

Human Nature: Good Or Evil?

We Create Our Own Nature

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I hope you all had an enjoyable Independence Day this past Wednesday when most of us celebrated our independence from Great Britain. As most Americans do, we spent it with family and friends around a pool. Probably many of you did something very similar in your backyard or at a park; you probably ate burgers or hot dogs or who knows what. We had chicken over at the “Onisick Oasis;” you probably had some potato salad and some watermelon, maybe some apple pie, ice cream—all those good American foods; probably watched some fireworks in the night once the sun went down.

Some of us played games. We engaged in pleasant conversation with one another—maybe caught up on some things that we had not been able to discuss over the past months. Some of us maybe went out into town and watched a parade go by. There were others, I am sure, around the country that listened to political speeches (Fourth of July is a big political speech day, or at least it used to be). All of these things are fine; they are good and wholesome uses of Independence Day, the day when we celebrate the birth of our nation.

Some Americans are actually a bit more patriotic than most other Americans and they—these certain ones—set aside some time every Fourth of July to read the Declaration of Independence in full, and some of them go so far as to pull out their pocket U.S. Constitution which they got from Cato Organization or Human Events or some of those other places that give them out, and they read the U.S. Constitution and the Bill of Rights, just to give themselves a touchstone back to the time of the Founders when those ideas that they believe in were being formulated and put into our founding documents. Those are fine things to do as well.

Others like to watch a good patriotic movie—one in which the Americans win—or something about the Founders or that period of time. Beth and I,

usually around this time every year, watch ‘1776’, the musical from the 1970s about the debate among the delegates to the Continental Congress leading up to the vote for independence. We think it is a good movie; maybe you do not. It is not absolutely historically accurate but it is a feel-good movie and it gives you the sense of the debate that was going on there in Philadelphia in 1776.

Now doing these things—even just celebrating the day, however we did it—should put us in mind of how the Founders of this nation thought about many things: about government, freedom, rights, tyranny and oppression, law and justice, property, honor, principle, and many, many other things besides. They were very intelligent men. They were well-versed (and I use that word advisedly) in Scripture, most of them. They had a lot of Christian principles. All the colonies were steeped in religion, and so it was just the environment that they grew up in.

One matter that always impresses me though when I read the writings of these men like Washington, Adams, Jefferson, Madison, Hamilton, and all the ones that we consider to be Founding Fathers or who were instrumental at the time, is how they viewed human nature. Almost invariably, they had the same idea about it.

Most of the time, human nature was not the subject that they were writing about directly because they were not philosophers. They were not, most of them, theologians. They were political people; they were revolutionaries. So they were talking about things like politics and government. But their views on human nature are always lurking in the background of what their political discourse was, because their views on human nature informed and undergirded their political positions.

They wanted the government to be a certain way. They wanted to have things in the country a certain way because of the way they felt about human nature. When they formed a republic, they did it because they had certain ideas about human nature; and a republic, they felt, was the best form of government to control it. So the very fact that they formed a republic is itself a result of what they believed about human nature.

Now, obviously, I have already given it away. Their fundamental view of human nature was that it is ‘depraved’ (this was a word they would have used—depraved). Most of them had grown up as some sort of a Protestant; most Americans at the time were Protestant. Many of them went back in their religious tradition to Luther, or to Calvin in the Reformed tradition, or to some form of Puritanism, just depending on where they lived. Some of them of course were Church of England, and Church of England was also of this mind as to what human nature was all about.

What all of these believed was the Protestant doctrine of total depravity. I do not know if you have ever heard that before but that is what they called it. The Calvinists call it the doctrine of total depravity, the others might call it the same way too but when it comes down to it, it is all the same. This doctrine of total depravity goes all the way to Augustinian thought and his notion of original sin.

The doctrine of total depravity posits that all humanity is sinful, that people possess no goodness that can satisfy God. That last phrase, “that can satisfy God,” is very important; they possess no goodness that can satisfy God. So while not all of human nature is depraved, all human nature is totally affected by depravity, meaning, that even the goodness that we do is tainted.

We are, as it says in Genesis 2 (since Adam and Eve took of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil), a mixture of good and evil. But even the good that is in us is tainted by evil. So even such good things as human love and any kind of active altruism like charity—or doing things for someone else’s good—are driven by selfishness and ego or some other sinful motive. That is basically, in a nutshell, as much as I can describe the Protestant doctrine of total depravity.

