

The Total Depravity of Man Chapter 12

COROLLARIES

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Transcript

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In the introductory section we intimated that we would endeavor to show that our present subject is of immense doctrinal importance and of great practical value. In view of all that has been advanced in our subsequent discussion, that fact should be clear. The Scriptures supply us with a divinely accurate diagnosis of man's present condition. They show us, as nothing else can or does, why the entire course of human history has been what it is, and explain why all the remedial methods and measures of man to effect any radical improvement in society are thorough failures. They account for the fact that man in the twentieth century is essentially the same as in the first, that like moral features pertain to white and black, yellow and red faces, that no change of environment or living conditions can transform a sinner into a saint. Removing thistles and nettles from a stony ground and transplanting them into the most fertile soil and lovely surroundings will not cause them to bear fragrant flowers or edible fruit. Human nature is fundamentally the same whether people live in mansions or hovels. Man does what he does because of what he is.

Value of This Doctrine The importance of this doctrine of man's total depravity also appears in the close bearing it has on other aspects of the truth, and the light it tends to cast on them. Reject what is revealed in Genesis 3 and the remainder of the Bible becomes entirely meaningless; but accept what is recorded there and everything else becomes intelligible and is seen in its proper perspective. The whole scheme of redemption manifestly proceeds in view of our first parents' ruination of their race. Our defection in Adam and our recovery by Christ plainly stand or fall together. Because man is a sinner he needs a Saviour; and being so great a sinner, none but a divine Saviour is sufficient for him. Since sin has corrupted the whole of man's constitution, vitiating and debasing all his faculties, he is utterly incapable of doing anything to raise himself out of the horrible pit into which the fall has plunged him. Sooner will the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots than those who are at enmity with God evoke any love to Him or do that which is pleasing in His sight. If such a creature is to be made fit to dwell forever with the thrice holy One, obviously a miracle of grace must be worked in him. Equally real and great is the practical value of this doctrine. Nothing else is so well calculated to humble the proud heart of man and bring him into the dust before his Maker crying, "Behold, I am vile." Nothing else is so well calculated to demonstrate the utter futility of the sinner's attempting to appease God and obtain His approbation by any efforts of his

own, or to gain acceptance with Him by his own performance. A murderer standing in the dock might as well seek to win the judge's favor by his smiles and flattery. Nothing is so well calculated to convince us that, since our hearts are rotten to the core, our very righteousnesses are as filthy rags. And nothing else will so deeply impress on the heart of a believer his entire dependence on the Lord as a keen sense of what he is by nature. He must realize that God must work in him to will and to do of His good pleasure if he is ever to perform His bidding, that nothing but daily supplies of grace can preserve him in the narrow way. Let us particularize what has just been summarized. Since the entire being of the natural man is under the dominion of sin, it follows that his will is in bondage also. Anyone who denies that fact evinces that he does not understand or believe in the total depravity of man, for in effect he is asserting that one of the most important of his faculties has not been debased by the fall. But as the whole of man's body is corrupt, so his entire soul is inclined to evil only, and so long as he remains in the sinful state his will is in captivity to sin. The power of the will can extend itself only to things within its own province and cannot act above it. All actions and powers of action are limited by the nature and capacity of their agent. As creatures below man cannot act rationally, neither can those who lack a holy principle act spiritually. Before divine grace works on and in the heart, man's will is enslaved by sin. He is "in the bond of iniquity" (Acts 8:23), the servant of those lusts and pleasures which he chooses and delights in. Christ must make us free (John 8:36) before there is or can be any deliverance from our moral captivity. The Lord Jesus declared, "Whosoever committeth sin is the servant [bond-man] of sin" (John 8:34). Sin is his master, ordering all his actions. Nevertheless, he voluntarily assents to it. That is why it is termed "the will of the flesh" (John 1:13), for it is defiled. It is "without strength" (Rom. 5:6) to do that which is good. Since the tree itself is corrupt, no good fruit can be borne by it. Romans 8: 7 not only declares that the carnal mind is enmity against God and that it is not subject to the law of God, but adds "neither indeed can be," which would not be the case were the will of fallen man free, or had it power to do good. Even when the understanding is convinced and sees the truth, the will obstinately opposes and rejects it. Rightly did G. H. Bishop of the Dutch Reformed Church say Man can no more turn to God than the dead can sit up in their coffins. He can no more originate a right desire than he can create a universe. God the Holy Spirit alone, by sovereign, special interference, calls dead sinners to life and creates within them "the desires of their hearts"—the first faint fluttering of a breath toward holiness.

