

No.12, Human Depravity & Inability

This passage of Scripture provides a vivid portrayal of the on-going and pervasive corruption of human nature. In nature the passage is prophetic, for in it the Spirit of God reveals very specifically a certain feature of “the last days.” In Scripture, “the last days” is descriptive of the entire New Testament period during which “perilous times” would come. This term, *perilous times*, is interesting – literally it signifies “difficult seasons”, the difficulty being for God’s people in every generation. Hence, Paul’s teaching is that during the entire N.T. era, a series of perilous times would come, one after the other, with each one worse than the preceding one. See v.13 where it is stated that “*evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived.*” Paul is, therefore, describing a series of apostasies throughout N.T. history, coming with increasing wickedness and departure from the truth.

One lesson that we can glean from grasping the sense of this passage of Scripture is that human nature does not get better with the passing of time – instead, it becomes more wicked. Notice in v.v. 2-5 a list of nineteen particular sins that mark the perilous time. This is the kind of society that the Church has to face in any given generation – morally & spiritually corrupt; and increasingly so as the world heads toward the end of time. Consequently, this passage of Scripture provides a vivid illustration of the particular line of study on which we are presently focusing – the results of the Fall, the natural state of man, and especially man’s moral depravity and spiritual inability. The results of the Fall were many and varied and we have noted a number of them over the past few weeks: the guilt of man; his moral corruption; the distortion of the divine image in him; the severing of fellowship between God & man; the man and the woman coming under personal adverse conditions; and the curse that came on the physical creation. Last week, inclosing we were only able to give a brief mention to another consequence of the Fall and we wish to take up our study at that point today –

ORIGINAL SIN – THE IMPUTATION OF THE GUILT OF ADAM’S SIN AND RECEPTION OF A CORRUPT NATURE

From all the detail that delineates the consequences of the Fall it is unambiguously clear that the natural state of fallen man is one of both guilt and corruption, that natural state being succinctly summed up for us in the Westminster Confession in chapter 6 that deals with the subject of the Fall of Man. In sections 3 & 4 we have the following statements: “*They (Adam & Eve) being the root of all mankind, the guilt of this sin was imputed, and the same death in sin and corrupted nature conveyed, to all their posterity, descending from them by ordinary generation.*” “*From this original corruption, whereby we are utterly indisposed, disabled, and made opposite to all good, and wholly inclined to all evil, do proceed all actual transgressions.*”

Effectively these confessional statements underline the consequences of the sin of our first parents with regard to their posterity. Note that these consequences are restricted to those “descending from them by ordinary generation.” Obviously the framers of the Confession included this restriction in order to exclude Christ. As man, Christ was of the posterity of Adam, but He did not descend from Adam by ordinary generation, Matt 1: 18. But the effects of Adam’s first transgression extend to the entire race, including the imputation of the guilt of Adam’s first sin as well as the conveying of a corrupt nature. This is what is meant by the term *original sin*.

The doctrine of original sin was universally held by the Christian Church until the beginning of the 5<sup>th</sup> century, when it was denied by Pelagius, a British monk. Pelagius taught that “*the sins of our first parents were imputed to them alone, and not to their posterity; that we derive no corruption from their fall, but are born as pure and unspotted as Adam came out of the forming hand of his Creator.*” Thus Pelagius denied the ruin of human nature by sin, thus that every human being has the natural ability to do good because God creates each person with the same natural ability as Adam had. According to Pelagius man does not have a sinful inclination or disposition and that sin consists only in separate acts of the will. He sought to explain the universal presence of sin as the result of the imitation of the habits of other sinners. On this error Dr. Jonathan Edwards once stated in his lectures on Original Sin – “*this is accounting for the corruption of the world by the corruption of the world.*” Pelagianism, therefore, had no place for the truths of God’s sovereignty, or the doctrines of grace or even for redemption. It held that man’s free will is sufficient for the practice of virtue, assisted by the law of God and the example of Christ, making it easier for man to practise holiness.

In Church history we also meet with what is known as Semi-Pelagianism, which is an attempt to embrace a middle position between Augustine’s defence of salvation by grace and Pelagius’s denial of it. Semi-Pelagianism presents the view that fallen nature retains some power to incline toward that which is good yet grace is necessary for salvation. However, it teaches that this grace is given after the first step is taken by the will of man. With regard to salvation, the sinner does not receive Christ because of grace, but receives grace after he decides to receive Christ. Arminians, who derive their name from Arminius, a 16<sup>th</sup> century theologian, are essentially Semi-Pelagian in their views on the nature of man.

The Bible’s presentation of the natural state of fallen man may be summarised in a three-fold way.

1. **Total Depravity** – man as he comes forth from the womb is morally and spiritually corrupt. The universal corruption of man is clearly presented in Scripture: see Gen 6: 5, 6; Gen 8: 21; Psalm 51: 5; Psalm 58: 3; John 3: 6; Rom 8: 7. All of these Scriptures show that all mankind has been infected by a corrupted nature derived from Adam. This is what is meant by the doctrine of Total Depravity. The total depravity of man means that all men are corrupt in the totality of their being with every part, power and faculty of their nature being affected by this corruption inherited from Adam – mind, intellect, emotions, will, conscience and body. It should be noted that by the term *total depravity* it is not meant that men **act** as bad as they really are by nature since they are prevented or restrained from doing so by the Lord.

2. **Total Inability** -- because corruption extends to every part of his being, man is incapable of changing his character or of acting in a way that is distinct from his corruption. He is not capable of discerning, loving or choosing the things that are pleasing to God, clearly presented in the following Scriptures: John 3: 3, 5; John 6: 44; John 14: 17; Romans 8: 7, 8; 1 Cor 2: 14; 1 Cor 12: 3.

3. **Real Guilt** – man’s moral & spiritual corruption and inability are the consequences of his own disobedience. His sin, therefore, is the contradiction of God’s holiness and can only meet with divine disapproval and wrath. Sin dishonours God and therefore man is guilty or liable to punishment, deserving only eternal damnation.