural revelation is all that men have. In other words, times when men *know* truths from nature can be called times when they *do not know* them. They possess moral knowledge, but they mangle it and thus will not express it accurately. We cannot look to unbelievers for moral guidance.

For this reason, theologians have distinguished Natural Revelation from Natural Law:

But as I have always *affirmed* the fact that all men, even the most wicked of men, have this *knowledge* so I have always *denied* that fallen man’s *interpretation of this revelation* of God to him is *identical* with the revelation itself. *Natural revelation must not be identified with natural theology.*²⁰

VanDrunen’s use of the term “Natural Law” actually moves back and forth between these two different concepts.

²⁰ Van Til cited in Bahnsen, *Van Til’s*, 185.

Consequently, natural revelation becomes useless as an independent moral guide, causing Calvin to call this revelation “vain,” which can “in no way lead us into the right path.” Alluding to Romans 1:20, he teaches that Paul “shows it not to go farther than to render [men] inexcusable” for their lifestyles.²¹ Our sin causes natural revelation to operate negatively as a witness against our behavior, not positively as an independent moral instructor. Ironically, VanDrunen admits this about Paul’s teaching in Romans 1:18–32: “Perhaps his primary point is that rebellious man is *inexcusable* before the judgment of God” (17).

2. *Biblical Anthropology Forces Tough Choice for Natural Law*

This dismal doctrine of man seems rather devastating to a Natural Law doctrine. But even though VanDrunen acknowledges fallen man’s relation to God’s revelation,

Sinful human beings will constantly pervert and reject the teaching of natural law. (40)

Man still knows [natural law], though in a corrupted fashion. (16),

he still advocates that sinners follow their corrupt interpretations of nature,

Human moral reasoning is indeed radically corrupt; nevertheless, I also argue that our situation in a sinful world continues to demand that we have recourse to natural law. (4)

According to the principles of the Noahic covenant of common grace, the cultural task is to be pursued by the human race as a whole. (34)

Natural law and unbelieving interpretation of natural law become an important part of biblical ethics in the spiritual kingdom. (67)²²

Men are to follow *corrupted* moral teachings? A bizarre conclusion for a Christian theologian, indeed!

But VanDrunen’s conclusion may not seem so bizarre when considering the choices. Since he does not give up the doctrine of man’s total depravity (a doctrine frequently dismissed by Natural theologians), he is forced with the choice of giving up Natural Law or advocating men follow corruptions of God’s revelation. I am sorry he has chosen the latter.

III. TWO KINGDOM DEFICIENCIES

A. VanDrunen on Two Kingdoms Doctrine

In chapter 3, VanDrunen explains the Two Kingdoms doctrine. He teaches that even after sin’s entrance into the world, God still rules over it, but He does so in two different ways. The first way VanDrunen calls the “civil kingdom”:

He has established two kingdoms (or, two realms) in which he exercises his rule in distinct ways. God governs one kingdom . . . as its creator and sustainer, but not as its redeemer. This civil kingdom pertains to temporal, earthly, provisional matters, not matters of ultimate and spiritual importance. . . . The ends of the civil kingdom were not salvation and eternal life but a relatively just, peaceful, and orderly existence in the present world in which Christians live as pilgrims away from their heavenly homeland. (24)

²¹ Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.5.14.

²² Would this commit him to accepting Mormon and Jewish interpretations of Scripture?

This civil kingdom covers the social and political aspects of life. Here a *common* realm exists for believers and unbelievers alike. About the second kingdom, the “spiritual kingdom,” VanDrunen explains:

The other kingdom . . . is also ruled by God, but he rules it not only as creator and sustainer but also as its redeemer in Christ. This kingdom pertains to things that are of ultimate and spiritual importance, the things of Christ’s heavenly, eschatological kingdom. . . . In this kingdom, the gospel of salvation is preached, and the souls of believers are nourished unto eternal life. (24)

This spiritual kingdom is found in the Church, not in sociopolitical affairs. Here a *particular* realm exists for believers only.

VanDrunen seeks to defend this doctrine biblically in the rest of the chapter. He begins with the Old Testament’s witness to the civil kingdom of cultural commonality, listing many commonalities shared by believers and unbelievers: The curse was common to all. God’s blessing of allowing labor and childbirth to continue after the Fall was shared by all. Genesis 4:20–22 depicts cultural life continuing and prospering even in the ungodly line. Abraham lived alongside others of the land, fought with unbelievers in wars to combat injustice, entered treaties with the rulers of the land, and engaged in commerce with his unbelieving neighbors. With the Noahic Covenant God formalized this commonality. He made this covenant with every living creature (Gen. 9:10, 12, 15–16), and it was to regulate temporal and political matters (Gen. 9:5–6).

But the spiritual kingdom was active in the Old Testament as well. Genesis 4:26 says that some people began to call on God’s name. And as with the civil kingdom, the particularity of the spiritual kingdom was formalized by covenant, the Abrahamic Covenant. This covenant, made not with all creatures but only with Abraham and his offspring (Gen. 17:7), concerned religious and redemptive matters. It was ratified by sacrifice (Gen. 15:12–21) and symbolized by the redemptive sign of circumcision (Gen. 17:9–14). Thus VanDrunen concludes: “Abraham was religiously separate from the world but culturally engaged with the world” (29–30). He was active in both kingdoms.

With the Mosaic Covenant “the situation changes quite drastically” (30). The principle of cultural commonality was rescinded, or rather, interrupted: “With the account of Israel’s exodus from Egypt and settlement in the promised land of Canaan, there was a temporary interruption of the two kingdoms principle” (30). This covenant broadened the particularity principle to cover the cultural realm as well, as the people of God were supplied with detailed regulations for this realm. He explains further:

Instead of living as aliens in the lands of others, now God’s people were given a land of their own. . . . Instead of mingling with unbelieving nations in cultural endeavors, God’s people were now commanded to exterminate the pagans within their nation’s borders (e.g., Deut. 7:1–5). (30)

Interestingly, this setting aside of the Two Kingdoms doctrine “applied only within the bounds of the Promised Land” (31). He illustrates from the practices of Kings David and Solomon who had friendly dealings with foreign kings (2 Sam. 10:2; 1 Kings 5; 10); from Ezekiel’s admiration of the cultural splendor of Tyre, a pagan city (Ezek. 26:1–19); from Daniel’s education in Babylon and faithful service to pagan kings; and from the behavior of exiled Jews in Babylon, whom “the prophet Jeremiah instructed to engage in all sorts of ordinary cultural practices (building, planting, marrying) while seeking the ‘peace and prosperity’ of the pagan city in which they now lived (Jer. 29:1–9)” (31), practices VanDrunen contrasts with the Jews in the Promised Land who were directed not to seek the peace and prosperity of Moabites or Ammonites or other pagans in the Land (Deut. 23:3–6; Ezra 9:12). However, “this cultural

commonality was not to taint their ongoing religious particularity (see Jer. 29:10–14; Dan. 1:8–16; 3:8–30; 6:1–28)” (32). The religious particularity applied inside and outside Promised Land boundaries.

VanDrunen gives a typological rationale for the extensive separation of believers and unbelievers in the Mosaic Covenant:

Theocratic Israel in the land is a typological foreshadowing of the eschatological age to follow Christ’s second coming, in which all sin and evildoers will be banished and therefore no mixing of believers and unbelievers will be possible. (32)

The eternal arrangement temporarily intruded into time under the Mosaic dispensation.

The New Covenant, however, returns to the Two Kingdoms arrangement. This covenant “meant the end of the Mosaic Covenant and the Israelite theocracy (Gal. 3:19, 23–25; Heb. 8:13)” (32). It is made with the institutional Church, contrary to the Mosaic Covenant made with Israel. These two covenants also differed in that “God never gave the church a civil code nor in any way treated it like a geopolitical institution” as He did with Israel (33). In this New Covenant, we are bidden to obey even pagan magistrates (Rom. 13:1–7), and to maintain pure associations only in the church but not necessarily in the world (1 Cor. 5:9–11). The Two Kingdoms’ cultural commonality and religious particularity have come back.