Some may reply, "But my own experience refutes what you have said. I am clearly conscious of the fact that my will accepted the offer of the gospel, that I freely came to Christ as a lost sinner and accepted Him as my own Saviour." We fully admit that. But if they go a little farther back they will find that their experience confirms what we have said. Previous to conversion, their will was opposed to God, and they refused to come to Christ. Though the time arrived when that was reversed, who produced or caused that change they or God? In every conscious act he performs, man necessarily wills. In repenting he wills, in believing he wills, in turning from his evil ways to God in Christ he wills. But does the sinner make himself willing, or does God? The question at issue is Does salvation begin by self-movement or divine? Scripture is plain on the matter. God alters the bent or bias of the will by communicating a principle of grace and holiness. A supreme will overcomes man's. He who said, "Let there be light: and there was light" (Gen. 1:3) says, "Let rebellion and opposition cease," and they do so. "So then it is not of him that willeth [originally], nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy" (Rom. 9:16). As He loved us before we loved Him, so His will precedes ours in conversion. Moral Insensibility of Natural Man Because the natural man is dead in trespasses and sins, he is quite insensible to his wretched plight. One of the most terrible elements in the fatal malady which has struck him is that he is so morally paralyzed that he is quite unaware of his desperate state. At this juncture it is necessary to point out that there is a difference between being totally ignorant of our condition and being insensible of it. The unregenerate may acquire a

theoretical knowledge of man's total depravity, yet they are without any feeling of the same in themselves. They may hold the theological belief that sin is the transgression of the divine law, but they have no inward horror and anguish over their vileness. That deadly insensibility is in all sinners at all times. Their natural emotions may be stirred as they listen to a portrayal of the sufferings of Christ on the cross—just as they shed tears over some particularly touching incident told in the newspapers or enacted on the stage—but they do not weep over their awful enmity against God, nor mourn because of their contrariety to His holiness. They are quite incapable of doing so, for they have stony hearts as far as God is concerned (Ezek. 36:26) and do not realize that His wrath rests on them. This explains why sinners generally seem secure and happy. It has always appeared strange as well as distressing to the saints to see the ungodly so unconcerned and lighthearted, though under sentence of death. Job did not understand how the wicked could "take the timbrel and harp, and rejoice at the sound of the organ," spending "their days in wealth, and in a moment go down to the grave" (21:12-13). The psalmist was perplexed when he "saw the prosperity of the wicked" and observed that they were "not in [soul] trouble as other men" (73:3-5). Amos was astonished as he saw the sinners in Zion "put far away the evil day," lie "upon beds of ivory, ... eat the lambs out of the flock, ... invent to themselves instruments of musick, ... drink wine in bowls, and anoint themselves with the chief ointments" (6:1-6), utterly unconcerned about their souls. Though natural men differ from one another in so many respects, in this they are very much alike: they generally live as though there is no God to whom they must render an account, and who will pass sentence of eternal damnation upon them. Such ignorance in rational and immortal creatures can be explained only on the ground of their insensibility. They have eyes, but see not; ears, but hear not; hearts, but perceive not. It is not at all strange that they, neither discerning nor feeling their danger, should not fear it. Those who deny the moral insensibility of sinners are proclaiming their own insensibility, for they repudiate not only what Scripture maintains but what universal observation confirms. Nothing but ignorance can account for the conduct of the great majority of mankind, who are saying peace and safety while exposed to instant and eternal destruction. They are completely unconcerned that their hearts are desperately wicked, their understandings darkened, and their wills in bondage to evil. They are unaware of Satan's malignant dominion over them, and do not know that he is perpetually causing them to sin. The devil employs a multitude of devices to ensnare them. He knows how to take full advantage of their dullness. Yet though they are led captive by him from day to day they do not perceive his wiles and influence. Even though they recognize the objects which he employs to seduce them, they do not realize his seducing power. They are ignorant that they are continually walking in the paths of the destroyer, who is leading them blindfold to hell. They do not know—or if they do, they do not care—that the friendship of the world is enmity with God, and that to follow a multitude to do evil is the direct road to endless woe. Hence they are not aware of their stumblings. They are united in their disaffection toward God and in their love of sin. They join hand in hand; all lead, and are led. Their very numbers inspire them with boldness and resolution, and encourage them to walk together in the path of ruin. In view of all that has been advanced, it is crystal clear that fallen man is in a lost and perishing condition. He is obnoxious to God, alienated from His life (Eph. 4:18), cast out of His favor (Gen. 3:24), cut off from communion with Him (Eph. 2:12). He is given up to the devil, to be led captive by him as he pleases. He is dead in trespasses and sins, and that means (among other things) that he is utterly powerless where spiritual things are concerned, quite unable to do anything in regard to them. Yet he is efficient with respect to that which is carnal and devilish. Entirely averse to all that is good and holy, his will is desperately set against the truth, but prone to—and in love with—whatever is sinful and evil. He is lying in a horrible pit of corruption, unable to break the cords of sin which hold him fast. He is so infatuated with his iniquities as to regard them as his benefactors (see Hosea 2:5, 12). His heart is so calloused that the mercies of God do not melt him, nor do His threatenings and judgments awe

