

"Did God Make Me Sinful?"

Some think that God made us the way we are and we can't change. Did God make us sinful? Can we change? Hello, I'm Phil Sanders, and this is a Bible study "In Search of the Lord's Way." The Bible answers these questions and gives us hope. Stay with us.

Welcome to In Search of the Lord's Way! We're here to search the Scriptures for God's will. We're here to search the Scriptures to find the Lord's way to be saved and to live the Christian life. Thanks for taking time with us today. We really appreciate hearing from you that you appreciate our Bible study. And we want to be a part of your life each week.

Occasionally people who are struggling with a moral problem ask, "Well did God make me this way?" Many people are convinced that our DNA makes us the way that we are and we can't change our behavior. Others believe that man is incapable of change on his own. Flip Wilson used to say, "The Devil made me do it"; but some people, instead of blaming the devil, blame God for making them do the things that they do. They believe that we're all born sinners, totally depraved and completely unable to choose what is good. They say our sinful nature is utterly incapable of choosing or even desiring God. They go even farther by saying some people are predestined to be lost, while others are predestined to be saved. They believe God arbitrarily makes the choice for us, and we have no freewill. They say we can't change our ways or our eternal destiny.

Well without a doubt all people struggle with temptation and sin throughout their lives. But what tempts you may differ from what tempts me, but we both face the struggle to live righteously. The apostle Peter urged Christians to "abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul" (1 Peter 2 and verse 11). Did God make us sinful and unable to resist temptation? Are we trapped in sin with no hope of salvation? What can we do? Well we'll look into the Scriptures, because they contain the words of eternal life. They have the answer to our problems.

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The Edmond church will now worship in song, we'll read from Ezekiel 18 verses 1 through 4, and we'll explore the true nature of humanity.

Our reading today comes from the inspired prophet Ezekiel, chapter 18, verses 1 through 4. "Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying, 'What do you mean by using this proverb concerning the land of Israel', saying, 'The fathers eat the sour grapes, But the children's teeth are set on edge'? As I live,' declares the Lord God, 'you are surely not going to use this proverb in Israel anymore. Behold, all souls are Mine; the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is Mine. The soul who sins will die.'" That's God speaking through Ezekiel. Let's pray together. Father, we pray that You will help us to understand our nature and to serve You and to do Your will always on earth as it's done in heaven. In Jesus name, Amen!

The Scriptures teach that man is capable of choosing between good and evil, and he is free to choose between God and Satan. Romans 6 verses 17 and 18 says, that "Though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were committed. You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness." Now this passage clearly teaches that a

lost person obeyed from his heart the gospel teaching and changed from being a slave to sin to being a slave of righteousness.

Now after preaching to the Jews on the day of Pentecost about their sin of crucifying the Lord Jesus Christ and their need to repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of their sins, the apostle Peter speaking by the power of the Holy Spirit said in Acts 2 and verse 40, "Save yourselves (or be saved) from this perverse generation." Well what does that mean, "Save yourselves"? Well are we suggesting that a person can earn his way to heaven? No. We're not saying that. We're saying a person must respond to God's gracious gift. God does the saving, but He puts qualifications on who can be saved. We must respond to His gift. One must repent and be baptized out of faith and love to meet God's conditions.

The Bible says in 1 Peter 1 verses 22 to 23, "Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart, for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and enduring word of God." Now people purify their souls when they hear and obey the gospel truth. They're born again not through some miraculous movement of God but by obedience to the preaching of the Word of God. It's the gospel that saves (Romans 1 and verse 16). Paul said in 1 Corinthians 1 and verse 21, "For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe." Now this was God's choice of how to save people, giving them a gospel and saving them through that message.

That man has freewill either to accept the gospel or to reject it is also clear in the Scriptures. Have you thought about that golden passage that you learned as a child? The Lord Jesus said in John 3 verse 16, "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Now "whoever" means "anyone." God will save people who believe, but those who refuse to believe shall perish. Our choices matter; we can freely choose. John the Baptist later said in the same chapter in verse 36 of the New American Standard Bible, "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever does not obey the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him." Now faith and obedience matter to our salvation. And God expects us to choose to believe and obey in order to have eternal life.

