

HUMAN DEPRAVITY

by

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My Christian friends, you are quite aware that the subject which is to engage our further attention this afternoon is HUMAN DEPRAVITY--a subject about which there are different opinions, which I shall not attempt to examine at the present time, but I shall confine myself to the teachings of God's word, which is the only infallible rule of faith and practice, and from which we learn what man was when he came from the hands of his Maker, and what he is now as a fallen creature.

It is explicitly declared by the sacred writers that God made man upright, and therefore his condition was one of perfect innocence and high moral excellence. There was no tendency to evil in any part of his nature, nothing that deviated in the least from the rule of moral rectitude. Whatever his duty was, it was to him his invariable and delightful employment.

But, alas! Man in honor did not long continue. Through the insinuating wiles of the devil, our first parents were induced to violate the positive command of their Maker, the observance of which was the condition of their happiness, and, as a punishment for their transgression, they were driven out of Paradise, and became liable to be cut off by the sentence of death and consigned to everlasting misery. And, in consequence of our connection with Adam as our federal head and representative, we became subject to the dreadful consequences of his fall.

This is evident from the testimony of the Apostle Paul in the fifth chapter of his Epistle to the Romans. There we read, "By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin, so that death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned." And, again, "By the offense of one, judgment came upon all men to condemnation, and by the disobedience of one, many were made sinners." It is evident from these passages that God viewed Adam in the covenant of works as the head and representative of his natural posterity, and, consequently, when he fell we fell in him and became subject to the tremendous consequences of his fall.

Here it may be asked, what are the consequences of his fall? What were they to him, and what are they to us? To answer this question, we must ascertain what the Apostle means when he uses the words death, judgment, and condemnation. I think that he uses these words in opposition to the grace of God, to justification of life, and to the reign of the redeemed in life by Jesus Christ. These are the benefits which result from the grace of God through Christ, and which stand opposed to the evils which sin has introduced into our world. As it cannot be supposed that these benefits relate to temporal life or solely to the resurrection of the body, it cannot be that the evils involved in the words death, judgment, and

condemnation relate simply to temporal death, but they must be considered as including temporal, legal, and spiritual death.

From the very hour that Adam transgressed, he became mortal--the sentence of death was pronounced upon him, and the seeds of depravity were sown in his system. Thus the fair and beautiful and glorious creature began to fade, wither, and die, and all his posterity became mortal in him and have from that day to this come into the world dying. Whatever the case of man might have been if he had not sinned, we cannot say. This, however, we know--that he would not have died, for death is the result of the federal failure of the father of our race. "Dust you are," God said to him, "and unto dust shall you return." "By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin." "In Adam all died." So that it may be said to every one of Adam's sons and daughters, "Dust you are, and unto dust shall you return."

But Adam by his transgression not only brought temporal death upon himself and his posterity, he also brought legal death. Having violated the law that was given him to observe, he became under the curse of that law, which involved not only temporal death and expulsion from Paradise but an exposure to suffer the just demerits of his transgression. In consequence of our connection with him as our federal head, we are under the curse of the same law: "By one man's disobedience judgment came upon all men to condemnation." Further, "By the offense of one many were made sinners." The very moment our progenitor transgressed, all his descendants became subject to the curse. The holy nature of God abhorred the apostate race, the curse of his holy and righteous law has ever rested upon that race, judgment has been given and recorded against us as a fallen world, in the court of Heaven, and unless it is reversed it must fall upon us with all its tremendous consequences.

We are also, in consequence of Adam's transgression, become the subjects of spiritual death, which consists not merely in the deprivation of the principle of life, but in having become depraved creatures. All the faculties of our souls and members of our bodies are depraved so that it may be said of us, as the prophet says of the Jewish nation, "The head is sick, the whole heart is faint, from the sole of the foot to the head there is no soundness. What! No soundness in any part? Nothing good in any part? Nothing spiritually good? Nothing, if cherished and fostered, that will not lead to God, to Heaven, and to happiness? Nothing whatever.

Let no one mistake me. I do not mean to say for a single moment that sin has destroyed any of the faculties of man's soul, for they are all there. They all exist as they did when they were produced. But I mean to say that sin has deprived man of the principle of spiritual life, and made him a depraved and debased creature. We believe that we can prove this from the word of God, as well as from observation.

First--from the conduct of little children. Children begin to sin very early in life. If there were any good in us, it would show itself in infancy, before good habits became corrupted and evil principles were produced by our connection with the world. But do little children prefer good? Are they inclined to the good and the excellent? Do you see from the earliest period of their existence that they are desirous of good? On

the contrary, I say, as soon as they begin to act they prove by their action that in them there is a depraved nature, from which they act. "Madness," says the wise man, "is bound up in the heart of a child." They go astray from the womb telling lies.

