

"By Nature ... Children Of Wrath"

Paul speaks of Jews as he writes *"among whom we also all once lived in the lusts of our flesh, doing the desires of the flesh and of the mind and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest ..."* (Eph. 2:3). Calvinists appeal to this phrase, *"By nature children of wrath,"* to prove that all men inherit Adam's sin -- that all are totally depraved when we enter this world. This passage does not teach their doctrine and multitudes of other passages most emphatically deny it. Ezekiel said, *"The soul that sinneth it shall die. The son shall not bear the sin of the father, neither shall the father bear the sin of the son ..."* (Ezek. 18:20). Solomon said, *"Behold, this only have I found that God made man upright, but they have sought out many inventions"* (Eccl. 7:29). And Paul, who declared that both Gentile and Jew were dead in their sins, shows they were not born that way.

Citing himself as an example of a universal age of innocence before becoming accountable to God, Paul wrote, *"I was alive apart from the law once, but when the commandment came, sin revived (i.e., sprang to life) and I died ..."* (Rom. 7:9). The contention that sin inherited meets its "Waterloo" in Jesus. He was the son of Adam, yet He pressed His nation to *"convict him of sin"* and Paul elsewhere wrote, *"Him who knew no sin ..."* (Lk. 3:23; 38; 2 Cor. 5:21). Yet, Paul did mean something when he wrote that Jews were *"by nature, children of wrath?"* What did he mean when he wrote this?

Understand that it was not Jews alone who were *"children of wrath"* for when he added, *"even as the rest,"* he has Gentiles in mind as well. Gentiles and Jews alike were *"children of wrath,"* those upon whom God would visit wrath, and they were this because first they were *"sons of disobedience."* They were *"sons of disobedience"* because they had *"walked according to the course of the world"* (Gentiles); because they had *"lived in the lusts of the flesh, doing the desires of the flesh and of the mind"* (Jews). Still, that does not fully answer the question, *"How were these, by nature, children of wrath?"*

To be able to answer the question it is needful that appeal be made to other passages from the same writer's pen in which he said that certain things were *"by nature."* By examining them, perception as to how Jews were by nature children of wrath can come.

One such passage is 1 Corinthians 11:14: *"Doth not even nature itself teach you, that, if a man hath long hair, it is a dishonor to him?"* Thus, *"by nature"* men have short hair. But *"nature"* in 1 Corinthians 11 does not mean that by nature men's hair will not grow long, that it will ever stay short! *"By nature"*

in 1 Corinthians has reference to long standing practice or custom. In Paul's Roman world, the mostly universal practice was that males wore their hair short and if it were otherwise, it was a dishonor or shame to them.

And the second such passage from Paul with the same expression "*by nature*" is Romans 2:14: "*for when the Gentiles that have not the law, do by nature the things of the law, these, not having the law, are the law unto themselves.*" Is Paul saying that Gentiles inherently did the things of the law? Were this true Paul would have Gentiles inherently righteous and Jews inherently sinful! This will not do, for while it was said that Jews were "*by nature*" children of wrath, the addenda is "*even as the rest.*" This shows that Gentiles also were "*children of wrath.*" Thus if Calvinists are true, Paul has Gentiles inherently righteous in Romans 2:14 and inherently sinful in Ephesians 2:3! It is not of inherent righteousness Paul speaks when he tells us that "*Gentiles did by nature the things of the law.*" He means that which by long-standing practice or custom Gentiles did the things within the law, these became the law unto themselves.

Thus, by comparing Paul's use of "*by nature*" in other passages, light is shed on the expression "*by nature*" in Ephesians 2:3. Jews (and Gentiles) were not inherently "*children of wrath;*" they were "*children of wrath*" because of their long-standing practice and custom. Sin had become "second nature" with them. They practiced it without thinking either of its nature or consequences! NEXT: "God's Great Love."

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