

## **PERSONAL EMAIL DISCUSSING MORAL GOVERNMENT AND RELATED ISSUES**

Jesse Morrell

### **THE LAWS OF GOD**

The law is not an arbitrary commandment but is derived from the Divine Mind (Gen 3:22). Laws do not originate right and wrong (Rom. 5:13) but Laws declare right and wrong (Rom 3:20; Rom 7:7). Well-being is intrinsically good and ill-being is intrinsically evil (Lk 16:25). So God's Laws are designed to promote the highest well-being of all (Deut 5:29; Deut 6:3; Deut 6:24; Deut 10:13; Jer 7:23; Jer 32:39; Lk. 6:9; Rom 13:4; Eph 6:3), His own glory supremely (Matt 22:37; Mk 12:30; Lk 10:27) and the well-being of our neighbors equally (Matt 19:19; Matt 22:39; Mk 12:31-33; Lk 10:27; Rom 13:4; Rom 13:9; Gal 5:14; Jas 2:8). God commands love because it promotes the well-being of all, and God forbids sin because it demotes the well-being of all. Love is the commitment of the will to promote the well-being of another (Jn. 15:13; 2 Thes. 3:13) while sin is essentially selfishness (Isa. 14:13-14, Matt. 23:5). God commands the means (love) which are relatively good because of their relation to an intrinsically good end (well-being) and God forbids the means (sin) which are relatively evil because of their relation to an intrinsically evil end (ill-being). God's Law is love because God loves His subjects. God's knowledge of reality is infinite (Ps 147:5) so He knows what is truly beneficial and what is truly detrimental. His laws therefore are truth; they are expressed truths of reality (Ps 119:142). What God commands, He commands because it is right (Isa. 25:19). God Himself is subjected to His own conscience (Gen. 18:25)

Conscience is simply the knowledge of right and wrong (Rom 2:15). Sin is rebellion against light or conscience (Jam 4:17), acting contrary to known law (Rom 5:13; 1 Jn 3:4). Obedience is love, because God's law is love, and love is the commitment of the will to promote the well-being of another (Jn. 15:13; 2 Thes 3:13) while sin is essentially selfishness (Isa. 14:13-14, Matt 23:5). Sin is an unwillingness to obey God (1 Sam 8:7; Isa 30:9; Isa 30:15-16; Isa 31:6; Isa 14:13-14; Isa 42:24; Neh 9:29; Lk 19:14; Lk 19:27; Jn 5:40) And temptation is not sin (Heb 4:15, Jas 1:14-15).

### **SIN IS AVOIDABLE**

I also find many professing Christians who say that sin is irresistible. But 1 Cor 10:13 says temptation never exceeds our ability, there is always a way of escape so we are able to not sin. If we couldn't help but to sin, it wouldn't be our fault and we couldn't be responsible or accountable for it anymore than you can be responsible and accountable for the color of your skin.

### **DO WE HAVE A SINFUL NATURE?**

And many Christians represent sin as if it were natural. This is probably due to

translations like the NIV. They translated terms like "lust of the flesh" "carnal mind" "body of sin" and "flesh" into the modern term sinful nature (Romans 7:5; Romans 7:18; Romans 7:25; Romans 8:3; Romans 8:4; Romans 8:5; Romans 8:8; Romans 8:9; Romans 8:12; Romans 8:13; Romans 13:14; 1 Corinthians 5:5; Galatians 5:13; Galatians 5:16; Galatians 5:17; Galatians 5:19; Galatians 5:24; Galatians 6:8; Ephesians 2:3; Colossians 2:11; Colossians 2:13; 2 Peter 2:10; 2 Peter 2:18). But the same word "flesh" that they translated "sinful nature" in many passages is also found 2 Jn. 1:7. It says that if anyone denies that Jesus came in the flesh is a deceiver and an anti Christ. The Gnostics said that the flesh was sinful because all that is physical is sinful. So the Gnostics denied that Jesus came in the flesh. Yet if the NIV were consistent in their translation of this word, the text would have to read, "For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus is come in a sinful nature. This is a deceiver and an antichrist." But this is absurd since we know that Jesus was without sin (2 Cor 5:21). Yet, the bible says that the same flesh and blood that we are made of, Jesus Christ himself was made of (Heb. 2:14-17) so that He himself was tempted like we are yet without sin (Heb 4:15). So obviously, this flesh and blood is not sinful or else Jesus Christ was sinful.

