

# BIBLICAL ECONOMICS TODAY

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## WITNESSES AND JUDGES

by Gary North

**And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die (Gen. 2:16-17).**

Good judgment. The Bible calls it wisdom. What is it worth to a godly man? It is what Solomon asked for, and what the Book of Proverbs says is the most valuable asset a man can seek.

Adam was called upon by God to render good judgment. He was to exercise good judgment in three senses. The first sense was economic or **dominical judgment**, in the sense of technical and leadership skills, as a dominion man. Second, he was to exercise **judicial judgment**: to declare God's word in condemnation of God's enemies. Third, he was to exercise **moral judgment**. Most commentaries dwell exclusively on the moral aspect of Adam's fall, but the dominical and judicial are equally important considerations.

The development of good **dominical judgment** as a godly subordinate was basic to Adam's calling before God. It is basic to humanity, for basic to humanity is the dominion assignment (Gen. 1:28). (On this point, see my book, *The Dominion Covenant: Genesis* [Institute for Christian Economics, 1982].) Adam was placed in the garden temporarily in order to develop his dominion skills and judgment: managerial, agricultural, aesthetic, technological, etc. Later, he was to begin the conquest of the whole earth. **The garden of Eden was a training ground for him.** It was not to become a permanent residence. He could not stay there forever.

The essence of good judgment in both the economic and judicial sense is the ability to "think God's thoughts after Him" as an ethically dependent subordinate. **Men are to exercise dominion over nature by remaining ethically subordinate to God.** Men are creatures. They are not to strive to attain exhaustive knowledge, but they are to strive to organize the knowledge that they have in terms of the presuppositions and explicit revelations that God has given to man concerning the creation. God holds men responsible for such intellectual and moral subordination. He rewards them for obedience. **Thus, the starting-point of good judgment is man's affirmation of the reliability and ethically binding nature of God's word.** When men do not start with this presupposition, they cannot hope to

exercise good judgment for very long.

### Bearing False Witness

The serpent tempted mankind in a very specific way. He first raised doubts in Eve's mind concerning the reliability of her husband's testimony to her concerning God's word. "Hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?" the serpent asked (Gen. 3:1). He quoted only part of God's word. Hadn't God opened up the entire garden to them?

Initially, she answered him properly. She told him of God's warning that they should die if they ate of one tree. So the serpent escalated his attack: he denied that God's word is reliable. "Ye shall not surely die" (3:4). Then he made the accusation that God had a secret ulterior motive in establishing the prohibition: "For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil" (3:5). In other words, God is jealously monopolizing His position as the Lord of creation, a position which can and should be shared with others. Man, of course, should share in this lofty position, Satan implied. He misled her, for he was the one with the ulterior motive: he believed that ultimately he should occupy God's position monopolistically.

Satan made a three-part claim: **God's word is not what He says it is, God's position is not what He says it is, and the results of eating the forbidden fruit are not what God says they will be.** In short, God is a liar. The heart of Satan's accusation against God was this: God bears **false witness** concerning Himself and the creation.

The phrase, "to know good and evil," implies power greater than mere intellectual comprehension. It implies the ability to **determine** good and evil, as Rushdoony has pointed out. This is a God-like ability, and Adam and Eve desired it. So did Satan. Man hoped to make his own law, carrying out his will without interference from God or other men, and certainly without resistance from the creation. So did Satan. Neither man nor Satan achieved this goal.

Eve saw that the tree was good for food, for aesthetic pleasure ("pleasant to the eyes"), and for wisdom. She did not seek to confirm her new understanding of God's word with her husband. She sought autonomy of interpretation. She would test God's word for herself. She ate, and she gave her husband fruit to eat. The subordinate in the family took control of the situation. The results were predictable for those governed by God's word. Adam and Eve did

not predict them.

Why did Satan begin by calling God's word into question? Because this was the essence of the temptation. The fruit was only the symbol; the reliability of God's word, and His authority to bring that word to pass, were the ultimate issues. Satan was challenging both. He was calling God a liar. He also was saying that God is not omnipotent: He cannot bring His word to pass. In short, Satan was saying that he was telling the truth, and that God was a false witness. Man had to decide. He had to make a judgment: Who was the false witness?

