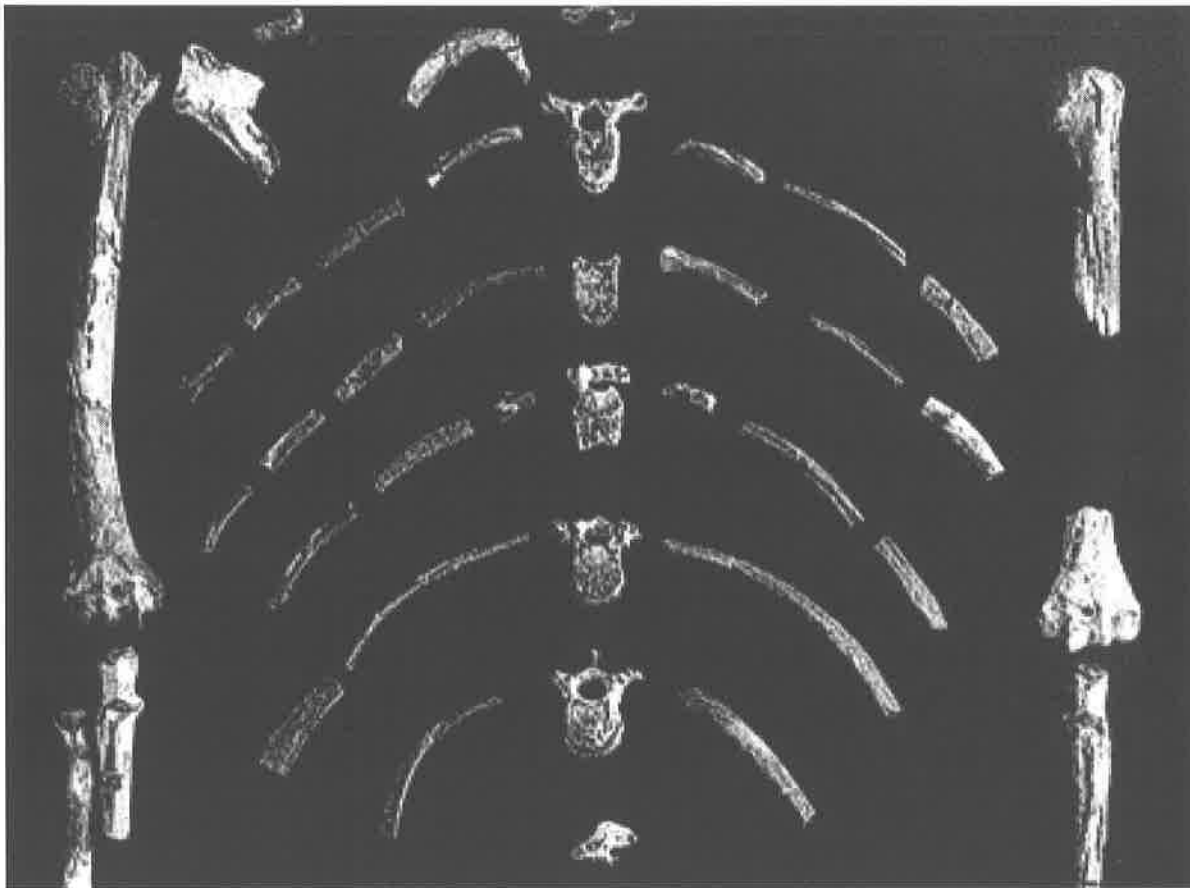


Overcoming the Natural Man: Lessons from Biology

by Jonathan Cannon | May 16, 2016 | Featured, Natural Theology, Politics, science, Transhumanism | 0 comments



I tend to not start or end with scriptural authority, but I want you to take a close look at what these verses teach about the natural *man*. (Unfortunately, I am limited in my knowledge about the natural woman both because of my natural bias in thinking about how *I* need to interact with the world *as a man* and because of the sexist bias in biological and psychological research. As my wife pointed out, I now need to educate myself in this area and prepare a follow up post when I am able. I welcome reading recommendations. Now back to the scriptures on the natural man.)

