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Depravity

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DEPRAVITY--TOTAL, UNIVERSAL, INHERENT

Depravity is a word that describes the state or disposition of man considered as a moral being. A moral being is one who is accountable to God for his thoughts, speech, and conduct. Depravity means the moral corruption of human nature; it refers to the state of sinfulness natural to the unregenerate.

Depravity is the opposite to what is required by the law of God. The sum of the divine law is love to God and our neighbour. (Matt. 22:37-29). Paul says that love is the fulfilling of the law. (Rom. 13:8-10). Depravity must consist then of the lack of love required by God, 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. Private self-love, to the exclusion of supreme love to God and equal love to men, is the very root of depravity. Self-will, self-admiration and self-righteousness are but different manifestations of depravity.

Depravity is that state of nature that causes man to put self in the place of God, and to seek his own gratification, honour, and interest as the ultimate end of all his actions. Every moral being ought to live and act for the highest good, and the highest good is the glory of God. Depravity is the corruption of nature that leads men to act for self glory. The very essence of sin is selfishness. Take the first and last letters off

the word SIN and you have the letter "I". Take the word self and spell it backwards, adding the letter "H" and you have the word "flesh". And the Bible often employs the word flesh to denote the corrupt nature of man. See Romans 7:18; Romans 8:1-13; Phil. 3:3, John 1:13; John 6:63.

When Paul describes men under a variety of wicked characters, the first link in the chain is: "lovers of their own selves" (II Tim. 3:2). This exclusive love of self is the fountain of depravity from which all evil thoughts and actions flow; it is the womb from which all sinful expedients are born; it is the incubator in which all evil inventions are hatched.

Depravity is total, reaching to all the faculties of the soul; it is universal; taking in all men by nature; and it is inherent, by which we mean that it is the result of original sin, transmitted by natural generation or physical birth.

TOTAL DEPRAVITY

Total depravity means that man is depraved or corrupted in all the faculties of his being. It is not a question of degree but of extent. It does not mean that any man is as bad as he may become, or that he is as wicked as the devil. However, the potential evil is about the same in every man. The Bible says there is no difference for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. If we have not sinned as much as others, it is due to restraining grace and not to anything good in our nature. When

Jesus Christ said, "Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies," He was not describing any particular heart but the heart of every man. John Bradford, a martyr, once watched the officers leading a criminal to the place of execution, and remarked, "There goes John Bradford but for the grace of God." The act of transgression is only a small part of sin. Eight ninths of an iceberg is below the surface of the sea. And potentially there is far more sin in everyone of us than every appears on the surface in actual transgression.

There are degrees in depravity. All men are not the same in the degree or amount of sin. 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 each part to a greater degree. So man, a child of wrath by nature (Eph. 2:3), may become more depraved.

The natural man is not depraved in spots, but the whole of his being is depraved. The carnal mind is enmity against God (Rom. 8:7); and the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked (Jer. 17:9); Matt. 15:19; the will is in bondage to sin (John 6:44, John 5:40; Phil. 2:13). The human will is no better than the mind and the heart that controls it. Men choose what they do because of the state of their minds and hearts.

Total depravity means that man, as the result of original sin, is morally or spiritually dead. And dead as an adjective does not admit of comparison. There are no degrees of death, but there are degrees in death. Here is a physical corpse. The man has been dead one day. He is totally dead--dead in all the physical parts. Here is another corpse. The man has been dead one week. He is no more dead than the other man, but the corpse is in worse condition. Now the Bible presents the natural man under the figure of a moral or spiritual corpse. Here is a young girl of sixteen summers, beautiful, vivacious, and outwardly charming. She knows nothing of the life of the brothel. But that girl, if an unbeliever in Christ, is morally or spiritually dead. She is lacking in love to God and to her neighbour. Her depraved nature is manifested in pride of apparel, pride of beauty, disobedience to parents, lack of interest in the word of God, and rejection of the Lord Jesus Christ. Here is another moral corpse. She is a woman of the brothel; her virtue is gone, and she is abandoned to a life of sin and shame.

She drinks, and swears, and smokes, and lies, and steals, and breaks up homes. She is no more dead than the girl of sweet sixteen, but she is in a worse

condition in moral death.

Moral death does not mean that man does not exist as a moral being. Death never means extinction of being, but a state or condition of being. The unregenerate man performs actions, but they are wicked. Theft, and murder, and lying are all acts of moral being, but they are wicked acts.