### Two Witnesses

What modern commentators fail to emphasize, or even to recognize, is this: **the temptation in the garden was fundamentally a judicial proceeding.** Satan was bringing charges against God. The charge was false witness. Yet it was more than false witness; it was the charge of false witness concerning God almighty. Satan charged that God was not telling the truth about the "real" God. It is a capital crime to teach men to worship a false god (Deut. 13:6-11). God was therefore deserving of death. But who would listen? To bring a charge of this magnitude against anyone, the accuser needs two witnesses (Num. 35:30). To begin his rebellion, Satan needed two witnesses to testify against God. (This is why Satan's rebellion probably began in the garden, not in heaven days before or even before time began.)

Furthermore, who had the right to execute the death sentence? Not the accuser. The witnesses have this responsibility: "The hands of the witnesses shall be first upon him to put him to death, and afterward the hands of all the people. So thou shalt put away evil from among you" (Deut. 17:7). Satan needed at least two witnesses who had knowledge of the actual words of God before he could see his goal achieved, namely, **the death of God.**

Adam had been given God's instructions concerning the forbidden tree. He was the witness whose word was fundamental to the trial. Eve knew of God's instructions, but only because Adam had told her. She had not been present when God had spoken these words to Adam. Her testimony would have been based on "hearsay evidence."

Judicially speaking, God's word could not be legally challenged in this court, for there were not two witnesses. But Satan proceeded as if he were in a position to bring charges. He appealed to Eve, who then acted autonomously, and who subsequently brought her husband into the court as an implicit witness against God, for she gave him fruit to eat, and he ate. Adam never verbally confirmed Satan's charge. He did not verbally lie. He simply acted out his rebellion. **But his act of rebellion constituted his testimony,** for implicit in his eating of the fruit was a denial of the binding authority of God's word.

The Christian view of God is trinitarian. God is three Persons, yet also one Person. Each Person always has the corroborating testimony of the others. Therefore, God's word cannot be successfully challenged in a court. Two Witnesses testify eternally to the validity of what the other Person declares. Each has exhaustive knowledge of the others; each has exhaustive knowledge of the creation. The truth of God's word is established by Witnesses. As the supreme Witness, God casts the first stone on the day of final judgment, and then His people follow Him in executing judgment.

The doctrine of the two witnesses also throws light on

the New Testament doctrine of the **rebellious third.** In Revelation 8, we are told that a third of the trees are burned up (v. 7), a third of the sea becomes blood (v. 8), and a third part of the creatures and ships in the sea are destroyed (v. 9). A third part of the rivers are hit by the star from heaven (v. 10), and a third part of the sun, moon, and stars are smitten (v. 12). In Revelation 9, we read that angels in judgment work for a time to slay a third part of rebellious mankind (v. 15), to testify to the other two-thirds of the coming judgment, yet they do not repent (v. 21). A third of the stars (angels) of heaven are pulled down by Satan's tail (Rev. 12:4).

Why these divisions into thirds? Because **for every transgressor, there are two righteous witnesses to condemn him.** God's final judgment is assured, for in God's court, there will always be a sufficient number of witnesses to condemn the ethical rebels.

### Instant Judgment

What was the primary lure of this particular fruit? It would make men wise. But what kind of wisdom was this? It was the wisdom given to Solomon by God: **the ability to make wise judgments.** Satan's promise was that men would be able to determine good and evil and then act upon the information. On the other hand, God had told man that he was to avoid the tree, and by implication, to avoid the quest for instant illumination, meaning instant authority as a judge. But man did not obey. He did not want to wait.

How was man to achieve good judgment? By conforming himself to God's word. Man was and is required first and foremost **to obey God's word.** This requirement applied both to his role as a **judge**, declaring good and evil, and in his role as a **dominion man**, working out the implications of God's word, in time and on earth.

In terms of his role as a subordinate sovereign over nature, he was to attain good judgment by bringing the whole world into subjection to God. When we are speaking of making economic judgments, we say that over time—possibly a lengthy period of time—man's skills in conforming his actions to God's standards would have progressively developed in him the judgment he needed.

In his role as a judge, on the other hand, man's field of testing was limited by God: to stay away from just one tree during a period of testing. Do this, God said, and you will eventually attain good judgment. But Adam wanted to be a judge that day. He was not willing to wait on God for one afternoon. He preferred to be an **instant, self-appointed judge** rather than to serve first as a God-fearing witness for the prosecution against the serpent.

