

IS MAN TOTALLY DEPRAVED?

"Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others." Ephesians 2:3.

This subject of man in his natural state is a very important one. It is vitally related to the whole question of redemption. If one is to comprehend what salvation is, and by what power it must be effected, he must understand the extent of the ruin wrought by sin. Because various enemies of God's truth sneer at the doctrine of "Total Depravity", there is a great need for a lot of teaching about the depravity of the flesh and the weaknesses of the human spirit which have been brought on by sin. The importance of the doctrine of total depravity can hardly be overestimated. Let a person realize and know that he is a totally depraved and ruined sinner, and he will see and feel that he needs a divine Saviour. But let him reject this great teaching of God's Word and he will not see any necessity of a change of heart, and will even doubt that such a change is ever experienced by anybody.

Total depravity is a much misunderstood subject. For that reason we need to understand that total depravity does not mean:

1. That man in his natural state is as bad as he might be.
Enemies of God's truth have sought to destroy faith in the teaching of His Word about original sin and its lasting effect by thus misrepresenting the meaning of total depravity. Only the enemies of this great truth of total depravity make the assertion that man is as bad as he can be. Those who believe God's Word know that most sinners have the natural ability to be more wicked than they are, to indulge worse thoughts and feelings, to say and to do worse things; and the contrary is not even implied in the fact of their depravity. Men may and do grow worse. "But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived." II Timothy 3:13.
2. That man in his natural state is prone to every form of sin.
The sin of miserliness may exclude the sin of luxury. Multitudes of depraved people refuse to indulge in numerous sins. Men are not equal in the degree or amount of sin.
3. That man in his natural state is devoid of conscience.
Even a pagan has a conscience. "Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts the meanwhile accusing or else excusing one another." Romans 2:15. Total depravity does not imply that the subjects of it may not act conscientiously. Even in the persecution of the Christians Paul was very conscientious.
4. That man in his natural state is destitute of all praiseworthy qualities.
Christ recognized the existence of praiseworthy qualities in certain individuals. In the case of the rich young ruler, we are told that "Then Jesus beholding him loved him, and said unto him, One thing thou lackest: go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, take up the cross, and follow me." Mark 10:21. He said that the scribes and Pharisees did some things God demanded. "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone." Matthew 23:23. Paul said that some Gentiles, who have not the law, "do by nature the things contained in the law." Romans 2:14.

Total depravity does not imply that the subjects of it are without natural affections, such as parental, conjugal and filial love; or without the emotions of sympathy and pity. We readily admit that impenitent persons are not destitute of kindly natural affections, but often possess them in a high degree. But we insist that the possession of them is not at all inconsistent with an entire alienation of the heart from God. They

may also possess love of country, natural friendship, honor, kind dispositions, and many things of this sort, and yet not be the children of God or have anything which resembles godliness.

God's Word recognizes the fact, which observation and experience abundantly confirm, that men, in varying degrees, are honest in their dealings, kind in their feelings, and beneficent in their conduct. But this does not imply that they are not depraved in their nature.

Depravity refers to the state of sinfulness natural to the unregenerate. It is a state of corruption, a vitiated or deteriorated state. By depravity we mean man's lack of original righteousness and of holy affections toward God, the corruption of his moral nature, and his bias toward evil. It consists of the lack of love for God as required by Him, and the setting up of some other object or objects in the human affections. And all the objects set up in competition with God may be reduced to one, and that is self. Self-love is the very root of depravity, the substitute in our affections for love to God. Depravity is that state of nature that causes man to put self in the place of God, and to seek the gratification, honor and interest of self as the ultimate end of all actions. This love of self is the fountain of depravity from which all evil thoughts and actions flow. Self-will, self-admiration, self-righteousness and self-glory are but different manifestations of depravity.

God's Word plainly teaches that man enters the world with a bent to sinning, and that, unless he hears the message of the glorious gospel of Christ, he will continue in sin, growing more and more ungodly with the passing years. Furthermore, it is impossible for depraved man to become a child of God unless the Spirit of God convicts him of his sin and the Son of God saves him therefrom. Without divine intervention there is no hope for him. Man is totally helpless outside the provisions of God's saving grace. So, by the phrase, "human depravity", we mean that corruption of our nature whereby we are inclined to sin rather than to holiness, to rebellion against God rather than to obedience, to enmity rather than to love.