Now the Founders believed this or something very similar to this. To them human nature was corrupt and therefore human beings are easily corruptible and—we have to add to this—that since government (as they understood it) is force, or we could also say that government is control, or government is power, then that meant that they had to form a government that separated governmental powers among several entities and then place checks and balances among them so that no one person or one branch of government

became strong enough to tyrannize the people. Thus we have what is in our Constitution. We have three branches of government and the legislative branch is even split up further into two branches—the Senate and the House.

So we have other things like the fact that the terms of each person's service is different—two years in the House, six years in the Senate, four years for the President, and lifetime appointment in the Supreme Court—so that supposedly as you went through these various parts of government, there would be wisdom the further up you went in the chain.

The way it worked with the legislative branch is that the House of Representatives was supposed to be a constant turnover of people who served for maybe two or four years and then went back to their homes, but the Senate was supposed to be a longer-term type of thing where men who were able to and perhaps who are were wiser than just the run-of-the-mill representative, could then cancel what the House did through their own legislation and therefore make sure that there was not going to be any kind of radical change in America.

Originally the President was not limited to eight years or two terms or however it works out. But we saw that in the first half of the twentieth century when Franklin Delano Roosevelt was elected four times and it was not very long thereafter that the amendment to the Constitution was put out there that it was only two terms, because we saw with the administration of Franklin Delano Roosevelt that too much power was being concentrated in one branch of the government.

In the judicial branch, they also have several steps of courts, but of course the Supreme Court is what we most normally concentrate on and they are given lifetime tenure so that they can have a longer period to learn the government and to help enforce the terms of the Constitution on the rest of the country. (Unfortunately, that was not done a week ago.) That is the separated powers of government.

Of course, there are certain checks and balances also that they put into government to make sure that not one branch of the government or one person became too strong. For instance, only the House can bring forward appropriations bills and then the Senate has the power to knock them down.

Another check and balance is that the President can name certain people to offices but the Senate has the ability to say 'Yes' or 'No' to them, and various other ones like that.

That is what the Founders did in this country in order to establish the fact that they did not believe that human nature was good. They had to constrain human nature because once people are in power, they want more power. They very much believed that power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely, and so they did whatever they could to make sure that the government of the United States of America would not fall to corruption—the corruption of human nature.

I do not know if you are aware of this, but the most significant check and balance in the entire U.S. Government is we, the people. Most governments were governments of an individual, like a monarchy, or a dictatorship of some sort, or they were an oligarchy made up of several very powerful people. What was so radical about 1776 and all the way down to 1787 was the fact that they made the people the masters and the government was the servant, and we have lost that check over the past generation or two.

So they knew what they were talking about because they had watched the government of King George III tyrannize the colonies. They had watched these taxes come upon them and they had no representation to even argue the taxes. People had died as a result of the king's soldiers coming over and killing civilians and various other things. They had seen firsthand the tyranny of one man who was under the spell of human nature. So they did what they could to create a government that could avoid that as that would at least, if it could, constrain, hold back, check, balance human nature and those corrupt people who were part of the government.

Do you know, they did a good job; they did an excellent job. Actually it is the best a rational people could conceive and enforce in the entire history of the world, and I think at this end time that God allowed it to happen on purpose to show that even the best attempt of man to constrain human nature on his own was doomed to failure. They could not do it alone. We are reaping the consequences now, even though it has been long delayed, of the human nature that is in Americans and we are all suffering for it and we will continue to suffer for it as we go forward.

Do you want to know why I say that? Because even today our political lines are drawn along the lines of the debate over human nature.

By and large, liberals believe that human nature is fine and they are the ones in power. They do not necessarily believe that it is perfect but they do believe that it is perfectible. That is, with time and with steady progress (you wonder why they are called ‘progressives’; it is this idea), humanity will evolve into a higher and better species; that all we need is time and they can maneuver mankind’s nature into a good nature.

Mirroring the Founders a little bit more, conservatives mostly believe that human nature is evil and must be constrained because they believe (conservatives do), like the Founders, that power corrupts and so it needs to be constrained. But conservatives know that they can only slow humanity’s descent into corruption and they do this by employing carrots and sticks to persuade self-interest to take the high road more often than it takes the low road. Neither side is good because both sides leave God out of the picture. The conservatives just want to make the descent bearable and that is about as good as it gets among humanity.