Adam could have achieved a position as a law-abiding, God-appointed judge by the end of the day, for he had another option: to eat of the tree of life. This would have served as a visible, public affirmation of man's belief in God's word. Eternal life is attainable only from that tree. **By eating of the tree of life, man would have declared ritually that he was subordinating himself wholly to God, relying wholly upon God's word concerning the true way of life.** Eating a meal from the tree of life would have meant communion with God—a **ritual communion meal**, eaten in faith while God was physically absent.

The moment Adam and Eve had eaten from that tree, the ethical test—the test of Adam as a judge—would have been over. The possibility of death would have been removed. On the day that they ate of the tree of life, they

could not have died. The penalty of eating from the forbidden tree would have been removed. **Without a penalty, there is no law.**

This does not mean that they would have eaten of the forbidden tree immediately. They would have awaited God's announcement that the tree was no longer "off limits." Presumably, this would have been announced on the very same day, after the trial of Satan. There would have been no need for God to have retained His prohibition after His return to the garden and after the trial, for their ethical temptation would have been over. But as the final Judge, He would have had to declare His acceptance of their provisional judgment against Satan and Satan's interpretation of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

By conforming themselves ritually to God's word concerning eternal life, they would have attained man's assigned goal of rendering provisional, subordinate judgment. But then they could not have attained their preferred goal: **autonomous** judgment. The issues were autonomy, the question of the reliability of God's word, and the authority to render final judgment concerning that word.

### **Witness: An Inescapable Office**

The drama in the garden was a courtroom drama. We commonly speak of the garden as a "trial" for Adam, in the sense of a test; it was also a trial in a judicial sense. There was an intruder in the garden. He was tempting them to commit a capital crime—in fact, a crime doubly capital in its offensiveness: eating the forbidden fruit, and perjuring themselves in a court of law regarding another person's commission of a capital crime. The penalty for committing perjury is the punishment which would have been imposed on the innocent victim (Deut. 19: 16-19).

Satan's charge, had he been able to prove it, would have required the death of God. This would have left Satan as the most powerful being in the universe, the one who renders final judgment. It was their responsibility to avoid all further contact with this intruder until they could bring formal charges against him when God returned. He had tempted them to deny the word of God and become false witnesses. He deserved death.

Inevitably, they would have to testify. They were witnesses. Adam had witnessed God's word, and Eve had witnessed Satan's. Before God returned and the trial began, Eve should have gone to her husband and openly asked him what God had said. If she still had doubts, she should have waited for God to return to repeat His law. Had Eve remained faithful to her husband's word, she would have been content to wait for God to declare Himself to her upon His return to the garden.

Had Adam served as a righteous witness, he would have asked Satan to repeat the interpretation of God's word which Satan had given to Eve. Then Adam would have awaited God's return, so that He might testify to Eve concerning His words to Adam. Then Adam and Eve would have testified against Satan.

They could testify against God or against Satan, but they could not escape testifying. God subpoenas all witnesses. There is also no constitutional "fifth amendment" in God's court—no right to remain silent even if the testimony might convict the witness. From the moment of temptation, man became a witness. **This is the very heart of the experience in the garden: man had to serve as a witness before he could serve as a judge.** This is also the experience of mankind throughout history, with some men

testifying for Satan and against God, hoping to become **autonomous judges**, and others testifying against Satan and for God, hoping to become **subordinate judges**. Before becoming judges, men must first exercise judgment concerning which kind of witness they will be. They must also decide whose court it is, and who the prosecutor is. Most important of all, who is the presiding judge: God, Satan, or man?

If they testified against the serpent, and he was convicted, they would also have to execute justice against him. They would crush his head. It is clear why God established stoning as the normal mode of execution in a covenantal commonwealth. **Stoning is the symbolic equivalent of head-crushing.** To crush the convicted person's head is to destroy him. Also, the witnesses for the prosecution must take full responsibility for their testimony. This is the requirement of God for human courts, and it was the requirement in Eden. If they brought the charge against Satan, they would have to execute the Judge's judgment.

