

Biblical Notes – Ephesians 2:3

3 – Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest. (3. ἐν οἷς καὶ ἡμεῖς πάντες ἀνεστράφημεν ποτε ἐν ταῖς ἐπιθυμίαις τῆς σαρκὸς ἡμῶν ποιοῦντες τὰ θελήματα τῆς σαρκὸς καὶ τῶν διανοιών, καὶ ἡμεθα τέκνα φύσει ὀργῆς ὡς καὶ οἱ λοιποί)

Strong's Concordance

phusis: nature

Original Word: φύσις, εως, ἡ

Part of Speech: Noun, Feminine

Transliteration: phusis

Phonetic Spelling: (foo'-sis)

Definition: nature

Usage: nature, inherent nature, origin, birth.

HELPS Word-studies

5449 phýsis – properly, inner nature, the underlying constitution or make-up of someone (something)

“and were by nature — He intentionally breaks off the construction, substituting “and we were” for “and being,” to mark emphatically his and their past state by nature, as contrasted with their present state by grace. Not merely is it, we had our way of life fulfilling our fleshly desires, and so being children of wrath; but we were by nature originally “children of wrath,” and so consequently had our way of life fulfilling our fleshly desires. “Nature,” in Greek, implies that which has grown in us as the peculiarity of our being, growing with our growth, and strengthening with our strength, as distinguished from that which has been wrought on us by mere external influences: what is inherent, not acquired (Job 14:4; Psalm 51:5). An incidental proof of the doctrine of original sin.”

—— Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible, Commentary on Ephesians 2:3.

“See φύσει — phusei of Gentiles in Romans 2:14. The implication of original sin is here, but not in the form that God’s wrath rests upon little children before they have committed acts of sin.”

—— A.T. Robertson, Robertson’s Word Pictures in the New Testament, Commentary on Ephesians 2:3.

“By nature children of wrath See on Ephesians 2:2. Children (τέκνα) emphasizes the connection by birth; see on John 1:12. Wrath (ὀργῆς) is God’s holy hatred of sin; His essential, necessary antagonism to everything evil, Romans 1:18. By nature (φύσει) accords with children, implying what; is innate. That man is born with a sinful nature, and that God and sin are essentially antagonistic, are conceded on all hands: but that unconscious human beings come into the world under the blaze of God’s indignation, hardly consists with Christ’s assertion that to little children belongs the kingdom of heaven. It is true that there is a birth-principle of evil, which, if suffered to develop, will bring upon itself the wrath of God. Whether Paul means more than this I do not know.”

—— Vincent’s Word Studies, Commentary on Ephesians 2:3.

“Ellicott. And Eadie remarks: “Had he written καὶ ὄντες, as following out the idea of ποιοῦντες, there might have been a plea against the view of innate depravity (see below)—‘fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and being,’ or ‘so being, children of wrath.’ But the Apostle says καὶ ἡμεθα—‘and we were,’ at a point of time prior to that indicated in ποιοῦντες”) children (not = υἱοί, but implying closer relation. The effect of the expression is to set those of whom it is predicated, beneath, in subjection to, as it were, the products of, ὀργή. So in the passages adduced by Harl.;—Deuteronomy 25:2, אִם־בֶּן־חֲבִית, ‘if he be the son of stripes,’ i.e. not as LXX and E. V. ἄξιος πληγῶν, but actually beaten:—1 Samuel 20:31, בֶּן־מָוֶת, ‘he is the son of death,’—i.e. as we express it, ‘he is a dead man,’ anticipating the effect of that which seems to be certain) by nature (the meaning of φύσει is disputed. Some of the ancients (Cyr., Æc., Thl.), and Grot. took it as = ὄντως, ἀληθῶς, which meaning it never bears; see on Galatians 4:8. Others (Holzhausen, Hoffm.) would join it with ὀργῆς,—‘anger, which arises from the ungodly natural life:’ but as Mey. remarks, even granting this use of φύσις, this would require τῆς τῇ φύσει ὀργῆς or τῆς ἐκ τῆς φύσ. ὀργῆς. It can then only mean, ‘by nature.’ And what does this imply? Harl., in loc., seems to have given the distinctive sense well: “ φύσις, in its fundamental idea, is that which has grown as distinguished from that which has been effected (das Gewordene in Gegensatz zum Gemachten), i.e. it is that which according to our judgment has the ground of its existence in individual development, not in accessory influence of another.

Accordingly, φύσις, in its concrete idea, as the sum total of all growth, is 'rerum natura:' and in its abstract philosophical idea, φύσις is the contrast to θέσις. The φύσις of an individual thing denotes the peculiarity of its being, which is the result of its being, as opposed to every accessory quality: hence φύσει εἶναι or ποιεῖν τι means, 'sua sponte facere, esse aliquid' and 'natura esse aliquid:' to be and do any thing by virtue of a state (εἶναι) or an inclination (ποιεῖν), not acquired, but inherent: ἔξοιδα καὶ φύσει σε μὴ πεφυκότα | τοιαῦτα φωνεῖν, μηδὲ τεχνᾶσθαι κακὰ, Soph. Philoct. 80." If this be correct, the expression will amount to an assertion on the part of the Apostle of the doctrine of original sin."

