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The Nature of Man - By Ron Halbrook - West Columbia, Texas

Continued from August's Beacon*** Man's Responsibility

5. Man is responsible to God, contrary to all concepts of fate or determinism. Because man bears the image of God, he has a mind with which to learn and understand the will of God. God as an intelligent being communicates with man as an intelligent being through the medium of words. And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die (**Gen. 2:16-17**).

Man in God's image has a moral capacity, a will power, and a conscience which equip him to choose to do right or wrong. God appeals to man to do right and announces the penalty for wrong. Satan appeals for man to do wrong and denies the penalty. Neither God nor Satan chooses for man. Both God and Satan recognize that man is a creature of choice (**Gen. 2:16-17; 3:1-5**). God votes for man to do right, Satan votes against it, but man casts the deciding vote. It is the whole duty of man to fear God and keep his commandments. When man chooses to act contrary to God's revealed word, he sins and must answer to God for it. "The soul that sinneth, it shall die" (**Eccl. 12:13-14; 1 Jn. 3:4; Ezek. 18:4**). Various concepts of fate or determinism excuse man from answering to God

for his sins. Fate says there is some inescapable law or force which compels man to act as he does. Some ancient religions taught that the gods along with man and all the universe are subject to the rule of fate. Fate is set by the stars in astrology. The theory of reincarnation explains some actions of man as the result of previous lives. Thus a person may unconsciously relive or re-enact certain events. Matter and flesh are inherently evil according to several ancient philosophies including gnosticism. Therefore man is compelled to sin by the flesh in which he lives. His soul is free from the taint of sin no matter what the flesh does so long as he holds the secret of true knowledge and light in his soul. **2 Peter, 1-2 John, and Jude** repudiate such notions.

During the third century A.D., the concept was forming that man inherits Adam's "original sin" or inherits from Adam a "fallen nature" predisposed to sin. The North African "bishop" Augustine (354-430) organized these theories into a system which said that Adam was created with a will having the freedom to choose right or wrong. His will was corrupted and its freedom lost when he sinned. All men inherit this corrupted or fallen nature which predisposes him to commit sin. Augustine rationalized that all mankind was in the loins of Adam when he sinned, thus making it right for God to impute to

all men Adam's sin, Adam's corrupt nature, their own depravity, and their own sins. In other words, man does not become a sinner because he sins, he sins because he is born a sinner. Since the time of Adam, man must sin because he is man. He has to sin because it is his inherent nature to sin. These same concepts were passed down in Roman Catholicism to the age of the Protestant Reformation. Martin Luther, Ulrich Zwingli, John Calvin, and John Knox all embraced this basic theory of man's nature. It has been passed down in the creeds of most denominations. It is deeply embedded in Calvinism but is not unique to that theological system. Modern man tries to escape the problem of sin by declaring that man's actions are predetermined by his environment. The individual is not to blame for wrongdoing. It is all the fault of society, or the family, or the government, or the economic system, or the church, or our genetic inheritance. Such explanations have been given for every sin from shoplifting to murder and from alcoholism to homosexuality. All such theories are false. They undercut man's responsibility and accountability to God for sin. As the consequence of Adam's sin, Adam was driven from the tree which perpetuated physical life in the Garden. Thus all mankind suffers physical death. But the moral and spiritual nature of man is unchanged. The Bible tells about death falling upon man just as God had warned, but where does it say that the inherent nature of the inner man has been altered or changed in any degree? **Ezekiel 18** shows that men have the same freedom to choose right or wrong which Adam himself had. We are not born with the sin of Adam or any other ancestor upon us (v. 20). When a man chooses right, he can later fall away from it and do wrong. When a man

chooses wrong, he can later fall away from it and do right (**vv. 26-27**). Men can rise above an environment of wickedness to seek and find righteousness with God (**vv. 14-18**). We are not mere victims of circumstance, of environment, of inheritance, of reincarnated lives, of the stars, of Adam's sin, or of fate. We must face the facts that we are sinners, we sin by choice, and we are responsible to God for it. Men sin because they choose to, not because they have to.

Man's Work

6. Man is a creature of work, contrary to the idea that "the world owes me a living and a life of ease." Even before sin entered the world, God put Adam into the Garden to dress it and to keep it" (**Gen. 2:15**). Adam and Eve erred when they took their minds off the good work God had given them to do and listened to the lies of Satan. After sin entered, the difficulty of Eve's labor in bearing children was greatly increased, as was the difficulty of Adam's labor in cultivating the ground (**3:16-19**). Life is a struggle. The struggle of life teaches us self-discipline. We are put into this world not to serve and please ourselves, but to serve and glorify God, and to serve and bless our fellow man. If we give proper attention to the work God gave us to do, sin is defeated (**Matt. 22:37-40**). Part of life's labor is to fight and to resist sin (**Jas. 4:7; 1 Pet. 5:8-9**). Any theory which says we are incapable of this God-given work is false. We fail in this work by freely choosing to sin. Prosperity opens the door to ease, to constant entertainment, to an idle and wandering mind, to inactivity - and to the temptations of Satan (**Deut. 32:15; Amos 6:1-6; 1 Tim. 6:9**). But God opens a door to escape every temptation (**1 Cor. 10:13**). We choose which door to take. We need to trust in God at all times, fill our hearts with things that are good

and uplifting, and be busy in the work God has given us to do (**Phil. 4:6-9**).