## **GOD IS THE AUTHOR OF OUR NATURE**

I've been thinking a lot about the concept of a "sinful nature". Both Pelagius and Finney said that God was the author of our nature and therefore we charge God with being the author of sin if we have a sinful nature. An early Pelagian said "it is impious to say that sin is inherent in nature, because in this way the author of nature is being judged at fault." Finney said, "To represent the constitution as sinful, is to represent God, who is the author of the constitution, as the author of sin." And I realized that the bible clearly says that God is the author of our nature "The Lord that formed me from the womb" (Isa. 49:5), "I formed thee in the belly" (Jer 1:5), "thou hast covered me in my mother's womb... I am fearfully and wonderfully (not sinfully) made." (Ps. 139:13-14). That is why Pelagius said, "...you ought to measure the good of human nature by reference to its Creator." By "the good of human nature" Pelagius simply meant that free will, intelligence and conscience, and emotions are a part of our nature and that these are good faculties. Whereas Augustine said that our nature is so corrupted that free will is no longer a functional faculty. He did not mean that moral goodness were anything but a choice. Pelagius, like Finney, said that both moral good and moral evil were free will choices. So when Pelagius spoke of a good of nature he simply meant that our constitution was good with good qualities, but not that you could be born morally good or morally evil, or that moral goodness and moral wickedness were hereditary. The bible itself speaks of men knowing good and evil by nature (Rom 2:14) because conscience is a part of their nature or constitution. Man is made constitutionally good but then man chooses to become morally depraved (Ecc 7:29).

The Early Church taught that free will was an essential element of our God given nature [constitution], and that we abuse that free will when we choose to sin. Irenaeus said, "Forasmuch as all men are of the same nature, having power to hold and to do that which is good, and having power again to lose it, and not to do what is right; before men of sense, (and how much more before God!) some... are justly accused, and receive condign

punishment, because they refuse what is just and right.” Again Irenaeus said, “Those who do not do it [good] will receive the just judgment of God, because they had not work good when they had it in their power to do so. But if some had been made by nature bad, and others good, these latter would not be deserving of praise for being good, for they were created that way. Nor would the former be reprehensible, for that is how they were made. However, all men are of the same nature. They are all able to hold fast and to go what is good. On the other hand, they have the power to cast good from them and not to do it.” Origen said, “The Scriptures...emphasize the freedom of the will. They condemn those who sin, and approve those who do right... We are responsible for being bad and worthy of being cast outside. For it is not the nature in us that is the cause of the evil; rather, it is the voluntary choice that works evil.” Origen said that “the heretics [the Gnostics] introduce the doctrine of different natures” saying that before regeneration, sinners have a nature that doesn't have the ability to obey God. So Pelagius was in agreement with the Early Church when he spoke of the good of our nature, that is, our nature having free will. While the Augustinians and Calvinists were in agreement with the Gnostic's when they speak of sinners and saints having different natures, the former having natures in capable of obeying God.

Now, our bodies do have natural desires. God has given us a body that has appetites. But these desires and appetites, like free will, are good if we use them rightly. Eve was tempted in the Garden because of her God given appetites (Gen 3:6). These appetites have a lawful means of gratification and an unlawful means of gratification. Even we are tempted by our lusts (James 1:14), but these lusts are temptations, not sin (James 1:15) as opposed to Augustine who confused the ethical with the metaphysical, and confused temptation with sin, saying that physical lust was itself a sin. But temptation is not sin. That is why it says Jesus had the same flesh we have (Heb. 2:14-17) and was tempted like we are yet without sin (Heb 4:15) because temptation is not sin. Paris Reidhead (A MGT preacher) said, "When God made us He gave us many different appetites... there's nothing wrong with our appetites. He gave us adequate means by which they could all be satisfied within His will."

So our nature is good in that it still retains a free will, and our body is good in that it has good appetites given to us by God. But sin is when we unlawfully gratify these appetites by forbidden means, and when we misuse and abuse our free will. That is why Romans 1:26 describes sin as unnatural, as that which is against nature.

