

Part 1:1

LAW IN GENESIS

There is very little mentioned in this first book that is specifically about law. Nevertheless, it contains many passages that tell about the laws of God; namely, about his laws of nature and his moral laws that are innate to man. Those innate moral laws can be called the common laws of God, his laws of righteousness. The laws of nature and the common laws of righteousness are not identified specifically as such. Nevertheless they are easily inferred from what the text says about the Creation, and about God's interactions with men.

THE CREATION AND NATURAL LAW

The Bible records several commands that God gave when he created the world. Since laws are rules given and enforced by authority, then the commands he gave for the Creation can be considered part of the laws of nature. That there are laws of nature is a Biblical concept. For example, when Jehovah spoke to Job during the time of his great suffering, he asked him many questions, contrasting his wisdom with man's. One of the things he asked Job was, **"Do thou know the ordinances of the heavens?"** (Job 38:33).

The first command of God recorded in the Bible says, **"Let there be light."** However, that was a special light that he replaced with a new source of light. About that new light the record says, **"And God said, Let there be lights in the firmament of heaven to divide the day from the night, and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days and years. And let them be for lights in the firmament of heaven to give light upon the earth. And it was so. And God made the two great lights, the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night, also the stars. And God set them in the firmament of heaven to give light upon the earth, and to rule over the day and over the night, and to divide the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good"** (1:14-18). Those remain ordinances of the heavens.

Another passage about the Creation says: **"And God said, Let the waters swarm with swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth in the open firmament of heaven. And God created the great sea creatures, and every living creature that moves, which the waters brought forth abundantly, according to their kind, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. And God blessed them, saying, Be fruitful, and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth"** (1:20-22). It was by the commands of God that the creatures of the sea and the air were created. And it is by his laws of nature that they survive and reproduce. For that passage says God commanded those creatures to be fruitful and multiply. And the creatures of the sea and the air have been obeying that command ever since. We call their obedience conforming to the laws of nature, laws which God made when he created them. Of course, their obedience is not an intellectual choice, but rather submission to innate urges and instincts.

God gave a similar command to mankind when he created them. For the record says, “**And God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him, male and female he created them. And God blessed them. And God said to them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and fill the earth, and have power over it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the heavens, and over every living thing that moves upon the earth**” (1:27-28).

Thus there are laws of nature for mankind to be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth and have power over it, and have dominion over every other living thing. Consequently, we have been doing those things from the beginning of Creation, as any man with eyes can see. And we will continue doing those things, which is in great contrast with all the other creatures of the world. Unlike the animals, however, our obedience to those commands is a combination of an intellectual choice as well as submission to an innate urge, because we alone have free will.

Societies that fail to obey those laws soon fade away. Societies that obey them weakly, become weak. It is our strength to obey the laws of nature that God gave us to be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth and have power over it, and have dominion over every other living thing. And we should do those things while obeying the moral laws he gave us as well. For that is our peace and prosperity.

Moreover, it is the duty of every individual to learn to recognize and apply as many of the relevant laws of nature that he needs to foster his own development. For example, God gave us the innate ability to walk and talk. However, unless those things are practiced and cultivated they fail to develop. That is one of the important functions of children’s play. Play helps them learn how to control their bodies and the things around them, and to communicate and interact with others. The need for practice and cultivation of the moral laws of God is also true of our moral development, which I discuss under the next heading.

The brief description of the Creation given at the beginning of the Bible tells about some of the natural laws God gave the world. Of course, the vast number of laws of nature that now operate in the world were no doubt also given during the week of Creation. There is evidence, however, that some laws were added or changed immediately after the great flood. One example is his creation of the rainbow as a sign he would never again destroy the earth by flood (see Genesis 9:13).

Another example concerns what could be eaten. Before the flood all creatures were vegetarians (see Genesis 1:29-30), but after the flood God allowed men to eat animals, and animals to eat each other. Perhaps it was then that carnivorous beasts were created, and who knows what else? The Bible is silent about such details. That kind of information is interesting, but not important. Let not ignorance about it trouble you. Those are things that become stumbling blocks only to unbelievers. Jehovah revealed nothing about germs when he gave his laws to Moses about cleanliness. And no doubt ignorance of germs was a great stumbling block to those who grumbled about having to obey those laws. God tests our faith in many ways.