him. Instead of the divine goodness leading him to repentance, it leads him to deeper impenitence, unbelief and presumption; for since he sees the sun shining and the rain falling on the evil and on the good, and God allowing all things to come alike to the one as to the other, he concludes that He will treat them all alike in the next world. Man's plight is very much worse than is generally recognized, even in those sections of Christendom which are still regarded as being orthodox. Imagine an island affected by some calamity, say, a raging fire, the only escape being a bridge to the mainland. The bridge offers the possibility of escape, of salvation for the entire island population. The realization of the possibility is dependent on the choice of each individual. The bridge does not offer automatic salvation, but simply the opportunity to attain it. If an individual thinks that the fire will die down, and he remains on the island, he forfeits the possibility of escape by the bridge. It is true that he can be carried by force over the bridge to safety. But, someone says, God does not accomplish the soul's salvation by compulsion. Unless the individual wills to accept God's way of escape, he perishes. He himself must decide to cross the bridge. But can he do so? Sin has such a stupefying effect on the whole soul of the natural man that he is oblivious to his peril and insensible of his dire need. It loses sight of the fact that the sinner is not only in gross darkness, but has no desire to be enlightened; he is stricken with a deadly malady, and is unwilling to be healed. He is highly displeased if someone tells him of his awful danger, for he resents anything which disturbs his false peace and comfort. Sinners in Bible times could not bear to hear the plain preaching of either God's prophets or His incarnate Son. They stoned the former and crucified the Latter. So it is now; they refuse to give a hearing to one who declares them to be totally depraved. The sinner, though mentally convinced of the urgency of his situation, has no eyes to see the "bridge." And if another offered to lead him it would be of no avail, for he lacks strength. True, God does not effect the soul's salvation by compulsion, but He does so by a miracle of grace: making His people willing in the day of His power (Ps. 110:3), imparting life, light and strength to them. Since man is totally depraved, how great is his need of salvation! The guilt of Adam's transgression is charged to his account, the polluted nature of our first parents transmitted to him. He is shaped in iniquity, conceived in sin, and enters this world a child of wrath, estranged from God from his mother's womb (Ps. 58:3). Born with a heart that is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked, from earliest childhood he pursues a course of self-will and self-pleasing, treasuring up wrath against himself. His iniquities are more in number than the hairs of his head (Ps. 40:12), and his "trespass [guiltiness] is grown up unto the heavens" (Ezra 9:6). He lies beneath the death sentence of the law. That curse cannot be removed until full satisfaction has been rendered to it, and the guilty culprit is utterly powerless to render such satisfaction. Nor can any of his friends—not even his nearest and dearest relatives—discharge his incalculable debt. "None of them can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him: for the redemption of their soul is precious" (Ps. 49:7-8), or "costly," as the same word is rendered in I Kings 7:9-10. The sinner is a moral bankrupt, with no good thing to his credit, without a penny to discharge his liabilities. Such a creature is utterly unfit for heaven; even if he were permitted to enter it, he would at once desire to leave, for he would be entirely out of his element, having nothing whatever in common with the ineffable holiness of its atmosphere and society. He is already ripe for hell, fit only for the company of the damned. Thus the natural man is in a perishing condition. Not only does he need delivering from the curse of the law, the wrath of God, and the captivity of the devil; he also needs saving from himself: from the guilt, dominion and pollution of his sins. He needs to be saved from his hard, impenitent and unbelieving heart, from his love of the world, from his self-righteousness. Divine justice requires not only that he be clear of any accusation the law can bring against him, but that he possess a perfect obedience which constitutes him righteous before the law, thus giving him title to the reward of endless joy. But his righteousnesses are as filthy rags, and the wearer of them a moral leper. His plight is desperate beyond the power of words to express. There is only a step

