

## The Nature of Man

Romans 1:18 – 32 “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because what may be known about God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. For since the creation of the world, His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, His eternal power and divine nature, so that they are without excuse.:

- People were designed to be able to discern the nature of God and truth through observation of nature.
- Judgment would not be just if people could not discern the nature of God in some way.

Ecclesiastes 7:29 “Truly, this only I have found: that God made man upright, but they have sought out many schemes.”

- People start out headed in the right direction, but hurt themselves along the way.

1 Corinthians 2:14, “But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.”

- The ‘natural man’ was a term from Greek philosophy representing the best that the world had to offer: the honest, upright, ethical person.
- The “things of the Spirit” are not according to the laws of physics, so are rejected by those who cannot see beyond the physical world.

Romans 8:7 “...because the fleshly mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can it be.”

- A mind set on the things of the world (not necessarily bad stuff, just not spiritual stuff) cannot bring themselves to submit to the desires of God (mutual trust and selfless concern).

How were outsiders attracted to the gospel? Physical facts, not theory.

- For Gentile audiences, the resurrection of Jesus as an historical event (Acts 10:40, 17:31, 25:19, 26:8, 26:23) and the evidence of God in nature (Acts 14:17, 17:24 – 29, Romans 19 – 23).
- For Jewish audiences, the resurrection of Jesus (Acts 2:24, 2:30 – 32, 3:15, 4:10:13:30 – 37, 17:3) and fulfilled prophecy (Acts 2:16 – 21, 2:25 – 28, 2:34 – 35, 3:18, 3:22, 3:25, 4:11, 8:32, 13:29 – 41, 17:2, 18:28)

Total Depravity

- In short, this is the teaching that people are born sinful and are inclined toward sin. A list of verses (all cited out of context) that are used to support this doctrine is appended for reference.
- This assumption leads to the necessity of God causing people to believe, since they are incapable of doing it on their own.
- However, we think we make decisions. This is similar to the philosophical argument by Descartes, “I think, therefore I am.” If we, in reality, do not make decisions but rather God has everything pre-programmed, then God is deceiving us by asking us to make decisions.
- A discussion of “we are by nature children of wrath” (Ephesians 2:3) is appended.

Is it necessary for people to know and accept the role of Jesus in the plan of God to be accepted?

- God announced that the gospel would go to the whole world before the destruction of the Temple (which happened in 70 AD): Matthew 24:14, 15, 34).
- The primary task of Christians is evangelism (2 Corinthians 4:1 – 5:21, 1 Thessalonians 1:8, 1 Peter 3:15, Ephesians 3:10, 1 Corinthians 2:12 – 13).
- The central topic of the lessons taught to unbelievers that we have in the New Testament is the resurrection of Jesus. So, those who spread the gospel thought that knowledge of Jesus was of “first importance.”
- As noted from Romans 1:18 – 21, anyone can deduce the existence and nature of God by observing nature, which are the first two steps in the logical proof: created, cares, consistent, communicate. Every accountable person (*cf*, John 9:41) can deduce logically that God must communicate for the purpose of filling in the parts we cannot figure out: the mysteries revealed in the New Testament. The list of “mystery” passages has been appended.

Why does it matter if we believe Total Depravity as the vast majority of churches teach?

- Christianity become irrational, since our perception of reality (truth) is inherently flawed.
- We are living a deception with no way out.
- We have no firm reality, so we have no way to choose good over evil except what we think. But that thinking is founded on deception.
- We cannot use reading comprehension to garner information from the Scriptures.
- The condition of the world is not my problem. God will work it out as He has planned.
- God is responsible for sin since He made people incapable of doing anything else.

## Total Depravity

### Summary of the Concept

Many teach that we are born with a corrupt nature, inclined toward evil from birth. This depraved nature, many say, is inherited from our parents. Therefore, all sin performed later in life is a consequence of this nature which remains with us even after we are forgiven. I disagree.

### Related Doctrines

- If we are born sinful, babies require baptism. At least two explanations of how Jesus escaped this inherited sin are popular. Either explanation makes it hard to explain how Jesus was "tempted in all points just as we are".<sup>1</sup>
  - The Catholic Church teaches that Mary did not have this sinful nature, so she could not pass it on. They do not explain how Mary escaped inheriting sin from her parents.
  - Others teach that sin is inherited only through the male parent. Since Jesus did not have an earthly father, He was not born sinful. No Scripture addresses this.
- If we retain this sinful nature even after being redeemed, the children of those who have been reckoned as righteous still inherit that sinful nature. Therefore, Satan started something God cannot fix.

