We are all born perfect, because God created our inmost being (Psa 139:13). The "spirit returns to God who gave it" (Ecc 12:7). The soul or spirit is a gift of God, and all God's gifts are "good and perfect" (Jas 1:17).

Some will try to cancel out these facts with David’s statement, "I was brought forth in iniquity... In sin did my mother conceive me" (Psa 51:5). However this must be interpreted so as not to contradict the other scriptures. David is not saying he was sinful as a child in the womb, nor is he saying his mother was sinful to conceive him. He is just saying that through conception he was brought into a sinful world. The terms "in iniquity... in sin" simply mean, in this poem, "in an environment of sin".

David also says to God, "You wove me in my mother's womb..." (Psa 139:13-16). Here David attributes procreation to the Creator. God brought David (and every other child) into being in the womb.

God can only weave something good. He cannot weave something corrupted. Therefore the child in the womb or new born is in a state of innocence (Note Acts 7:20).

The state of innocence is a state of grace, not a state of merit. Nobody except Jesus can claim eternal life by personal merit.

An infant has done no evil by which to be condemned. Yet neither has an infant done righteous works by which to claim merit.

So an infant, like all human beings, relies entirely on the grace of God through the righteousness of Christ. Although infants lack sin, they also lack righteousness unless God imputes to them "the righteousness of God in Christ" (2Co 5:21).

2. THE QUESTION OF NATURE.

Some texts seem to teach that human nature is corrupt, and every human being inherits this corruption. Peter speaks of redemption "from your futile conduct received by tradition from your fathers" (1Pe 1:18).

Paul says, "You were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest" (Eph 2:3). "The natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God." (1Co 2:14).

However the "nature" in these verses is not inherited, but acquired by experience in a sinful society whose ways are futile and wicked. One can learn and accept those ways and become darkened by them.

Culture may influence a person's thinking and behaviour enormously. Yet one can turn to a belief system based on the ways of the Lord, being re-educated so that a new nature supplants the old nature (Rom 6:4-6).

Paul believed that human "nature" is as much capable of upholding God's law as it is capable of perverting and rejecting it.

The people in Romans 1:26 had grown up in a world where the knowledge of God was clear. They had gone "against nature", having suppressed and perverted what, by nature, was theirs.

Romans 2:14 says people "do by nature the things written in the law". Their lives and thoughts were obviously influenced by God's law which was present in their environment. What's more, they did not suppress or pervert that truth but chose instead to live by it.

Thus one can "by nature" do right (Rom 2:14) and one can "by nature" do wrong (Eph 2:3).

Everyone is able to abhor what is evil in their environment and experience. Everyone is able to cling to what is good. And everyone should (1Th 5:21).

An infant has not yet acquired such a nature, having not yet been taught right from wrong. Therefore an infant cannot to do either right or wrong "by nature".

We have considered the state of innocence and the question of nature. Finally, we will look at who is a proper candidate for baptism.