between him and death, and beyond that lies "the blackness of darkness for ever" (Jude 13). It is equally evident that the lost sinner is incapable of contributing toward his salvation. Can a foul and filthy fountain send forth clear, pure water? Neither can a polluted creature offer anything which is acceptable to the holy One. "The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD" (Prov. 15:8), as He made clear at the beginning, when He did not accept Cain and his offering. Instead of a pleasing service to God, it is an insulting provocation, for it lacks that principle without which it is impossible to please Him. The supplications of the unregenerate are rejected by God. "And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear" (Isa. 1:15). Why? Because such "praying" is the howling of those in pain (Hosea 7:14) rather than the breathings of loving devotion. It is the wishings and cravings of those who want their lusts gratified (James 4:3) rather than their souls ministered to. It is the bold presumptions for things unwarranted by the divine promises, for they hope to have mercy without holiness, sins forgiven without forsaking them. Their praying consists of the perfunctory exercises of those who have a form of godliness but are strangers to its power. Likewise are their fastings rejected (Isa. 58:3-7; Zech. 7:5). Charnock said: We can no more be voluntarily serviceable to God while our serpentine nature and devilish habits remain in us, than we can suppose that the Devil can be willing to glorify God while the nature he contracted by his fall works powerfully in him. Our nature and will must be changed, that our actions may regard God as our end, that we may delightfully meditate on Him, and draw the motives of our obedience from love.

The imperative necessity of that radical change in the soul—a change as great and complete as to be like a second birth—was expressed by Christ when He declared, "Ye must be born again," having prefaced the same by stating, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God ...Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God" (John 3:3, 5-7). There must be a spiritual and supernatural principle in us before we can live a spiritual and supernatural life. The new birth is indispensable, yet what can one who is dead in sin do to experience it? As Nicodemus asked, "How can a man be born when he is old?" (v. 4). "Ye must be born again" at once reveals the utter futility of all self-effort. Such a demand withers all fleshly pretensions and bars the gates of heaven against all the unregenerate. It is designed to crush pride and make man realize his helplessness. As the sinner cannot regenerate himself, neither can he produce any sincere repentance, for "godly sorrow worketh repentance" (II Cor. 7:10), and he has not a spark of godliness. Until he is born again he can neither hate sin nor abhor himself. Nor is he capable of exercising faith. How can he confide in one to whom he is a total stranger, trust in one whom he regards as his enemy, love one with whom he is at odds? The obstacles in the way to salvation are absolutely insurmountable by any efforts of the sinner. He could as easily turn the ocean tide as deliver his soul. That solemn fact was shown by Christ when in answer to His disciples' question "'Who then can be saved?'" He averred, "With men this is impossible" (Matt. 19:26). What a shattering word that was to all creature sufficiency! How it should bring the sinner to despair of saving himself. Salvation Only by God's Grace Since man is totally depraved it necessarily follows that if ever he is to be saved it can be only by divine grace and power. Grace is a truth which is peculiar to divine revelation. It is a concept to which the unaided powers of the human mind can never stretch. Proof of that is found in the fact that where the Bible has not gone it is quite unknown. But grace is not only taught in God's Word; it is given great prominence there. Holy Writ declares that salvation is by grace from first to last: it issued from grace, it is received by grace, it is maintained by grace, it is perfected by grace. Divine grace is bestowed on those who have no merits, and from whom no recompense is demanded. More than that, it is given to those who are full of demerit and blame. How thoroughly grace sets aside every thought of worthiness in its object is evident from a single quotation: "Being justified freely by his grace" (Rom. 3:24). The Greek word is even more impressive and emphatic, and might be rendered "gratuitously," "for