Alma 26:19-22

“Oh then, why did he not consign us to an awful destruction, yea, why did he not let the sword of his justice fall upon us, and doom us to eternal despair? Oh, my soul, almost as it were, fleeth at the thought. Behold, he did not exercise his justice upon us, but in his great mercy hath brought us over that everlasting gulf of death and misery, even to the salvation of our souls. And now behold, my brethren, what natural man is there that knoweth these things? I say unto you, there is **none that knoweth these things, save it be the penitent**. Yea, he that repenteth and exerciseth faith, and bringeth forth good works, and prayeth continually without ceasing—unto such it is given to know the mysteries of God. .

..

Doctrine and Covenants 67:10-12

“verily I say unto you that it is your privilege, and a promise I give unto you that have been ordained unto this ministry, that inasmuch as you strip yourselves from jealousies and fears, and humble yourselves before me, for ye are not sufficiently humble, the veil shall be rent and you shall see me and know that I am—not with the carnal neither natural mind, but with the spiritual. For no man has seen God at any time in the flesh, except quickened by the Spirit of God. Neither can any natural man abide the presence of God, neither after the carnal mind.

Mosiah 3:19-21

“the natural man is an enemy to God, and has been from the fall of Adam, and will be, forever and ever, unless he yields to the enticings of the Holy Spirit, and putteth off the natural man and becometh a saint through the atonement of Christ the Lord, and becometh as a child, submissive, meek, humble, patient, full of love, willing to submit to all things which the Lord seeth fit to inflict upon him, even as a child doth submit to his father. And moreover, I say unto you, that the time shall come when the knowledge of a Savior shall spread throughout every nation, kindred, tongue, and people. And behold, when that time cometh, none shall be found blameless before God, except it be little children, only through repentance and faith on the name of the Lord God Omnipotent.

I leave out Corinthians because I either don't know how to interpret it, or it can be interpreted like these LDS scriptures.

This is not a new idea, but you may have noticed that the “natural man” is closely tied to the concept of pride. It is those who would seek control, or dominion, or compulsion over the souls of the children of men who are unable to see or understand the things of God—including seeing God Himself.

There is a seeming contradiction in LDS theology. We would have everyone put off the natural man, yet we came to earth for the essential purpose of receiving a physical body—a body that we keep with us throughout the eternities. Birth is a veiled separation from God—not a fall from grace, but a trusting flight forward into the arms of grace. With this in mind, we see that the call to put off the natural man is a call to leave behind our pride and vain ambition, not a call to disdain our biology. In fact, we can use our increasing understanding of biology to do just that, if we will but have ears to hear. . .

1. There have been at least two measurable reductions in sexual dimorphism (sorry, paywall) in the history of human evolution. Both were steps leading to the kind of intelligent, civilized beings we are now. Cause and effect? Impossible to say, but interesting to think about in light of the finding that lower sexual dimorphism in primates leads to reduced competition among males and greater equality generally.
2. Men (specifically) are war-like to increase their reproductive success with a minimum of effort. Killing unrelated men and children (and elderly women), raping women, and leaving women to raise children with the minimum of economic support, is a selfishly effective reproductive strategy. It seems to me that this is an ancient, natural man than we have begun to put off. Most of the world now accepts that killing civilians is a crime, and much of it labels rape as a war crime—but this is a very recent development. (Good job, humanity!)
3. Another almost as recent development is that of more egalitarian family relationships that formed in Europe in the last centuries. This more egalitarian monogamy has been argued to be responsible for the success of democracy and capitalism (cited in two diametrically opposed books *Men and Marriage* and *Sex and World Peace*). The increased power and respect accorded to women caused significant cultural shifts that have benefited the entire world.
4. Children form in-groups and love and befriend those whom they perceive to be like them. But children don't hate out-groups. They learn to make fun of, put down, exclude, fight, or hate those who are different through mimicking adults. Without the cultural training, children have few prejudices against the "other". We can fight our own prejudices, and work to not pass them on. We can become as little children.
5. Men justify unethical behavior when their self-interest is threatened *primarily when it threatens their manhood*. Women generally don't change their ethical beliefs based on self-interest, and men don't either if their sense of *manhood* is not threatened. We may not be able to remove what appears to be this biological inclination for men to be selfish in light of threats to their masculinity, however, the specific meanings of

manhood are strongly culturally determined and thus malleable. If we can define ethical, fair, just, loving, and particularly *humble* behavior as manly, then we have a great hope to reduce risky and unethical behavior in all aspects of life.