So today, as you probably figured out, I want to make a survey of what God’s Word says on the subject of human nature. Most of us realize (if you have not figured it out already), that we believe that the Bible takes a pretty dim view of man’s natural character. But it is beneficial, I think, to see this occasionally in stark black and white on the pages of the Bible so that we can once again recognize the enemy and plunge back into the fight against it.

I have to warn you—you probably know this—we will never overcome it completely, not in this life, but we are to engage it undauntedly to our last breath. So as my dad’s sermon series on the Christian Fight told us, we are in it in a struggle to the death against our natures. So, as Pogo said in the cartoon, “We have met the enemy and he is us.” It is our nature we are fighting against, primarily.

Let us go back to the first chapters of the book to Genesis 2. I want to set a little bit of a background here before we actually get into the survey and the background takes a fair amount of the sermon, as I usually do. But we have

actually moved beyond the introduction; now we are into the meatier things. But I want you to see how God sets this up at the beginning. He always starts things right where they need to start. So here in Genesis 2, we will see the command that God gave to Adam.

Genesis 2:16-17 And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."

That was the command. There was a positive command there that you have got the freedom of all of these other trees and there was a negative command there—you shall not eat of this one tree. So actually He gave them the 99.9999% of everything to use for their benefit and He withheld the 0.0001%. But God only withheld a little bit.

So Adam was faced with a choice. He did not necessarily have to choose right then but ultimately there was going to be a choice; he had to choose whether he was going to obey this. He would certainly take the 99.9999%; but what would he do about that 0.0001%? That was the choice.

Then we get into chapter 3. Now the wildcard comes into play.

Genesis 3:1-5 Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said to the woman, "Has God indeed said, 'You shall not eat of every tree of the garden'?" [So far, so good.] And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden; but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die.'" Then the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

That was his whole pitch. He started asking questions and she could not answer them quite right. She had already started to get the command muddled in her head. So she listened to this serpent who was cunning; he was wise, he seemed to know what was going on.

Genesis 3:6 So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise . . .

These things that she saw in the tree are very much like those things that John tells us in I John 2:16—the lust of the eyes and all that.

Genesis 3:6-7 . . . [So] she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves coverings.

This is the way it began—human life on earth, the way it appears in the Bible—just a few days after they were made. We do not know if it was Sunday morning when this happened; there might have been some time, we do not know, but it gives the impression from the way the Bible is written that it happened fairly soon. So Satan, you could say, got to work quickly to influence their minds.

Those who teach the doctrine of original sin believe, as we do, that Adam's sin in the Garden of Eden altered man's essential nature. On that we can agree. We agree that Adam's sin brought in a new dimension into human life, and what it did was it altered our nature from one that was open to God and directed toward Him to one that is hostile to God and directed toward the self. So we turned away from God, being directed toward Him originally but then turning away from Him, and then we went from looking to Him for everything to looking to ourselves for everything. Of course, Romans 8:7 says that the carnal mind is enmity against God. We understand that enmity is hostility; we became hateful toward God, we became an enemy of God once sin appeared.

Now the major point where we differ from the world's Christianity in terms of original sin is the way that human nature is passed down from one generation to the next. While most Protestants and Catholics believe that one is born with an evil nature, we believe essentially three things:

1. We absorb and learn sinful attitudes from our parents, siblings, friends, neighbors, acquaintances—you could say ‘from the world’. That is the first thing: we absorb and learn it from the world.
2. Our human spirit is receptive to Satan’s broadcast of his own evil nature. The spirit that God put in man is a spirit and therefore it has an open frequency to other spirits, and the one that tries to dominate our spirit is Satan’s spirit and he sends out his broadcast of attitudes and we pick them up, whether we are aware of it or not (most of us are not aware of it), and we follow them and it changes our nature.
3. Our flesh is essentially selfish. Always wanting to be satisfied, it always has desires that it wants filled, and that predispose us to carnality; and carnality is just simply giving in to our flesh, giving in to our ego, giving in to what we want and it produces selfishness.