### Scriptures Used to Support Total Depravity

Psalm 51:5 "In sin did my mother conceive me" - *In sin* modifies *mother*, not *me*, so the psalmist is either acknowledging his mother's sin, or the fact that his mother lived in a sinful world. This is part of an hyperbole. The psalmist laments that not only does he sin on his own, he was born into a sinful world. Proof that it is a figure of speech is in verse 7, where the cure for sin is found in a branch of hyssop. The author's point is that he has been very sinful for a long time. His purpose was not to describe inherited sin. Psalm 22:10 expresses the opposite view (also by David) that he was "cast upon Thee from the womb." In that psalm, David was describing his lifelong commitment to the Lord.

Psalm 58:3 "The wicked are estranged from the womb." - The next few lines reveal that this also is hyperbole, since the "wicked" are said to *go* astray, which involves choosing, and *speak* lies, which requires the ability to speak.

Exodus 20:5 "Visiting the impurity of the fathers on the children." - Either this teaches inherited sin or inherited consequences. One must have a reason to choose the figurative consequences rather than the literal sin. Ezekiel 18 (the whole chapter) specifically addresses the concept of inherited sin, denying that any such transfer of guilt from father to son is possible with God. So, if Exodus 20:5 teaches inherited sin, Ezekiel was wrong.

Genesis 8:21 "The imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth." - In the Bible, a youth is anyone under thirty. Soldiers and bridegrooms have been described as youths. A youth is one who can make decisions, so a case for inherited sin cannot be made here.

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<sup>1</sup> Hebrews 4:15

Isaiah 48:8 "You have been called a transgressor from the womb." - Verse 1 of the chapter identifies the transgressor as the nation of Judah. From Old Testament history, it is quite true that the nation was sinful at its birth. But that has no connection to inherited sin in people.

Jeremiah 17:9 "The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked" - This line is in the midst of repeated comparisons between the righteous and the wicked. This one line cannot be taken out of its context to apply to all people since God applied it to only one of two groups.

Romans 5:12 "So death passed upon all men." - Reading the whole sentence, death passed to all men because they sinned, not because they inherited it. Secondly, the death that Adam introduced was spiritual death, not physical. If Adam introduced physical death, then Jesus failed, as evidenced by the deaths of many faithful people.

Ephesians 2:3 "We are by nature children of wrath." - Many have wished to dispose of the word *nature* by redefining it as "long standing habit or custom." The literal meaning has no such connotation. It is used as we use it: that which is a part of our inherited make-up, including both physical attributes and instincts. So, the New Testament speaks of natural functions, natural branches, natural affection, divine nature, the nature of angels, and being by nature uncircumcised. (There is no equivalent Hebrew word, so there can be no Old Testament references.) This nature is not all bad, since "the Gentiles do by nature the things of the Law",<sup>2</sup> meaning that morality is instinctive. So, this nature in Ephesians is either literal and we are born with an instinct for sin or it is figurative, expressing the extremeness of our sin. If sin is instinctive and morality is instinctive, we are made with an inner conflict. That is exactly the explanation used by many for Romans 7, although the explanation requires circular logic and falls apart if one also reads Romans 8. Since the word *nature* is used only 14 times in the New Testament, it is difficult to determine if a figure of speech based on that word is intended. However, Galatians 2:15 seems to be such an example of figurative usage. Paul describes his relatives as "Jews by nature." Although one did become a member of the Kingdom of Israel by birth, Paul's point in that paragraph had to do with the works of the Law, which are certainly not instinctive. This alone is not proof that Ephesians 2:3 is figurative, but at least the possibility exists. In Ephesians 2, Paul's point is that Jews were no different than Gentiles in that they were equally sinful. To create a doctrine from one phrase of a paragraph not about inherited sin, in direct contradiction to an entire chapter of Ezekiel which was written specifically to that point, seems at least tenuous.

## Refutation

- Ecclesiastes 7:29 Truly, this only have I found: that God made man upright, but they have sought out many schemes.
- Where did Adam's sinful nature come from?
- Ezekiel, in his chapter 18, wrote nearly an entire chapter to explain that each person is responsible for his or her own sin, and not for the sins of those who went before. Inherited sin is specifically denied.
- Why don't the children of the redeemed inherit their righteousness?