But it may be said, in the way of objection, that this may arise from the unfavorable circumstances in which some children are placed. No doubt, unfavorable circumstances have a bad influence upon the minds of children; but it is not so with the whole race. Point out to me one child who is disposed from its infancy to seek that which is good, that which is holy. And surely, if the tendency of infants from their earliest history is to evil, it is a proof that it must arise from the evil propensities within them, which grow with their growth and strengthen with their strength.

Second--We have further proof of human depravity from the aversion of sinners to come to Christ. They are invited to come, persuaded to come, and are assured that they shall find pardon, acceptance, and salvation. But they cannot be induced to come to him. And why will they not come? Is it because he is not willing to receive them, or because there is anything in him to prevent them? No, but it is because of the deep-rooted depravity in their hearts. The heart is averse to all that is good, and therefore rejects the Savior and turns away from him. Hence he complained when in our world, "How often would I have gathered you, even as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and ye would not." "Ye will not come to me that ye might have life."

What more need be added? Man turns away in proud disdain from all the blessings of the gospel and the glories of heaven brought before him, and rushes on with steady purpose to damnation. "Light is come into the world, and men love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil." Oh, to how many in this land may it be said, "They hate knowledge and did not choose the fear of the Lord; they would have none of his counsel, they despised all his reproof."

Third--We have further evidence of native depravity from the testimony of Scripture. In the first place, let me refer you to the fifth chapter of the Book of Genesis and the third verse. There we read that Adam, after he had lived 130 years, begat a son in his own likeness after his image. Mind, the image in which Adam was created was the image of God, but that image he had lost before he begat Seth. Therefore the image in which Seth was born must have been the image of his progenitor, as a fallen and depraved creature.

Let me refer you, in the second place, to the third chapter of the Gospel by John. "He who is born of the flesh," said the Savior to Nicodemus, "is flesh, and he who is born of the Spirit is spirit." To be born of the flesh, according to the wisest interpretation of that passage, is to be born of a depraved nature. To be born of the Spirit is to be born of the Holy Spirit of God, which birth, the Savior told Nicodemus, he must experience before he could see the kingdom of God.

Again, we have several passages in proof of this point. In the seventh chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, at the fifth verse of that chapter,

the Apostle says, "When we were in the flesh, the sinful passions which were aroused by the law were at work in our members to bear fruit to death." "When we were in the flesh" means this: when we were in an unrenewed depraved state.

In the same chapter he says, at the 14th verse, "We know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin." It is as if he had said, "I am as a sinner, a depraved creature." In accordance with this the Apostle says, at the 18th verse of the same chapter, "In me--that is, in my flesh--there dwells no good thing." No love to God, no holy aspirations! No, none whatever. At the beginning of the eighth chapter of the same Epistle we find the terms "flesh" and "Spirit" placed in opposition to each other: "Who walk not after the flesh," says the Apostle, describing Christians, "but after the Spirit." To be in the flesh is to be in a depraved state; to be in the Spirit is to be a partaker of his grace. To walk after the flesh is to walk after the dictates of corrupt principles and propensities; to walk after the Spirit is to be governed by spiritual principles and by the Holy Spirit of God. And the Apostle, in writing to the Galatians, says to them: "Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lusts of the flesh." These passages, I think, prove beyond all contradiction that man as a fallen creature is a depraved creature, destitute of any good.

There are many other passages of Scripture that confirm this doctrine, such as the following: "Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? No one!" "What is man that he should be clean, or the son of man that he should be just?" "Behold," says the Psalmist, "I was shaped in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me." Read the account of man before the deluge, and there we find that every imagination and the thoughts of his heart were only evil, and that continually. The same account is given of him after the flood. The deluge could not wipe away the stains of moral pollution, could not destroy in man the deep-rooted depravity of his heart. "The heart," says Jeremiah, "is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked, who can know it?" I think that what our blessed Lord said to the Jews of old is applicable to every unconverted man under heaven: "But I know you, that ye have not the love of God in you."

Some of you may be more humane than others, more benevolent than others, more compassionate than others, as men and as women. But one has as much of the love of God in him as others. "The carnal mind is enmity against God"--against the being of God, against the government of God, against the gospel of God, against the purposes of God. The enmity of the human heart is unconquerable by any human agency whatever. It is mortal enmity. It strikes at the being of God, and, therefore, as Present Edwards, of America, justly observes, "that when it found God in our nature, in our world, it put him to death on the accursed tree." Such, my brethren, is the enmity of the heart of man. Such is its deep-rooted depravity, that in him there is no good thing. We can never speak too harshly of what sin has done for us, and we can never speak too much or too well of what God has done for us in the person of his Son, and in us by the agency of his Holy Spirit.