There was no escape from the ethical obligation to witness against Satan and for God. There still isn't. There is also no escape from the ethical duty of crushing the head of the serpent (Gen. 3:15). It is done progressively, through cultural dominion. Man will eventually judge the fallen angels (I Cor. 6:3).

Man is to crush the head of the serpent, and redeemed man does so as he witnesses against Satan, but now man is vulnerable to the bite of the serpent (Gen. 3:15). This would not have been true if Adam and Eve had gone directly to God upon His return to the garden and had brought charges against the serpent. While they were waiting for God to return, they could have eaten of the tree of life, and they would thereby have become immune to his bite—his **ethical bite**.

Final judgment was delayed. They had to wait for God to return in order to obtain judgment. There had to be a trial. This delay is part of what repelled them. They wanted to declare instant judgment, and they believed that they could do this only by siding with Satan and eating from the forbidden tree immediately. They ate, thereby becoming **witnesses for Satan**. Their eyes were immediately opened, as promised by Satan—his partial word of truth—but they still had to wait on God. They wanted to become autonomous judges instantly, but they could not achieve their goal. They had to wait for God to return, for only God can declare final judgment.

### **Judicial Robes**

Their immediate response to their new condition—at this point, an **ethical** condition, not yet a physical condition—was to sew fig leaves together to cover themselves. They needed a covering because of their shame. They could no longer work together without coverings. Their sin had interfered with the division of labor between them. I suspect that they worked separately, not as a team. This is an explanation which is most consistent with the nature of their rebellion: they hid from each other until their coverings were in place. Their sin alienated them ethically from God and from each other, as God's images. They sewed fig leaves together; they were probably not working together. Their ability to fulfil the terms of the dominion covenant in the God-designed division of labor was compromised by their perception of their nakedness.

It took time to sew these fig leaves together. They

worked, not to subdue the earth, but to cover their shame. Rather than working together in their first joint project on their first day of independent labor, in all likelihood, they worked separately. It was each for his own glory—or at least lack of shame—that they worked. Man's imitation glory is simply a make-shift covering, a hoped-for lack of shame.

Why did they think they needed clothing? Shame is specifically mentioned in the text. But shame over what? Vulnerability? What kind of vulnerability? Was it their fear of God? If they were afraid of God, they needed protection. They still had access to protection: **the tree of life**. What seems astounding in retrospect is that they did not make a mad dash for the tree of life. God later closed the garden to them, and set a flaming sword in front of it, specifically to keep them from eating from the tree of life and gaining immortality (Gen. 3:22). The tree of life still retained its life-giving power. Why did they refuse to eat during God's physical absence?

We come to the heart of man's sin when we answer this question. **Man would have had to subordinate himself to God's word in order to receive eternal life.** They saw that they were naked. Their eyes had been opened. The serpent's word was partially fulfilled. God had not told them about this aspect of the tree of knowledge, and now the serpent was apparently vindicated. However, the second half of the serpent's word had yet to be fulfilled, namely, that on the day that they ate, they would **not** surely die. But God had said that they would die. So the partial fulfillment of Satan's word—having their eyes opened—was insufficient to prove the case. This was merely Satan's additional information vs. the silence of God. The crucial test was still undecided. What would be the outcome of the two antithetical words? Would the rebels die before the day was over?

Satan had said that they would not die. Why would they believe such a thing? Because God is immortal. By implication, becoming as God would mean that they, too, were immortal. Would they not participate in the very being of God? Would not His attributes become theirs, including immortality? This temptation, James Jordan says, is the origin of the **chain of being** philosophy.

They were still clinging to their false witness. They would not admit that Satan was lying, that God's word was sure. They did not go directly to the tree of life while there was still time remaining prior to the judgment of God. They refused to admit ritually that the day was not yet over, that God would surely come in judgment and slay them as He had promised. Instead, they spent their time making coverings for themselves. It was a question of **saving their skins** or **covering their hides**. They chose to cover their hides. Their pride condemned them.

Jordan argues that they sensed their need for coverings because they understood a judge's need for a robe. The robe in the Bible is a **robe of judicial office**. Joseph's long, sleeved robe (sometimes translated "coat of many colors") from Jacob was just this kind of robe (Gen. 37:3). It signified his authority over his brothers. When he told them of his dream that they would bow down to him (37:5-11), they stripped him of his robe (37:23) and tore it up (37:32). They refused to tolerate his authority over them. They cast him into a pit, and the pit was in the wilderness (37:22)—another familiar Bible theme.