nothing." The same term is translated "for nought" in II Thessalonians 3:8, and "without a cause" in John 15:25. There is nothing whatever in the beneficiary to make it attractive, but rather everything to make it repulsive. "None eye pitied thee... to have compassion upon thee... When I passed by thee and saw thee polluted in thy blood, I said unto thee..., Live" (Ezek. 16:5-6). Divine grace is the sinners only hope, for it is not searching for good men whom it may approve, but for the guilty and lost whom it may save. It comes not to those who have done their best and are quite presentable, but rather to those who have done their worst and are in rags and tatters. Grace ever draws near to the sinner with his condition fully exposed. Grace recognizes no distinctions either social or moral: the chaste virgin is on the same level as the confirmed harlot, the religious moralist with the wildest profligate. Grace is God's provision for those who are so corrupt that they cannot help their conduct, so averse to God that they cannot turn to Him, so dead that He must open their graves and bring them onto resurrection ground. Unless men are saved by grace they cannot be saved at all. It is equally true that the salvation of sinners must be by divine power. Their ignorance and insensibility are irremovable by any human means. Nothing but God's might can dispel the darkness from their minds, take away their hearts of stone or free their sin-enslaved wills. All the faculties of the natural man are opposed to the offers and operations of divine grace until divine power saves him from himself. None ever turned to God except God turned him. By this time it should be quite apparent that the sinner lies entirely at God's disposal. If He sees fit to leave him in his sins, he is undone forever; yet God has a perfect right to do so Had He precipitated the whole race to hell, as He did the fallen angels the day they sinned, it would have been no excess of severity but simply an act of justice, for they deserved eternal damnation. In its ultimate analysis salvation is a matter of God's choice and not ours, for we are merely clay in His hands to be molded into a vessel of honor or dishonor entirely as He pleases (Rom. 9:21). Sinners are in the sovereign hand of God to save or to destroy according to His own will. That is His divine prerogative. "Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth" (Rom. 9:18). Far from offering any apology, He bids us observe and ponder that solemn fact: "See now that I, even I, am he, and there is no god with me: I kill, and I make alive; I wound, and I heal: neither is there any that can deliver out of my hand" (Deut. 32:39). Such a One is not to be spoken lightly about, but to be held in the utmost awe. In the very nature of the case, mercy is not something which can be claimed as a right—least of all from Him whom we have wronged far above all others—but lies entirely at the discretion of the one who is pleased to exercise it. Robert Erskine stated: "Because He is a sovereign God, infinitely happy in Himself without us, it is at His option to manifest mercy or not, to save or not, as much as it was His option to make man or not." "He doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, 'What doest thou?' (Dan. 4:35). Therefore He exercises sovereignty in His reason for showing mercy, because He "will shew mercy." God is sovereign not only as to the ones He saves, but as to the time, the instrument, and the means by which He saves them. Such teaching alone accords to God His proper place, as it likewise cuts away all ground for human merits and boasting; and at the same time it deepens the wonderment and gratitude of the redeemed. God can never act unjustly, but He can and does bestow His favors on whom He pleases, and in so doing exercises His high prerogative: "Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own?" (Matt. 20:15). The exemption of any sinner from everlasting condemnation is an act of sovereign mercy and free grace; therefore God consults none but exercises His own good pleasure as to those on whom He bestows this grace. "Many widows were in Israel in the days of Elias... when great famine was throughout all the land; but unto none of them was Elias sent, save unto Sarepta, a city of Sidon, unto a woman that was a widow. And many lepers were in Israel in the time of Eliseus the prophet; and none of them was cleansed, saving Naaman the Syrian" (Luke 4:25-27). If some are brought to believe in Christ, while others are left in their unbelief, it is sovereign grace alone which makes the one

differ from the other. And if it is right for God to make such a difference in time, it could not be wrong for Him to purpose doing so from eternity. They who balk at sovereign and unconditional election believe in neither the total depravity of man nor the God of the Bible. On the one hand, He hides these things from those who are wise and prudent in their own conceit. On the other, He reveals them to babes (Matt. 11:25). There cannot be an election without a rejection: "The one shall be taken, and the other left" (Matt. 24:40-41). "The election hath obtained it, and the rest were blinded" (Rom. 11:7). "Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated" (9:13). Inasmuch as the sinner's will is enslaved by sin, God must overcome his opposition before he will submit to Him. But both Scripture and observation make it evident that He does not bring all rebels into subjection, but only a favored few. As Psalm 110:3 declares, "Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power." Though "by nature the children of wrath, even as others" (Eph. 2:3), equally depraved and guilty, yet these few even in their unregenerate state are "God's people." They are His by sovereign election, His by eternal decree, His by covenant relationship. He loved them with an everlasting love (Jer. 31:3), chose them in Christ before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4), predestinated them to be conformed to the image of His Son (Rom. 8:29). Accordingly, in the day of His power He quickens them into newness of life, and puts the soul into a condition to receive the truth and cordially embrace it. That putting forth of divine power upon and within the "vessels of mercy" takes place at a definite season, for there is a select time for God to show favor to the members of Zion (Ps. 102:13). As the length of Israel's captivity in Babylon was so divinely fixed that none could any longer detain them when that time had expired, likewise must His elect be delivered from their bondage to sin and Satan when the appointed moment arrives. He who ordered the moment of our birth and death (Eccles. 3:2) does not leave us to decide the day of our conversion—still less whether we shall be converted or not. "Thy people shall be willing" to whom? To do what? Willing for that to which previously they were completely averse. Willing to submit their intellect wholly to God's Word, so that they receive with childlike simplicity all that is revealed there. Willing to lean no more to their own understanding, but to accept without question the mysteries of the faith. High imaginations and lofty reasonings against the knowledge of God are cast down, and every thought brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. Miracles which infidels scoff at, aspects of truth which critics term contradictory, precepts which run counter to the lusts of the flesh, are meekly accepted. The elect are willing to bow to God's way of salvation, so that they freely abandon their idols, renounce the world, repudiate all merits of their own, and come as empty-handed beggars, acknowledging themselves to be deserving only of hell. Willing to receive Christ as Prophet to instruct, as Priest to atone for their sins, as King to rule over them. Willing to receive Him as their Lord, to take His yoke upon them, to follow the example He has left them. Willing to bear reproach for His sake, to be given the cold shoulder, to be hated and persecuted. Willing to be on the side of the minority, to be cast out of the organized church if need be, to lay down their lives rather than deny Him. Obviously, a miracle of grace must be effected within them before they will choose what is so contrary to fallen human nature. That wonderful change from unwillingness to willingness is not the result of creature effort, but of divine operation; it is not of self-improvement, but the effect of God's work in the soul. Thus we read of "the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power" (Eph. 1:19)—That putting forth of His power does not violate man's constitution or responsibility. Instead of destroying the freedom of his will, it liberates it from its native bondage. God's people are not dragged to Christ, but drawn (John 6:44) by "bands of love" (Hosea 11:4). That action of His power has reference to that blessed time when the effectual inworking of the Spirit delivers the soul from the dominion of sin and Satan, when the influences of grace prevail over the corruptions of the flesh, when the Lord opens the heart to receive His Word (Acts 16:14), when the affections are turned from the world to Christ, and the soul gladly gives up itself to Him. This power is life-giving and liberating, and delivers from death in sin. It