UNIVERSAL DEPRAVITY

Universal depravity means that all men are depraved. Every man, apart from inwrought grace, is lacking in that which the law of God requires. He does not love God, neither does he love his neighbour as he loves himself. It is only the born again ones who love God (I John 4:7); who understand the things of God (I Cor. 2:14; John 3:3; II Cor. 4:4); who believe on the Lord Jesus Christ (I John 5:1); or who practice righteousness (I John 2:29).

In Noah's day it is said that "the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Gen. 6:5). Of David's day it was written: "There is none that doeth good, no, not one" (Ps. 14:3). And Paul quotes this verse from David and applies it to the people of his day (Rom. 3:10). The only man free from corruption of nature since the first Adam sinned and fell was the Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, and his birth was not according to the law of natural generation. To deny the virgin birth of Jesus of Nazareth is to make him a sinner. And who wants to trust a sinner as Saviour?

INHERENT DEPRAVITY

Depravity of nature is transmitted to all men by natural generation. Like begets like; that which is born of the flesh is flesh, and the carnal or fleshly mind hates God.

The early appearance of sin in the child is proof that depravity of nature is inherited. The very first act that discovers reason in the child has sin in it. Watch the child when reason begins to dawn, and it will express itself by doing harm to others, or by lying, or by pride of apparel, or by natural inclination to revenge. Have not all parents quieted the baby by beating that which had hurt or offended it? The small child at the very dawn of reason manifests a spirit of revenge towards others and a dislike for God.

In Andrew Fuller's diary, under date of January

8, 1785, are these lines: "Much affected today in hearing my little girl say, 'How soon sabbath day comes again!' Felt grieved to see the native aversion of the carnal heart to God so early discovering itself."

Inherent depravity is seen in the fact that the child will sin without being taught to sin. "A child left to himself puts his mother to shame" (Prov. 29:15). Only leave the child to act naturally and freely, and it will shame its mother. But we must be taught to do the things that are not natural. Take a person who has never been taught to swim and throw him into deep water he will drown. But take a horse or some other beast and plunge it into the stream and it will swim because nature hath taught him. Man sins naturally, but he has to be taught to do good.

Inherent depravity is directly taught in many Scriptures. "Behold I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me" (Ps. 51:5). David is not casting reflection upon his mother's virtue; he is confessing to a sinful nature received in birth. "The wicked are estranged from the womb; they go astray as soon as they are born, speaking lies" (ps. 58:3). In Ephesians 2:3, we read that we "were by nature the children of wrath." In Romans 9:8, we are told that the children of the flesh are not the children of God--and if not the children of God, they are the children of wrath, children of disobedience; yea, children of the devil.

The Scriptures which teach the necessity of the new birth prove that depravity is total, universal, and inherent. Regeneration is not of parts but of persons; the whole psychic being is born again. And every man needs the new birth, for except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. If depravity were not hereditary, the new birth would not be necessary; training and education would bring one into the kingdom of God. If there were a spark of goodness it could be fanned into a flame, and a birth from above would not be essential to salvation.

ILLUSTRATION

The following supposed incident will illustrate the truth of depravity. A ship's crew mutiny, put their officers in chains, and take command of the ship. They sail to a distant port, dispose of the cargo, and divide the money. But while they are on the voyage, they find it necessary, for self-preservation, to establish some kind of laws to govern them in their relation to one another. To these laws they adhere punctually, act with a

degree of fairness with one another, and agree to an impartial distribution of their plunder. But before they reach port, one of the crew relents and becomes very unhappy. He insists they they are engaged in a wicked scheme. He urges that they release their officers, implore their forgiveness, and resume their duties under their command. But they plead their justice, honour, and respect for one another. They remind him that they are keeping the laws they had agreed upon, and that there is peace and harmony among them. But he tells them there is no virtue in it; that all their equity while exercised in pursuit of a scheme which violates the great law of justice, is itself, a species of iniquity. He shows them that they are running the ship for their own selfish interests and glory, and not in the interest of the owner. He urges them to repent of their wicked design. He pleads with them to release their officers, and plead for mercy.

The application of this parable is easy. As sailors on the ship of life the human race mutinied in the very beginning, and every one born upon the ship has joined in the rebellion. While there has been a semblance of law and order, and some respect for one another, every man, apart from the grace of God working in him, has lived for self rather than for God, the Creator and Owner of all. The need of every one is to repent of his sin towards God, surrendering to Him and hoping for mercy through the blood of His Son. May both writer and reader abhor themselves for what they were by nature and rejoice in what they are by God's amazing grace!



S O GREAT SALVATION

His mercy is so great
that it forgives great sins
to great sinners,
after great lengths of time,
and then gives great favours
and great privileges,
and raises us up to great
in the great Heaven
of the great God.