Now granted, if we are to say that God is the author of our nature, and we are going to recognize that we do in fact have a fallen body and inherit physical depravity like Finney taught, then we do have to admit that God is the author of this physical depravity. I don't deny this. God creates our physical constitutions so God is the author of physical depravity. To say that God just set things in order and then stepped back, so that we inherit these things just by natural generation of Adam, seems to be more Deism then Theism. But we do inherit physical depravity from Adam because of God. It was God who removed us from the tree of life (Gen 3:22-23) so we inherit physical death from Adam because of God. And it is God who determined that some children will be born deformed and handicapped because of the sin of the parent (Exo 20:5). God no doubt has

a good and wise reason for this. But physical depravity is not moral depravity. God is the author of physical evil (Isa. 45:7; Amos 3:6) but God is not the author of moral evil. We author our own moral character by our free will, we originate our own sin (Matt 12:35; Matt 15:19).

There is a sense in which we are made constitutionally good (Ecc 7:29, Isa. 49:5, Jer 1:5, Ps. 139:13-14; Rom 1:26). But only in that we have an intelligence (conscience, reason, and understanding), free will, and sensibilities. But there is also a sense in which we are constitutionally depraved. We are subjected to death, disease, and may even inherit depraved appetites and desires from our parents (Exo 20:5, 1 Cor 15:21-22). So our constitution is partially depraved but not entirely, while the moral character of sinners is in fact entirely depraved.

And while we are on the topic of our nature, I thought I'd point out that there are two ways that the scripture uses the term nature. Nature is an expression for constitution at times while also an expression of character at other times. Nature is used to describe constitution or make up (Rom 1:31, Rom 2:14, 2 Tim 3:3). Nature is used to describe character or manner of life (1 Cor 2:14, Eph 2:2-3, 2 Pet 1:4, Gal 2:15, Acts 26:4, 2 Tim 3:10, Jer 13:23).

I didn't mean for this email to be so long. I guess it helps me to type all this out as I've been thinking a lot about it. I hope you find some of it helpful in your studies.

Jesse Morrell  
[www.OpenAirOutreach.com](http://www.OpenAirOutreach.com)

## **FURTHER SCRIPTURAL SUPPORT**

### **CONSTITUTIONAL NATURE & CHARACTER NATURE**

Nature is an expression for constitution at times while also an expression of character or custom at other times.

Nature is used to describe constitution or make up (Rom 1:31, Rom 2:14, Rom. 2:27, 2 Tim 3:3).

Nature is used to describe character or manner of life (1 Cor 2:14, Eph 2:2-3, 2 Pet 1:4, Gal 2:15, Acts 26:4, 2 Tim 3:10, Jer 13:23).

God is the author of our constitutional nature (Isa. 49:5, Jer 1:5, Ps. 139:13-14)

Men are the originators of their character nature (Matt. 12:35, Lk. 6:45)

Sin is rebellion of the will, not a defect of nature (Isa. 14:13-14, Isa. 30:9, Isa. 30:15-16, Isa. 31:6, Isa. 42:24, Neh.9:29, Lk.19:14, Lk.19:27).

### **AGE OF ACCOUNTABILITY:**

“Your children, which . . . had no knowledge between good and evil” (Deut. 1:39);

“For before the child shall know to refuse the evil, and choose the good” (Isa. 7:16);

“For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil” (Rom. 9:11);

“To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin” (Jas. 4:17).

### **LIMITS OF ACCOUNTABILITY AND LIMITS OF RESPONSIBILITY:**

Accountability is limited to or exactly proportionate to knowledge (Matt. 11:21-22, Lk. 12:47-48, Lk. 23:34, Jn. 9:41, Jn. 15:22, Rom. 4:15, Rom. 5:13, Jas. 4:17, Jn. 19:11, Matt. 23:14, Mk.12:40, Lk. 20:47, Jas. 3:1, Matt. 10:15, Matt. 11:24, Mk. 6:11, Lk. 10:12, Lk. 10:14, Heb. 10:26, 2 Pet. 2:21)

Responsibility is limited to or exactly proportionate to ability (Deut. 6:5, Deut. 10:12, Deut. 30:6, Matt. 22:37, Mk. 12:30, Lk. 10:27, 1 Cor. 10:13)

Children do not inherit the guilt or sin of the parent (Deut. 24:16, 2 Kng. 14:6, 2 Chron. 25:4, Jer. 31:29-30, Eze. 18:2-4, Eze. 18:19-20)

### **THE INNOCENCE OF NEW BORN CHILDREN**

Infant children are morally “innocent” (2 Kgs. 21:16; 24:4; Joel 3:19) because they have not yet “done anything” morally “good or evil” (Rom. 9:11)