Robes are given by God or those who are God's lawful subordinates. Adam and Eve wanted to manifest their self-appointed authority as judges, but without robes, they were visibly usurpers. They had judged God's word, and by

implication, they had to judge God and execute the sentence. Yet they were naked. A naked judge is not in a position to render judgment.

Adam and Eve were naked, not because they were sinless, but because they were **children**. As they matured, they would have been given clothing by God as a sign of their maturity, and as a sign of their authority as judges. Now that they had autonomously and **prematurely** grabbed judicial authority, they felt compelled to sew coverings for themselves. They were the image of God, and God wears clothing. He wears the glory cloud. In Daniel 8:9, the Ancient of Days is adorned in a white robe. In Revelation 1:13, the son of man is a robe that covers his feet. But God is not a sinner in need of covering. He is a judge who wears a robe. They, too, wanted to wear such robes.

It is significant that God in His mercy killed animals and made coverings for them. He simultaneously saved their skins (temporarily) and covered their hides, but only by sacrificing the life of an animal whose hide became man's covering. They were covered physically because of the shed blood of one or more animals. Their physical shame was temporarily removed from sight. (Ultimately, the shame of death can no longer be successfully hidden by clothing.) But this act of slaying the animal pointed to the necessity of the death of an innocent victim to cover man ethically.

Perhaps they were too ashamed to be seen running for the tree of life. They may have decided to clothe themselves before heading in the direction of the tree. They may have believed that with their coverings, they would not be ashamed in front of each other or the serpent; they could always eat of the tree of life after their coverings were in place. "First things first."

Prior to the judge's rendering of final judgment, witnesses can change their testimony. If they have perjured themselves, they must admit their guilt, but they can avoid the penalty by throwing themselves before the mercy of the court. **They incur shame, but they avoid the penalty for perjury.** But Adam and Eve would not accept shame. Rebellious man never does. They preferred to risk the penalty. Rebellious man always does.

They could have gone to the tree of life. They could have had a ritual communion meal with God. They could have attained eternal life. They refused. It was more important to cover their shame.

They had another option. When they heard God walking in the cool of the day, they could still have run to him and admitted their guilt. Instead, they hid from him, thereby abandoning their last opportunity to escape the penalty.

### The Judicial Process

Immediately upon His return, God began His investigation. He looked at the evidence. They were wearing fig leaves. He concluded that their eyes were open. This meant that they had eaten from the forbidden tree (3:11). Adam admitted that he had eaten, but first he blamed his wife. He refused to "take the rap" by himself. Misery loves company. He wanted the "bone of his bone" to suffer the penalty, too.

Then God asked Eve about what she had done. She blamed the serpent. In effect, both Adam and Eve blamed their environment, which God had made. They blamed God indirectly. But neither wanted to suffer the penalty alone.

This is the response of ethical rebels. It is not a godly

response. What did Christ say? “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13). He accepted the full punishment. This is what Isaiah said the messiah would do for Israel: “Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed” (Isa. 53:4-5). What is rebellious men’s response? Isaiah points to **shame**: “He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not” (52:3). Men hide their faces in shame, just as our parents did in the garden.

God judged the serpent without asking him to testify. No cross-examination was necessary. Adam had admitted guilt; Eve had blamed the serpent. He had lured them into sin. The serpent had nothing to say in his defense. The serpent stood condemned. Soon he would crawl condemned. God had seen and heard. But God did not declare final judgment against the serpent. He declared **definitive judgment** and announced a **provisional penalty**: the serpent would crawl on its belly and eat the dust of the ground. Eventually, its head will be crushed by the promised man (Gen. 3:15). There will be a final judgment. But Satan now has no response to give in God’s court. He has been definitively condemned.

What we see in the story of the garden is that God gives men time to repent and become faithful witnesses to the validity of God’s word. But once the final verdict is rendered, there is no escape. Men are cast out of the garden and away from the tree of life. They cannot attain eternal life through a return to the physical garden and a physical tree. Once God pronounces judgment, man’s destiny is sealed.

