

VI. The Noetic Effects of Sin.

When Adam and Eve fell into sin, unfortunately the consequences of their act extended well beyond their own personal context. It didn't only affect them but brought sin and its curse upon all of humanity. Because of the Fall, all men are born in corruption with a sin nature and are in bondage to sin (Rom. 5:12). Herein lies man's deepest problem. All men suffer from radical depravity. In other words, sin affects each person from the core of their being, from the root of who they are. Sin therefore taints all that a person does, says, and thinks.

In particular, sin has affected the human mind rendering men and women incapable of discerning God's truth. Theologians refer to this as the "noetic affects of sin." The word "noetic" comes from the Greek verb *noeō*, which means to think, understand, perceive, or discern. Because sin has tainted our hearts and minds, our judgment is drastically impaired. We are not able to interpret the world around us or God's special revelation to us accurately. Naturally rather than turning to God who is the source of truth, we seek to determine truth for ourselves and at the heart only know falsehood.

This does not mean that unbelievers cannot discern any truth. Unbelievers and believers alike study the sciences and math. Both study human language and can comprehend the meanings of words. People are able to come to correct conclusions at a surface level. Part of this is because all men have been created in the image of God (Gen. 1:26-27). God has given all men the ability to think and reason. But at the heart, the unbeliever begins from an incorrect reference point. Although they are dependent upon God to accurately understand and interpret truth, they would rather judge for themselves what is true or false or right or wrong.

1. Look up the following passages. How do they describe man's sin nature from birth?

a. Genesis 8:21.

b. Psalm 51:5.

c. Ephesians 2:3.

2. According to Romans 5:12, why did death spread to all men (cf. Rom. 3:23)?

3. Write out Romans 1:18-25.

4. From Romans 1:18-25, what does God's truth reveal about sin's affect on the mind?

a. Though God reveals His truth to men, what do men do with that truth (v. 18)?

b. How does God describe human thinking in v. 21?

c. What is the difference between man's estimation of his own understanding and God's estimation of it (v. 22)?

d. Rather than believe the truth, what would men rather hold to (v. 25)?

5. How else does the Bible describe the sinful condition of man?

a. Ephesians 2:1-3.

b. Isaiah 42:16; John 9:39; 12:37-40.

c. Ephesians 4:18.

d. Romans 8:7-8.

6. Romans 1:22 states, "Claiming to be wise, they became fools." According to Scripture, what is the definition of a fool (Ps. 14:1; 53:1)?

7. How are the foolish described in Scripture?

a. Psalm 74:18, 22.

b. Psalm 92:5-8.

c. Proverbs 1:7.

d. Proverbs 1:22.

e. Proverbs 10:21.

f. Proverbs 10:23.

g. Proverbs 12:15.

Richard Pratt: "What can we see if our eyes are closed? What shall quench our thirst if our well is dry? Nothing. The same is true of wisdom and knowledge. God alone 'teaches man knowledge' (Ps. 97:4) through His revelation. If we reject His Word, we reject truth and in principle know nothing but falsehoods."[[1]](#footnote-1)

**"Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah"**

Guide me, O Thou great Jehovah,

Pilgrim through this barren land;

I am weak, but Thou art mighty;

Hold me with Thy pow'rful hand;

Bread of heaven, Bread of heaven,

Feed me 'til I want no more,

Feed me 'til I want no more.

Open now the crystal fountain,

Whence the healing stream doth flow;

Let the fire and cloudy pillar

Lead me all my journey through;

Strong Deliverer, strong Deliverer,

Be Thou still my strength and shield,

Be Thou still my strength and shield.

When I tread the verge of Jordan,

Bid my anxious fears subside;

Bear me thro' the swelling current,

Land me safe on Canaan's side;

Songs of praises, songs of praises

I will ever give to Thee,

I will ever give to Thee.

Thoughts for Application

1. What does the term "the noetic effects of sin" mean? How would you explain the noetic effects of sin in your own words?

2. Much of the world chooses to believe that people are born essentially good, and that through their environment and circumstances they learn to do evil and wrong. How can you defend from Scripture that man has a sin nature from birth?

3. Reflecting on Romans 1:18-25, how clear is God's revelation of Himself to people? In what ways do we respond wrongly to God's revelation?

4. Even though unbelievers can discern certain truths accurately like the laws of physics or mathematical rules, how does even their correct knowledge fall short of God's standards? Why are unbelievers ultimately referred to as "fools" in God's Word?

5. How does a deeper understanding of the noetic effects of sin make you more thankful for the gospel? How does it motivate you to evangelize the lost more faithfully?

1. Richard L. Pratt, Jr., *Every Thought Captive* (Phillipsburg, N. J.: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1979), 31. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)