

# The Natural Man and Conscience

by W.J. Erdman

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*The natural man knows God's existence, but suppresses the truth and despises His goodness, and it is only through faith that one can be justified in the sight of God.*

**Scripture:** Acts 17:30, Romans 1:20, Romans 2:14, Romans 3:20, Galatians 3:11

**Topics:** "Natural Man", "Salvation By Faith"

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## Description

W.J. Erdman preaches about the universal truth underlying all natural religions, emphasizing the importance of fearing God, doing right, and acknowledging the coming judgment day. He highlights how various cultures and wise men throughout history have recognized the significance of fearing God and keeping His commandments, as echoed in the New Testament teachings. Erdman emphasizes that while duty is essential, it is not redemptive, and salvation cannot be earned through works alone, contrasting the Gospel message with the beliefs of other sacred texts.

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## Transcript

The most positive Proof that to fear God and keep His commandments, and in view of a judgment to come, is the Conclusion of man under the sun, is found in the New Testament.

Did the Hebrew sage conclude to fear God and keep His law as the best and noblest thing for man to do; so also did the Persian; the Greek, the Roman wise men, for they, with all Gentiles, "shew the work of the law written in their hearts; their conscience also bearing witness." It is charged upon the Gentiles, by Paul, that they knew God's eternal power and Godhead; that they did not like to retain God in knowledge; that they suppressed the truth; that they knew of the judgment of God and despised His goodness, and so were without excuse. His conclusion is, " For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these having not the law are a law unto themselves, their conscience also bearing witness and their thoughts the meanwhile accusing, or else excusing, one another." The same apostle, whether preaching to the philosophers of Athens or to the rustics of Lycaonia, reiterates the same charge of inexcusable ignorance of God, and warns them of future judgment. To fear God is, then, not heard for the first time, among men, in this old Hebrew sermon, but is there with the seal of inspiration, that the book may become the book for the race, its mirror and its spokesman; and that its final sentence may be the link to the Gospel of Christ.

That sentence, that " conclusion," is the truth underlying all natural religions; the utterance of the universal conscience; the highest teaching of Greek wisdom; the grand motive of heroic deeds; the central principle

and illuminating idea of the histories of a Carlyle, and a Froude, who, with an enlarged application of its truth, call to an unrighteous nation -- " Fear God; do right; thy judgment day is coming." It is verily nobler in the blood to do right than to mope in melancholy, or to eat and drink.

"What is man

If his chief good and market of his time

Be but to sleep and feed? a beast, no more."

It is some relief, amidst the wrongs and perplexities of the world, to look for a day of divine judgment to righten and clear up all, but there is no personal salvation in it. And should one believe that many do fear God in every nation, it will still remain a question whether such fear has led them to look, in confessed failure, like a Cornelius, beyond themselves for salvation; or whether, like the unbelieving proselytes who despised the gospel, they rest in pharisaic obedience to justify them before God. Over such men of his own nation, boasting in this very conclusion of Ecclesiastes, and going about to establish their own righteousness, the apostle's heart yearned; and for such he prayed as for men unsaved, natural men needing forgiveness and the righteousness of God.

It was true in Paul's day, in Solomon's, in Abel's, and is now and always will be: " The just shall live by faith." " By the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified in the sight of God." The very testimony certain commentators adduce out of all countries and centuries to make this Book a "pious" God-fearing treatise, but proves it is all of the natural man; duty is not redemptive; the wise of Greece and Rome counted the Gospel "foolishness." A scholar (Max Müller) most competent to speak on this great question has affirmed, as follows:

"I have devoted as much time as any man living to the study of the sacred books of the East, and I have found the one keynote -- the one diapason, so to speak -- of all these so-called sacred books -- whether it be the Veda of the Brahmins, the Puranas of Siva and Vishnu, the Koran of the Mohammedans, the Zend-Avesta of the Parsees, the Tripitaka of the Buddhists -- the one diapason, the one refrain through all, to be salvation by works. They all say that salvation must be purchased, must be bought with a price, and that the sole price, the sole purchase money, must be our own works and deservings. Our own Holy Bible, our sacred book of the East, is, from beginning to end, a protest against this doctrine,"

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