

HUMAN DEPRAVITY

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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 instrument 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; and so 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, and 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 each 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, and 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." And 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 even unto 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, and 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 actions, 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 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.

Secondly—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 chickens under her wings, and you would not." "You will not come to me, that you 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 none of His counsel, they despised all His reproof."

Thirdly—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 one hundred and thirty 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 that is born of the flesh,” said the Savior to Nicodemus, “is flesh, and he that 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.

And 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 motions of sin, which were by the law, did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto 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 fourteenth verse, “We know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin,” as if he had said, “I am as a sinner, a depraved creature.” In accordance with this the apostle says, at the eighteenth verse of the same chapter, “In me (that is, in my flesh), 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 you 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.” Not 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 shapen 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 you 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 President 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 badly 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.

Fourthly—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 shall save his people from their sins.” “In him we have redemption through his blood,” says 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 excellences, 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.

Fifthly—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 unto you, you 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 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.” 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 fit my immortal spirit 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 this afternoon who is not disposed to agree with me, when I say that man is a fallen creature, is a depraved creature, is a condemned creature, he is under the curse of God’s righteous law, and at the same time the subject of the reigning power of depravity, the subject of the effects of sin throughout his whole nature, and that, as a sinner, let it be recorded in high heaven there is no good in man’s nature until God puts it there, and you will never be brought, my beloved hearers, 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, my hearers, teach us, in the first place, the amazing long-suffering of God towards 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 rather that he should turn from his ways and live. “Turn you, turn you, for why will you die, oh! house of Israel?”

And 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. But, 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 that is mighty, one who, by His passive and active obedience, has magnified the law and made it honorable, satisfied the claims of Divine justice, so that God can be just, and the justifier of him that believes in the Lord Jesus Christ. And 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, and I trust, most of us are—would to God that I could believe that we all are—let us pray for a larger measure of the Spirit upon ourselves

individually, and upon the world around us. Surely, my hearers, my dear brother who has to occupy this platform, and who has to unfurl to you the banner of the cross, will need a large measure of the Holy Spirit. May He come upon his head, and upon his heart, and may he never ascend this platform but in His strength, and under His guidance, and in His light; may he never preach a sermon without its being blessed to the conversion of souls, and the building up of the Church, and may you, as a Christian Church, continue earnest in prayer for the Spirit to come, and if the Spirit will reconcile us to each other, the Spirit will remove differences between Arminians and Calvinists, the Spirit will bring us to see, by and by, eye to eye, and this world will be filled with the glory of God. May the Lord command His blessing upon these remarks, for His name's sake. Amen.

The Meeting then adjourned till half-past six. After the friends had reassembled—

The Rev. C. H. SPURGEON said, I wish to make one or two observations before I introduce to you the speakers of this evening. Controversy is never a very happy element for the child of God; he would far rather be in communion than engaged in defense of the faith or in attack upon error. But the soldier of Christ knows no choice in his Master's commands. He may feel it to be better for him to lie upon the bed of rest than to stand covered with the sweat and dust of battle, but as a soldier he has learned to obey, and the rule of his obedience is not his personal comfort but his Lord's absolute command. The servant of God must endeavor to maintain all the truth which his Master has revealed to him, because, as a Christian soldier, this is part of his duty.

But while he does so, he accords to others the liberty which he enjoys himself. In his own house of prayer he must and will maintain that which he believes to be true. He does not feel himself at all out of temper or angry when he hears that in other places there are some holding different views of what the truth is, who as honestly, and perhaps as forcibly, endeavor to maintain their views. To our own Master we stand or fall. We have no absolute judge of right or wrong incarnate in the flesh on earth today. Nor is even the human judgment itself an infallible evidence of our being, for since the fall, no powers of mortals are free from imperfection. Our judgment is not necessarily a fully enlightened one, and we must therefore let another man's judgment also be his guide unto God, but we must not forget that every man is responsible to the Most High for the use of that judgment, for the use of that mental power which God has given him, by which he is to weigh and balance the arguments of either side.

I have found commonly that, with regard to the doctrine of grace which we preach, there are a great many objections raised. One of the simplest trades in the world is the raising of objections. You never need, if you wish to set up in that line of business, to look abroad for capital or resources; however poor and penniless a man may be, even in wits, he can easily manufacture difficulties. It is said "That a fool may raise objections which a thousand wise men could not answer." I would not hesitate to say that I could bring objections to your existence tonight, which you could not disprove. I could sophisticate and mystify until I brought out the conclusion that you were blind, and deaf, and dumb, and I am not sure that by any process of logic you would be able to prove that you were not so. It might be clear enough to you that you could both speak, and see, and hear. The only evidence, however, I suppose that you could give would be by speaking, and seeing, and hearing, which might be conclusive enough, but if it were left to be a mere matter of word-fighting for schoolmen, I question whether the cavalier might not cavil against you to the judgment day in order to dispute you out of the evidence of your very senses.

The raising of difficulties is the easiest trade in all the world and, permit me to add, it is not one of the most honorable. The raising of objections has been espoused, you know, by that great and mighty master of falsehood in the olden times, and it has been carried on full often by those whose doubts about the truth sprung rather from their hearts than from their heads. Some difficulties however, ought to be met, and let me now remove one or two of them.