— Greek Testament Critical Exegetical Commentary, Commentary on Ephesians 2:3.

"The apostle says further, τέκνα φύσει—"children by nature;" the dative, as Madvig says, defining "the side, aspect, regard, or property on and in which the predicate shows itself," § 40. See also Phrynichus, ed. Lobeck, p. 688; Kühner, 585, Anmerk 1. φύσις—"nature"—in such an idiom, signifies what is essential as opposed to what is accidental, what is innate in contrast with what is acquired; as Harless puts the antithesis—das Gewordene im Gegensatz zum Gemachten. This is its general sense, whatever its specific application. Thus- φαρμάκου φύσις is the nature of a drug, its colour, growth, and potency. φύσις τοῦ αἰγύπτου is the nature of the land of Egypt—a phrase referring to no artificial peculiarity, but to results which follow from its physical conformation. It stands opposed to νόμος οράνάγκη, as marking what is spontaneous, in contrast to what is enjoined or is inevitable. Thus Plato, De Leg. lib. x.—Some say that the gods are οὐ φύσει ἀλλὰ τισὶ νόμοις. Again, the noun is often used in the dative, or in the accusative with κατὰ or παρὰ in descriptions of condition or action, and then its signification is still the same: φύσει τυφλός—"blind by nature," not by disease; τὸν φύσει δοῦλον—"the slave by nature," that is, from birth, and not by subjugation; οἱ φύσει πολέμιοι—"warriors by nature," by constitutional tendency, and not by force of circumstances. And so in such phrases as, κατὰ φύσιν—"agree ably to nature," not simply to education or habit; παρὰ φύσιν—contrary not to mere conventional propriety, but to general or ordinary instinctive development; thus- ὁ κατὰ φύσιν υἱός—"the natural," not the adopted "son." The usage is similar in the Hellenistic writers. Wisdom of Solomon 7:20, φύσεις ζώων—"the natures of animals," not the habits induced by training. φύσει πάντες εἰσὶν φίλαυτοι—"all are by nature," not by training, "self-lovers." φύσει πονηρὸς ὢν—"being evil by nature," and not simply by education. So also in the same author—of the constitutional clemency of the Pharisees- φύσει ἐπιεικῶς ἔχουσιν. Likewise in Philo, εἰρηναῖοι φύσει—"peaceful by nature," not from compulsion; and in many other places, some of which have been collected by Loesner. The usage of the New Testament is not different. Save in James 3:7 and 2 Peter 1:4, where the word has a signification peculiar to these passages, the meaning is the same with that which we have traced through classical and Hellenistic literature. If the term characterize the branches of a tree, those which it produces are contrasted with such as are engrafted (Romans 11:21-24); if it describe action or character, it marks its harmony with or its opposition to instinctive feeling or sense of obligation (Romans 1:26; Romans 2:14; 1 Corinthians 11:14); if it point out nationality, it is that of descent or blood. Romans 2:27; Galatians 2:15. See Fritzsche on the references to Romans. And when the apostle (Galatians 4:8) speaks of idols as being φύσει "not Gods," he means that idols become objects of worship from no inherent claim or quality, but simply by "art and man's device." And so "we are children of wrath," not accidentally, not by a fortuitous combination of circumstances, not even by individual sin and actual transgression, but "by nature"—by an exposure which preceded personal disobedience, and was not first created by it; an exposure which is inherent, hereditary, and common to all the race by the very condition of its present existence, for they are "so born" children of wrath. For φύσις does not refer to developed character, but to its hidden and instinctive sources. We are therefore not atomically, but organically children of wrath; not each simply by personal guilt, but the entire race as a whole; not on account of nature, but by nature. Wholly contrary, therefore, to usage and philology is the translation of the Syriac מליצה -plene; that of Theophylact, OEcumenius, and Cyril, ἀληθῶς or γνησίως—"really" or "truly;" that of Julian, prorsus, and that even of Suidas—"a constant and very bad disposition and long and evil habits"—ἀλλὰ τὴν ἔμμονον καὶ κακίστην διάθεσιν καὶ χρονίαν καὶ πονηρὰν συνήθειαν, for on the contrary, φύσις and συνήθεια are placed by the Greek ethical writers in contrast. Harless adduces apt quotations from Plutarch and Aristotle. Pelagius, as may be expected, thus guards his exegesis—Nos paternae traditionis consuetudo possederat, ut omnes ad damnationem nasci VIDEREMUR. Erasmus, Bengel, Koppe, Morus, Flatt, de Wette, Reiche, and others, take the word as descriptive of the state of the Ephesian converts prior to their conversion, or, as Bengel phrases it—citra gratiam Dei in Christo. But, as Meyer observes, the status naturalis is depicted in the whole description, and not merely by φύσει. Such an interpretation is also unsatisfactory, for it leaves untouched the real meaning of the word under dispute. That the term may signify that second nature which springs from habit, we deny not. Natura had such a sense among the Latins—quod consuetudo in naturam vertit—but in many places where it may bear this meaning, it still implies that the habit is in accordance with original inclination, that the disposition or character has its origin in innate tendencies and impulses. When Le Clerc says that the word, when applied to a nation, signifies indoles gentis, he only begs the question; for that indoles or φύσις in the quotations adduced by him, and by Wetstein and Koppe, from Isocrates, the so-called Demetrius Phalereus, Polyaeus, Jamblichus, Cicero, and Sallust, is not something adventitious, but constitutional—an element of character which, though matured by discipline, sprang originally from connate peculiarities. The same may be said of Meyer's interpretation—durch Entwicklung natürlicher Disposition—"through the development of natural disposition;" for if that disposition was natural, its very germs must have been in us at our birth, and what is that but innate depravity? And yet he argues that φύσις cannot refer to original sin, because the church doctrine on that subject is not the doctrine of Paul, and one reason why Koppe will not take even the interpretation of Le Clerc is, that it necessarily leads to the doctrine of original