VanDrunen nicely summarizes the Two Kingdoms doctrine:

While God, in the progress of redemptive history, would choose out of the world a people of his very own, he has also preserved a common, cultural realm in which those who love him and those who do not must live and work together. (26)

B. Christ’s Kingdom Errors

1. *Mitigates Extent of Christ’s Kingdom*

That the civil²³ and spiritual realms exist is uncontroversial. The crucial question is: Is the civil realm outside the kingdom of Christ? VanDrunen’s labors to demonstrate the existence of a common area shared by believers and unbelievers are irrelevant to this crucial question. Let us survey the Bible’s answer.

a. God mediates His *entire* kingdom through His all-conquering Son. As God rules all of His creation, so has He appointed Christ over all the works of His hands (Ps. 8:6; Heb. 2:7). The Father has invested His Son with all authority (Matt. 28:18; Col. 2:10), and “has given all judgment to the Son” (John 5:22). Christ is “a great King over all the earth” (Ps. 47:2), the “heir of all things” (Heb. 1:2), who possesses “the very ends of the earth” (Ps. 2:8). The prophet Zechariah noted well the scope of Christ’s kingdom: “Behold, your king is coming to you; . . . And His dominion will be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth” (Zech. 9:9–10). Yes, indeed, the entire world and everything in it has been inherited by death’s victor. Nothing escapes the scepter of King Jesus.

b. He rules over *nations*. His obedience gained Him this inheritance. As ruler, nations must serve Him (Ps. 2:8, 12). The vision shown to Daniel runs these two thoughts together: “And to him was given

²³ Since VanDrunen believes that God rules the civil kingdom, he should have no problem advocating civil governments at least acknowledge its Creator and Sustainer King. In this sense, the civil kingdom is also a religious kingdom.

dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him” (Dan. 7:14). Nations *as nations* must acknowledge Christ’s kingship over their lands (1 Sam. 8; Dan. 4:25–26). Since such ought to be the case, the great Bible commentator Matthew Henry encourages you to “do your utmost to make the nations Christian nations.”²⁴

c. Christ’s kingdom even embraces the *civil magistrates and governments* of all nations. Civil officials, as His servants (Rom. 13:4), must serve the Lord through His Son (Ps. 2:10–12). “The government shall be upon his shoulder” was the prophecy (Isa. 9:6); and as “the zeal of the Lord of hosts will accomplish this” prophecy (Isa. 9:7), it surely came to pass. Jesus is now “the ruler of kings on earth” (Rev. 1:5), the “King of kings” (Rev. 17:14; 19:16). Earthly magistrates, therefore, must serve Christ as they execute their duties, even as David, caught up in the subject matter of the coming Messiah’s royal sovereignty, prayed, “May all kings fall down before him, all nations serve him!” (Ps. 72:11).

For where David urges all kings and rulers to kiss the Son of God [Ps. 2:12], he does not bid them lay aside their authority and retire to private life, but submit to Christ the power with which they have been invested, that he alone may tower over all.²⁵

d. Christ’s kingdom includes even *unbelievers*. Set at the Almighty’s right hand, He was told to “rule in the midst of Your enemies” (Ps. 110:1–2). “Let the nomads of the desert bow before him, and his enemies lick the dust” (Ps. 72:9). In Jesus’ parable of the tares among wheat (Matt. 13:24–30, 36–43), “sons of the evil one” exist within “the kingdom of heaven,” which Jesus also identifies as the “world” (v. 38).

To include all things, though, under Christ’s rule seems to go too far. Many reject and ignore Him. Can Jesus be said to rule over those whom He does not rule? The author of Hebrews addresses this question. After stating that God has “put all things in subjection under [Christ’s] feet,” he goes on to say, “but now we do not yet see all things subjected to him” (Heb. 2:8). Though Jesus now rules over all creation *by right*, many yet rebel against His authority; someday, though, *in actual fact*, He shall rule over a creation that willingly kisses His royal ring. The loyal subjects of His kingdom, the Church, will someday be a great mountain and fill the entire earth (Dan. 2:35), becoming coextensive with the members of the broader kingdom, so that the Christian’s evangelistic efforts will be no longer needed on this planet, “for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them” (Jer. 31:34).

We see, then, that Christ’s kingdom encompasses far more than the community of believers, as Calvin quite recognized: “As the right hand of God fills heaven and earth, it follows that the kingdom and power of Christ are equally extensive.”²⁶ While we must teach that Christ rules His Church in a special way, we must not restrict His rule there. Jesus claims that “all things have been handed over to Me by My Father” (Matt. 11:27; cf. John 3:35). Let us claim nothing less for Him.

2. *Mitigates Christ’s Redeeming Works*

Given that Christ’s kingdom embraces all, He is at work to refashion all of history as *redemptive* history. To be sure, some events are more significant to redemption (e.g., Pentecost), but ordinary events are no less redemptive. Scripture frequently mentions Christ’s universal redemptive mission:

²⁴ *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible* (McLean, VA: MacDonald, n.d.), Matt. 28:19.

²⁵ Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.20.5.

²⁶ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul to the Galatians and Ephesians*, trans. Rev. William Pringle (Edinburgh, Scotland: Calvin Translation Society, 1843; reprint, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2003), Eph. 1:20.

For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, and through Him to reconcile *all things* to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether *things on earth* or things in heaven. (Col. 1:19–20)

“You have crowned him with glory and honor, and have appointed him over the works of your hands; you have put *all things* in subjection under his feet.” For in subjecting *all things* to him, he left *nothing* that is not subject to him. (Heb. 2:7–8)

. . . making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite *all things* in him, things in heaven and *things on earth*. (Eph. 1:9–10)

. . . whom heaven must receive until the period of *restoration of all things* about which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from ancient time. (Acts. 3:21)

Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to *all rule* and *all authority and power*. For He must reign till He has put *all enemies* under His feet. The last enemy that will be destroyed is death. For “He has put *all things* under His feet.” (1 Cor. 15:24–27)

We may reach this same conclusion by considering Christ's blessings and judgments. Each event in history invokes one or the other from the King. With regard to blessing: as people become redeemed, they redeem the rest of the earth by applying God's will to the various aspects of life, which the King amply rewards. As the earth becomes populated with more and more Christians, then, our Lord's redemptive blessings become so extensive that the earth will overflow with sustenance (Amos 9:13); exhibit beautiful scenery (Isa. 35:1–2); and bring times of tranquility and security (Ps. 72:7; Isa. 32:18), large-scale health (Isa. 35:5–6; Matt. 11:5), and general happiness (Isa. 61:3; Rom. 14:17). Each obedient action, then, brings about the blessings of Jesus by which He redeems the earth.

But we easily understand how blessings redeem the earth. Doing so by judgment, though, strains our thinking somewhat. But Jesus does indeed redeem by judgmental curse, ridding sins and foes from His domain. Hear the psalmist sing about the King's judgments: “Your arrows are sharp; the peoples fall under You; Your arrows are in the heart of the King's enemies” (Ps. 45:5); and, “May [the king] vindicate the afflicted of the people, save the children of the needy and crush the oppressor” (Ps. 72:4). St. John does not let us miss the kingly nature of these judgments, noting in Revelation 19:11–21 the many regal crowns upon the head and the inscription “King of kings” upon the robe and thigh of the victorious Christ as He strikes down nations, rules them with an iron rod, and fiercely treads them in a wine press. Such redemptive judgments, in fact, commenced upon His coronation:

The LORD says to my Lord: “Sit at My right hand until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet.” The LORD will stretch forth Your strong scepter from Zion, saying, “Rule in the midst of Your enemies.” . . . The Lord is at Your right hand; He will shatter kings in the day of His wrath. He will judge among the nations, He will fill them with corpses, He will shatter the chief men over a broad country. He will drink from the brook by the wayside; therefore He will lift up His head. (Ps. 110:1–2, 5–7; cf. Ps. 2)

These are not the judgments of God in general, but of Christ *as King*. By these judgments He rules; by these judgments He redeems.

All events signalize God's kingdom-working purposes (Rom. 8:28), fulfilling His plans “to unite all things in” Christ by working “all things after the counsel of His will” (Eph. 1:10, 11). The King commands us to acknowledge the redemptive significance of all we do, bidding us to “seek first His kingdom” (Matt. 6:33), to subdue all thoughts and arguments to Him (2 Cor. 10:5), and to speak and work all things in His name (Col. 3:17), even the giving of a cup of water (Mark 9:41).

And Jesus rules as redeemer over nations no less than of individuals. If we call “redemption” a progressive cleansing from sin and enslavement to righteousness (Rom. 6; Titus 2:14),²⁷ then we should not deny the term to nations that also experience such sanctification.²⁸ We have seen how Christ the Redeemer has inherited the nations (Dan. 7:14), along with their governments (Isa. 9:6) and magistrates (Ps. 2:10–12). Being then under this Redeemer-King, a nation that acknowledges their ultimate Ruler and seeks to follow His revealed will receives the benefits of such obedience. Their redemption includes national peace and security (Deut. 28:7, 10; Prov. 29:18; Isa. 2:4), political justice (Ps. 72:12–14; Isa. 42:1–4), and economic prosperity (Deut. 28:12). In short, “the Lord your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth” (Deut. 28:1). Such is the look of a nation being redeemed.

But redemption of nations comes by redeemed citizens. And if a nation’s citizens think that redemption applies not to their nation, as per VanDrunen’s doctrine, then no redeemed nation will result. If we are to see the day when the nations stream to the Lord’s mountain (Isa. 2:2) we must not mistake our mission—a mission given to us by a *Redeemer-King*. Having ascended as death’s conqueror, He gives us the redemptive mission to conquer death in all the earth. Death shall not gain the victory in history over the One who already in principle defeated it. As prophesied, Christ will bring redemption even to seemingly insignificant horses’ bells and cooking pots (Zech. 14:20–21). “The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil” (1 John 3:8); and as the devil’s works now infect all of creation, including the civil sphere, the Son of God will surely bring redemption to all of creation, including the civil sphere.

The Church has always recognized that God sent His only begotten Son in order to redeem the world, and that He will be satisfied with nothing less than what He paid for.²⁹

The New Covenant era is gloriously called “the period of restoration of all things” (Acts 3:21) and “a time of reformation” (Heb. 9:10) and of “the regeneration” (Matt. 19:28). This ought to inform us of the exhaustive breadth of Christ’s redemptive kingdom.

