

806 Did God Make Me a Sinner?

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God's Answers to Life's Questions

Occasionally people struggling with a moral problem ask the question, "Did God make me this way?" Many people are convinced that our DNA makes us the way we are and that we cannot 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 they do. They believe that we are all born completely sinners. They say that our sinful nature is utterly incapable of choosing or even desiring God. They go even further 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 eternal destiny. Is that Biblically true? Well, the best way to find out is to look into the Scriptures.

There are many passages that teach man is capable and free to choose between good and evil, and between God and Satan. In Romans 6:16-18 God said, "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." 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.

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 2:40, "Save yourselves from this perverse generation." What does that mean, "Save yourselves"? Are we suggesting that a person can earn his way to heaven? No, by no means. We are not saying that. We are saying that a man can and must repent and be baptized in order to respond in faith to God. No one earns salvation by responding to the gospel, but you can "save yourselves" by submitting to the will of God in repentance and baptism.

On another occasion this same inspired apostle Peter wrote about how people are saved. He wrote in 1 Peter 1:22-23, "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." People purify their souls when they hear and obey the gospel truth. They are born again not through some miraculous movement of God but by obedience to the preaching of the Word of God. It is the gospel that saves (Rom. 1:16). Paul said in 1 Corinthians 1:21, "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." This was God's choice of how to save people, giving them a gospel and saving them through the message.

That man has freewill to either accept that message or to reject it is also very clear in the Scriptures. Have you thought about that golden passage you learned as a child? The Lord Jesus said in John 3:16, "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life." "Whoever" means "everyone." The people who believe can be saved, while those who refuse to believe shall perish. Our choices do matter; we do have freewill. John the Baptist said later in the same chapter (John 3:36), "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." Faith and obedience matter to our salvation. God expects us to choose to believe and obey in order to have eternal life.

Throughout history people have made choices as to whether they will obey God or not. You'll remember that Joshua late in life addressed the people of Israel. He said in Joshua 24:14-15, "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 is 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 choice which god they would serve, whether the God of Heaven or some other god. They had freewill.

The prophet Elijah many years later faced off against 450 prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of the Asherah on Mount Carmel. You'll remember that the prophets of Baal were completely overcome by the God of Heaven when the fire came down and consumed Elijah's sacrifice. Before the challenge in 1 Kings 18:21 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 22:17 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 take the water of life without cost. God invites us to believe and obey!

Now I want here to ask some questions. Jesus said in Luke 13:5, "unless you repent, you too will all perish." Why would Jesus Christ condemn people for failure to repent when they are incapable of repentance or doing any good toward their salvation? Wouldn't that make God into a monster? The Hebrew writer wrote in Hebrews 11:6, "without faith it is impossible to please him [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 humans, when He knows that people are incapable of believing? Why, we humans are capable of believing. God is not a monster. He will not require something of us that we are not capable of doing.

The apostle Paul encouraged people in 2 Corinthians 5:18-20 to "be reconciled to God." Why would God ask men to be reconciled if they were not capable of doing anything by which they could be reconciled? Let's think together. The word "reconcile" implies a separation and a reunion; it means "to bring back into harmony." A reconciled husband and wife were once in harmony, separated, and later restored. If an infant is born in sin, he cannot be reconciled because he was never in harmony with the Lord to begin with. My friend, the truth is that infants are not born in sin but born pure; they separated from God when they sinned; and they reconciled to God by obedience to the gospel. In gospel obedience one is freed from sin and born again into the family of God.

The Bible teaches clearly that God is not a respecter of persons (Acts 10:34; Rom 2:11-12; 1 Pet 1:17). He didn't arbitrarily choose some folks to be saved and others to be lost. Rather the blood of Jesus was shed for all people and the gospel is offered to all people. The apostle Paul said in 1 Timothy 2:4 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 is a false and cruel doctrine. The apostle Peter said in 2 Peter 3:9, "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 be right with Him and live with Him forever.

Now if God has decided your eternal state that you are saved or lost, and if you have no choice in the matter, why would any of us need to beware of the devil. You’ll remember that the apostle Peter warned in 1 Peter 5:8, “Be of sober *spirit*, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.” Such language becomes absurd if you have no freewill, if you cannot be tempted. The very word temptation refers to moral testing, whether we will choose to do right or give in to the wrong. That’s freewill. My friend, you are not puppet or a robot. How can man be held accountable to God for his actions in judgment without free will? My friend, you are made in God’s image and you have been given free moral agency by God.