Note: None of the laws of nature operate independently of God. From the beginning he has been actively involved in the world, and he has always reserved for himself the power to control those laws to serve his purposes. For example, it was only with God's permission that Satan could cause calamities (natural and human) against Job. And Jesus said, **"Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall on the ground independent of your Father"** (Matthew 10:29). Not one sparrow could fall then, and not one sparrow can fall now. God's invisible hand is continually involved in the activities of this world. And Christians can take comfort in these words of Paul: **"And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, who are the called according to purpose"** (Romans 8:28).

MAN AND MORAL LAW

When God made Adam the text says he **"put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it"** (2:15). He also commanded him, **"Of every tree of the garden thou may freely eat, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shall not eat of it. For in the day that thou eat of it thou shall surely die"** (2:16-17). Sometime after Eve was created the serpent tempted her to eat fruit of the forbidden tree, and she gave to Adam who also ate of it. Eating that fruit somehow gave them knowledge of good and evil. That knowledge was no doubt not intellectual but intuitive. And it began a change in the laws of human nature. I say more about those things in Parts 3:6 and 4:4 of this book.

Eating that fruit not only gave knowledge of good and evil to Adam and Eve, but it also caused all men thereafter to be born with innate knowledge of right and wrong. As Paul wrote, **"For when the Gentiles who have no law do by nature the things of the law, these men, not having law, are a law to themselves. Who show the work of the law written in their hearts, testifying of their conscience, and their thoughts amidst each other accusing or also defending them in a day when God judges the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my good news"** (Romans 2:14-16).

That passage says all men are born with knowledge of God's law in their hearts, meaning his moral law. Hence, our awareness of the basic differences between right and wrong is instinctive; it is, Paul said, "by nature." And it is not intellectual, it is intuitive. Ducks are born with an instinctive fear of large birds that have short necks; it is their nature. Men are born with an instinctive knowledge of basic right and wrong; it is our nature.

Of course, like walking it takes a little time for our conscience to mature. For when God cursed that faithless generation of the sons of Israel to die in the wilderness, he said, **"Moreover your little ones, who ye said would be a prey, and your sons, who this day have no knowledge of good or evil, they shall go in there, and I will give it to them, and they shall possess it"** (Deuteronomy 1:39). Also our conscience can be weakened or even destroyed. For Paul spoke of men whose consciences had been **"seared with a hot iron"** (First Timothy 4:2).

Just as the development of our physical skills is a result of the maturation of our innate abilities trained through education and practice, so too is the development of our moral knowl-

edge and habits. Our conscience, with its knowledge of good and evil, is a combination of the maturation of our innate knowledge enlightened by the training we get through education and experience. This training of our moral sensibilities through practice was written about in the book of Hebrews: **“But solid food is for mature men, those having their sensibilities trained through practice for the discernment of both good and evil”** (Hebrews 5:14).

OUR INNATE MORAL LAW AND GOD’S JUDGMENT

The Bible says nothing about laws like the ten commandments having been given for men to learn before the time of Moses. Nevertheless God held men accountable for committing evil. They were judged as Paul said men without law would be judged: by **“the law written in their hearts,”** which is our innate knowledge of right and wrong. Isaiah spoke of that when he said, **“The earth also is polluted under the inhabitants of it, because they have transgressed the laws, violated the statutes, broken the everlasting covenant. Therefore the curse has devoured the earth ...”** (Isaiah 24:5-6). The everlasting covenant is God’s promise of reward for men when we obey those moral laws born within us.