Man's Mate

7. Man is suited to one mate for life, contrary to the advocates of license, hedonism, and immorality. Jesus reminds us that when God made one man for one woman "at the beginning," God established the proper order for all mankind "from the beginning" until now. "What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder" (**Gen. 2:24; Matt. 19:3-9**). It is against God's established order, "against nature," for men to have sexual relations with men or women with women. That order is also violated when a person has a living mate and yet marries another. This is adultery and an abomination in God's sight (**Rom. 1:26-27; 7:2-3**). If and only if a person puts away his mate for fornication, he may marry another and not commit adultery (**Matt. 19:9**).

Those who advocate any other order confuse love with lust, liberty with license, passing pleasure with perpetual profit, and God's grace with gross perversion. To pursue such a course is not true freedom but is abject slavery to sin and a dreadful curse on mankind (**2 Pet. 2:19**). This sin breaks down man's resistance to sin generally and weakens him in the face of many foolish and hurtful lusts. God's way in the family blesses men and women in many ways and lays the foundation for warding off many dangers.

Man's Conscious Identity

8. Man's personal identity and conscious existence is a blessing, not a curse, contrary to the claims of such Eastern religions as Hindu and Buddhism. God has personal identity and conscious existence, and man "in the image of God" has that same nature (**Gen. 1:27**). Adam knew he was Adam and not Eve, Cain, Abel, or

Seth. Eve knew she was Eve and not someone else. God as an intelligent, self-conscious, and distinct person addressed man as an intelligent, self-conscious, and distinct person. God blessed Adam and Eve by explaining to them their duties and privileges (**Gen. 1:28; 2:15-17**). There is to be a bodily resurrection and final accounting by each person for the use made of all God's blessings and commands (**Jn. 5:28-29; 2 Cor. 5:10**). Some world religions admit man has a personal consciousness and identity but claim this is a curse to be overcome. His goal in life is to submerge that personal sense into the conception that he is only a part of the great divine whole. Through a process of meditation and extreme self-denial (which may include leaving one's family to wander as a monk), and through the process of many reincarnations, man's ultimate destiny is to escape existence in a body. He thereby loses all personal sense of individual identity and becomes submerged into the great divine whole. Such teaching denies to man many of the blessings, privileges, and duties God ordained (**1 Cor. 7:3-5; Eph. 5:25; 1 Tim. 4:3-4**). This effort to escape personal identity destroys the sense of a personal responsibility with eternal consequences. The result is sin against self, against God, against one's mate, against one's children, against one's parents, and against his fellow man in many ways.

Man's Fellowship With God

9. Man is capable of fellowship with God but sin breaks that fellowship, contrary to all claims that one can be right with God while sinning. Before Adam and Eve sinned, they knew the love, joy, and peace of communion with God. When they sinned, they died spiritually as God had warned. They were separated from God by their sin. They knew shame and dread at the

approach of God and "hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God amongst the trees of the garden" (**Gen. 2:17; 3:6-8**). To underscore his anger against sin for all time, God cast them out of the Garden and from the tree of life, thus bringing the consequence of physical death upon all mankind (**3:22-24**). Adam and Eve had committed only one sin, but God is too holy and too pure to abide in fellowship with even one sin. When we commit even one sin, we stand guilty before God as a lawbreaker and a sinner (**Jas. 2:10**). Modernism teaches that all men are accepted by God in spite of their sins on the basis of "the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man." Catholicism teaches that venial (or lesser) sins do not separate man from God. Denominational theories of man's inherited sinful nature say that we all sin all of the time and cannot help it. These theories propose that we can be in fellowship with God on one basis or another while we continue sinning by human nature. From time to time, some brethren are influenced by such theories. We must remember that Satan is the father of the idea that we can sin and "not surely die" (**Gen. 3:4**).

Man's Pardon From Sin

10. Man can be forgiven and restored to fellowship with God only through God's own merciful provision of a Savior, which must be accepted by man upon conditions, contrary to every theory of unconditional pardon. God promised to defeat Satan by providing sinners with a Savior. God said to Satan, "And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel" (**Gen. 3:15**). Jesus Christ is the seed of woman who received a minor blow when Satan led men to crucify the Son of God, but he in turn delivered Satan a fatal blow by rising from the dead.

God's provision of a perfect sacrifice for man's sin was foreshadowed by rivers of blood from animal sacrifices flowing toward the cross of Christ. The death of Christ, and that alone, is the sufficient and perfect sacrifice for our sins (**Gen. 4:4; Heb. 10:1; Matt. 26:28**). In the death of Christ, the lawful demand of justice for sin to be punished was met and, at the same time, God unconditionally provided the basis for the forgiveness of the sins of all men. In the cross, perfect justice and perfect love meet. God does not force his forgiveness and fellowship on anyone. Therefore, man's acceptance of God's grace is conditional. Man must choose to receive it. That forgiveness has been available to all men throughout history on the basis of genuine faith in the Savior. Before Christ came, men exercised their faith in him as the Savior to come. Today we must act upon our faith in him as the Savior who came. We must repent of our sins, confess him as God's Son, and be immersed in water (**Acts 2:38; Rom. 10:10; Gal. 3:26-27**). In baptism we receive the remission of our sins through the death of Jesus Christ (**Rom. 6:3-4**). After we enter the family, church or kingdom of God, but we stumble again and fall into sin, the blood of Christ is again applied to our need as we repent and pray forgiveness from God (**Acts 8:24; 1 Jn. 1:7-2:2**). From: **Guardian of Truth XXXVI: 12, pp. 368-371 June 18, 1992**