This is the origin of the three ‘S’s of overcoming. Have you have ever heard that in the church? Society, Satan, and Self—the three ‘S’s that we must overcome. Or we could say: the world, Satan the Devil, and ourselves—Society, Satan, and Self.

Now God gives His called-out ones a fourth ‘S’—His Spirit—and that Spirit is given to us to guide and empower us to recognize sin and to overcome it. Ultimately what God wants is that we gradually change our nature to resemble His own, and this of course we do in cooperation with Him.

We are going to go to a string of verses that shows this, I think, without much explanation. First, let us go to Romans 12. These are memory scriptures. Paul writes here after he has gone through a very lengthy doctrinal message. He then gets to what he wants us to do. He says:

Romans 12:1 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.

So he is telling us, “Okay, the first thing you have to do is submit to God as a sacrifice. You will remain alive but it’s your job to submit yourselves wholeheartedly to this proposition. It’s your reasonable service. This is the only thing that you could conclude after what God has done for you.”

Romans 12:2 And do not be conformed to this world [do not listen anymore to all those influences out there], but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

What you are going to do is stop living the way you have been living—listening to Satan, listening to people in this world, following the dictates of your own lusts. You are going to stop doing all that and now you are going to transition—you are going to be transformed—to a whole other way of life. You have to got to start doing this, you have got to start turning so that you can prove to yourself what God’s will is so that you can change to His way of life, so that you can have His character. It is not going to come by fiat. It is not going to come immediately. It is a transformation. It happens over time.

The next scripture is in II Corinthians 3. This one is much more succinct. When he uses the term ‘unveiled face’ he means that we now have the Holy Spirit, we have understanding, we know what God is doing.

II Corinthians 3:18 But we all [as in, the church of God], with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord . . .

It is reflected glory; we cannot look on it straightway but we can look at it in terms of a reflection.

II Corinthians 3:18 . . . are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.

Paul is telling us here in II Corinthians the same thing essentially that he said in Romans 12:1-2, but he changes up the imagery just a little bit and says we are being transformed into the image of God, the image of His glory (look at that wonderful goal that we have before us), and he says “just as by the Spirit

of the Lord.” So he adds a necessary ingredient to all this for us to understand that we cannot do this ourselves. Even though we have the understanding because the veil has been taken away, it still requires the Spirit of the Lord giving us all these things that we need to make sure that the transformation takes place.

Let us move forward to Ephesians 4. This gives us another view of the same thing, another image or another metaphor, that we can think of it as.

Ephesians 4:17-18 This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind, having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the [hardening] of their heart.

We will see a little bit of this in another place but this is the way the world is; this is the way things are under the sway and dominion of human nature. So their understanding is darkened; they have the veil still over them; they are alienated from the life of God, they are cut off from Him just as Adam and Eve were cut off; and they are ignorant of God’s way of life. They are ignorant of what is good for them; they just do not know, it has not been revealed to them because their hearts have been hardened; they cannot accept it.

Ephesians 4:19-20 Who, being past feeling, have given themselves over to [licentiousness], to work all uncleanness with greediness. [That is the general state of man.] But you have not so learned Christ.

We are in a different category. We have come to an understanding of a far different, a radically different way of life.

Ephesians 4:21-24 If indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus: that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according

to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man [like a new set of clothing] which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.

Here we have our marching papers—that we are to be radically transforming ourselves from what we were (as he described there, in verses 17-19, because that is what we came out of) and put on a new spirit of your mind, as it says here. We are changing our nature with God's help so that we are a new creation created according to God under His plan, under His supervision, and that we eventually, as it says here, become righteous and truly holy. That is the goal—to be just like God.

Now all of what I said before is that we have this job to do but what it says in Galatians 5 is that it is not going to be easy. He says here:

Galatians 5:16-17 I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary [they are opposed] to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish.

It sounds a lot like the end of Romans 7, does it not? Paul said he wanted to do what is right, but that law that was within him—that carnality that was still there—kept making him do wrong things. The spirit of his mind, which had been renewed, did not want to do that but this law that was in his members, as he says there, was fighting him tooth and nail and sometimes that old corrupt spirit won, and then he had to repent and seek forgiveness. And it was only Christ that was able to take him from this body of death, as he says. He needed the extra help. There was no way he could do it on his own.