Regarding murder, it was only after the great flood that God commanded a law forbidding murder and specifying the penalty for it. For he said to Noah, **“And surely your blood, the blood of your lives, I will require. At the hand of every beast I will require it. And at the hand of man, even at the hand of every man’s brother, I will require the life of man. Whoever sheds man’s blood, by man shall his blood be shed. For in the image of God he made man”** (9:5-6). Yet many years before that time God had punished Cain, the first son of Adam, because he murdered his brother Abel. God condemned Cain by the innate law against murder that was written in his heart. However, he was not punished with the death penalty, for that law had not yet been given.

Cain murdered his brother Abel because he was angry that God respected Abel’s offering of the firstlings of his flock, but not Cain’s offering of the fruit of the ground. When Cain became angry because his offering was not respected, Jehovah said to him, **“Why are thou angry? And why has thy countenance fallen? If thou do well, shall thou not be accepted? And if thou do not well, sin crouches at the door. Its desire shall be for thee, and thou shall rule over it”** (4:6-7). Nevertheless, Cain murdered Abel anyway. The New Testament indicates they both knew what God wanted, for the book of Hebrews says, **“By faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain, because of which he was reported to be righteous, God testifying about his gifts ...”** (Hebrews 11:4). How they knew is not told, but it certainly was not from their innate knowledge.

God also destroyed the entire antediluvian world with a great flood because they were so sinful, all except Noah and his family because he was righteous. And sometime after the flood Jehovah destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah because he judged them wicked. God also condemned the nations of Canaan to extinction when he brought his people Israel out of Egypt, because those nations had become so sinful. And there are other such examples. Yet

there is no record in the Old Testament that he gave all mankind laws about right and wrong beyond that which is written in our hearts innately.

It was only when his Son, Jesus Christ, brought his good news of eternal salvation into the world that God gave all of mankind moral laws beyond those written in our hearts. Even the law of Moses was not for the entire world, but only for the sons of Israel. Gentiles were not judged by him according to the laws of Moses. For Paul told the Gentiles of ancient Athens that God tolerated their ignorance about him before Christ.

Those men of Athens had been worshiping idols, and Paul said to them, **“The God who made the world and all things in it, he, being Lord of heaven and earth, dwells not in temples made with hands, nor is he served by the hands of men, as needing anything, since he himself gives to all life, and breath, with all things. And he made from one blood every nation of men to dwell upon all the face of the earth, having determined prescribed times, and the limits of their occupancy, to search for the Lord, if indeed perhaps they might grope for him and find him, although being not far from each one of us. For in him we live, and move, and exist, as also some of the performers from you have said, For of him we are also offspring.**

“Being therefore offspring of God, we ought not think the Divine to be like gold, or silver, or stone handiwork of the skill and thought of man. Indeed therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God now commands for all men everywhere to repent. Because he appointed a day during which he is going to judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he appointed, having provided assurance to all men because he raised him from the dead” (Acts 17:24-31).

God tolerated the idolatry of the Gentiles before Christ, but he never tolerated sin against his common laws of righteousness. That is witnessed by the antediluvian world, the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, and the nations of Canaan, all of which he condemned for destruction because of their wickedness.

ABRAHAM, ISAAC, AND JACOB

A people to preserve righteousness

A few generations after the destruction of the antediluvian world, God called Abraham (who was originally named Abram) to go to a land where he would make of him a great nation. Jehovah said of him, **“For I have known him, to the end that he may command his children and his household after him, that they may keep the way of Jehovah, to do righteousness and justice, to the end that Jehovah may bring upon Abraham that which he has spoken of him”** (18:19). God chose Abraham to begin a race of people who would preserve righteousness on the earth, for he knew the world would become wicked again. That race of people was the Hebrews. Their forefathers were Abraham, his son Isaac, and his son Jacob. They were also called Israelites after Jacob, because Jacob was later named Israel, and the twelve tribes descended from him. Much later they were called Jews because the tribe of Judah is the only one of the twelve that survived conquest and exile.

For about two thousand years righteousness was preserved by those descendants of Abraham. Indeed, it was through them that the entire Holy Bible was written. However, it was only a minority of them who preserved righteousness. As a whole those blood descendants proved unworthy. Therefore, God chose a new race of people who are the *spiritual* descendants of Abraham. And those are souls who have the kind of faith in God that Abraham had. Actually, Hebrews with that kind of faith were those who preserved righteousness and wrote the Bible.