Throughout history people have chosen whether they will obey God or not. You'll remember Joshua late in life addressed the people of Israel. And he said in Joshua 24 verses 14 to 15, "Now, therefore, fear the LORD and serve Him in sincerity and truth; and put away the gods which your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD. If it's disagreeable in your sight to serve the LORD, choose for yourselves today whom you will serve: whether the gods which your fathers served which were beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD." Joshua knew that people had to choose which god they would serve, whether the God of Heaven or some other god. They had freewill.

The prophet Elijah many years later stood against 450 prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of the Asherah on Mount Carmel. Now the God of Heaven completely overcame the prophets of Baal when the fire came down and consumed Elijah's sacrifice. Before the challenge in 1 Kings 18 and verse 21, Elijah went before the people and said, "How long will you waver between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal is God, follow him." Of course, Baal was just an idol and was never anything but a figment of the people's imagination. The God of Heaven, however, was real and sent fire down from heaven, which convinced the people to kill the prophets of Baal. When the people saw the evidence, they chose God and rejected Baal.

They had freewill. And so do you. In Revelation 22 and verse 17 the Spirit and the bride say, "Come." And let the one who hears say, "Come." And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who wishes to take the water of life without cost. God invites us to believe and to obey!

Now let's reason together. Jesus said in Luke 13 and verse 5, that "unless you repent, you too will all perish." Why would Jesus Christ condemn people for a failure to repent if they're incapable of repenting or doing any good toward their own salvation? Wouldn't that make God into a monster?

Hebrews 11 and verse 6 says, "without faith it's impossible to please him (that is God), for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him." Why would God demand faith from us, if He knows that people are incapable of believing? We humans are capable of believing! God won't require of us something that we're not capable of doing.

The apostle Paul encouraged people in 2 Corinthians 5 verses 18 to 20 to "be reconciled to God." Now why would God ask men to be reconciled if they weren't capable of doing anything by which they could be reconciled? Let's think together. The word "reconcile" implies that there is a separation and a reunion; reconciliation means "to bring back into harmony." A reconciled husband and wife were once in harmony, then they separated, and then later that harmony was restored. If an infant is born in sin, he cannot be reconciled because he was never in harmony with the Lord at the beginning. My friend, infants aren't born in sin but born pure; they separate from God when they're old enough and responsible enough to sin on their own. They are reconciled to God by faith and obedience to the gospel. Now in gospel obedience one is freed from sin and born again into the family of God.

The Bible teaches God is no respecter of persons (and He teaches that in Acts 10:34; Romans 2 verses 11 and 12; and 1 Peter 1 and verse 17). Now God hasn't arbitrarily chosen some folks to be saved and others to be lost, as some people teach. Rather the blood of Jesus was shed for all people and the gospel is offered to everyone. The apostle Paul said in 1 Timothy 2 and verse 4 that God "desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." God didn't make people just to condemn them. That's a false and cruel doctrine. The apostle Peter said in 2 Peter 3 and verse 9, that "The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance." That's what God wants, for you to repent and to be right with Him and live with Him forever.

Now if you have no choice as to your eternal destiny, why would you need to beware of the devil? The apostle Peter warned in 1 Peter 5 and verse 8, "Be of sober spirit, be on the alert, because your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour." Well such language is absurd if you have no freewill. Temptation tests whether we will choose to do right or give in to what's wrong. You see, that's freewill. My friend, you are not a puppet or a robot; you're made in God's image and God made you a free moral agent.

The Bible says in James 1 verses 13 to 15: "Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am being tempted by God'; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death." God is not the source of our sinful behavior. He tests our faith but doesn't lead us into moral failure and sin. How could a holy God lead anyone into behavior that totally contradicts His own nature? God doesn't create someone for a sinful life.

Now we do admit that man is often weak to sin, but being weak to sin isn't the same thing as being incapable of resisting sin. Many Bible characters resisted the temptation to sin. Joseph said no to the continual pressures of Potiphar's wife. Joshua said no to serving false gods. Daniel as a young man said

no to eating the unlawful foods at the Babylonian king's table. As an old man, Daniel said no to the law that forbade him to pray to the God of heaven. When the Sanhedrin told Peter and John not to preach the name of Jesus, they said in Acts 4 verses 19 and 20, "Whether it's right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard." The apostles chose the moral high ground rather than give into the Council. People can choose what they do.

