

What Does the Bible Say about Human Nature?

(Compiled by Paul R. Blake)

Introduction:

A. Eph. 2:1-10

B. Rom. 3:23 - Why is it that everyone sins, except Jesus?

1. A common denominational doctrine is that people are born sinful.

2. The Westminster Confession of Faith states: "Our first parents, being seduced by the subtlety and temptations of Satan, sinned in eating the forbidden fruit. This, their sin, God was pleased, according to his wise and holy counsel, to permit, having purposed to order it to his own glory. By this sin they fell from their original righteousness and communion with God, and so became dead in sin, and wholly defiled in all the faculties and parts of soul and body. They being the root of mankind, the guilt of this sin was imputed, and the same death in sin and corrupted nature conveyed to all their posterity, descending from them by original generation. From this original corruption, whereby we are utterly indisposed, disabled, and made opposite to all good, and wholly inclined to all evil, do proceed all actual transgressions. This corruption of nature, during this life, doth remain in those that are regenerated; and although it be through Christ pardoned and mortified, yet both itself, and all the motions thereof, are truly and properly sin."

3. In other words, Adam and Eve's first sin changed them and all of their descendants, not just spiritually but also physically, so that people have a built-in propensity to sin. Even when saved by Christ, the predisposition to sin remains while we are in the physical flesh.

4. This view is so pervasive, one of the most popular contemporary Bible translations, the New International Version, changed most of the uses of the word "flesh" to say "sinful nature."

C. Is the doctrine that we are born to sin a Biblical teaching, or is it a sectarian, unscriptural exaggeration of the human condition?

I. WHAT IS OUR NATURE?

A. The misused proof text is Eph. 2:3. "This text necessarily teaches that 'By nature, we are made children of wrath'."

B. "Phusis is the Greek word for nature; it can be used both for the natural world as a whole and for the "nature" (i.e., the essential or intrinsic characteristics) of any particular thing, which it has "by nature" (phusei). We derive our words physics and physical from this word." (Encyclopedia.com)

1. Plato and Aristotle constructed their ethics and politics around their understanding of human nature. From their philosophy came the Western Civilization's view that we sin because we have a sinful nature.

2. For those who believe in God as their Creator, it is a short journey to the belief that if I have a sinful nature, God gave it to me.

3. And, if God gave me a sinful nature, I am not responsible for my sins

C. Uses of "nature" in scripture:

1. The natural branches - Rom. 11:21

2. Jews by nature (that is by birth) - Gal. 2:15

3. Idols by nature cannot be gods - Gal. 4:8

4. Homosexuality is against nature - Rom. 1:26

- D. The Westminster Confession of Faith said “we are utterly indisposed, disabled, and made opposite to all good, and wholly inclined to all evil”
 - 1. Rom. 2:14-15 - Gentiles did by nature the things in the Law.
 - 2. How can Gentiles, who by nature can only do wrong, do what is right?
- E. There is another use of phusis:
 - 1. “That which a person does by ingrained habit, his character, or temperament. Phusis is then used for a man’s character or nature, without reference to his birth or descent, in so far as this is given and not dependent on conscious direction or education.” [Kittle’s Theological Dictionary, IV:253].
 - 2. Romans 2:14 and Ephesians 2:3 are examples of this definition. It is based on how we once lived, not how we were born, that we naturally became objects of God’s wrath. It is in the nature of sin to be subject to God’s wrath.
- F. We are born upright - Ecc. 7:29
 - 1. At some point in life, we all choose to sin - Rom. 3:23
 - a. We took action to sin. We became sinners, we were not born sinners.
 - b. We sin when we transgress God’s law - 1John 3:4
 - c. Birth is not a violation of God’s law.
 - 2. If sin is “natural,” then how can scripture say that homosexuality is against nature? - Rom. 1:26-27.
 - 3. If sin is “natural,” then how could Gentiles by nature do what is right? - Rom. 2:14