communicates a new disposition which causes its recipient cordially to yield himself to God. This convincing power convicts the individual of his wickedness, wretchedness and need. God's power works in him "both to will and to do of his good pleasure" (Phil. 2:13). As the Christian reflects on all that this power has accomplished in him, he sings: O happy day that fixed my choice On Thee, my Saviour and my God! Well may this glowing heart rejoice, And tell its raptures all abroad.

'Tis done, the great transaction's done; I am my Lord's, and He is mine; He drew me, and I followed on, Charmed to confess the voice divine.

Marvel of Christ's Mediation The vile condition of mankind heightens the marvel of Christ's mediation. It was by no means incumbent upon God to recover those who had turned their backs on Him. As He was not obligated to prevent their defection, neither was He obliged to restore any of those who had revolted. 'When He permitted the whole human race to offend in Adam, had He left them to be buried in the ruins of their fall, to sink utterly beneath the weight of their iniquities, it would have been no undue severity on His part. He might well have reserved all men in those chains which they fully deserved, and left them to feed on the fruits of their evil doings, without lifting a finger for their deliverance. To go farther back, as God might forever have left men in their nothingness without bringing them into being, so He could have left them all in their contracted misery. There was no more reason why the Lord should save any of Adam's posterity than there was for Him to bring back the fallen angels to their original obedience and bliss. The blessedness of God Himself would have been no more infringed upon by the eternal destruction of our entire race than it was by the everlasting ruin of devils. It was wholly at God's own option whether He provided a Saviour or withheld Him. There was no reason why God should not have abandoned all mankind. He certainly was not bound in justice to intervene on their behalf, for as the righteous Governor of the world He might well have proceeded to uphold the majesty of His law by executing its penalty on the disobedient, thereby making them an example of vengeance to all other intelligences in the universe. Nor did His goodness oblige Him to rescue His refractory subjects from their misery, for He had previously given full proof of that goodness in their creation, as is still made manifest in the happiness enjoyed by all His loyal subjects. Nor did any consideration of His glory require that He should show them mercy. God's glory is not dependent on the manifestation of any one attribute, but on the manifestation of each in its proper time and place, and in full harmony with the others. God is glorified when He sends blessings on the righteous; He is equally glorified when He sends punishment on the wicked. 'What would the loss of this world be to Him in whose sight it is nothing, yes, less than nothing and vanity? The provision of a Saviour was a matter of His free grace, and grace is something which none can claim as a right. God was pleased to act in a manner which will cause both the holy angels and redeemed sinners forever to marvel and adore. His way of salvation is the wonder of all wonders, whether we consider the dignity of the Mediator's person, the nature of His work, the things it accomplished, or its beneficiaries. The Saviour was none other than the Lord of glory, the Coequal and the Beloved of the Father. His work necessitated a journey from heaven to earth, the assumption of human nature, being made under the law, and enduring unspeakable humiliation. It required Him to become the Man of sorrows, so that the whole of His life in this scene was one of suffering and grief. It involved His becoming the Substitute of His people; the iniquity of them all was placed upon Him, and He took the wages due them. It entailed laying down His life to ransom them, dying a cruel, shameful and accursed death, during which He was separated from God Himself. So infinitely meritorious and efficacious was Christ's death that it appeased the wrath of God against His people, satisfied every demand of His justice, removed the guilt of their transgressions from them as far as the East is from the West, conquered Satan and spoiled him of his dominion over them, procured the Spirit to quicken and indwell them, opened heaven for them so that they might have access to and fellowship