The day in the garden is symbolic of each man’s life on earth, as well as mankind’s stay on earth prior to the final judgment. There is still time to repent of the act of bearing false witness against God. There is time to eat the tree of life. This is what the communion meal means: a ritual meal eaten in the spiritual presence of God, before He returns physically to render final judgment. When He returns physically, it is the time of final judgment, just as when He draws near spiritually (for example, in the glory cloud in Old Testament times), it is a time of provisional judgment. Ungodly men hide; Godly men rejoice. God delays rendering final judgment for mercy’s sake. He did so in the garden, and He does so today. But He will eventually return. The time of mercy will end.

### Rendering Provisional Judgment

Man wanted to render autonomous judgment. He also wanted to render instant judgment. But as a witness, he was not allowed to declare a final judgment, nor was he allowed to execute final judgment. The combined act of **declaring** judgment and **executing** it is what we call **rendering** judgment. God renders final judgment. Man would have been allowed to render provisional, subordinate judgment, as a witness. He should have rendered provisional judgment by avoiding all further contact with the serpent until God returned. He was not to declare final judgment. Man is a subordinate witness and a subordinate judge. He is not the final judge, nor is he a final witness. God testifies to Himself and against His enemies.

The reason why man today can execute judgment provisionally is because he is made in God’s image (Gen. 9:5-6). God has declared His judgment against sin in His word. This was a **definitive** declaration. He brings His judgment to pass in history. This is His **progressive** judgment. He will declare and execute judgment at the end of time. This is His **final** judgment. Men can therefore render provisional judgment because God has declared His judgment and His standards of enforcement in His law. He declared Himself definitively to Moses, as He had to Adam. Men are therefore called to render earthly, provisional judgment in God’s name, as His lawful subordinates. But they must render honest judgment in terms of His law.

The temptation in the garden was in the form of a judicial proceeding. So is all of life. We are to render provisional, subordinate judgment in every area of life. We are to master God’s law so that we can render honest judgment, just as Adam and Eve should have rendered provisional judgment against Satan in the garden by avoiding him and the forbidden tree before God returned physically to render final judgment.

Man wanted to be able to render autonomous, instant judgment. He ate of the forbidden tree. What he found was that final judgment is delayed. It is delayed against him, but it is also delayed against Satan. Satan remains man’s enemy, bruising man’s heel. God threw Adam and Eve out of the garden and banned their return to it physically, in time and on earth. But he offered them grace and a promise: man will eventually crush the head of the serpent. Redeemed men will witness against him formally, in the court of life, and then execute judgment against him. But now the delay in God’s physical return would be more than one afternoon. Rebellious man declared instant judgment against God and for Satan; redeemed man must now struggle against Satan and the works of Satan’s people, developing his good judgment over time.

Man must serve as a judge. He must declare judgment **progressively** in terms of God’s **definitive** judgment and the promised **final** judgment. Man is now outside the garden, which was to have served as his training ground before he entered the world at large. Now the garden is closed to him, and the earth is cursed. This cursing of the ground also delays man’s judgment, under God. It takes longer to render judgment as he works under God to build up the kingdom of God, in time and on earth. He struggles ethically against Satan and physically against the thorns. Adam had hoped to be an instant judge, but only Satan was willing to promise him that option, and then only if he testified against God.

So man’s dream has been turned against him: hoping to render judgment instantaneously, he has had to render **judgment progressively**. His dream of autonomy has also been thwarted: he can declare judgment against God under Satan, or he can declare against Satan under God. But he is a **provisional judge**, not a final judge. He is always under the overall sovereignty of God, but ethically he places himself under the judicial sovereignty of either God or Satan.

### Standards of Judgment

What God has declared **definitively** must serve as man’s standards **provisionally**, for man will be judged in terms of these standards **finally**. This points inescapably to the continuing validity of biblical law. Rebellious man will attempt to adhere to the dominion covenant by rendering

judgment, but as he grows more consistent with his condition as a covenant-breaker, he will seek to declare his own standards, and to render final judgment.

