

Support for The Bible, Natural Law, and Natural Theology

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<https://njjat.com/apologetics.html>

A fellow Faith Defender found this wonderful comment and sent it in to me. It supports my recent book, *The Bible, Natural Law, and Natural Theology*. I will include it in the book next time we edit it. Feel free to send it to all your natural theology friends.

"NATURAL THEOLOGY

Romans 1:19–21 and 2:14–15 have been the classical center for arguing that Paul taught a natural theology (so especially Roman Catholic theology and much mainline Protestant thought). The argument is that Paul's thought here reflects either dependence on or similarity to Stoic natural theology as mediated through Hellenistic Judaism.

Stoicism was an ancient school of philosophy current with the early centuries of the church. Stoic cosmology (origin and nature of the world) taught that the creative and unifying principle of the world was a reality called one of many different names: spirit (pneuma), reason (logos), nature (physis), common law (nomos), god (theos). This "reason" or "nature," often called a natural law, is prior to creation and governs the universe. It may be discerned by the careful observation of nature. The goal of human beings is to live in conformity to "nature" or "reason." This law of nature is eternal and unchangeable. "Justice" is established by nature. The laws of human communities are valid to the degree they are in harmony with this natural law. Laws are needed for human communities because most people do not participate sufficiently in the "reason" to live in harmony with "nature." Wise men (the Stoics were very gender specific), however, are "self-sufficient," because they live in harmony with "nature," and thus do not need local laws. Cosmology and ethics are thus linked in a rigorous and closely reasoned ethical system.

A careful reading of Romans 1 and 2 indicates that Paul knows nothing of Stoic "natural theology."

1. Paul's focus is the judgment of God, not the creation of the universe.
2. He does not have an independent doctrine of creation. Creation theology in Paul is a function of theology proper, talk about God, and anthropology, talk about the creatureliness of humanity.
3. Paul makes no reference to the order of the universe (dioikesis or taxis) as a base for knowledge of God. Knowledge of God is not perceived as a problem, but is presupposed as self-evident for everyone.
4. Paul does not argue that God can be deduced from divine works, and, therefore, humanity should have deduced God, the form of the argument in Hellenistic Judaism. Rather, he asserts that humanity did know God. The problem is that human beings did not give glory and thanks.
5. Paul does not argue that people naturally do the will of God. The point of 2:14 is that the Gentiles do not have the law by nature of their birth and cultural-religious inheritance, not that they naturally do what the law requires.
6. The rhetoric in Romans is not philosophical (especially metaphysical) speculation, but prophetic accusation. The purpose is not to reason from below to above, but to assert the "excuselessness" of the creature before the Creator. Paul is not seeking to explain a point of contact with the divine, but to characterize God as powerful lord and humanity as in revolt against the known lord. The focus on the power and lordship of God is to emphasize the creatureliness of humanity. That creatureliness is evidence of God's lordship. As Guenther Bornkamm says so well, Paul does not "infer God's being from the world, but ... the being of the world from God's revelation" (1969:59).
7. Paul knows nothing of "self-sufficient" human beings. All humans are creatures who worship a god or the God. Natural theology is foreign to Paul. He knows only of revealed theology.

See Bornkamm, 1969:47–70; Käsemann, 1980:39–43; McKenzie, 1964."