II. WHAT IS OUR FLESH?

- A. The Greek word sarx, primarily refers to the physical flesh. By extension, it can refer to the desires that arise from the physical body.
 - 1. Lusts come from this world - 1John 2:15-17
- B. Some advocate that Romans 7:18 teaches that sin is built-in our bodies.
 - 1. But a subtle assumption is being made that if nothing good is found in the flesh, then the flesh must be evil. Yet, that isn’t what is stated.
 - 2. If sin is built-in to our flesh, then how did Jesus live without sin?
 - 3. Heb. 4:15 - Jesus was made like us. He had flesh and blood like us. He was tempted like us. Yet, He committed no sin while in the flesh. So sin isn’t naturally in the flesh.
- C. God did not make flesh sinful; sin does not make flesh sinful; the misuse of the flesh is sinful - Ecc. 7:29
 - 1. Paul stated that before knowing the commandments, he was alive - Rom. 7:9-11
 - 2. Children have no knowledge of good and evil - Deut. 1:39
 - 3. We are not created sinful, and as children we are not born in sin; therefore, sin comes not from flesh, but from another cause
- D. Where does sin come from?
 - 1. We are created with healthy desires and instinctive responses to promote and preserve our existence in this world.
 - 2. Satan uses those desires against us by inflating our desires pressing us toward sin - James 1:14-15

3. When Paul said there is nothing good in his flesh, what he is saying is that natural instinct isn't capable of moral choices. Our physical bodies do not know the difference between right and wrong.

III. WHAT IS THE ROLE OF OUR WILL?

- A. Our minds are different than our flesh. Our minds can judge whether what we desire to do is right or wrong - Rom. 7:15-16
- B. Do we focus our minds on what our flesh desires, which due to the flesh's inability to make moral choices will lead to sin more often as not, or do we focus our minds on what God teaches? - Rom. 8:5-8
- C. Where we focus our minds is our choice - Joshua 24:14-15
- D. We are not forced to sin by our internal flesh nor by our external circumstances; we choose to do righteousness or sin
- E. The world believes that the will is weaker than the flesh. These justifications are offered by the world for allowing the flesh to over-rule the spirit:
 1. "I was born this way, so therefore I must live this way."
 2. "My feelings are so strong in this area that they cannot be denied."
 3. "Anyone can do whatever they want, so long as there is consent between adult and there is no harm done."
 4. "I am free to say whatever I want because I have the right to express my feelings whenever and however I feel moved."
 5. "No one should ever hinder anyone else from pursuing their dreams."
 6. "How can something be wrong if so many people agree that it's good?"
 7. "The greatest way of living is if everyone is free to do whatever makes them happy."
- F. What does God say about the power of the will over the flesh?
 1. 1Cor. 3:1-4; Gal. 5:16-17; Col. 3:5-14

IV. NO ONE BEGINS LIFE IN SIN

- A. To claim that we are born in sin is to say God made us sin - James 1:13
- B. No one is ever forced to sin; in fact God limits temptation so that our choice remains intact - 1Cor. 10:13
- C. Why do we sin? For many it is simply by not thinking. We let our instincts run our lives and follow them into sin. At other times, we drop our guard and instinct takes over.
- D. Once, an old man and his grandson were walking through the woods when the grandfather turned to the young man and said, "Young one, inside all of us there is a battle raging between two wolves. You have felt it even in your young years, and I have felt it all my life. One of the wolves is evil – he is anger, envy, greed, regret, arrogance, resentment, lies, hatred, and ego. The other is good – he is love, joy peace, hope, humility, kindness, empathy, generosity, compassion, truth and faith. Everyone has this battle going on inside them." They walked a little further in silence, until the young boy stopped and asked, "Grandfather, which wolf will win?" The wise, old man simply replied, "The one you feed."

Conclusion:

- A. We all stumble into sin. But there is a way out - 1John 1:8-9