There are two humanistic standards that covenant-breakers substitute in place of biblical law: **natural law** and **positive law**. Natural law theorists declare that man, as judge, has access to universal standards of righteousness that are binding on all men in all periods of time. These standards are therefore available to all men through the use of a universal faculty of judgment, either **reason** or **intuition**. In fact, to declare judgment in terms of such a law-order, the judge must exercise both reason and intuition, in order to "fit" the morally binding universal standard to the particular circumstances of the case. What is therefore **logically binding** becomes **morally binding** in natural law theories. **What is logical is therefore right.**

Positive law does not appeal to universal standards of logic in order to discover righteousness. It appeals to the particular case. Circumstances determine what is correct. The legislature declares **definitively** what the law is, and this becomes the morally binding code of justice. But the legislature has a rival: the judiciary. The judge interprets the law, and this judgment **finally** becomes the true law, if "the people" (or the executive) are willing and able to enforce what the judge declares. In short, **what the State can enforce is therefore right.**

Neither system can escape the need to declare some sort of coherent (logical) standard, and neither system can avoid the use of some non-logical human faculty (intuition) to apply the law. "Circumstances" do not speak with a universally clear voice, nor does "reason." In fact, each system relies on aspects of the other to impose man's law. As Cornelius Van Til has said, each side makes its living by taking in the other side's laundry.

Both natural law theory and positive law theory are apostate. Both cry out together against the universally binding nature of God's revealed law. Both sides define justice in terms of what man can discover and enforce, not in terms of what God has declared, has enforced, and will bring to final judgment.

It is more common for self-styled Christian social, political, and legal theorists to declare the doctrines of natural law. Natural law seems at first glance to be closer to a concept of eternal law made by God. Natural law theorists can also appeal to the fatherhood of God (Acts 17:26) as the foundation of their universal valid categories of law. But the fatherhood of God is a doctrine that condemns man, for it points to fallen man's position as a **disinherited covenant-breaker**, not an ethical son. How can a disinherited son agree with an adopted son about the nature of their mutual responsibilities to themselves and to the Father, let alone agree about the final distribution of the inheritance? Did Isaac and Ishmael agree? Did Jacob and Esau agree? Did Cain and Abel?

What was the "natural law" aspect of God's prohibition against eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil? Satan at first tried to lure Eve into eating by an appeal

to what appeared to be a universal law. Hadn't God said that they could eat of every tree in the garden? In other words, why not eat of this one tree? Eve replied appropriately: God has forbidden us to eat of this particular tree. This was a specific revelation to her husband. If she had stuck with her initial resistance, Satan would have been thwarted in his plans. **If man had relied on natural law theory to guide his actions, he would not have offered even this token resistance to the temptation.**

It is not surprising to find that those Christian scholars who have been most open in their denial of the continuing applicability of revealed Old Testament law have also been vociferous promoters of some version of natural law theory. Natural law theory offers them a time-honored, man-made covering for their shame, for they fear being exposed as unfashionably dressed in the eyes of their humanist colleagues. **Natural law theory is the conservative antinomian Christian's fashion preference in the world of fig leaf coverings.** The "bloody skins of God-slaughtered animals"—the forthrightly biblical morality of God-revealed law—are just not adequate for him.

### Conclusion

The development of a godly sense of judgment takes many years. The emphasis of the Bible on the importance of training in the law is central to the question of godly judgment. "And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up" (Deut. 6:6-7). **The mastery of God's revealed law is fundamental for rendering righteous, provisional, subordinate judgment, just as it was on that first working day in Eden.**

One of the main reasons why Christians are culturally impotent today is that for well over a century, they have been taught alternative theories of law. They have been told that Christianity can survive under any system of law. The accent is on mere survival. There is supposedly no prospect of Christians exercising godly rule in every area of life. Of course, we are told, Christianity cannot be expected to flourish under any system of law, not because of specific kinds of flaws in humanistic law systems, but because the church is supposedly impotent by nature in history. For many of those who believe that Christianity is doomed to historical impotence, there seems to be no reason to call forth ridicule, let alone persecution, on themselves by declaring that all humanists are wearing fig leaves, and that revealed law is the only way that God wants us to cover our nakedness, through grace. Meanwhile, they can buy an "off the rack" fig leaf wardrobe from the latest humanist collection—well, maybe not the latest, but a discount version that is only ten years out of date. "Better to be almost trendy than never to be trendy at all!"

**Fig leaves do not stand up to the howling winters of a cursed world.** When Christians finally learn this lesson, they will be ready to begin to exercise godly judgment.

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