James, the brother of the Lord, said in James 1:13-15: 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 nature. He tests our faith but does not lead us into moral failure and sin. How could God lead anyone into behavior that totally contradicts His own nature? It is totally against the nature and the will of God to believe that He could create someone for a sinful life.

Now man is often weak to sin, but being weak to sin is not the same thing as being incapable of resisting sin. Many Bible characters said no 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 wrong foods at the king’s table. As an old man, Daniel said no to the law that would not allow 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 4:19-20, “Whether it is 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 very best description of the nature of man is found in Matthew 26:41. You’ll remember that Jesus was in the garden of Gethsemane with his three disciples: Peter, James, and John. He was praying in agony, but they kept falling asleep. Jesus said, “Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. 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 is not all bad. We all face weakness to sin. This is why we must be alert and pray, so that we can overcome the temptation. Jesus did not accept the notion that men must give in to the flesh. No, we can resist temptation, and we can repent of our past sins. I thank God we have the ability to resist and repent.

Some people think there is something in their physical makeup that makes their character inherently sinful. Some speak of born alcoholics or born drug addicts. Others think that our sexual orientation is determined and cannot be changed. But there are thousands, perhaps millions, of people who are alcoholics but have given up drinking altogether. Alcoholics Anonymous is full of them.

There are thousands who have stopped smoking or taking drugs, even though they were once addicted. And there are thousands of people who repented of sexual misdeeds (both heterosexuals and homosexuals) to live a godly life. You see, sin is a learned behavior not a foregone conclusion. The hope of the gospel is that men can repent. Jesus died on the cross to give us that opportunity. The Bible always assumes that people can change their lives.

The apostle John wrote in 1 John 3:4, “Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness.” (English Standard Version) The King James version says in this verse that sin the “transgression of the law.” Sin is not some inborn characteristic; it is an act. Sin is the violation or transgression of the law. Sin takes place when a person acts in such a way as to violate God’s law. Sin is unrighteous behavior. Don’t let anyone fool you into thinking that you have no hope of changing. You can repent. God has granted us the opportunity to repent, if we will. But we have to make up our minds that we want to serve God. Free will means you have the opportunity to change, but you must take that opportunity. You have to decide that you will follow the Lord Jesus whatever the cost. I hope that today you have that desire in your heart. Follow Jesus and do it today.

At this point someone is probably saying, “Phil, don’t you know about Psalm 51:5?” Yes, I do. Psalm 51:5 says, “Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.” They say, “See there, we are born in sin.” Does it really say that? The idea of this verse is that David was born in an evil and sinful world. Let’s remember that sin is an act, a transgression of God’s law according to 1 John 3:4. Sin is not inherited; it is learned. For instance, a person speaks a certain language because he was born in an environment that speaks that particular language. In Acts 2 the apostles spoke with the miraculous gift of tongues to people from many nations. When they heard the apostles, they marveled and said, “Why, are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we each hear them in our own language to which we were born?” (Acts 2:7-8). How is one born into a language? One learns a language, by being born into a world that practices it. And one learns sin by being into a world that practices sin.

To make this passage say that David was born totally depraved and sinful as a baby would make it contradict what David says in Psalm 22:9-10: “Yet you 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.” This is not a baby born in sin but a baby born in a sinful world yet still loving God. The fact that the world is a sinful place in which to be born does not mean that one is born sinful and guilty of sin. We aren’t born into sin, we commit sin by transgressing God’s law. Now, sin is a serious issue. Unforgiven sin will cost us our souls. We need the blood of Jesus to be saved. How do we come into contact with that blood? By believing in Christ, repenting of our sins, and by being baptized. When we from the heart obey the gospel, we are baptized into the death of Christ, where the blood was shed. It is in baptism that the blood of Jesus is applied to our souls. That is the time our sins are washed away (Acts 22:16). My friend, do you want to be saved today? Why not obey the gospel truth in love, faith, repentance, and baptism, and the Lord will purify your soul. Be forgiven! Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.

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