So what we see here in these two places, Romans 7 and Galatians 5, is that it is a terrible struggle; it is always there, we will never get rid of it. We can grow to the point where we can become stronger and, most of the time, hold it down with God's help, but it is always going to be wriggling and squirming under us, trying to get the mastery again.

Galatians 5:18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

Meaning, if you are truly led by God's Spirit and you have got things under control as best you can, you will not be sinning because you come under the law when you sin. Like I said, we all slip up and there is a way that can be overcome—through Christ. But it is our goal to always walk in the Spirit so that we will not ever come under the penalty of the law, which is spiritual death—and physical death too ultimately. I hope that gives you an idea of just maybe the overall state of things where we are as members of the church, and how we have this fight going on within us all the time.

Now that we have seen that, what is the biblical basis for this belief? What we have seen so far is just the overview. What is the more nitty-gritty of this belief that man's nature is corrupt and needs changing? Let us go back to the beginning of the book again, Genesis 1 this time. These verses are maybe the thesis statements of the Bible here.

Genesis 1:26-27 Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.

Genesis 1:31 Then God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good. So the evening and the morning were the sixth day.

It is important that we begin at the beginning and notice how the matter stood immediately following God's creation of mankind in the person of Adam and Eve. Once He was finished—He had created Adam and then He had taken Eve out of his side, as it were, and then He was looking around; as sunset was falling on that sixth day, like a good quality control engineer—He took a final inspection of the many products that He had made and He

certified everything that He had made as very good. He stamped His approval on what He had made. It was all very good. Everything worked together.

In fact, we could say that “everything that He had made was very good” is a kind of understatement because God does not do things halfway; He does not do things three-quarters of the way; He does not even do things ninety-nine-and-one-hundredths of the way. He does everything perfectly. So, within His powers, He did *everything* perfectly in His creation. There was nothing that He could do better. He is God. Who is going to say, “Uh, flaw there, gotcha!”?

No. He looked at His own work and said, “This is totally without flaw.” Everything was made to work as He had designed it to function, and that everything includes our hearts and minds. The hearts of men everywhere, well, there were only two of them at the time but they were perfect—as perfect as God could make a physical being, including the heart and the mind.

At this point, this is the perfect time to introduce the idea of free will or free moral agency because that must be added to the story or things do not make sense. Herbert Armstrong often said, “God could not create perfect moral spiritual character by fiat.” That means He could not just say “Sesame!” and suddenly there would be a person, a being, who would do everything that God does without being taught, without having to learn it—just do it. Even His angels do not have that sort of mind where they just automatically do what is right.

He had to create these beings with free will—free moral agency—so that they can decide for themselves what they would do, how they would choose to act, how they would choose to think and speak. A created being with such character, meaning if God tried to make a being with perfect moral spiritual character by fiat where it was just plugged in to this mind, would be an automaton. It would be a programmed machine essentially. It would just act as it was programmed—on instinct almost, you could say. It would just be doing, not what it wanted to do but it would be doing what God wanted it to do at all times without choice.

That is why I read Genesis 1:26-27. It says that God is *reproducing Himself*. He is creating children in His own image. If He was going to have children—with the power that He was going to give them and the responsibilities that He was going to give them—He needed then to give them the ability to make their own choices, under His guidance of course. He would not divorce Himself from this process; He was God; He wanted to create a perfect product as well as He could, with human beings.

So He gave people choice. He gave them the ability to make up their own minds whether they would grow in the character to be like Him, or whether they will reject it and be like His enemy. So the mind—the heart—of Adam and Eve was just fine at that point. When He said it was very good, it was fine because there had been no taint of sin; it was just fine. And Adam and Eve were given the choice to obey. So they had free will, free moral agency. They had *choice*.

So while the human mind was as unspoiled as He could make it, it was not—and this is very important—permanently set. He made it wonderful. I am boggled all the time thinking about the human mind and the spirit that God put in us to give us all of those abilities of intelligence and language and creativity and whatnot. But it was not set; it is still malleable; it could be changed. Of course, it could be added to with other good things constantly added to the mind and spirit of man but it was not set. Not yet.

Each person then has the God-given ability to improve or corrupt his own nature through free will. So God did not create human nature. We create our own natures through the decisions that we make throughout our lives. If it is a good nature that we are trying to create and we have God's Spirit, He adds to that and it becomes His creation. But if we have a corrupt nature, which He will not have anything to do with because He is a holy God, then we do the creation influenced by Satan's nature. But do you notice the common denominator in both of those situations? It is us. *We make or break our own natures*.

