

Sin Nature – Did We Choose Sin or Did Sin Choose Us? (Scriptures are NKJV, some emphasis)

One doctrine many falsely read into scripture from Gnosticism, Augustine, the Roman Catholic Church, and from many Protestants today is the teaching that mankind is incapable of choosing good from birth. Neither Christ nor any apostle taught any doctrine suggesting infants are born sinners with a sinful nature. None taught “total depravity” as if humans could not choose good until God first regenerated them. The entire reason any human being is worthy of blame or condemnation is *precisely because* he or she **could have chosen good** yet *failed* to make such a choice. Yet if humans are only capable of evil *until* God regenerates them, then where would the blame lie for their evil? Would it not be with the Creator who designed us to be incapable of good? Would it not be with the One who is responsible to “begin” our regeneration? May it never be so!

Jesus’ preaching

From Jesus’ very first words as he preached the gospel of the kingdom in Galilee, we hear him lay the responsibility on mankind: “*repent and believe in the gospel*” (Mark 1:15) The unbeliever or sinner must **do something** – he must change his mind and ways, orienting them toward the kingdom to come. Jesus never preached: “*wait until God regenerates you, then you can repent.*” No, repentance and belief precede regeneration. It is certainly true the Father draws us to Jesus (John 6:44). This drawing is even something we must respond to - called or invited by God, then we make such a calling sure by obedience (see 2 Pet 1:10). Repentance, belief, and following this drawing are all good actions on our part which lead to our baptism and reception of the Spirit, so we are born again (or “from above” – John 3:5-8).

It may be that Jesus’ question to Nicodemus in John 3:10 “*Are you the teacher of Israel, and do not know these things?*” refers to Ezekiel 18:30-31. There God spoke through His prophet that He would judge them according to their ways (their **choices**), that they should repent, turn from transgressions, and get for themselves a new heart and new spirit. As we say today, “*the ball is in your court.*” The ball was in Israel’s court to change, and the ball is in mankind’s court today. God required action on their part, and He requires action on humanity’s part today. He will not believe or repent for anyone. People must choose to do so – their decision.

As Jesus’ apostles rightly preached, it is after this repentance and baptism in the name of Jesus believers will receive remission of sins, the gift of the Holy Spirit, and “*times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord*” (Acts 2:38-39, 3:19). Notice the promise in Acts 2:39 is to the crowd at the time, their children, and “*all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call.*” God’s **call** is not the remission of sin, nor the refreshing, nor the gift, nor the presence, nor the regeneration. Those come *after* the call and our response. The call is to **respond** to His kingdom gospel just as His Son and Jesus’ apostles preached it. If mankind were completely incapable of any good choice, we would be “off the hook” for our past sins, and as some have wrongly concluded, we would be “waiting on God” to do something in us or for us first.

Backward Thinking

Rather than understanding Genesis 5:3, 6:3, and 8:21 as general indictments on how quickly mankind (from a young age) seeks self-gratification, many assume this means our Creator designed us so poorly that we are physically or spiritually made up of sin (due to Adam and Seth). If that were the case, it would have been key information for God to plainly mention so in Genesis 3:16-19. God seems unaware of any inherited sin after the fall in Genesis 6:7 and 6:12. Some err assuming Psalm 51:5 or 58:3 are literal rather than figurative, and they believe these coupled with Romans 5:12 and Ephesians 2:3 both taken out of context “seal the deal” doctrinally. A false doctrine that teaches God is in the business of making sinners.

It doesn’t stop there! This low view of humanity, and of our God, proceeds to change the human Jesus into something other than human. Instead of a human Jesus who “*shared in the same*” flesh and blood we have, who “*in all things he had to be made like his brethren*” (Heb 2:14, 17), those espousing this inherited sin nature say Jesus’ flesh was different. Their Jesus had some “super-flesh” and could not really sympathize with our

weaknesses as Hebrews 4:15 says. Most won't dare say Jesus didn't "*come in the flesh*" because they've seen the warning in 1 John 4:2-3, but their intent is the same – to deny that Jesus was human like us. In fact, the NIV translates the Greek word *sarx* (flesh) simply fine for Jesus, but for others (see NIV Romans 7) the word *sarx* becomes "sinful nature."