3. *Possibly Disallows Proper Interaction Between Church and State*

Not only has VanDrunen misunderstood the natures of the civil kingdom and the spiritual kingdom, but he also appears to compartmentalize them too water-tightly. He disallows the interaction between them that Scripture requires. On the one hand, God enjoins the Church to educate the flock about proper citizenry. Its ministers must proclaim the whole counsel of God, which includes the necessary qualifications of a political candidate (Ex. 18:21; Deut. 1:13; 17:15), obedience to political laws (Rom. 13:1–2), praying for civil officials (1 Tim. 2:1–2), and providing sound legal testimony (Deut. 19:15–21). In these ways, the members of the spiritual kingdom interact with the civil kingdom.

²⁷ “Redemptiveness connotes deliverance from the enslavement of sin and release to a new freedom” (*The Zondervan Pictorial Bible Dictionary*, ed. Merrill C. Tenney [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1967], s.v. “Redemption”).

²⁸ Not that the redemption of a person and that of a nation are identical at every point—or for that matter, that of families and churches. For example, nations, families, and churches are not given new natures as are individuals. Nonetheless, redemption happens to them all. As John Frame says: “The creation itself is not saved in the sense that God’s elect people are saved. Yet creation does receive blessings that flow from God’s covenant lordship. Everything in creation is blessed in accordance with its nature and the role it plays in God’s cosmic drama” (*The Doctrine of God* [Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2002], 412).

²⁹ David Chilton, *Days of Vengeance*, 496–497.

On the other hand, the members of the civil kingdom are to punish infractions against the first table of the Law—things often associated solely with the spiritual kingdom. God wills the State to punish idolatry (Deut. 17:2–7), instigations to idolatry (Deut. 13), improper worship practices (2 Kings 18:3–4; 23:8–9; 2 Chron. 17:6; 20:32–33), and blasphemy (Lev. 24:10–16, 23). Civil ministers must be the “guardians” and “nurses” of the redeemed community (Isa. 49:23), or they will feel God’s weighty threat: “the nation and the kingdom which will not serve you will perish, and the nations will be utterly ruined” (Isa. 60:12). As a matter of fact, the State’s only function is to create the conditions in society whereby the gospel may flourish (Jer. 29:7; 1 Tim. 2:1–2). In short, civil government operates for the sake of the Church, as Calvin recognized: “it is the duty of godly kings and princes to sustain religion by laws, edicts, and judgments,”³⁰ “seeing God hath furnished them with the sword to defend the kingdom of his Son.”³¹

C. Covenant Errors

1. *Discontinuities Exaggerated*

A second major fault with the Two Kingdoms doctrine is its departure from the covenantal theology presented in God’s Word. The Bible presents certain discontinuities between the covenants, and certain continuities. In *By This Standard*, Greg Bahnsen nicely summarizes the discontinuities between the Old (Mosaic) Covenant and the New Covenant. The New Covenant, he says, surpasses the Old Covenant in glory (2 Cor. 3), power (Jer. 31:33; 2 Cor. 3:1–6), and finality (Eph. 2:20; Jude 3), and the New Covenant’s reality supersedes the Old Covenant’s shadows (Heb. 10:1; Col. 2:16–17).³²

These discontinuities, though, have nothing to do with the content of God’s moral requirements. Like the constant salvation scheme that runs through all post-Fall covenants (Eph. 2:12³³)—the “covenant of grace” in the Westminster standards—the ethical demands remain constant throughout the covenants as well. So though “this covenant [of grace] was differently administered in the time of the law, and in the time of the gospel” (WCF 7.5), the differences were not in regards to the moral law. Of this moral law the Westminster Confession teaches:

This law, after [Adam’s] fall, continued to be a perfect rule of righteousness; and, as such, was delivered by God upon Mount Sinai, in ten commandments, and written in two tables. (19.2)

And:

The moral law doth forever bind all, as well justified persons as others, to the obedience thereof; . . . Neither doth Christ, in the gospel, any way dissolve, but much strengthen this obligation. (19.5)

Thus, according to the covenant theology of Westminster, the same moral law existed before and after Adam’s fall, was the Law delivered to Moses, and continues on after Christ’s earthly ministry.

The Confession does not confuse, as does VanDrunen, the covenant of Moses with the moral laws within that covenant. To be sure, as a particular administration of the covenant of grace, the Mosaic

³⁰ Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.11.16.

³¹ John Calvin, *Commentary Upon the Acts of the Apostles*, ed. Henry Beveridge, Esq., trans. Christopher Fetherstone (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1843; reprint, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2003), Epistle Dedicatory.

³² *By This Standard: The Authority of God’s Law Today* (Tyler, TX: Institute for Christian Economics, 1985), ch. 16.

³³ This verse speaks of “the covenants [plural] of the promise [singular].” The various covenants are but differing administrations of the one salvific promise.

Covenant had unique ceremonial characteristics that did not carry over into the New Covenant. But the Confession does not confuse these ceremonial ordinances of the Mosaic Covenant with its moral instructions:

Beside this law, commonly called moral, God was pleased to give to the people of Israel, as a church under age, ceremonial laws, containing several typical ordinances, partly of worship, prefiguring Christ, his graces, actions, sufferings, and benefits; and partly holding forth divers instructions of moral duties. All which ceremonial laws are now abrogated, under the new testament. (19.3)

Calvin also avoids this confusion:

So Christ was enforced to clear himself, that he came, not to destroy the law, but to fulfill the law; because, when he had preached of abrogating the ceremonies, the wicked wrested this unto another purpose, as if he meant to abolish and take away the whole law.³⁴

Covenant Theology teaches that the Bible's moral teaching, reflecting the unchanging character of God, remains unchanged throughout the covenants.

We see this quite clearly from Jeremiah's prophecy about the New Covenant:

"Behold, days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them," declares the LORD. But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days," declares the LORD, "I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people." (Jer. 31:31–33; cf. Heb. 8:7–13)

It was the renowned Law of God, codified by Moses' hand, that Jeremiah foretold would be inscribed on New Covenant hearts. For this reason, Paul, a minister of the New Covenant, repeatedly appeals or alludes to the laws of Moses.³⁵

Neither does the Confession confuse situational alterations in the applications of the moral law with an abrogation of the moral law. So though the Confession says,

To [Israel] also, as a body politic, he gave sundry judicial laws, which expired together with the State of that people; not obliging any other now, further than the general equity thereof may require (19.4),

it continues to enforce moral conclusions by appealing to the "sundry judicial laws" given to ancient Israel's "body politic." It refers to these judicial laws to justify the civil ruler's duty to punish civil and ecclesiastical revolutions (20.4, citing Deut. 13:6–12); to justify the civil ruler's duty to punish corruptions of doctrine and worship in the Church (23.3, citing Lev. 24:16; Deut. 13:5, 6, 12); to specify which near relations are eligible for marriage (24.4, citing Lev. 18; 20:19–21); to specify the procedures necessary for divorce (24.6, citing Deut. 24:1–4); and cites Exodus 21:15 and Deuteronomy 21:18–21 as proof-texts for sins of inferiors against superiors (Larger Catechism Q. 128); Numbers 35:31, 33 as proof-texts for capital punishment; Deuteronomy 20:1 as a proof-text for just war; Exodus 22:2–3 as a proof-text for necessary defense; Leviticus 19:17 to condemn hatred; Numbers 35:16–18, 21 to condemn unjust

³⁴ Calvin, *Commentary*, Acts 6:14.

³⁵ Acts 23:5; 25:11; Rom. 7:7; 13:8–10; 1 Cor. 5:1, 13; 9:8–10; 14:34; 2 Cor. 13:1; Gal. 5:14; Eph. 6:2–3; 1 Tim. 1:8–10; 5:18.

violence; Exodus 21:18–36, which deals with issues of violence and property (Larger Catechism Q. 136); and many more.³⁶

Whereas the Confession authors believed only the general principles (“general equity”) of Mosaic legislation continue to oblige, and believed the specific laws applying in the State of ancient Israel “expired together with the State of that people,” they also believed those very laws obliged other nations and other times *when the situations are similar*. There exist *situational* discontinuities between ancient Israel and, say, modern America, but these have nothing to do with the change of covenants.

There are cultural differences, not only between our society and the *Old Testament*, but *also* between modern America and the *New Testament* (e.g., its mention of whited sepulchers, social kisses, and meats offered to idols). Indeed, there are cultural differences even *within* the Old Testament (e.g., life in the wilderness, in the land, in captivity) and *within* the New Testament (e.g., Jewish culture, Gentile culture) themselves. Such cultural differences pose important *hermeneutical* questions—sometimes very vexing ones, since the “culture gap” between biblical times and our own is so wide. However, these differences are *not* especially relevant to the question of *ethical validity*.³⁷

We must not reason, therefore, from a Mosaic law’s situational change of application to an abrogation of that law. The faithful covenant theologian will be *both* sensitive to situational differences between biblical cultures and our own, *and* avoid fallacious reasoning that “annuls one of the least of these commandments” (Matt. 5:19).