Notice the choice. Deuteronomy 30 (we all know this). Notice how God puts this out to us and it is obvious what side He is on, what choice He wants us to make. But He still leaves it up to us.

Deuteronomy 30:15-20 See [He tells Israel and He tells us], I have set before you today life and good, death and evil, in that I command you today to love the Lord your God, to walk in His ways, and to keep His commandments, His statutes, and His judgments, that you may live and multiply; and the Lord your God will bless you in the land which you go to possess. But if your heart turns away so that you do not hear, and are drawn away, and worship other gods and serve them, I announce to you today that you shall surely perish; you shall not prolong your days in the land which you cross over the Jordan to go in and possess. I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore [this is His recommendation] choose life [it is a command], that both you and your descendants may live; that you may love the Lord your God, that you may obey His voice, and that you may cling to Him, for He is your life and the length of your days; and that you may dwell in the land which the Lord swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give them.

It is clear how God wants us to choose but He sets these two choices before us and says, “You pick. The one over here on the right hand that says ‘Life,’ that’s where all the goodies are, and the one on the left that says ‘Death,’ that’s where all the curses are. But it’s your choice. How about it? I’ll give you a lifetime to choose.”

It is clear that He wants us to choose to love Him and live, but even so the choice is ours. He will guide us as the Sovereign of this universe, our sovereign God. He will guide us and try to put everything in our way to show us the right way. All the signs will be pointing in the right direction—to life—but He is not going to make that decision for us. Ultimately it is ours.

Back to the book of Genesis, this time in Genesis 3 at the end of the chapter. Just a little while ago, we saw that both Adam and Eve took of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil and so we have here, at the end of Genesis 3, what God did because of that. See, they had made their choice; at least that initial choice was to follow Satan the Devil (follow the snake) and do what was wrong, do what God had said not to do.

Genesis 3:22 Then the Lord God said, "Behold, the man has become like one of Us, to know good and evil . . ."

Meaning, that now they knew the entire spectrum of good and evil; God wanted them only to know good things, but they had opened their minds up to everything from the worst of corruption and evil to the best of what is good, and they could choose from that whole spectrum.

Genesis 3:22 “. . . and now, lest he put out his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever”—

Meaning, we do not want these people to be like this for all time because that would be a horrible life.

Genesis 3:23-24 Therefore the Lord God sent him out of the garden of Eden to till the ground from which he was taken. So He drove out the man; and He placed cherubim at the east of the garden of Eden, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the tree of life.

Since Adam and Eve had chosen to open their minds to Satan's influence and allowed themselves to be persuaded to satisfy their lusts, He separated Himself from them. They chose to rebel against God, they chose death and evil, and thus they were separated because God cannot abide the sin which they were going to be doing. They rejected God's guidance and took another mentor, and so there must be separation.

I was going to go to Isaiah 59:1-2. That is another memory scripture. It says essentially that your sins have separated between you and God. God is a holy God; He cannot stand sin in His presence. That is how much He hates it. So every time we sin, especially our persistent habitual sins, we tell God that we do not want to be with Him or be like Him. We drive a wedge between us and Him and the relationship founders. It founders upon sin because our natures are being pulled the opposite direction. God is always good and our sins corrupt our human nature. As our sins pile up, we move further and further away from Him and His way of life. So this is the state of mankind.

Let us notice Romans 1. We have gone through these scriptures. A lot of these scriptures are memory scriptures or well-known passages. I want to just go through this quickly again without a great deal of commentary but just understand the flow here—the thought, the logic.

Romans 1:18-19 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 of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them.

Essentially God is out there. We can see what He has done. We should know better.

Romans 1:20 For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made [us, creation], even His eternal power and [divine nature], so that they are without excuse.

No human being has any excuse before God because if they just open their eyes they can see that there is a great God behind it all.

Romans 1:21-25 Because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened [because they made the wrong choice]. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man—and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things. Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves, who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.

Romans 1:28 And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting.

