

## **"Cross-Examination: The Universal Validity of God's Law"**

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Each month the "Cross-Examination" column presents a summary statement of a Reformed and Reconstructionist conviction in theology or ethics, and then offers brief answers to common questions, objections or confusions which people have about that belief. Send issues or questions you would like addressed by Dr. Bahnsen to the editor.

## We Believe

The Bible teaches us that "there is one God, the Father, by whom are all things... and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things" (1 Cor. 8:6). Christianity is a monotheistic religion, maintaining that there is but only one, the living and true God. Other religious philosophies hold that there are many gods -- one for the country, one for the mountains, one for the sea, one for farming, one for traveling, one for warfare, one for fertility, etc. By contrast, the Bible proclaims that there is one God and Lord over all of creation and over all human activities. "The earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof: the world, and they who dwell therein" (Psalm 24:1).

God the Son was particularly the agent of creation. "All things were made through Him, and without Him was not anything made that has been made" (John 1:3). His creative work extends to absolutely everything: "by Him were all things created, in the heavens and upon the earth, things visible and things invisible" (Colossians 1:16). Christ upholds all things by the word of His power (Hebrews 1:3), and by means of His power and government "all things hold together" (Colossians 1:17). In terms of creation and providence, the Son of God is Lord over all -- the whole of creation, all nations and realms, all men, and all areas of life. "For of Him and through Him and unto Him are all things; to Him be the glory for ever" (Romans 11:36).

Thus we believe that the Son of God is universal Lord. All men in all places in all walks of life owe to Him their submission, worship, devotion, and obedience. The singularity and sovereignty of God were fundamental theological tenets in the promulgation of God's holy law. "Hear, O Israel: Jehovah our God, Jehovah is one" (Deuteronomy 6:4). Accordingly, God is to be loved with the whole of one's being -- all your heart, all your soul, and all your might (v. 5). And the words of God's law are to be upon one's heart (v. 6), guiding your hands and regulating your thoughts (v. 8). They are to have an impact upon every aspect of one's life -- your children, your house, your paths, your rising, your retiring, the doorposts for entering your home, and the gates leading out to the world (vv. 7, 9).

Thus the Reformed faith teaches that Christianity constitutes not simply a perspective on a narrow slice of life (private, inward spirituality or the soul's eternal salvation) but is an entire world-and-life-view. Because there is but one Creator who is universal Lord, there cannot be differing standards of morality. Because there is but one Creator who is universal Lord, religious faith has implications for every aspect of human experience and all human activities. Because there is but one Creator and universal Lord, no man or nation is exempt from the absolute demand to bow before God and serve Him in all that they do.

Examination

Question: If there is only one moral standard which applies to all cultures and all times, then doesn't it seem that God has kept it a secret? After all, moral standards differ widely from place to place, and they seem to constantly change through the course of history.

Answer: We should avoid making the logical mistake of thinking that because men (or groups of men) have different opinions about morality, then morality must be relative. When the mathematics teacher finds that his students have brought back homework papers with different answers to certain questions, he does not conclude from that observation that math must be relative! He continues to believe that there is a right answer to each question -- that there is an absolute truth pertaining to math -- but some people have arrived at mistaken opinions regarding it.

God has not kept His universal standards of righteousness a secret from anybody or from any culture in history. Just ask the men of Sodom, whom God destroyed with judgmental fire (Genesis 19)! Just ask the Canaanite tribes which were utterly devoted to destruction when Israel occupied the land -- destroyed for defiling themselves in the abominations which are forbidden in the law of Moses (Leviticus 18:24-30). Although all men may not have received a verbal or written revelation of God's commandments, they nevertheless all know God (Psalm 19:1-4) and are accountable to live by His righteous character.

Both Moses and David assumed the universal moral validity of God's law. After revealing the statutes of the Lord to Israel prior to Israel entering the promised land, Moses declared: "This is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples, that shall hear all these statutes and say, surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.... What great nation is there that has statutes and ordinances so righteous as all this law which I set before you today?" (Deuteronomy 4:5-8). Years later, David sang outloud: "I will also speak of thy testimonies before kings and shall not be put to shame" (Psalm 119:46). Obviously the kings to whom David would speak God's commandments were Gentile magistrates.

According to the Old Testament prophets, God held all civilizations -- even the Gentile cultures outside of Israel -- guilty for their idolatry and disobedience to His holy standards. Thus we read in Amos 1 of God's judgment against neighboring nations, in Jonah and Nahum of God's threatened judgment against Ninevah (the capital of the great Assyrian empire), in Daniel of God's word to pagan Babylonian monarchs, in Isaiah 14-23 of oracles against Babylon, Philistia, Moab, Syria, Ethiopia, Egypt, Edom, and Tyre. Isaiah 24:5 explicitly condemns the "inhabitants of the earth" for polluting God's creation "because they have transgressed the laws, violated the statutes" of the Lord.

Likewise, the Apostle Paul taught without equivocation that the living and true God has clearly made Himself known to all men through the created order, even though they suppress the truth in unrighteousness (Romans 1:18-20). He says that men are "without excuse" for their failure to live according to the holy demands of God (vv. 20-21). This includes their acts of idolatry as well as their sexual perversion (vv. 22-32). In this regard, Paul describes unregenerate men as "knowing the ordinance of God" which forbids their unethical behavior, even though they have not been blessed with the verbal oracles of God (cf. Romans 3:1-2). According to Paul, the "Gentiles who have not the law" nevertheless know the demands of God's law through the inward testimony of conscience and the image of God: "they show the work of the law written on their hearts" (Romans 2:14-15).

Therefore, the universal character of the rule of the Creator, Jesus Christ as God the Son, is matched by the universal revelation of God's absolute moral standards for all men in all ages in all areas of life. God's law has not been kept a secret from anybody.

### Further Investigation

You can learn more about the universal validity of God's commandments from the taped lecture, "Should We Uphold Moral Absolutes," which Dr. Bahnsen delivered to the Evangelical Theological Society (\$5) -- or by reading his book, *By This Standard* (\$6). Both are available from Covenant Tape Ministry, 24198 Ash Court, Auburn, CA 95603.

A number of opportunities for education in ethics, apologetics or theology are available through the ministry of the Southern California Center for Christian Studies. Write and ask to be placed on their mailing list (P. O. Box 18021, Irvine, 92713).