2. *Mosaic Covenant Grossly Misunderstood*

Perhaps the most misunderstood covenantal administration by modern theologians is the Mosaic Covenant. VanDrunen, coming from the Reformed tradition that has understood quite well this covenant, disappointingly departs from that tradition. His book reveals such a mistaken understanding of the Mosaic ethic that it is no wonder he sees a great chasm between it and the Abrahamic Covenant/New Covenant ethic.

Let us start with an egregious error: “God’s people were now [in the Mosaic Covenant] commanded to exterminate the pagans within their nation’s borders (e.g., Deut. 7:1–5)” (30). This statement reveals an extreme tunnel vision on VanDrunen’s part. The pagans specified were those then occupying the Promised Land. The treatment of these peoples was distinguished from the treatment of other pagan peoples (Deut. 20:15–18). Apart from these positive holy war directives, unbelievers had a civil right to dwell in Israel. In fact, God forbids His people to vex or oppress them; commanding, on the contrary, love toward them (Ex. 22:21; 23:9; Lev. 19:33–34; Deut. 24:17; Jer. 7:6). While in Israel, pagans had to obey the laws of the land—like the criminal laws prohibiting child sacrifice (Lev. 20:2) and blasphemy (Lev. 24:16, 22). They could find employment in Israel (Lev. 25:40), could glean from Israel’s harvests and vineyards (Lev. 19:10; 23:22), and for those who had means, could even buy Hebrew servants (Lev. 25:47). There had to be unbelieving pagans in the Land for Moses to permit them to eat animals that die naturally (Deut. 14:21), an action denied to believing foreigners in the Land (Lev. 17:15). Indeed, a

³⁶ For a fuller account of this, see James B. Jordan, “Calvinism and ‘The Judicial Law of Moses’: An Historical Survey”; available from http://www.reformed.org/ethics/Jordan_judicial_laws_Moses.html; (accessed February 1, 2008).

³⁷ Greg L. Bahnsen, “The Theonomic Position,” in *God and Politics: Four Views on the Reformation of Civil Government*, ed. Gary Scott Smith (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1989), 31–32.

passage as well-known as the Decalogue countenances unbelievers staying in Israel (Ex. 20:10; Deut. 5:14; cf. Ex. 23:12; Lev. 16:29).

Another misunderstanding of the Mosaic Covenant is the reason why God gave Israel its own land. Not to extinguish a common realm where believers and unbelievers may interact, as VanDrunen surmises, but to display to unbelieving nations what true wisdom and justice looks like (Deut. 4:5–8).

Another misunderstanding: The New Covenant differs from the Old, he tells us, in that “the reigning civil authorities are legitimate and worthy of obedience . . . even though they do not profess true religion” (33). But under the Mosaic administration this was true as well. Manasseh’s kingship was legitimate, requiring all Judah to obey him, despite his pagan beliefs and practices (2 Kings 21). Daniel and his friends faithfully obeyed lawful Babylonian and Medo-Persian royalty. Nebuchadnezzar became the legitimate ruler over Israel once conquering it (Jer. 27:5–8)—over those both in the land of Israel (2 Kings 24–25; 2 Chron. 36:10–13) and over those captive in Babylon (Jer. 29). The pagan king of Persia, Artaxerxes, required obedience from the Jews, even from those in the Land (Ezra 7), a requirement of which God’s priest, Ezra, heartily approved (vv. 27–28). These examples show that even in the land of Israel under the Mosaic Covenant, unbelievers had the civil right to occupy political office, requiring the people’s obedience. The New Covenant changed nothing in this regard.

And where in the laws of Moses is Israel forbidden from commercially trading with pagan nations or from admiring the (non-sinful) cultural splendor of pagans? Such prohibitions do not exist.

Furthermore, many of the common principles VanDrunen lauds operated in Israel under the Mosaic economy. Abraham is said to live in a common grace covenant because he lived alongside unbelievers and entered commercial transactions with his unbelieving neighbors (29); but we have seen already that many unbelievers lived in Israel alongside believers, and Nehemiah mentions that the people of God engaged in commerce with the unbelievers of their land (Neh. 13:15–21).

However, some of the commonalities mentioned were in the nature of the case unlikely to happen *in the Land*. Would not a place primarily made up of a particular kind of people inevitably function by members of that kind of people, even though the civil laws did not require it? Abraham, for example, is noted for entering into treaties with the unbelieving rulers of the land (29), an unlikely scenario given that most of Israel under the covenant of Moses were members of the visible Church. For the same reason, the possibility of admiring the cultural splendor of pagans would have been rare in Israel. Again, David and Solomon are noted for having friendly dealings with *foreign* kings (31), but this infrequently happened *within the Land*. And when a foreign dignitary like the Queen of Sheba does visit the Land, she is not exterminated but shown kindness (1 Kings 10). Therefore, many of the commonalities VanDrunen mentions were either practiced in Israel under the Mosaic Covenant or were implausible for Israel.

And we can hardly approve of the insinuations that Mosaic laws applied only within the bounds of the Promised Land (31–32). Exiled Jews, not being in power, obviously could not apply appropriate civil laws, as only those laws that are “on the books” can one apply. We should note that the Jews did not punish murder, thievery, or false witnesses in Babylon either. And though Daniel was educated in Babylon, he was also a slave, making us hesitant about seeking too much guidance from his forced behavior. At any rate, concluding that these laws *ought not* to be applied in Babylon from the fact that believers did not apply these laws there would be like concluding there ought not be infant baptisms at a particular Baptist congregation because visiting Presbyterians did not seek to apply that law of baptism there. Such arguments ignore the details of the situation. The “just” civil penalties of the Mosaic Law (Heb. 2:2)—for instance, the penalty against bestiality (Lev. 20:15–16)—should be the laws of all lands, whether in Israel or in pagan nations like Egypt (Lev. 18:3). Justice by definition is universal.

And finally, trying to dismiss the moral system of Moses by making it typological of the eternal state suffers from several problems. First, in the eternal state, all sins are considered capital offenses, whereas in the Mosaic Law not all sins are crimes (e.g., coveting, gluttony), and of those that are, not all are capital crimes (e.g., stealing). Second, Hebrews 2:2–3 makes a distinction between Mosaic penalties and eternal penalties. Third, dismissing Moses’ laws subjects the Two Kingdoms doctrine to the *reductios* often leveled at Dispensationalism. That is, if the commandments given through Moses were uniquely for that time only, not to be applied in our own time unless repeated in the New Testament, then laws like “You shall not curse a deaf man, nor place a stumbling block before the blind” (Lev. 19:14) and prohibitions of sexual relations with close relatives and animals (Lev. 18:9, 23) apply not to our time since they are not repeated in the New Testament. This is a high price to pay. Now VanDrunen could retort that Natural Law also condemns these practices even though they are not repeated in the New Testament. But, fourth, this maneuver reveals the fundamental subjectivity of the theory. Without an objective way to determine which laws of Moses are also taught in nature, can the theory escape the charge that appeals to Natural Law are merely euphemistic ways of justifying one’s personal tastes? Whatever is not liked in Moses is dismissed as “typological”; whatever is liked is also taught in “Natural Law.”³⁸

3. *Noahic Covenant Doubly Misunderstood*

VanDrunen makes too much and at the same time not enough of the Noahic Covenant. In saying this “covenant of common grace regulates temporal, cultural affairs” (27), he says too much. Though by this covenant God allows man to take the life of a murderer, this is not a whole lot to regulate temporal affairs with.

If states today are limited to punishing infractions as defined by the Noahic revelation, there would be precious little protection left to citizens—against such common crimes as theft, fraud, rape, kidnapping, perjury, violation of contracts, compensation for damages, etc.³⁹

Apparently, God leaves these to Natural Law. But why come to man and mention one temporal regulation?

On the other hand, in saying this covenant deals not with “more narrowly religious affairs pertaining to salvation from sin” (28), he says not enough. This overlooks several issues: First, the covenant was directly made with the Church, at this time consisting of Noah and his family (Gen. 6:18), and only indirectly with the rest of creation. As God appointed man steward of all creation, when he fell the creation was cursed (“cursed is the ground *because of you*,” Gen. 3:17). It “groans” on account of man, and it anxiously longs to “be set free from its slavery to corruption” by looking to man’s redemption (Rom. 8:19–23). In short, all of creation, including unbelievers, benefit from God’s merciful covenant made with Noah and his faithful descendants. In order to save His elect, God prolongs judgment, “not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9). Second, Noah received *salvific* grace from the Lord (Gen. 6:8). This was not common grace. Noah had redemptive faith—the kind of faith that produces good works (“prepared an ark for the salvation of his household,” Heb. 11:7) in

³⁸ Further questions worthy of pondering: Did God cease to reveal His Moral Law through nature during the Mosaic Covenant? Is it possible for there to be interruptions in God’s Two Kingdom dealings if these dealings are morally normative?

³⁹ Greg L. Bahnsen, *No Other Standard: Theonomy and Its Critics* (Tyler, TX: Institute for Christian Economics, 1991), 219.

obedience to his Lord's command (Gen. 6:22); the kind of faith that numbers him in the Hall of Faith (Heb. 11). He "became an heir of the righteousness which is according to faith" (Heb. 11:7; cf. Gen. 6:9). Third, Noah offered sacrifices—not a *common* grace sort of thing—which prompted God to utter the content of the covenant, "I will never again curse the ground on account of man" (Gen. 8:21). Consequently, the Noahic Covenant concerns narrowly religious affairs. In it God promises to preserve the theater, as it were, where the redemptive drama would be acted out. Without this covenant of preservation, worldwide *redemption* simply could not happen.