Mostly this is focused on Adam and Eve and the result of what happened with the whole world; the whole world has followed Adam and Eve's example. But ultimately we can say that God allowed mankind to go his own way. There are three instances there (verses 24, 26, and 28) where it very specifically says that "God gave them up" or "God gave them over," that He allowed it, He just let them go to whatever consequence would happen. He just said, "Okay, that's the way you want it. Now you're going to reap the consequences. Now you're going to see the result of your actions." So He let us debase our bodies and our minds and to corrupt our natures. Like I said, it began with Him driving Adam and Eve out of the Garden. So this is the way that it is with all people. Adam and Eve are an example.

As we have said before, man's nature begins as essentially neutral, just as Adam and Eve's nature began as essentially neutral, but with a bias towards self because human beings are made of flesh and flesh always wants to be satisfied. So, since Adam and Eve, each baby has begun life with this neutral (meaning 'selfish') nature and has been easily pulled toward evil due to God giving humanity up to its own devices. He has kind of had a hands-off policy. "Okay, because that's the way you want it, your kids, they may start out fresh and clean but they're going to get very dirty over the course of a lifetime because I'm not intervening for the most part."

Of course, God reserves the right in all this to call anyone out of that debasement—this corruption—and at any time. Frankly, that is the only way a person can change his nature; only with the calling, grace, and gifts of God to give him the desire, the will, and the power to repent and live according to God's way of life. Otherwise we are in the murk.

Once He does that and we believe Him and accept Him, then Christ's blood covers our sins and we are made right before God—we are justified, as it were—so that we can have a relationship with Him. But—and this is huge—God does not wipe away our human nature with the wave of the hand. He opens up our minds to His truth, He gives us His Spirit and various gifts to help us fight it, but it remains in us. It remains for us to deal with. And so there is more than justification and thank God for that. Thank God there is the next step, which is sanctification, a process in which we are cleansed of

the worst of our human nature and transformed then into His character image. But the human nature remains, and like I said before, it has to be fought and put down all the time.

I want now to very quickly to do a survey of the Bible where there are statements that are out there very plain to show what God thinks of our nature. So we are just going to run through these quickly so you can just get a very clear image in your mind of what God thinks of human nature.

Let us start in Genesis again, back to chapter 8. Now you will remember that in chapter 6, verse 5 He said that every intent of the thoughts of man's heart was only evil continually, and so He sends the Flood to punish mankind. Now look what He says in chapter 8. Noah makes a sacrifice after he lands.

Genesis 8:21 And the Lord smelled a soothing aroma. Then the Lord said in His heart, "I will never again curse the ground for man's sake, although the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth."

Did anything change by the Flood? Not in man's heart. Lots of people died, lots of animals died, lots of trees and grass and other things died. But man's heart did not change; it is still evil from his youth.

In this next verse He is speaking to His people. He gives them this command that they are to wear tassels on their garments. Now why did He do that? These things were supposed to be hanging down below any kind of covering so they would always have them in sight. What does He say?

Numbers 15:39 And you shall have the tassel, that you may look upon it and remember all the commandments of the Lord and do them, and that you may not follow the harlotry to which your own heart and your own eyes are inclined.

'Harlotry' meaning idolatry. Their hearts and their eyes were inclined to worship something other than God, which is what Adam and Eve did in the Garden.

This is next one is one of the direct wordings on what man's nature is really like. Paul quotes this in Romans 3:10-12.

Psalm 14:1-3 The fool has said in his heart, "There is no God."
They are corrupt, they have done abominable works, there is none who does good. The Lord looks down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there are any who understand, who seek God. They have all turned aside, they have together [or altogether] become corrupt; there is none who does good, [he repeats] no, not one.

We are all corrupt. The only thing that saves us is the blood of Jesus Christ. So all are under sin, everyone is worthy of death, none are good. Paul, in Romans 3, concludes: "For we have all sinned and fall short of the glory of God." So man's nature is only evil continually.

This next one is an interesting one. David's prayer of repentance. Notice what he says in verse 5:

Psalm 51:5 Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me.

Now those who believe in the original sin think that David is saying that he was born a sinful person, but that is not what David was actually saying here. Do you understand what David was trying to say? He was trying to say that he was born into a sinful world and even his mother, who he probably loved more than anyone else other than God after he was converted, was a sinner. He says, "In sin my mother conceived me. She was a sinner and I was born into a sinful world, and all I have seen my whole life is sin." He is telling God, "It's no wonder that I sinned. But I don't want to sin like this."