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<sup>2</sup> Romans 2:14

- In Isaiah 7, the prophet uses the phrase "at the time he knows to refuse evil and choose good," implying that there is a time before that knowledge. There is a period of time before children know enough to make a choice.
- Jesus, as recorded in John 9:41, announced that those who cannot understand are not guilty of sin.
- If God created us with an inclination to sin, how can we be condemned?

From the mistaken belief that children are born guilty of sin, infant baptism began. But that is also a misunderstanding of baptism, which is a symbolic act, not magic. An individual commits to the following list of concepts by choosing to be baptized. God is not obligated to accept us because we perform a symbolic act. Rather, in the act we are committing ourselves to these principles.

- Acts 22:16, Hebrews 10:22 My sins are washed away.
- 1 Corinthians 6:11, Ephesians 5:26 I am reserved for godly purposes (sanctified)
- Romans 6:3-4, 12:1. I become a sacrifice like Jesus.
- Romans 6:4, Titus 3:5 I walk in newness of life. My spirit is resurrected: reconnected.
- Romans 6:5 I will be raised on Judgment Day.
- Romans 6:6 I am freed from slavery to sin.
- 1 Corinthians 12:13 I will achieve miraculous unity.
- Galatians 3:27 I am being transformed (Romans 8:29, 2 Corinthians 3:18) into the image of Jesus.
- Colossians 2:12 I am buried with Him and raised (see Romans 6).
- 1 Peter 3:21 The water rescued Noah from an evil world as baptism rescues me.
- Acts 2:38 I receive the Holy Spirit

Since guilt for sin cannot be inherited (Ezekiel 18) and sin must be understood to produce guilt (John 9:41), children cannot need to be forgiven. So, what does it mean to be "by nature children of wrath"? It describes the audience of the letter, those who had corrupted their natures by sin. They did it to themselves. We cannot blame God or our ancestors for the bad choices we have made.

**By Nature Children of Wrath**  
Ephesians 2:3

This phrase has led to much debate over whether children are guilty of sin. Here are some references to put the phrase in context.

1. In the same paragraph (verse 10), Paul also writes that we were "created in Christ Jesus for good works which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them." However, one could take that to mean that, when we are forgiven, we are, at that time, re-created for good works.
2. In Isaiah 7, the prophet uses the phrase "at the time he knows to refuse evil and choose good," implying that there is a time before that knowledge. There is time before children know enough to make a choice.
3. Ezekiel, in his chapter 18, writes nearly an entire chapter to explain that each person is responsible for his or her own sin, and not for the sins of those who went before. Inherited sin is specifically denied.
4. Jesus, as recorded in John 9:41, announces that those who cannot understand are not guilty of sin.

From the mistaken belief that children were born guilty of sin, infant baptism began. But that is also a misunderstanding of baptism, a symbol of being washed of the past, or dying to self, etc. It is not a magical act, but a symbol. Since guilt for sin cannot be inherited and sin must be understood to produce guilt, children cannot need to be forgiven.

So, what does it mean to be "by nature children of wrath?" It describes the audience of this letter, those who had corrupted their nature by sin.

**The Mystery**  
**Ephesians 3:3**

The mystery is no longer a mystery. It was revealed to the apostles and prophets of the first century. Usually, this mystery concerned the salvation of the Gentiles. In every case, the writer either has or is revealing the mystery.

Romans 11:25 Why Israel responded to Jesus in small numbers at first.

Romans 16:25-26 The mystery has been made known to all nations

1 Corinthians 2:7 The mystery are the things of the Spirit

1 Corinthians 15:51 How judgment day will happen and how we will live forever

Ephesians 1:9 How redemption would work

Ephesians 3:3-9 What about the Gentiles?

Ephesians 5:32 The nature of marriage

Ephesians 6:19 To make known the mystery of the gospel

Colossians 1:26-27 What about the Gentiles?

Colossians 2:2 Full assurance of understanding, to the knowledge of the mystery of God  
Colossians 4:3 To speak the mystery of Christ  
2 Thessalonians 2:7 The mystery of lawlessness is already at work.  
1 Timothy 3:9 Holding the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience  
1 Timothy 3:16 Great is the mystery of godliness – the pillar and ground of the truth  
Revelation 1:20 The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches  
Revelation 10:7 The mystery is finished when the seventh angel sounds  
Revelation 17:5-7 Mystery, Babylon the great.