But wait – there's more! They must explain how Jesus avoided this Gnostic error with theology. So here is how the slight of hand works – Roman Catholics claim Mary to have been "sinless" to conceive a human born free from this "inherited sin nature." Protestants are not so bold – they will declare that the mystical "sin gene" passes on via sperm of a man, which Jesus missed by the virgin conception. Either way, voila! You have a Jesus who escapes being tainted with this filthy fabricated doctrine, separated from the rest of humanity. Its advocates have created a solution for a problem that doesn't even exist!

Like Job's friends (Job 15:14-16) who spoke incorrect things of God in their folly (Job 42:7-8), many Israelites in Jeremiah and Ezekiel's day (Jer 31:29, **Eze 18:2-4, 20**) used a terrible proverb God hated. It seems they took God's Exodus 34:7 punishing iniquity "*to the third and fourth generations*" too far. Some Pharisees and disciples may have done so when Christ defended the man born blind (John 9:1-3, **34**). It was Gnostics and those under Manichaeism who taught it to Christianity saying all matter was sinful, like flesh/bodies. Satan's agenda behind the heresy was to make us believe we are unable to obey like Jesus. What better excuse than, "Jesus didn't have the same sinful flesh the rest of you have, you all are born sinful, and have no choice but to sin."

Gnostics went further to say Jesus didn't have flesh period (hence 1 John 4:2-3). Manichaeism (Augustine instructed it for over 8 years), even taught married sexual intercourse was sinful because of desires, and because it produced another 'sinner' or human soul 'trapped' in a 'sinful' body of flesh. Augustine confessed struggles with lust, so he borrowed inherited sin from teachings of Mani/Manes, supplanting them right over scripture. It is from him many reformers (like Calvin) taught doctrine of the impossibility of consistent obedience to God, and the "Original Sin" doctrine (or "Total Depravity"). They made sin a *natural, inevitable substance, disease, or condition* we inherit instead of an *unnatural, conscious violation* of God's law. It is from the 4th century the early church became infused with so many of these false teachings we see today.

Fixing the Error

We must diligently expose the error and teach truth to eradicate this! God made us in His image, even after the fall as scripture teaches - Ex 4:11, Job 31:15, Ps 33:15, 100:3, 139:13-14, James 3:9. God gave us our spirit as well - Ecc 12:7, Isa 42:5, 57:16, Jer 38:16, Zech 12:1. Yet it was our choices as humans which corrupted our own ways. Jesus coming "*in the likeness of sinful flesh*" in Romans 8:3 means Jesus never sinned like other flesh (or people) who did, not that his flesh was "like" ours minus a sin-gene. He did not have a "get-out-of-temptation" free pass. He was and is living proof any human being *could have* and **should have** chosen to avoid sin every day, just like he did. What a powerful human Messiah example for us!

Let us all do as Romans 13:14 instructs us – to "*make no provision for the flesh.*" Some claim this false 'sin nature' as an excuse of why youths sin, yet others use it as an excuse for sin post-conversion. A strong tendency may exist among humans to adhere to cultural or religious norms, family habits, personal weaknesses, (not immediately seen as sinful) - until one matures over time and faithful practice – proactively a 'doer of the word'. An important topic I will address in the future! But since rejecting this errant sin nature doctrine many years ago, I've heard many claiming: "we can't obey God because of this body/sin nature" or "we cannot avoid sinning until we have our new bodies" to make provision for the flesh. We are better than that – let us all walk worthy of God who calls us into His own kingdom and glory (1 Thess 2:12)!

"But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts. -Romans 13:14