with God, ensured their preservation in time and fullness of joy for eternity. And on whose behalf did the Son of God suffer such awful indignities? Not for the fallen angels, whose original habitat was heaven, but for creatures of the earth who are but breathing dust and animated clay. These best of men compared with Christ are less in His sight than a worm is in ours. In Job 25:6 He actually terms them worms. It was for the unworthy, the unholy, the unlovely, that Christ's sacrifice was ordained. 'What an amazing thing that the Lord should set His heart on those who in their fallen estate were incapable of doing anything to please or honor Him. The objects of Christ's mediation were despicable not only in their beings but in their actions also. As man is nothing comparatively, so he can do nothing to glorify Christ, though he can do much to provoke and dishonor Him. How can one who is lame and blind walk or work, or one who is dead act? Such were the Lord's people when He entertained thoughts of mercy toward them: destitute of any good qualities or fruit, and lacking any spiritual principle or nature to yield one or the other. And after Christ has bestowed such a principle and nature on His people, they cannot act except as they are acted upon. They cannot stand, except as He upholds them. They cannot move unless He draws them. Christ must work all their works in them (Isa. 26:12). Man is not only impotent but poverty-stricken. He is nothing, can do nothing, has nothing. He not only has "no money" (Isa. 55:1) but is heavily in debt. He is in a famishing condition, feeding on nothing but wind and husks, on the vanities and pleasures of this world. He has nothing with which to cover his shame; though he may, like the Leodiceans, imagine himself to be rich and in need of nothing, yet in God's sight he is poor and naked. He cannot rightly say that his soul is his own, for he has given it over to Satan, sold himself to work wickedness. 'What a marvel that Christ should love such a forlorn creature! But more: man is not only a bankrupt spectacle but a hideous one. Poverty will not hinder love, especially if there is beauty; but who can admire deformity? Yet the sinner, in the eyes of holiness, is full of revolting loathsomeness. No human pen can depict the obnoxiousness of defiled man. He was created fair and very good, adorned with the beauty of God's image; but not only is all of that erased, but the horrible image of Satan has displaced it. Man's light has been turned into darkness, his comeliness into corruption; instead of a sweet savor there is a stench and burning instead of beauty (Isa. 3:24). That which makes the soul most unlovely is its being dead. 'When life expires all beauty expires with it. A dead soul is as repulsive to God as a dead body is to us. But men are not only hateful to Christ but haters of Him. They hate His person, His offices, His precepts. They hate His very image, and the more resemblance to Him any of His followers have the more they are detested. Yet there is not the least occasion of hatred in Christ. He is altogether lovely—divinely glorious, humanly perfect. Nor does He give any cause to be hated. All His administrations are righteous, so that His justice ought to be admired as much as His mercy. But men hate Christ with an unmixed hatred, without any degree of love, without the slightest inclination or tendency toward Him. This hatred was so deadly that when He was delivered into their hands they murdered Him. This hatred remains unvarying and inveterate, firmly rooted in men's hearts, expressed by continual acts of rebellion against God. 'What a truly amazing thing it is that Christ should voluntarily lay down His life for such creatures! Yet "when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son" (Rom. 5:10). Behold such love. Behold and wonder. Opposition to the Gospel The total depravity of all mankind explains the opposition which the gospel encounters. 'When one considers what the gospel is in itself—a message of good news to lost sinners—one would naturally suppose that it would be universally and cordially received. Will not those condemned to eternal damnation welcome a reprieve? Will not those dying from a deadly malady be glad to avail themselves of an effectual remedy? Will the naked scorn the garments of salvation, the poverty-stricken refuse the unsearchable riches of Christ, the famishing decline an invitation to a feast? One would not think so. The evangel contains the most illustrious display of the divine character which has ever been given to this world, and thus it is called "the glorious gospel of the blessed God" (I Tim. 1:11). It makes known to us