We should note, as well, that common grace operated under the Mosaic Covenant (God giving sunshine, rain, civil governments, childbirths, etc.), even as special grace operated under the supposedly common grace covenant of Noah (Gen. 6:8). Appealing to these notions, consequently, will not help distinguish these covenants.

IV. DENIAL OF SOLA SCRIPTURA

A. VanDrunen on Natural Law's Propriety for the Civil Kingdom

In chapter 4, VanDrunen shows why Natural Law must be the standard for the civil kingdom. As a common area of life, the civil kingdom demands commonly revealed instructions:

The civil kingdom has been ordained by God as a *common* realm, a realm for all people of whatever religious conviction in which to live and pursue their cultural tasks, while natural law is God's *common* moral revelation given to all people of whatever religious conviction. (38)

But "Scripture," he says, "is not given as a common moral standard that provides ethical imperatives to all people regardless of their religious standing" (53); and therefore he concludes that "Scripture is not the appropriate moral standard for the civil kingdom" (38).

He seeks to demonstrate Scripture's impropriety for civil guidance by limiting it to the spiritual kingdom: "The purpose of Scripture's moral instruction is to regulate and define the lifestyle of God's redeemed covenant people" (39). Appealing to Psalm 147:19–20—"He has revealed his word to Jacob, his laws and decrees to Israel. He has done this for no other nation; they do not know his laws."—he wants to prove that "the Old Testament Scriptures were not given to the world at large but to the people of Israel, God's covenant people of old" (39). He believes the same for the New Testament.

Since God gives the Bible to His people "as a consequence of their redemption" (39), there exists a grammatical structure, an indicative-imperative structure, which does not allow us to make use of the Bible in the sociopolitical arena, an arena where the non-redeemed function.

Biblical morality is characterized by an indicative-imperative structure. That is, all of its imperatives (moral commands) are preceded by and grounded in indicatives (statements of fact), either explicitly or implicitly. The most important indicative that grounds the imperatives in Scripture is that the recipients of Scripture are the covenant people. (39)

In the preface to the Ten Commandments, for example, God directs Himself to the body of people whom He rescued from Egypt, thereby delimiting their applicability. Paul does the same, when he directs his imperatives to people who "have been raised up with Christ" (Col. 3:1) and who have been seated with Him in the heavenly places (Eph. 2:6). Thus VanDrunen gives this warning: "To lift the imperatives in Scripture from the context of the indicatives that ground them is to misuse Scripture and force it to serve

purposes for which God did not give it” (39). To it put bluntly, “Christians cannot rightly appeal to the moral lifestyle set forth in Scripture as directly applicable to non-Christians” (40).

The rest of chapter 4 discusses three general ideas “indicating that when God’s people . . . interacted with others in the civil kingdom, they did so by appealing to a common natural moral standard rather than to the particular special revelation divinely given to their covenant community” (41). The first general idea is of *things that should not be done*. Abraham lied to Abimelech, telling him that his wife Sarah was actually his sister, whereupon Abimelech took her to make his wife. When Abimelech found out the truth, he rebuked Abraham by telling him “you have done to me things that ought not to be done” (Gen. 20:9). Abimelech “did not need to make a detailed moral argument nor point to a sacred text in order to bring the matter to bear against Abraham” (43). The response of Jacob’s sons to the treatment of their sister Dinah furnishes us with another example. Shechem did something to her that “ought not to be done” (Gen. 34:7). “Once again,” VanDrunen says, “the appeal is not to the stipulations of the Abrahamic covenant but to a common moral standard and mutual responsibility” (44).

The second general idea is the *fear of God*. Returning to Abraham’s confrontation with Abimelech, VanDrunen shows that Abraham justified his behavior by telling Abimelech, “Because I thought, surely there is no fear of God in this place, and they will kill me because of my wife” (Gen. 20:11). By fear of God, VanDrunen understands not that fruit of regeneration that impels obedience to the true God, that is, “the heart of true religion,” but rather to “some sense of accountability to one greater” (46). Thus here again, a common notion is appealed to by a son of God when dealing with a pagan in public matters, not to a word from God. Other examples include the Egyptian midwives, whose fear of God kept them from infanticide (Ex. 1:17); Jethro, who made fearing God a criterion for civil magistracy (Ex. 18:21); and Joseph, who as a civil ruler assured his brothers that he would treat them justly because he feared God (Gen. 42:18).

The third general idea is of *a common humanity*. When interacting with nonbelievers in the civil realm, believers are guided by an understanding that we are all creatures of God, made in His image. “Fearing God,” VanDrunen explains, “entails respect for his image-bearers and hence constrains one’s actions toward those image-bearers” (49). He gives Job as the first example. Job’s creaturely brotherhood with his servants prevented him from treating them unjustly (Job. 31:13–15). Another example is Amos’s condemnation of pagan nations for their sins, wherein “No appeal is made to the Mosaic law or covenant” (51), VanDrunen notes, but rather to “a treaty of brotherhood” (Amos 1:9). And, lastly, God faults Cain for his murder on the basis of brotherhood, not upon any contractual basis (Gen. 4). “The text highlights this point by repeatedly referring to Abel as ‘his/your brother’ (4:8, 9, 10, 11)” (52–53).

In these ways, then, VanDrunen believes Natural Law is “a common, natural moral standard to which Christians . . . should ordinarily⁴⁰ appeal when interacting with others in their lives in the civil kingdom” (45).

B. Scripture Errors

Sola Scriptura is often defined with reference to what may be taught in the Church, reacting to the Romanist belief that Church tradition is an authority on par with Scripture. Theologians in their better moments, though, define it more comprehensively:

⁴⁰ Ordinarily? He never explains what counts as an *extraordinary* situation wherein Scripture can be used.

God's word must be, in the nature of the case, the ultimate standard for judging claims to truth, and God's word must be the preconditioning context in which man goes out to discover more truth about himself and his world.⁴¹

Only Scripture serves as the supreme authority for human thought and life.⁴²

The Scriptures are a complete rule of duty . . . in the sense that there is and can be no higher standard of moral excellence.⁴³

The supreme judge by which all controversies of religion are to be determined, and all . . . doctrines of men . . . are to be examined, . . . can be no other but the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture. (WCF 1.10)

Any zeal for good works that wanders outside God's law is an intolerable profanation of divine and true righteousness.⁴⁴

It is Scripture, and Scripture alone, in the light of which all moral questions must be answered.⁴⁵

Scripture's authority is (a) over all people and all spheres of life, and (b) supreme over all other authorities. VanDrunen departs from both aspects of this cherished doctrine:

1. Mitigates Bounds of Scripture's Authority

a. The Bible binds believer and unbeliever. VanDrunen should at least bind unbelievers to those portions of Genesis dealing with the Noahic Covenant, since he believes that this covenant was made with all living creatures. But this is much too minimal a boundary for Scripture. All of Scripture binds all of humanity. We should not conclude that Scripture is uniquely for the covenant people simply from the fact that God gave it to them. Any attentive reader to the writings of Moses discovers its common applicability. God tells us that in giving Israel His Law He was making them a model for all nations. Moses reminds Israel of this before they entered the Land:

See, I have taught you statutes and judgments just as the LORD my God commanded me, that you should do thus in the land where you are entering to possess it. So keep and do 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 a god so near to it as is the LORD our God whenever we call on Him? Or what great nation is there that has statutes and judgments as righteous as this whole law which I am setting before you today? (Deut. 4:5–8)

Moses understood that all nations were to follow Israel by implementing and keeping the same wise laws. And several times God urges the Israelites to keep His laws, warning that if they break them the consequences will be the same as the people He will eject from the land (Lev. 18:24–30; 20:22–26; Deut. 8:18–20; 18:9–14). These unbelieving nations were bound to the same laws written down by Moses. Yes, in Israel "there shall be one standard for you; it shall be for the stranger as well as the native" (Lev. 24:22).

And Jesus informs us that His coming changes nothing with regard to the moral teaching of the Old Testament:

⁴¹ Bahnsen, *Van Til's*, 230.

⁴² John M. Frame describing Van Til's understanding of *sola Scriptura* in *Cornelius Van Til: An Analysis of His Thought* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1995), 121.

⁴³ Hodge, *Systematic*, 3:270–271.

⁴⁴ Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.8.5.

⁴⁵ Van Til in Bahnsen, *Van Til's*, 21n.65.

Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your *good works*, and glorify your Father who is in heaven. Do not think that I came to abolish the *Law or the Prophets*; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the *Law* until all is accomplished. Whoever then annuls one of the least of *these commandments*, and teaches others to do the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I say to you that unless your *righteousness* surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven. (Matt. 5:16–20)

Man, not just believing man, continues to live by God’s word, not merely nature (Matt. 4:4, quoting Deut. 8:3). When Jesus, therefore, gives His marching orders on how to Christianize the nations, He says teach His commandments (Matt. 28:19–20). His apostle had no problem with proving the whole world guilty of sin by applying to them a string of biblical quotations (Rom. 3:9–19).

