

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

Jonah 1:12-14; Romans 2:14-15; 1:19-20; Matthew 5:45; Acts 14:16-17; James 1:17; Psalm 145:15-16

I. Natural Law

He said to them, "Pick me up and hurl me into the sea; then the sea will quiet down for you, for I know it is because of me that this great tempest has come upon you." Nevertheless, the men rowed hard to get back to dry land, but they could not, for the sea grew more and more tempestuous against them. (Jonah 1:12-13)

Therefore they called out to the Lord, "O Lord, let us not perish for this man's life, and lay not on us innocent blood, for you, O Lord, have done as it pleased you." (Jonah 1:14)

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

God has written His law on people's hearts: *For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them (Rom.2:14-15).*

God has revealed Himself to all people through nature, which is often called Natural Revelation or General Revelation: *For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. (Rom.1:19-20)*

"I must affirm that people can indeed know something of God's moral laws apart from the Bible. Even without the specific moral teachings of the Bible, human beings have consciences that give them an inward sense of right and wrong. In addition, people are able to observe the way many other people act and the way everything functions in the world, and then they can reason about those observations and draw conclusions about human nature and about the right and wrong actions that are appropriate to human nature. The set of moral conclusions resulting from this type of study is known as 'natural law.'" – Wayne Grudem

For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. (Rom.1:21-23)

For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin, as it is written:

"None is righteous, no, not one;

no one understands;

no one seeks for God.

All have turned aside; together they have become worthless;

no one does good,

not even one." (Rom.3:9-12)

For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin. (Rom.3:20)

II. Common Grace

“Common grace is the grace of God by which he gives people innumerable blessings that are not part of salvation.” – Wayne Grudem

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

Jesus: *But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. (Mt.5:44-45)*

Paul said in a sermon to Gentile unbelievers: *In past generations he allowed all the nations to walk in their own ways. Yet he did not leave himself without witness, for he did good by giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness. (Acts 14:16-17)*

Timothy Keller elaborates on the idea of Common Grace:

“James 1:17 says, *Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights.* That is, God is ultimately enabling every act of goodness, wisdom, justice, and beauty—no matter who does it. Isaiah 45:1 speaks of Cyrus, a pagan king, whom God anoints and uses for world leadership. Isaiah 28:23–29 tells us that when a farmer is fruitful, it is God who has been teaching him to be so.

“That means that all good and great artistic expressions, skillful farming, effective governments, and scientific advances are God’s gifts to the human race. They are undeserved, gifts of God’s mercy and grace. They are also “common.” That is, they are distributed to any and all. There is no indication that the monarch or the farmer mentioned in Isaiah embraced God by faith.

“Common grace does not regenerate the heart, save the soul, or create a personal, covenant relationship with God. Yet without it the world would be an intolerable place to live. It is wonderful expression of God’s love to all people:

*The eyes of all look to you,
and you give them their food in due season.
You open your hand;
you satisfy the desire of every living thing. (Psalm 145:15–16).*

Conclusion: We have seen evidence of God’s Common Grace throughout our lives:

- The NYC Firefighters and Police Officers who raced up the stairways of the burning Twin Towers of the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001 to save countless lives, knowing they would probably lose their lives in the process.
- The dedicated men and women in every Emergency Room are there to save the lives of whoever comes through the door with a life-threatening illness or injury.
- All who serve in such positions are not Christians; most are probably not. But they are agents of God’s Common Grace to meet needs and save lives

We have had unbelievers make significant contributions to our lives: doctors, teachers, coaches, neighbors, family members, etc. God used them to bless us in countless ways through His Common Grace.

Whenever we see or benefit from such virtue and nobility in unbelievers, we need to thank God for His Common Grace. We also need to thank everyone God uses to bless our lives.