He says in the very next verse that God desired truth and he wanted that truth in his inward parts; he wanted his nature changed. That is what he is saying. "I was born into a corrupt world to a corrupt mother; I'm just full of sin and have been since my early days," he is saying. What did God say in Genesis

8? Evil from their youth. And that is what David is essentially saying. He wanted his nature changed from evil to good, from dirty to clean, from lies to truth.

Proverbs 14:12, another memory scripture.

Proverbs 14:12 There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death.

Even the things we think we are doing right are sinful; if they were not sinful, they would not end in death because death is the result of sin. So even the right things that we do without God are sinful because they come out of a corrupt nature.

Where my dad has been lately, Ecclesiastes.

Ecclesiastes 7:20 For there is not a just man on earth who does good and does not sin.

Ecclesiastes 9:3 This is an evil in all that is done under the sun: that one thing happens to all. Truly the hearts of the sons of men are full of evil; madness is in their hearts while they live, and after that they go to the dead.

Their whole lives are full of sin, evil, madness, and then they die. Not even good and just men, as people think of them, are truly good and just. They are full of sin.

You can take a note of Isaiah 1:4-6. This describes Israel at its most corrupt, but it is typical of all mankind. He says we are sick; we are burdened and weighed down with sin from the top of our heads to our very toenails; there is not a good thing in us; we are just totally cancerous with sin—and Israel had God's revelation. If Israel's knowledge of God's will and what He required of them was this bad, how do you think the Gentile world was and is without God?

Jeremiah 17:9, we all know that one. He says our hearts are desperately wicked, meaning, they are unfathomably corrupt. “Who can know it?” he asks. We do not know the depths of our own sin, our own corruption.

Matthew 7:9-11. Jesus pulls no punches where He says, “If you, being evil, can give good things to your children who ask you, then how good is God? He gives to those who do not ask Him, whether they are good or evil.” So He says very clearly to these people He was talking to that they were evil.

Let us turn to this next one. This is in the instance where the people out there think He did away with clean and unclean meats, but He does not; He was making a bigger point.

Mark 7:20-23 And He said, "What comes out of a man, that defiles a man. For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, [licentiousness], an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within and defile a man."

So we cannot say, “The Devil made me do it!” or “The world that I lived in was so corrupt, I didn’t have a chance”. Jesus says, “Uh-uh! Even though those things are out there, you made the choices and those things came out of you. That came out of your own corruption. You’re going to have to pay for those sins or I’m going to, because they come from within.” Very consistent with what He said earlier in Matthew.

Ephesians 2:2. That is another memory scripture. We were always influenced by Satan, the prince of the power of the air; we all walked according to the course of the world; we all fulfilled our lusts; all of us were children of wrath, he says. That is, we were under judgment because of sin. We were ready to have God’s wrath fall on us. Our nature is corrupt to the core.

Finally, Peter writes:

I Peter 4:3 For we have spent enough of our past lifetime in doing the will of the Gentiles—when we walked in [licentiousness], lusts, drunkenness, revelries, drinking parties, and abominable idolatries.

He could have named a ton more. But we were all like the Gentiles in the world. We were all cut off from God and all living in sin—all humanity from Adam and Eve on, except for those few who He has called to salvation. Actually even those too, before they were called, have acted out of a sinful nature—a very corrupt, sinful nature. It seems overwhelmingly clear that human nature, fashioned by the influence of Satan and this world and our own selfishness, is evil to the core. So we know this.

How about some advice about what to do about this state of mankind and our place as God called-out ones in it? Let us go to Titus 3 to finish. Paul writes to Titus:

Titus 3:1-7 Remind them [the people of the church] to be subject to rulers and authorities, to obey, to be ready for every good work, to speak evil of no one, to be peaceable, gentle, showing all humility to all men. [Why?] For we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another. But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit [which], He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

By the grace of God, we have been given a rare and wonderful opportunity to rise above the rest of humanity. We are now heirs of God (not inheritors yet, but heirs), possessors of the hope of eternal life. We are, as Jesus said, to be lights shining in the darkness of this present evil age. So, Paul says, it is

our responsibility as God's children in this world to show the nature of God in all of our actions—toward the world and toward one another—as we prepare for our ultimate work in His Kingdom.