"And you hath He quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins." So, between man's natural state and the state to which he is brought by divine grace, there is all the difference that obtains between death and life in the natural realm. Oh, what a difference that is! Between the two there is a great gulf fixed. That being true, there is but One Who can bridge that gulf, there is but One in Whom life resides as in its native Element and in its proper and original Source; and that One is God Himself. Hence salvation must be of God and therefore must also be of grace because we are by nature "dead in trespasses and sins."

Depravity is total, reaching to all the faculties of the soul. It means that every sinner is destitute of that love to God which is the fundamental requirement of the law (Deut. 6:4-5; Matthew 22:35-38); that he is supremely given to a preference of himself to God (II Timothy 3:4); that he has an aversion to God which on occasion becomes active enmity to Him (Romans 8:7); that his every faculty is corrupted (Ephesians 4:18); that he has no thought, feeling or deed which God can fully approve (Romans 7:18); and that he has entered upon a line of constant progress in depravity, from which he can in no wise turn away in his own strength (Romans 7:18).

1. The mind is defiled.

"And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." Genesis 6:5.

"Unto the pure all things are pure: but unto them that are defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure; but even their mind and conscience is defiled." Titus 1:15.

2. The understanding is darkened.

"Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart." Ephesians 4:18.
Romans 3:11.

3. The heart is deceitful.
"The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?" Jeremiah 17:9.
4. The conscience is defiled.
"Unto the pure all things are pure: but unto them that are defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure; but even their mind and conscience is defiled." Titus 1:15. We read of an evil conscience, a weak conscience, a defiled conscience, and a seared conscience.
5. The will is enslaved.
In nothing is the depravity and rebellion of the human will more apparent than in its virtual and practical rejection of the will of God, both in the equity of His law and the grace of His gospel. "For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not." Romans 7:18. "And ye will not come, that ye might have life." John 5:40. Literally, "And ye have definitely willed not to come to me." Only because a man's will is depraved would he definitely will against Jesus Christ.
6. The affections are perverted.
"And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil." John 3:19. If men's affections were not in a depraved state, they would love God and hate Satan. They would be devoted to that which is right and opposed to that which is wrong. But in actuality, we find it to be the very reverse.

Total depravity means that sin has permeated every faculty of man's being just as a drop of poison would permeate every molecule of a glass of water. Drop a grain of arsenic into a glass of water, and the water is totally affected. Every drop of the water is poisoned. Put in another grain of arsenic and the poison is not extended, but it is intensified. It is not poisoned in more of its parts, but to a greater degree. So man, a child of wrath by nature (Ephesians 2:3), may become more depraved. All parts, though corrupt by nature, may become more corrupt.

Man is totally depraved in the sense that every element and faculty of his being has been weakened and depraved by sin. Body, soul and spirit have passed under its power. He is totally unable to deliver himself from the power of sin. The truth for which total depravity stands is the total disability of man to save himself, his entire helplessness in the grasp of Satan. Without the redeeming power of God's grace, man will sink deeper and deeper into sin.

Three things prove that man in his natural state is totally depraved:

1. The Bible.
The scriptures abound with testimonies of the fact that whatever comes into the world by ordinary generation is flesh, carnal and corrupt. The Bible plainly teaches that all men need redemption through the blood of Christ. Every man descended from Adam by ordinary generation must be born again if he is to enter the kingdom of God.
2. Observation.
Observation clearly testifies to the entire selfishness and sinfulness of every unsaved person. Any person who denies the doctrine of total depravity is certainly blind to the realities all about him. But his denial of the fact does not change it in the least.
3. Experience.
Who would dare contend before God that he had never sinned? Men everywhere are conscious that they are sinners, that they need pardon, cleansing and purification in order that they may meet God in peace. Any person who has had an experience of

grace knows that depravity is a reality. Anybody who denies the doctrine of total depravity is a splendid example of that depravity which he tries to refute.

This depravity of man's nature is inherent and universal. These two ideas are inseparable. The Bible teaches us that the first man, Adam, violated God's expressed will and by so doing the stream of human history was corrupted at its source. "By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men." Romans 5:12. The fact that man dies is proof that he is depraved. Is there any part of the lost man that is not depraved? If so, let it be named. All men everywhere are challenged to name it. Man as he is by nature is destitute of spiritual life, is alienated from God, and is utterly unable to deliver himself from this state of corruption and misery. But he need not remain in that condition, for the Lord Jesus Christ has provided for him that which he never could obtain for himself.