That new spiritual race is the church of Jesus Christ, which consists of both Hebrews and Gentiles. When Paul was contrasting the sons of Israel, who were given the law of Moses, with disciples of Christ, he said, **“For the promise to Abraham or to his seed, for him to be heir of the world, was not through law, but through a righteousness of faith. For if those from law are heirs, faith has been made void, and the promise has been made useless. For the law works wrath. For where there is no law, neither is there transgression. Because of this it is from faith, so that it is according to grace, in order for the promise to be sure to all the seed, not only to the seed from the law, but also to the seed from the faith of Abraham, who is father of us all (as it is written, I have made thee a father of many nations), before him whom he believed, of God who makes the dead alive, and who calls things not existing, as existing”** (Romans 4:13-17). I explain those things more thoroughly in Parts 3:6 and 4:2 of this book.

Paul made it plain he was speaking of Abraham’s spiritual descendants not his biological ones, because he said, **“For all those from Israel, these are not Israel, nor, because they are Abraham’s seed, are they all children, rather, In Isaac a seed will be called for thee. That is, the children of the flesh, these are not children of God, instead, the children of the promise are reckoned for seed”** (Romans 9:6-8).

Abraham had other sons besides Isaac, but Isaac was the seed of God’s promise. And the children of promise are not children of the flesh, they are spiritual, because they include Gentiles. For when Paul wrote to the Gentile Christians in Galatia he told them they too were Abraham’s seed and heirs according to promise: **“For ye are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many as were immersed into Christ have put on Christ. There is no Jew nor Greek, there is no bondman nor freeman, there is no male and female, for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye are Christ’s, then ye are Abraham’s seed and heirs according to promise”** (Galatians 3:26-29).

Laws for Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob

Abraham was not given a legal system to live by, but he was expected to obey God’s commandments and laws for him. The Bible speaks of that when it describes a time during a famine when God appeared to Isaac. Jehovah said to him, **“Do not go down into Egypt. Dwell in the land which I shall tell thee of. Sojourn in this land, and I will be with thee, and will bless thee. For to thee, and to thy seed, I will give all these lands, and I will establish the oath that I swore to Abraham thy father. And I will multiply thy seed as the stars of heaven, and will give to thy seed all these lands, and in thy seed**

all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because Abraham obeyed my voice, and kept my order, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws” (26:2-5).

Abraham faithfully obeyed every command that God gave him, even the one commanding him to sacrifice his promised son Isaac upon an altar for a burnt offering. At the last moment God stopped Abraham from slaying Isaac, because it had been a test of his faith. God said to him, **“Do not lay thy hand upon the lad, neither do thou anything to him. For now I know that thou fear God, since thou have not withheld thy son, thine only son, from me” (22:12).**

God gave Abraham a few other commandments about specific things, such as what to do about his first son Ishmael, but the only enduring law he gave him was the rite of circumcision. God said to him, **“This is my covenant, which ye shall keep, between me and you and thy seed after thee: every male among you shall be circumcised. And ye shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskin, and it shall be a sign of a covenant between me and you. And he who is eight days old shall be circumcised among you, every male throughout your generations: he who is born in the house, or bought with money of any foreigner that is not of thy seed. He who is born in thy house, and he who is bought with thy money, must be circumcised. And my covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant” (17:10-13).** The other laws Abraham obeyed must have been those common laws of righteousness that are universally recognized by all men, such as not committing murder or theft.

The record tells of no specific laws given to Isaac and Jacob, but they were given a few commands from God. And for the most part they were faithful and obedient. When Jacob was very old God commanded him to live in Egypt. It was there that the biological seed of Abraham multiplied greatly. Eventually God led them out of Egypt by the hand of Moses, and brought them to their promised land. He also gave them the legal system called the law of Moses. The story of all those things is told in the next four books of the Bible.