

ACBC Theology – Question 6

6. Explain the doctrine of the noetic effects of sin relating the doctrine to the limitations of secular psychologists to understand true information about the human condition.

I. Breakdown of the Question

- A. What is the Doctrine of the Noetic Effects of Sin?
- B. What is the true information about the Human Condition? (Recap from last week)
- C. How does the Noetic Effect of Sin limit a Secular Psychologist's ability to understand true information about the human condition?

II. What is the Doctrine of the Noetic Effects of Sin?

- A. The doctrine of the noetic effects of sin teaches that the natural state of man, that is, after the fall, because man was originally created in the image of God and therefore declared to be good, is one in which every aspect of the man (actions, thoughts, words, deeds) has been affected by sin and therefore cannot observe, think, act, interpret in a way that is not tainted with sin.
 1. “When God declared the creation good, he meant *good* in every sense appropriate to every creature. The earth, plants, and animals were useful, fascinating, and beautiful. Each was formed and acts perfectly according to its God-given purpose. Adam and Eve were good in these senses, but also ethically good. Their actions, thoughts, words, and deeds pleased God. Otherwise, God would not have declared them good. And their nature pleased him. They were good people, good servants of God. They bore God's image without distortion.”¹
- B. What does ‘noetic’ mean?
 1. Noetic is derived from a Greek adjective, meaning “intellectual” and a Greek verb, meaning “to think.”²
 2. “The noetic effect of sin is the effect of sin on man's intellect. Because of sin, man's ability to think and reason is clouded. The result is an impairment of the intellect that fosters doubt, skepticism, and unbelief concerning the things of God.”³
- C. “Total depravity (we have said) means not that a person is as bad as he might be (God's common grace restrains sinners from fully manifesting their sinful potential), but, rather, that in every aspect every person is affected by sin. That means (of course) that, among other things, his thought processes have been affected. At every point in the process of thought, breakdowns may—and do—occur. Because of Adams' sin—and their own—human beings do not think straight! That is an altogether important fact for the counselor to keep in view.”⁴

¹ John Frame, Systematic Theology, 845.

² What are the noetic effects of sin?, <https://www.gotquestions.org/noetic-effects-of-sin.html>.

³ What are the noetic effects of sin?, <https://www.gotquestions.org/noetic-effects-of-sin.html>.

⁴ Jay Adams, A Theology of Christian Counseling, 165.

ACBC Theology – Question 6

1. **Jeremiah 17:9** *The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?*
2. **Psalm 58:3** *The wicked are estranged from the womb; they go astray from birth, speaking lies.*

D. “It is not just that some parts of us are sinful and others are pure. Rather, every part of our being is affected by sin—our intellects, our emotions and desires, our hearts (the center of our desires and decision-making processes), our goals and motives, and even our physical bodies. Paul says, ‘I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh’ (Rom. 7:18), and, ‘to the corrupt and unbelieving nothing is pure; their very minds and consciences are corrupted’ (Titus 1:15). Moreover, Jeremiah tells us that ‘the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately corrupt; who can understand it?’ (Jer. 17:9). In these passages Scripture is not denying that unbelievers can do good in human society *in some senses*. But it is denying that they can do any *spiritual* good or be good *in terms of a relationship with God*. Apart from the work of Christ in our lives, we are like all other unbelievers who are ‘darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart’ (Eph. 4:18).”⁵

III. What is the true information about the Human Condition? (Recap)

- A. “When God first created Adam and Eve, humanity’s condition was ideal—the perfect environment, an innocent nature, and intimate fellowship with the Creator. After Adam’s willful disobedience of God, the human condition changed. Gone were the perfect environment, the innocence, and fellowship with God. Ever since then, the human condition is lost, blind, sinful, guilty, enslaved, morally ruined, and dying. Thanks to the grace of God and the salvation Christ provides, we can look forward to the human condition being restored to its original state.”⁶
- B. **Ephesians 4:17-19** *Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity.*
 1. “This ‘ignorance that is in them, resulting from the hardness of their hearts’ toward God and His Word, is not only error, but consists of rebellious plans and purposes, sinful scheming, lewd imaginations of the heart and the like. All this is said to stem from the heart (which is closely identified with the processes of thinking, planning, deciding, etc., as we have seen in an earlier chapter). It is ‘from the heart’ that ‘evil thoughts’ (not merely *erroneous* thoughts) proceed (Matt. 15:19).”⁷

⁵ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 497.

⁶ What is the human condition according to the Bible?, <https://www.gotquestions.org/human-condition.html>.

⁷ Jay Adams, *A Theology of Christian Counseling*, 167.

ACBC Theology – Question 6

C. Does the noetic effects of sin influence how the natural man views the Word of God?

1. **1 Corinthians 1:18** *For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.”*
2. **1 Corinthians 2:14** *The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.*

D. Does the noetic effects of sin influence how the natural man lives their life?

1. **Proverbs 5:22-23** *The iniquities of the wicked ensnare him, and he is held fast in the cords of his sin. He dies for lack of discipline, and because of his great folly he is led astray.*
2. **Genesis 6:5-6** *The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the Lord was sorry that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart.*

E. Do the noetic effects of sin influence a born-again believer?

1. **James 1:14-15** *But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.*
2. **Romans 7:15-24** *For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good. So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep doing. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?*

IV. **How does the Noetic Effect of Sin limit a Secular Psychologist’s ability to understand true information about the human condition?**

- A. The noetic effects of sin limit the ability of a secular psychologist to understand true information about the human condition because any information they obtain will be directly affected by their inherent sinfulness. All their observations, but especially their interpretations and interventions, will be laced and tainted with sin, because sin has infiltrated their minds. Furthermore, true information about the human condition is found in the Word of God, which, as we noted earlier, they see as folly, or foolishness, and reject it (1 Cor 1:18; 2:14). They reject the wisdom of God and claim hold to their own wisdom (Rom 1:21). This wisdom is corrupt and debased, like a rudderless ship.

ACBC Theology – Question 6

- B. “Human sinful thought has so perverted biblical values that an entire system of such value-reversal could be developed and seriously entertained as an option by many. Nietzsche, in fact, taught this explicitly. But greed, self-assertiveness, looking out for ‘number one,’ etc., flourish even among counseling systems. Most of the appeal of counseling is hedonistic—‘We can show you the way to happy, fulfilled, self-actualized living.’ It is grounded in selfishness, desire for power, wealth, etc., rather than on the desire to live in a way that pleases God.”⁸

1. Read Jay Adams, *A Theology of Christian Counseling*, 166 (Paragraph 1).

V. Additional Scripture References

- A. Jeremiah 17:9
- B. Romans 1:21-28
- C. Romans 3:10-18
- D. 2 Corinthians 10:5
- E. Romans 8:7-8
- F. Isaiah 55:8

VI. Further Resources

- A. ACBC Approved Reading
 1. Jay E. Adams, *A Theology of Christian Counseling: More Than Redemption, The Jay Adams Library* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979), 165-173.
 2. Heath Lambert, *A Theology of Biblical Counseling: The Doctrinal Foundations of Counseling Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 70-73.
 3. Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *Basic Theology* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1986), 216-219.
 4. John MacArthur, ed., *Biblical Doctrine: A Systematic Summary of Bible Truth* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2017), 467-468.
 5. Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 3rd ed (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 548-583.
 6. Paul P. Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1989), 310-314.
 7. Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology, Complete ed* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co, 2018), 245-248.

⁸ Jay Adams, *A Theology of Christian Counseling*, 166.

ACBC Theology – Question 6

8. John M. Frame, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Christian Belief* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2013), 845-871.