Fourth--The doctrines of human depravity may be proved from those passages which assert the universal necessity of redemption by Jesus Christ. "You

shall call his name Jesus," said the angel, "because he will save his people from their sins." "In him we have redemption through his blood," says St. Paul, "even the forgiveness of sin according to the riches of his grace."

Now, the work of redemption presupposes the sinful state of man and implies a deliverance from that state and from the punishment to which man is exposed. Hence it is said of Christ that he came into the world to save sinners, to seek and to save that which was lost, and that he died--the just for the unjust--that he might bring us to God. Now, if redemption by Christ is necessary, it is evident that man is a sinner. And if man is a sinner, it is evident that man has a depraved nature. You cannot make anything else of it. Say what you like about man and about his excellencies, you must come to this conclusion: that he is a condemned and a depraved creature or else he would not need redemption through the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Fifth--The passages that assert the universal necessity of the new birth prove this very truth. "Except a man be born of water," said the Savior, "and of the Spirit, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Marvel not that I said to you, ye must be born again." But if a man has some good in him, and if that good could be cherished and be increased and worked up so as to make men fit for heaven, what need of the new birth? What need of the Spirit of all grace to renew him in the spirit of his mind?

Whenever, my brethren, you pray to God for the Spirit to change the human heart, whether you believe the doctrine or not you imply it in your petition before the mercy seat. They [who are saved] are represented by the sacred writers as having been called from darkness into light, as having an unction from the Holy One whereby they know all things, and those of them who have been called readily acknowledge that they were once foolish, once deceived and deceiving, once depraved--very depraved. And not only so, but the very best of Christians in the world confess with humility the depravity of their hearts, and I believe that the man who knows himself best is the man who is most ready to confess this and to humble himself before God. "Oh wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" And while Christians feel this, their language is, "Create within me a clean heart, oh God, and renew a right spirit within me. Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow." In other words, apply the blood of sprinkling to my guilty conscience, and let the Spirit of all grace work in my polluted and depraved heart, and form me to the image of the Lord Jesus Christ, and make my immortal spirit acceptable for the inheritance of the saints in light and of angels in glory.

My dear friends, I need not say more. I should not think there is an individual here who is not disposed to agree with me when I say that man is a fallen creature, a depraved creature, a condemned creature. He is under the curse of God's righteous law. At the same time he is the subject of the reigning power of depravity, the subject of the effects of sin throughout his whole nature. As a sinner (let it be recorded in high heaven), there is no good in man's nature until God puts it there. You will never be brought into a right state of mind before God until you are

brought to feel that you have nothing and that you must have all in the Lord Jesus Christ. "Oh, Israel, you have destroyed yourself!" But here are blessed tidings: "But in me is their help found."

Does not this subject teach us, in the first place, the amazing long suffering of God toward our race? God might, as soon as man sinned, without the least imputation of injustice to his character have cut him down, because the fall was the result of his criminal choice and attended by the most aggravating circumstances. But God has borne with us and is bearing still, which shows that he has no pleasure in the death of the sinner but would rather he should turn from his ways and live. "Turn ye, turn ye, for why will ye die, oh house of Israel?"

Does not the subject teach us also the helplessness of man as a sinner? He is unable to atone for his sins or to renew his heart. Many attempts have been made to atone for human transgression and to cleanse and purify the human heart, but they have all failed; not one has succeeded. No sacrifice short of an infinite one could satisfy Divine justice and magnify the broken law. No power short of the omnipotent energy of the Eternal Spirit can renew the human heart.

While man is a helpless creature, he is not a hopeless creature. We do not say to him there is no hope. Oh, no! I rejoice in that thought at this very moment. God has remembered us in our lowest state. He has laid help upon one who is mighty, one who (by his passive and active obedience) has magnified the law and made it honorable, one who has satisfied the claims of Divine justice so that God can be just and the justifier of him who believes in the Lord Jesus Christ. While he made atonement for our transgressions, he has procured for us the Spirit of all grace to renew our nature, to transform us into the likeness of himself, and to prepare us in the use of means for the inheritance of the saints in light.

Those of us who are made partakers of the Holy Ghost, let us pray for a larger measure of the Spirit upon ourselves individually, and upon the world around us. May the Lord command his blessing upon these remarks, for his name's sake. Amen.