6. On the flip side, if manliness continues to be defined by being economically productive, a ruler in the home, workplace, or church, or the font of all wisdom and spiritual direction, we continue to foster environments where men will bend the rules to preserve status. This will become increasingly problematic as fewer and fewer jobs are financially productive. Technology will continue to destroy manhood (and family) through depriving men of labor and thus manhood. Crime will flourish and society will fragment as men seek to defend their lost manhood through whatever means they see. Many jobs are gone for good, never to be replaced (at least in our current economic model). As long as manhood depends on a high paying job we are fostering unethical behavior in men.

7. Men will feel justified in seeking their own advancement in all spheres of public activity, whatever the consequences for the good of others, as long as winning or ruling defines manhood. We are fostering men who seek their own. Fame, fortune, and power will often trump the public good.

8. If manhood is tied to a wife staying at home and children following their command, men will feel justified in dominating their wife and children, especially if they find themselves *unable* to lead in "righteous" ways. And again, poverty (or its threat) experienced by the majority of men in the world will foster unethical choices in defense of manhood.

9. In our God blessed and technologically abundant world, we cannot build Zion with our current definitions of manhood. We must truly put them off and become as little children. We must value life, simply because it is beautiful. We must see happy play as inherently valuable, since happy paid work (or any paid work) will increasingly become an impossibility for many (it already is for the more than 1 in 20 unemployed, and that isn't accounting for the happy part). We must eliminate true want and lift people up into a secure middle class. But even that's just a stopgap on the road to no rich and no poor.

I've shared about half of my opinion—mostly the pitfalls we need to overcome as we leave behind the natural man. I've given hints of the other half of my opinion—the things we *must do* to overcome.

If we truly aspire to putting off the natural man and building Zion, I think it is worth

our effort to once again check our prejudices and perhaps change a few to prejudices that will foster a more celestial world. Which world do your prejudices foster? Do they create a definition of manhood that is simply impossible for many to achieve? Do they justify inequality? Do they vilify out-groups? Those aren't the path to Zion. Do they value human equality? Treat out-groups with respect? Define manhood based on intrinsic virtues accessible to all? We wouldn't be leaving behind the biological gift given us by our Heavenly Parents. We wouldn't be turning away from the gender that is part of our eternal nature (however we should understand that). We just may be allowing our Heavenly Parents to work in us those changes where weak things become strong unto us. I'd call that a strong foundation. Maybe we can build on it together.



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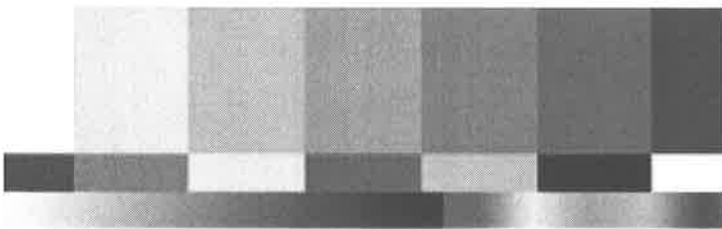
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Jonathan lives in rural Georgia with his wife and three boys, teaching Chemistry and enjoying the good people of his community. He studied Molecular Biology at Brigham Young University, and Biophysics at the University of Wisconsin, Madison. Jonathan is passionate about fatherhood, teaching and learning, Mormonism, and dance (he's much better at the first three), and dabbles in home repairs, various crafts, poetry, music, gardening, and Transhumanism. He has enjoyed many years working in Primary, with Young Adults and Ward Missions in various capacities. He currently enjoys serving in his ward and community however he is able. He posts on whatever interests him at the moment at <http://theyogrehunt.blogspot.com/>

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