God does indeed reveal His moral will through nature, and God binds all people to His will revealed through this medium. But as we have seen, sinners will not live up to this standard. So natural revelation is often mentioned in the Bible for condemnatory purposes, to show what people or nations have violated. Such is the case with those outside of the covenant community not possessing God’s Word, as when the prophet Nahum condemns Nineveh for lying (Nah. 3:1) or when the apostle Paul condemns the Athenians for idolatry (Acts 17:23). These pagans failed to keep God’s will that they truly knew from nature, and by these means He leaves them “without excuse” for their sins (Rom. 1:20). Nobody can claim ignorance of the righteous standard they have broken.

But as the moral content of Scripture and nature are the same, we may appeal to Scripture as a moral guide for humanity just as much as to nature. God’s moral principles revealed through the created order do not lose their binding character once men inscribe them. When the Bible approves or condemns an action, nature approves or condemns the same. God’s multi-manifested will is one. We find biblical characters therefore convicting unbelievers for violating Scriptural norms, even though these people have never read or heard of Deuteronomy or Ecclesiastes or Romans. John the Baptizer, for instance, held the heathen Herod accountable to the laws of Leviticus 18:16 and 20:21 (Matt. 14:4).

Furthermore, what does it mean to say that Scripture regulates the redeemed life only? Am I prohibited from showing a thief Exodus 20:15, “You shall not steal,” or Ephesians 4:28, “He who steals must steal no longer; but rather he must labor, performing with his own hands what is good”? Restricting our instructions to nature when we have the surer Word of God readily accessible seems like an awkward position indeed. No, God’s Holy Writings oblige *in common* both believer and unbeliever.

b. God requires that His Scriptures govern the common areas of life, including civil affairs. Greg Bahnsen asks the poignant question:

Where do civil magistrates find the political dictates of God? Surely not in varying subjective opinions, personal urges, the human wisdom of some elite group, the majority vote, *or even a natural revelation that is suppressed and distorted in unrighteousness.*⁴⁶

Can we afford to leave power so historically and potentially ruinous on so shaky a foundation? Bahnsen goes on:

It stands to reason that God’s objective and unchanging standards for civil government will necessarily be found in the infallible, inscripturated Word of God, where and when it speaks to the subject of political ethics.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Bahnsen, *God and Politics*, 31, emphasis mine.

Such was the case under the Old Covenant for Israel and for unbelieving nations. “The Old Testament prophets applied the very same standards of political ethics to pagan nations (Hab. 2:12) as they did to Israel (Mic. 3:10).”⁴⁸ We have seen already how Israel’s laws were to be copied by all nations (Deut. 4:5–8) and how all the “rulers of the earth” ought to serve the Lord through His Christ (Ps. 2:10–12). And we have also seen how the New Covenant continues the same ethical program (Matt. 5:16–20). Indeed, “all Scripture” is useful for righteous living (2 Tim. 3:16–17), and righteous living certainly includes duties in the social and political arenas.

God wills His moral *Word* to be preached to the State. Elijah prophesied the Lord’s condemnation of King Ahab’s murder (1 Kings 21:17f.). Jeremiah committed his prophetic denouncement of King Jehoiakim to writing for the king to read (Jer. 36). The prophet Nathan confronted King David about his crimes (2 Sam. 12:1–15). The seer, Hanani, reproved King Asa for his unrighteousness (2 Chron. 16:7–10). Pagan rulers find their practices in the cross hairs of inspired men as well. The prophet Daniel preaches to both kings Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar, urging them to “break away now from your sins by doing *righteousness* and from your iniquities by showing mercy to the poor” (Dan. 4:27), and to cease their self-exaltations and idolatries (Dan. 5:22–28). Nor did God leave Nineveh and its king to natural revelation, but sent them His mouthpiece, Jonah. John, as we have seen, preached the demands of Leviticus to Herod (Matt. 14:4). Jesus calls the same politician a “fox” (Luke 13:32), deriding this magistrate for his subtle treacheries. And Paul likewise preaches “righteousness” to the pagan governor, Felix (Acts 24:24–25). Indeed, one can scarcely read of a prophet who is not confronting a civil officer about biblical virtue. With the psalmist we must unabashedly declare God’s commandments to civil rulers (Ps. 119:46).

c. VanDrunen’s indicative-imperative paradigm is shortsighted. Redemption is but one ground for God’s imperatives. His authority provides another ground. He prefaces many of His laws, including the Decalogue, with “I am the Lord.” God must be obeyed simply because He is God. He has authority to command obedience of all creation. His holy character provides another basis for His commandments; we must be holy because He is holy (Lev. 11:44). The fact that He created us is yet another. The Lord issued orders to Adam and Eve before they needed redemption. And God did not think it was a “misuse” of His Word or a forcing of “it to serve purposes for which He did not give it” to have Jonah speak it to unbelieving Ninevites. Being His creatures bound them to His orders (Rom. 1:25).⁴⁹ Given these other grounds, we can say there is an authority-imperative structure, a character-imperative structure, and a creation-imperative structure. And inasmuch as unbelievers and civil rulers fall within these grounding structures, then God’s Word, even when written down, binds them as well.

The major reason God gives His Word to His redeemed people is they are the chosen ones in whom He wills to enter into fellowship—those in whom He is going to work so that they will obey His laws. We can understand why Israel was given the Moral Law inscripturated when we consider that they were also given the ceremonies; in other words, it was necessary that the means of reconciliation were given to those sinners whom God willed to have relations. The rest of sinful mankind God leaves with the Moral

⁴⁷ Bahnsen, *God and Politics*, 31.

⁴⁸ Bahnsen, *God and Politics*, 49.

⁴⁹ God also gives *motivations* for keeping His Word. He promises rewards (Josh. 1:9; Deut. 28:1–14; Ps. 1:1–3; Matt. 6:33; Eph. 6:1–3; 1 Tim. 4:8; 2 Tim. 3:16–17; James 1:25) and His presence (Josh. 1:9; Matt. 28:20), and threatens punishments (Deut. 28:15f.). Love for Jesus (John 14:15) and God’s glorification (Matt. 5:16) are other motivations. Redemption can be seen in both grounding and motivating terms.

Law revealed through nature (Acts 14:16; 17:30), which does not prepare them for divine fellowship but only takes away their excuse of ignorance (Rom. 1:20). Calvin expresses these same thoughts:

The knowledge of good and evil is indeed imprinted by nature on men, whereby they are rendered inexcusable; nor has any amount of barbarism ever so extinguished this light as that no form of law should exist. But, since the main principle of righteousness is to obey God, it was by special privilege that He deposited with His elect people the rule of living aright as a pledge of His adoption.⁵⁰

Those whom God enters covenantal relations, therefore, He enters by way of His voice, which He commits to writing (see Ex. 34:27).

As a result, in that the Scriptures are given to a particular people does not mean the laws therein are only for that people. Sabbath laws were given to Israel (Ex. 20:8–11; 31:12–17) and yet its demands obligate all men (Mark 2:27). There is a difference between the covenant and the laws of the covenant. Israel (those in the covenant) had the Law specially revealed to them, but Herod (a man outside the covenant) was still required to obey the laws of the covenant (Matt. 14:4). The moral laws of the Scriptures bind all men and all spheres of life.

2. *Ignores Scripture's Primacy*

What is more, the Bible sits atop a hill. It looks up to none and submits to none, whether the Roman Catholic Magisterium, Watchtower Society, Book of Mormon, Koran, or any charismatic cult teacher; in the Confession's words, it is the "supreme judge" (1.10).

Neither does it take a back seat to natural revelation. Even our interpretations of nature must subject themselves to the Lord's writings. If by "nature" we mean our experiences of what goes on in the natural world, these experiences cannot serve as our ultimate guide. Abraham's experience told him that one hundred year old men do not have babies, but God's Word told him otherwise. Elevating the Word above his understanding of nature—"in hope against hope he believed" (Rom. 4:18)—he received God's commendation. And if a false prophet correctly predicts the future, we cannot violate our Lord's commands to follow this prophet's instigations to idolatry (Deut. 13:1–5). For though our experience informs us that mortal men cannot predict the future, and though predicting the future is a test of true prophecy (Deut. 18:20–22), none of these can overcome the Lord's decree, "You shall have no other gods before Me."

Or if by "nature" we mean our heart,⁵¹ here too God lays it prostrate to His inscribed will. Under the Old Covenant God illustrated this truth in His people's attire:

Speak to the sons of Israel, and tell them that they shall make for themselves tassels on the corners of their garments throughout their generations, and that they shall put on the tassel of each corner a cord of blue. It shall be a tassel for you to look at and remember all the commandments of the Lord, so as to do them and not follow after your own heart and your own eyes, after which you played the harlot, so that you may remember to do all My commandments and be holy to your God. (Num. 15:38–40)

In their clothing, the faithful were reminded to check their heart's desires against the laws of God. And our divine Author elsewhere unflatteringly depicts what is essentially Natural Law: "This wicked people,

⁵⁰ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Four Last Books of Moses Arranged in the Form of a Harmony*, trans. Charles William Bingham (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1843; reprint, Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 2003), Use of the Law. Cf. *Institutes*, 1.6.1.