The Lord Jesus describes the nature of man in Matthew 26 and verse 41. Here Jesus was in the garden of Gethsemane with his three disciples: Peter, James, and John. And He was praying in agony, and they kept falling asleep. And Jesus said, "Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. (And then He said) The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." When Jesus says that man is indeed willing, that shows that man does have some good inclinations within. He's not all bad. We all face weakness to sin. And this is why we must be alert and pray, so that we can overcome the temptation. Jesus didn't accept the notion that men must give in to the flesh. Oh no, we can resist temptation, and we can repent of our past sins.

Some people think there's something in their physical makeup that makes their character inherently sinful. Some speak of people being born alcoholics or born drug addicts. Others think that our sexual orientation is determined and cannot be changed. But millions of alcoholics have given up drinking altogether. And millions have repented of sexual misdeeds in order to live a godly life. You see, sin is a learned behavior not a foregone conclusion. And the hope of the gospel is that men can and will repent. Jesus died on the cross to give us that opportunity. And the Bible always assumes that people can change their lives.

So don't let anyone deceive you. Refuse to accept any doctrine that says that you have no hope of changing your ways or of overcoming sin. God can and He will help you overcome the sins of your life. You can repent, if you will. But you have to make up your mind that you want to serve God. Now free will is yours, and you must make your choice firm. You have to decide what you love most. You have to give your heart to the Lord. Please choose to follow the Lord whatever the cost. I hope today that you have that desire in your heart. Follow Jesus and do it today. Let's pray together. Father we're so thankful that You've given us freewill and that we can change our hearts and change our lives. And Father, may we always do Your will on this earth as it's done in heaven. In Jesus name, Amen!

At this point someone asks, "well Phil, what about Psalm 51:5?" Psalm 51:5 is a penitential Psalm after David had committed adultery with Bathsheba, and in his agony and his guilt he says, "Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me." Now some say this passage teaches that we're born in sin. Well does it really say that? David said that he was born into an evil and sinful world which is different; he didn't say that he was born sinful. You see sin is an act, it's a transgression of God's law according to 1 John 3 and verse 4. Sin isn't inherited; it's a learned behavior. For instance, a person learns English because he was born where they speak English. In Acts chapter 2 the apostles spoke miraculously in tongues to people from many nations. And when they heard the apostles, they marveled and they said, well "How is it that we each hear them in our own language to which we were born?" (Acts 2 verses 7 and 8) Well how is one born into a language? Well one learns a language by being born into a place that speaks it. Likewise, one learns sin by being born into a world that practices sin.

Now David wasn't born totally depraved because this contradicts what he said in Psalm 22 verses 9 to 10: David said, "Yet you (that is God) brought me out of the womb; you make me trust in you even

at my mother's breast. From birth I was cast upon you; from my mother's womb you have been my God." Now this isn't a baby born in sin but a baby born into a sinful world and yet still able to love God.

Sin is serious business. And un-forgiven sin will cost you your soul. We need the blood of Jesus to be saved. Well how do we come into contact with that blood? By choosing to believe in Christ, choosing to repent of our sins, and by choosing to be baptized. Now when we're baptized into the death of Christ, we come into contact with His shed blood (according to Romans 6 and verse 3). In baptism God applies the blood of Jesus to our souls. And that's the time that our sins are washed away (Acts 22 and verse 16). My friend, be saved from this corrupt generation.

We hope that you'll think about what we've studied today. And if you live in the United States and you want a free printed copy or a CD of this message, mail your request to In Search of the Lord's Way, P.O. Box 371, Edmond, OK 73083 or send an e-mail to searchtv@searchtv.org. Or you can call the Search office toll-free at 1-800-321-8633. Now you can download these lessons or a newsletter online at our website: www.searchtv.org. We hope you will go there, there are many fine resources at that site. There's also a schedule of our programs and a map with the location of churches, some of which may be in your area. We also offer free Bible Correspondence courses. Now if you get a hold of us, don't worry, we're not here to get your money or to exploit you. We're here to help you learn the truth and to get to heaven.

So we ask that you please get involved with a church of Christ in your area. And if you're looking for a healthy, Biblical church home, we'll be happy to help you find one. Well we'll be back next week, Lord willing. So keep searching God's Word with us and tell a friend about the program. As always we say to you, God bless you and we love you from all of us at In Search of the Lord's Way.