There are some who say, "Provided the doctrines of grace be true, what is the use of our preaching?" Of course I can hardly resist a smile while I put this splendid difficulty—it is so huge a one. If there are

so many who are to be saved, then why preach? You cannot diminish, you cannot increase the number, why preach the Gospel? Now, I thought my friend Mr. Bloomfield anticipated this difficulty well enough. There must be a harvest—why sow, why plow? Simply because the harvest is ordained in the use of means. The reason why we preach at all is because God has ordained to save some. If He had not, we could not see the good of preaching at all. Why! we should come indeed on a fool's errand if we came here without the Master's orders at our back. His elect shall be saved—every one of them—and if not by my instrumentality or that of any brother here present, if not by any instrumentality, then would God sooner call them by His Holy Spirit, without the voice of the minister, than that they should perish.

But this is the very reason why we preach, because we wish to have the honor of being the means, in the hand of God, of calling these elect ones to Him. The certainty of the result quickens us in our work, and surely it would stay none but a fool in his labor. Because God ordains that His Word shall not return unto Him void, therefore we preach that Word, because, "as the rain comes down and the snow from heaven, and returns not thither, but waters the earth and makes it to bring forth and bud, even so does the Word of the Lord accomplish His purpose," therefore, we would have our doctrine to drop as the rain and distil as the dew, and as the small rain upon the tender herb.

But, there are some again who say, "To what purpose after all, is your inviting any to come, when the Spirit of God alone constrains them to come, and why, especially, preach to those whom you believe to be so depraved that they cannot and will not come?" Ay, just so, this is a serious difficulty to everything except faith. Do you see Ezekiel yonder, he is about to preach a sermon. By his leave, we will stop him. "Ezekiel, where are you about to preach?" "I am about," says he, "to preach to a strange congregation—dead, dry bones, lying in a mass in a valley." "But, Ezekiel, they have no power to live." "I know that," says he. "To what purpose, then, is your preaching to them? If they have no power, and if the breath must come from the four winds, and they have no life in themselves, to what purpose do you preach?" "I am ordered to preach," says he, "commanded," and he does so. He prophesies, and afterwards mounting to a yet higher stage of faith, he cries, "Come from the four winds, oh breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live." And the wind comes, and the effect of his ministry is seen in their life.

So preach we to dead sinners, so pray we for the living Spirit. So, by faith, do we expect His divine influence, and it comes—comes not from man, nor of man, nor by blood, nor by the will of the flesh, but from the sovereign will of God. But notwithstanding it comes instrumentally through the faith of the preacher while he pleads with man, "as though God did beseech them by us, we pray them in Christ's stead to be reconciled to God."

But if ten thousand other objections were raised, my simple reply would be just this, "We can raise more objections against your theory, than you can against ours." We do not believe that our scheme is free from difficulties; it is uncandid if we were to say so. But we believe that we have not the title of the difficulties to contend with that they have on the opposite side of the question. It is not hard to find in those texts which appear to be most against us, a key, by which they are to be harmonized, and we believe it to be utterly impossible, without wresting Scripture, to turn those texts which teach our doctrine, to teach any other thing whatsoever. They are plain, pointed, pertinent.

If the Calvinistic scheme were the whole sum and substance of all truth, why then surely, if it held everything within some five or six doctrines, you might begin to think that man were God, and that God's theology were less than infinite in its sweep. What are we, that we should grasp the infinite? We shall never measure the marches of eternity. Who shall compass with a span the Eternal God, and who shall think out anew His infinite thoughts? We pretend not that Calvinism is a plumb line to fathom the deeps, but we do say that it is a ship which can sail safely over its surface, and that every wave shall speed it onwards towards its destined haven. To fathom and to comprehend is neither your business nor mine, but to learn, and then, having learned, to teach to others, is the business of each Christian man, and thus would we do, God being our helper.

One friend kindly suggests a difficulty to me, which, having just spoken of, I shall sit down. That amazing difficulty has to do with the next speaker's topic, and therefore, I touch it. It says in the Scriptures, that Paul would not have us destroy him with our meat for whom Christ died. Therefore, the inference is—only mark, we do not endorse the logic—the inference is, that you may destroy some with your meat for whom Christ died. That inference I utterly deny. But then, let me put it thus. Do you know that a man may be guilty of a sin which he cannot commit? Does that startle you? Every man is guilty of putting God out of existence, if he says in his heart, "No God." But he *cannot* put God out of existence, and yet, the guilt is there, because he would if he could. There be some who crucify the Son of God afresh. They cannot—He is in heaven, He is beyond their reach. And yet, because their deeds would do that, unless some power restrained, they are guilty of doing what they can never do, because the end and aim of their doings would be to destroy Christ, if He were here.

Now, then, it is quite consistent with the doctrine that no man can destroy any for whom Christ died, still to insist upon it that a man may be guilty of the blood of souls. He may do that which, unless God prevented it—and that is no credit to him—unless God prevented it, would destroy souls for whom Jesus Christ died. But, again I say, I have not come here tonight to anticipate and to answer all objections; I have only done that, that some troubled conscience might find peace. This was not a meeting of discussion, but for the explaining of our own views, and the teaching them simply to the people. I now shall call upon my beloved brother to take up the point of particular redemption.

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