⁵¹ In VanDrunen's words, Natural Law is "the moral order inscribed . . . in human nature" (1).

who refuse to listen to My words, who walk in the stubbornness of their hearts . . .” (Jer. 13:10). Understanding the human heart’s depravity and deceitfulness (Jer. 17:9), there is little wonder why it became proverbial among the Jews that “He who trusts in his own heart is a fool” (Prov. 28:26).

God requires us to sift all of our actions and all of our thoughts through His commandments: “You shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead” (Deut. 6:8). To separate our readings of nature from God’s commandments tramples on this specific injunction. This injunction from our Lord, like all others, is for our good (Deut. 6:24; 10:13), as He wishes to preempt calamity caused by our blindness.

Just as old or bleary-eyed men and those with weak vision, if you thrust before them a most beautiful volume, even if they recognize it to be some sort of writing, yet can scarcely construe two words, but with the aid of spectacles will begin to read distinctly; so Scripture, gathering up the otherwise confused knowledge of God in our minds, having dispersed our dullness, clearly shows us the true God.⁵²

The Eden narrative displays that it has always been sinful for man to interpret nature independently of God’s Word. Sin did not necessitate the conjoining of Word and nature but only intensified our need to conjoin them. Van Til brilliantly notes these truths:

Even before man sinned he walked in the light of the supernatural thought-communication given him by God. Supernatural thought-communication is inherent in the human situation. It is involved in the Creator-creature relationship. . . . The Bible simply carries on this communication after the fall of man into sin.⁵³

To the sinless Adam, God interpreted for him who he was, his task in life, and how to perform his task. Nothing was left for Adam to figure out by his own reasoning skills. The need for God’s interpretations of nature have only intensified once mankind “became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened” (Rom. 1:21). Let us remember that to interpret nature independently from God’s Word follows the serpent’s advice, not our Lord’s. “Apart from revealed law, man cannot claim to be under God but only in rebellion against God.”⁵⁴

Two practical benefits result from God directing us to the Bible for moral instruction. First, the correcting gospel lies therein. As fallen people refuse to interpret nature accurately, choosing rather to “suppress the truth in unrighteousness” (Rom. 1:18), the gospel gives sight to the blind and liberates the oppressed (Luke 4:18), enabling the correct reading of nature. The Scriptures, in fact, join the gospel of Jesus to every moral commandment: “Christ is the goal of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes” (Rom. 10:4).

Second, Scripture provides an objective measuring rod of our readings of nature. How else can we test our hearts, our experiences, our research and evaluation of empirical data of the natural world? Holy Writ provides an objective way to know when our intuitions are righteous (revealing God’s will) and when they are sinful (revealing God’s will suppressed).⁵⁵ “Being a sinner, man will not read nature aright unless he does it in the light of Scripture.”⁵⁶

Without bringing every thought about nature captive to Christ’s Word (cf. 2 Cor. 10:5), exceeding what is written (cf. 1 Cor. 4:6), proponents of Natural Law have been led far astray from true

⁵² Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.6.1.

⁵³ Cornelius Van Til, *The Intellectual Challenge of the Gospel* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1980), 20–21.

⁵⁴ Rousas John Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1973), 1:10.

⁵⁵ At one place, VanDrunen seems to agree with this: “Scripture . . . shapes and corrects Christians’ understanding of” natural law (38).

⁵⁶ Van Til cited in Bahnsen, *Van Til’s*, 209.

righteousness. Romanism, for example, disallows artificial contraception even for marital relations,⁵⁷ and in so doing go beyond Scriptural requirements (Prov. 5:18–19; Song of Solomon; 1 Cor. 7:3–5). Another Natural ethicist believes the State may sanction homosexual civil unions,⁵⁸ whereas God wills the State to punish homosexual acts (Lev. 20:13; Rom. 1:32). Some advance government-funded education,⁵⁹ while the Lord forbids governments from such endeavors (Deut. 17:20). “When men try to improve on God’s law-word, they open the door to monstrous evils.”⁶⁰ Oh, how true!

Natural ethicists need to come to grips with the fact that it is God’s *judgment* to leave people to nature alone. As Paul and Barnabas told the crowds at Lystra, “In the generations gone by [God] permitted all the nations to go their own ways” (Acts 14:16). He did not see fit to correct those walking in their own sinful ways—one of the advantages of having the oracles of God (Rom. 3:1–2). Being left to the guidance of nature alone brings “times of ignorance,” leading to lifestyles that are not praised by God but to lifestyles requiring repentance (Acts 17:30). Even when the covenant people ignored the law of their God, they walked not in moral knowledge but in the lack thereof, meriting their destruction (Hos. 4:6). What should we say, then, about a moral theory advocating this very arrangement that is the judgment of God!

C. Responding to VanDrunen’s “Biblical Evidence”

Let us recall VanDrunen, by highlighting three general ideas of the Bible, tries to prove “that when God’s people . . . interacted with others in the civil kingdom, they did so by appealing to a common natural moral standard rather than to the particular special revelation divinely given to their covenant community” (41). But before we respond to the evidence that VanDrunen brings forward, we should be aware of several things: (a) When VanDrunen says believers appealed to a “common natural moral standard,” this is less than what he needs to prove. Remember, God’s standard revealed through nature and the standard revealed through His Word are the same; (b) What VanDrunen needs to prove is that when believers gave moral counsel to unbelievers, they did not check that counsel against God’s Word; (c) Even the task he has set for himself he does not accomplish, though this is less than what he needs to do. Now let us analyze his proofs.

His first attempted proof, “things that should not be done,” hardly fulfills the task. VanDrunen notes *Abimelech’s* appeal, not a believer’s appeals. Does it follow that Natural Law should function for the civil kingdom because a pagan called a certain action immoral? Pagans call many actions immoral, like preaching against abortion and in the reality of hell. We would not conclude that such preaching is immoral simply from the fact that pagans think so. Here, then, we have no appeals from believers and thus no divine sanction one way or another on any appeals. And the fact that “Abraham . . . did not dispute the basic moral point at issue” (43) only proves at best that *Abimelech’s* conclusion was correct, not that the manner of reaching the conclusion was correct. The same goes with the other illustration of

⁵⁷ *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* (paragraph 2370), 2d ed.; available from <http://www.scborromeo.org/ccc/p3s2c2a6.htm#2370>; (accessed April 17, 2012).

⁵⁸ Lee Irons, “What I Believe About Homosexuality,” 19 July 2002; available from [http://www.upper-register.com/irons_trial/WhatIBelieveAboutHomosexuality\(Irons\).pdf](http://www.upper-register.com/irons_trial/WhatIBelieveAboutHomosexuality(Irons).pdf); (accessed December 18, 2009).

⁵⁹ Benjamin Rush, “Benjamin Rush: A Plan for the Establishment of Public Schools” in *The Annals of America* (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, 1968), 3:57–59; Gordon J. Spykman, “The Principled Pluralist Position,” in *God and Politics*, 99.

⁶⁰ Rousas John Rushdoony, *Commentaries on the Pentateuch: Leviticus* (Vallecito, CA: Ross House, 2005), 412.

this idea, the Dinah incident. Here we have the *narrator's* condemnation of an action (Gen. 34:7), but no record of a believer appealing to a standard when interacting with an unbeliever.

The second idea, “the fear of God,” misses the target as well. None of his examples display “God’s people appealing to Natural Law when interacting in the civil kingdom.” The first two examples do not even involve appeals during interaction. When Abraham mentions the fear of God to Abimelech (Gen. 20:11), it is not to say what Abimelech should do or how he should do it, but rather Abraham explains the rationale for why he lied to Abimelech (“because I thought . . .”). It does not follow that Abraham appealed to a common natural standard from the fact that Abraham stated (rightly or wrongly) that there was no fear of God in a pagan city. A statement is far different from a moral admonition or appeal to a moral standard. When the fear of God is mentioned in the Hebrew midwives incident (Ex. 1:17), it is by the author narrating the incident, not by a believer-unbeliever interaction. And though the third and fourth examples do not help VanDrunen’s cause either, at least these examples involve human interaction. Jethro, however, mentions fearing God as a necessary quality of those seeking civil office (Ex. 18:21). In other words, political candidates must be believers (that is, followers of Scripture!). And Joseph assured his brothers of justice from the fact that he feared God (Gen. 42:18), but did not advocate the fear of God for moral instruction. VanDrunen imagines these texts to read: “So and so believer said to so and so unbeliever, ‘Do those actions impelled by a fear of God.’” But nothing of the sort appears in these examples.

The third idea supposed to show how believers used Natural Law in the civil sphere is “a common humanity.” Here, again, VanDrunen’s examples—Job, Amos, Cain—lack the “interaction” integral to his task. Pagans do know God’s just standard of righteousness revealed through nature and their own consciences, as I have maintained throughout this review. God can justly condemn them for not living up to what they know. But simply showing that pagans know the moral truth is a far cry from what is needed to justify Natural Law.