sin. Grotius, Meyer, de Wette, and Usteri (Paulin. Lehrbegriff, p. 30) object that the word cannot refer to original depravity, because it is only of actual sin that the apostle speaks in the preceding clauses. So little has Grotius gone into the spirit of the passage, that he says—that it cannot refer to original sin, as the preceding verses show, in which vices are described from which many of the ancients were free—a quibus multi veterum fuere immunes. Usteri is disposed to cancel φύσει altogether, and Reiche (Comment. Criticus, 1859) dilutes it to a habitus naturalis connatus quasi, p. 147. See also Episcopus, Instit. 2.5, 2; Limborch, Thelog. Christ. 3.4, 17, p. 193; Amstelaedami, 1686. We may reply with Olshausen, that in this clause actual sins are naturally pointed out in their ultimate foundation—"in the inborn sinfulness of each individual by his connection with Adam." Besides, the apostle means to say that by natural condition, as well as by actual personal guilt, men are children of wrath. Had he written καὶ ὄντες, as following out of the idea of ποιοῦντες, there might have been a plea against our view of innate depravity—"fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and being, or so being, children of wrath." But the apostle says, καὶ ἦμεν—"and we were," at a point of time prior to that indicated in ποιοῦντες. This exegesis is also supported by the following clause—

—— John Eadie's Commentary on Galatians, Ephesians, Colossians and Philippians, Commentary on Ephesians 2:3.

"'By nature' is not the emphatic phrase, but is in implied contrast with what they became by adoption. The phrase undoubtedly refers to something innate, original, as distinguished from subsequent development and external influences. Bishop Ellicott finds in Galatians 2:15; Romans 2:14; Galatians 4:8, respectively, the meanings (a.) transmitted inborn nature; (b.) inherent nature; (c.) essential nature."

—— Philip Schaff, Schaff's Popular Commentary on the New Testament, Commentary on Ephesians 2:3.

"The term φύσις, though it may occasionally be applied to what is habitual or to character as developed, means properly what is innate, implanted, in one by nature, and this with different shades of meaning (cf., e.g., Romans 2:14; Galatians 2:15; Galatians 4:8, etc.). The clause means, therefore, that in their pre-Christian life those meant by the ἡμεῖς πάντες were in the condition of subjection to the Divine wrath; and that they were so not by deed merely, nor by circumstance, nor by passing into it, but by nature. Their universal sin has been already affirmed. This universal sin is now described as sin by nature."

—— The Expositor's Greek Testament, Commentary on Ephesians 2:3.

"And were by nature. He intentionally substitutes 'and we were' for 'and being,' to contrast emphatically his and their past state by nature with their present state by grace. Not merely, we had our way of life fulfilling our fleshly desires, and so being children of wrath; but we were by nature originally "children of wrath," and consequently had our way of life fulfilling our fleshly desires. "Nature" [phusei (Greek #5449)] implies that which has grown with our growth, and strengthened with our strength, as distinguished from that worked on us by mere external influences: what is inherent, not acquired (Job 14:4; Psalms 51:5). An incidental proof of original sin."

—— Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible - Unabridged, Commentary on Ephesians 2:3.

"The word φύσις in signification and usage corresponds very nearly to our word nature. When used, as in this case, to indicate the source or origin of anything in the character or condition, it always expresses what is natural or innate, as opposed to what is made, taught, superinduced, or in any way incidental or acquired. This general idea is of course variously modified by the nature of the thing spoken of. Thus when the apostle says, Galatians 2:15, ἡμεῖς φύσει Ἰουδαῖοι, we by nature Jews, he means Jews by birth, in opposition to profession. In Galatians 4:8, it is said of the heathen deities that they are not by nature gods, they are such only by appointment, or in virtue of the opinions of men. In Romans 2:13, men are said to do by nature the things of the law, i.e. the source of these moral acts is to be sought in their natural constitution, not in the instruction or example of others. In Romans 2:27, uncircumcision is said to be by nature, i.e. natural, not acquired."

—— Hodge's Commentary on Romans, Ephesians and First Corinthians, Commentary on Ephesians 2:3.