

The Messenger

“... How beautiful are the feet of those who bring glad tidings of good things!” Romans 10:15

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Dedicated to the Proclamation of the Truth in the Spirit of Love (Ephesians 4:15)

By Nature the Children of Wrath

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In Ephesians 2:3, Paul asserts that these brethren, prior to their salvation by grace, had been “by nature the children of wrath.” From this statement is posed the fundamental question: Did Paul teach that men are sinners by natural generation, BORN sinners? Did he mean that their inherited constitution was corrupt?

The TRUE sense of a passage of scripture can be learned only by considering the setting in which it appears. All language must be treated in this manner. Numerous false religious doctrines have been originated by “lifting” a scripture from its context and giving it an arbitrary meaning, thus perverting or wresting the Word of God (see II Peter 3:16).

CALVINISM - - NOT SCRIPTURE

Much of the Protestant world has taken it for granted (because of tradition) that “by nature” means by birth, by natural inheritance. The doctrine of total hereditary depravity is a cardinal point of the Calvinistic theology which underlies much of the religious teaching of our day. This is nowhere taught in God’s word. Men need to take a closer look at what Paul ACTUALLY says in Ephesians 2:3 as it is explained in the setting. Unless one is reading through glasses of Calvinism, he will not find Paul discussing something the Ephesians had inherited from Adam, but rather a condition attained before their conversion by their OWN ACTIONS.

PERSONAL CONDUCT - - NOT INHERITANCE

Read the first three verses of Ephesians 2 carefully. As you read, note the expressions which show that their state had been incurred by their own actions. (1) “And you were dead in your trespasses and sins (2) in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. (3) Among them we too all formerly lived in the lust of the flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest” (NASV). Several things should be noted:

(1) The Ephesians had been in the past “dead in YOUR trespasses and sins” - - NOT because of Adam’s sins, but “YOUR” sins (See Isaiah 59:1-2).

(2) The reason they were dead in their own sins was because of what THEY had done, their own conduct. Note:

YOU “WALKED” after the ways of the world and Satan (verse 2).
“LIVED” in lust (verse 3).

"INDULGED" the desires of the flesh (verse 3).

(3) Therefore, the very "nature" of their CONDUCT was sinful. It was made so by their walking, living, and indulging. The passage does not refer to their nature by birth but to the nature (character) of their deeds. Living in sinful ways had become their customary, habitual practice. The point is that they had become this way; nothing indicates they had been born that way. It is as though the apostle was saying, "You were, by the very nature of your actions, children of wrath."

"PHUSIS" - - "NATURE"

While it is true that the Greek word "phusis" (nature) can and does at times denote an inherited nature, it does not always do so. The context must be considered in determining the sense. The Greek lexicographer, J.H. Thayer, defines the word also to mean:

"c. A mode of feeling and acting which by long habit has become nature" (Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, p. 660).

This is the definition which best fits what Paul describes, for Eph. 2:1-3 clearly shows that their "mode of feeling and acting" had "by long habit" become "nature" to them. Hence, they were subject to God's wrath.

UNDERSTANDING WHAT SIN IS

When one examines BIBLE explanations of sin, he sees easily that sin is not something one inherits by birth, but rather something which one practices.

(1) "Sin is the transgression of law" (I John 3:4). It is the practicing of that which is unlawful. One is not born transgressing any law. Infants are incapable either of knowing the law or of acting contrary to the law.

(2) "All unrighteousness is sin" (I John 5:17). Sin (unrighteousness) is something a person does (I John 3:7-8). Infants, having no awareness of what is "unrighteous" are incapable of sin.

(3) "Whatsoever is not of faith is sin" (Rom. 14:23). Since an infant is incapable of exercising faith, he cannot be a sinner "by nature" (birth).

Let it be remembered, when one insists that every man is a sinner by fleshly birth, that our Lord Jesus Christ partook of the fleshly nature of man (Heb. 2:14). He was of Adam's lineage (Luke 3:38). Certainly Jesus was not "by nature" a child of wrath.

News and Notes:

Remember to check the prayer list for those with ongoing spiritual weaknesses and physical illnesses.

"...Pray for one another...The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." James 5:16