What is needed is proof that believers refused to check their counsel against God’s Word—as if believers, cognizant of their Lord’s moral instructions revealed through His Word, could clear their memory of those instructions when offering counsel to unbelievers. But the minimal task that VanDrunen set out to prove—that God’s people appealed to common notions when conversing with unbelievers in the civil kingdom—has not materialized either. It is almost as if VanDrunen forgot what he was setting out to prove. On two levels, then, his proofs have proved empty.

V. MAKES SCRIPTURE ENTIRELY UNNECESSARY

A. VanDrunen on Natural Law’s Involvement in the Spiritual Kingdom

Even though the “spiritual kingdom . . . is governed in doctrine and life by Scripture” (55), chapter 5 discusses the reasons why we should not dismiss Natural Law for this kingdom. VanDrunen’s first reason is the *renewal of the image of God*. When God engrafts one into the spiritual kingdom, He begins to renew their nature back to its original righteousness. From this VanDrunen reasons: “If the citizens of the spiritual kingdom are renewed image-bearers, then the way of life learned in this kingdom cannot be one that is at odds with the original created order and its natural law” (56). If Natural Law is “the moral order inscribed . . . in human nature” (1), then, he reasons, the renewal of human nature better conveys that Natural Law.

From this theological reasoning, he moves to two ways “Scripture incorporates natural law into the way of life that it sets forth for the spiritual kingdom” (57). The first way: “Scripture often gives moral instruction by alluding to phenomena of the natural world” (57). Analogies are drawn, for instance, between unnatural events in the created order and unnatural behavior in people, as Proverbs 26:1: “Like snow in summer and like rain in harvest, so honor is not fitting for a fool” (cf. also Amos 3:3–8; 6:12). Or sometimes the analogy is a “comparison of human behavior to the behavior of animals in such a way that people are able to recognize the moral course of action in the way that animals act” (60), as God bids us to follow the diligent work of ants (Prov. 6:6–8) or the loyalty of oxen, donkeys, and birds (Isa. 1:2–3; Jer. 8:7). Or sometimes the analogy is between our actions and the broader world’s natural order of things, as when Isaiah compares the absurdity of Israel rebelling against her Creator with the absurdity of a pot rebelling against its potter (Isa. 29:16; cf. 1 Cor. 11:14–15), or when Jesus uses a fig tree pedagogically (Matt. 24:32–33).

The second way Scripture incorporates Natural Law is by making “substantial use of or even borrows from the moral achievements of the broader culture of the civil kingdom in setting forth the ethics of the spiritual kingdom” (62–63). Examples include the remarkable resemblance of the covenant code of Moses (Ex. 20:23—23:19) to the laws of Hammurabi (an ancient king of Mesopotamia); parts of the book of Proverbs possibly relying on some Aramaic proverbs and the proverbs of Ahiqar; and Paul seemingly borrowing from the morals of the Greco-Roman world, with regard to household codes (Col. 3; Eph. 5–6), in exhortations toward Hellenistic concepts (Phil. 4:8), and his care to behave well in the sight of unbelievers (1 Thess. 4:12; 1 Tim. 3:7). From these examples, VanDrunen concludes:

If much of the wisdom commended in Scripture is not unique but mirrors the accepted wisdom of those without Scripture and exposed only to natural law, then there is further reason for contemporary Christians, with due discernment, to respect and learn from the moral reflections of the world in which they live. (66)

B. Where is Natural Law in These Arguments?

The first argument attempting to validate Natural Law for the spiritual kingdom confuses natural revelation and Natural Law. God renews in man his understanding of *revelation* through nature, not a better understanding of a philosophy advocating independence from God’s Word. Man’s renewal in God’s image says nothing about Natural Law.

The second argument that reasons from phenomena of the natural world ignores a couple of truths. (a) Without a biblical evaluation of events, we could not know which events are unnatural. In Proverbs 26:1,⁶¹ for example, unless the Lord told us that honoring fools was wrong, how *objectively* could we prove such a principle? We would be left with our *subjective* intuitions, affections, and opinions. (b) In wanting to draw moral instruction from the behavior of animals (e.g., Prov. 6:6–8) we run into the problem of selectivity. Which animal behavior must we follow: Should we be warring people like ants, be cannibals like many animals, join predatory gangs like wolves, and have monarchies and episcopal churches like bee hives ruled by a single queen bee? If Scripture did not draw moral comparisons to animal behavior, how could we know the moral usefulness of their behavior? These passages demand reading nature through God’s Word, and therefore contravene Natural Law.

The third argument, that the Bible borrows from and respects unbelieving moral achievements, has been answered already. When Paul stood before the Areopagus, he acknowledged a *formal* agreement

⁶¹ This proverb does not speak to spiritual kingdom issues, which is what VanDrunen is supposed to be addressing.

with the Athenians—that in God we live and move and have our being and that we are His offspring (Acts 17:28)—while disagreeing with their *material* meaning wherein they attributed these truths to false gods. When unbelieving peoples recognize a certain moral truth, say, that stealing is wrong, we can commend them for formally recognizing a proper moral principle while reproving them for idolizing it. In other words, pagans bind us to a principle on the authority of false deities, or make the principle self-authoritative, separating it from Christ’s authority, and in so doing make an idol of it. We must do otherwise and see moral principles as Christ-authoritative (binding on us because Christ says so), taking it captive to His authority (2 Cor. 10:5; Col. 3:17). As a blind man tentatively feels his way around the house, so morally blind unbelievers only “feel after” moral truths (Acts 17:27); or to use Calvin’s metaphor:

They are like a traveler passing through a field at night who in a momentary lightning flash sees far and wide, but the sight vanishes so swiftly that he is plunged again into the darkness of the night before he can take even a step—let alone be directed on his way by its help.⁶²

Christians, then, can only praise the slight formal accomplishments of pagans, while ignoring their monstrous philosophies they attach to these accomplishments.⁶³

Yet as with the other arguments, there is no advocacy to follow nature independently of Scripture. Without checking the achievements of unbelieving nations against God’s Word we would not know how to evaluate them. As Christians, we can respect only those laws that have been brought into agreement with the supreme judge, “the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture” (WCF 1.10).

For nothing is more absurd than for us to fix our minds on the actions of men, and not on God’s word, in which is to be found the rule of a holy life. It is, therefore, just as if God would overthrow whatever had been received from long custom, and abolish the universal consent of the world by the authority of His doctrine.⁶⁴

Let us hear Calvin, then, who would have us bring the Law of Nations to bow before God’s voice or let us ignore this Law altogether.

Some additional perplexities: (a) How can VanDrunen say the Hammurabi code is a witness to the *moral* achievement of the surrounding culture, many laws of which are similar to the laws of Moses, and yet say that the laws of Moses are no longer applicable for culture and society? (b) Since VanDrunen says the moral standard revealed through nature and the standard revealed through Moses are the same,⁶⁵ if the Hammurabi code reflects Natural Law, and Natural Law is universal and eternal, then does this not also make the Mosaic code universal and eternal?

VanDrunen thus ends the book with an odd chapter. After having sought to prove the usefulness of Natural Law for the civil kingdom, this chapter seeks to prove the same for the spiritual kingdom. But the Reformer, John Calvin, believed “no one can get even the slightest taste of right and sound doctrine unless he be a pupil of Scripture. Hence, there also emerges the beginning of true understanding when we reverently embrace what it pleases God there to witness of himself.”⁶⁶ The Reformed seminaries, consequently, have wandered quite a distance from its heritage when they teach that the Scriptures are not needed for *any* part of life!

⁶² Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.2.18.

⁶³ VanDrunen may agree with this paragraph: “one can find much wisdom in the moral reflections of the broader culture, even if not wisdom in its most genuine and perfect form” (66).

⁶⁴ Calvin, *Commentaries on the Four Last Books of Moses*, Lev. 18:4.

⁶⁵ VanDrunen says about Romans 2:14–15: “Paul makes it clear that the requirements of this natural law are essentially the same as those of the law of Moses” (19).

⁶⁶ Calvin, *Institutes* 1.6.2.

CONCLUSION

Van Til once wrote:

We are children of the King. To us, not to the world, do all things belong. It is only if we demand of men complete submission to the living Christ of the Scriptures in every area of their lives, that we have presented to men the claims of the Lord Christ without compromise.⁶⁷

As advocates of the Christ, we need to remind ourselves constantly of this. As sinners, there is no end to the ways we seek compromise. We want to live our lives according to our own patterns, rationalizing our ignoring of the Lord's instructions—even offering “biblical cases” for our rationalizations. Limiting guidance to God's pantomimed instructions through nature has been a convenient route, inasmuch as it is difficult to correct erring interpretations of nature. Thus God breathed His moral nature, offering a plumb line for our readings of natural revelation. But by restricting Scripture to certain spheres of life, we can turn distorted readings of creation into ethical models. Such concocted theories, though, amount to annulling some of God's righteous commandments. Jesus informs us how we should reckon teachers of such concoctions (Matt. 5:19).

*Sin naturally seeks its own mold,
In pantomimes by nature it found a foothold.*

*But God's nature by breath He reveals,
To correct loopholes we make legal ideals.*

*Annulling commandments it is actually,
Should we consider such teachers the least? Naturally.*

⁶⁷ Van Til cited in Bahnsen, *Van Til's*, 23.