how divine wisdom has so perfectly adjusted His attributes that God can at the same time be both just and merciful in saving a hell-deserving sinner, that He can lavish on him the riches of grace without in any way compromising His holiness. Such a marvel is so far beyond human conception that it evidences itself to be truly divine. It is indeed "worthy of all acceptance." It announces the inestimable blessings of pardon, holiness and joy, and therefore should be cordially welcomed by all who hear it. The love of God which the gospel publishes, and the sufferings of Christ for sinners, ought to melt the hardest heart and cause every hearer fervently to cry, "Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift." This message of glad tidings proclaims peace. It tells of deliverance from condemnation, and promises eternal life to all who receive it. Yet the fact remains that the great majority of those who hear it are scarcely affected and obtain no lasting advantage to their souls; and that perplexes many Christians. But the total depravity of man fully explains that lamentable state. In a heart that is desperately wicked there is nothing whatever on which the gospel can seize that will evoke any echo to it. Its message is directly opposed to the opinions and inclinations of the fallen creature. If it informed men of how great worldly honors could be secured gratis, or how large sums of money could be obtained for nothing, it would be heartily welcomed. If it assured men how they could indulge their lusts with impunity and live in sin without fear of death and hell, it would indeed be good news to them. But a holy gospel does not appeal to them, being foreign to their tastes. If God were to leave men entirely to themselves in their response to the gospel, it would be universally rejected. There is a deeply rooted contrariety to God in man's very nature which makes them turn a deaf ear to His voice, though they are ready enough to listen to the least whisper of Satan. As there are plants which are attractive to the eye but poisonous to the stomach, so even though the gospel is a pleasant sound to the ear it is repulsive to a corrupt heart. The gospel requires men to renounce their own wisdom and become as little children, to repudiate their own righteousness and accept that of Another, to turn from self-pleasing and submit to the will of God. The gospel is designed to transform the inner man and regulate the outer man, and that is quite unacceptable to the unregenerate. No exhortations will reconcile a wolf and a lamb. No logical arguments will tame a fierce lion. Though man is a rational creature, he follows the promptings of his lusts rather than the dictates of his judgment. One who is wholly in love with sin and Satan does not desire to enter the service of Christ. To turn to God in Christ is altogether contrary to the stream of corrupt nature, and therefore it needs to be overcome by a flood of almighty grace, as the stream of the river is overcome by the tide of the sea. Certain writers represent the heart of fallen man as painfully conscious of its burden and sighing for deliverance. But the statement that the natural man is eager to escape from the ruin and degradation to which sin has reduced him is a figment of fancy, unsupported by a single fact of experience. The natural man does indeed encounter conflicts, yet his struggles are not for deliverance from indwelling corruption, but to escape the accusations of conscience. Man's misery is that he cannot sin without unpleasant consequences. There is nothing whatever in him that predisposes him to welcome the gospel or to give it joyful acceptance when it is made known to him. The heart of man is more unwilling to embrace the evangel than it is to acknowledge the equity of the law. Charnock stated: The Law puts man upon his own strength, the Gospel takes him off from his own footing. The Law acknowledges him to have a power in himself, and to act for his own reward; the Gospel strips him of all his proud and towering thoughts (2 Cor. 10:5), brings him to his due place, the foot of God, and orders him to deny himself as his own rule, righteousness, and end, and henceforth not to live unto himself (2 Cor. 5:14). This is the reason why men are more against the Gospel than against the Law: because it doth more deify God and debase man.

As there needed to be a forerunner for Christ to prepare the way before Him, so the Holy Spirit must first work upon the heart before it is ready to receive the gospel. Not until He renews the soul is any real sense of need awakened; and until its sickness is felt the great Physician is not desired. Before the heart has

been divinely prepared for its reception, the Word of God can find no permanent place in it. That is very evident from our Lord's parable of the sower, wherein He likened those who heard the Word to several kinds of ground. The seed sown was the same in each case. it was the soils that differed. The seed which fell by the wayside, on the stony ground and on the thorny ground was abortive. The heart has to be made "honest and good" (Luke 8:15) before there will be any increase or fruit. None but the Holy Spirit can produce in the soul a hatred of sin, and the desire to be saved from it because of its intrinsic vileness. Only because of the distinguishing and astonishing grace of God are any brought to repent and believe the gospel. One whose affections are chained to the things of earth cannot seek those things which are above. Nothing more clearly demonstrates the certainty of human depravity than the fact that without a special and divine operation no heart ever did or ever will savingly receive the gospel. In view of the total depravity of man we need not be the least surprised at what we observe in Christendom itself. A change of clothes effects no alteration in the character of the wearer, neither does a person, s taking on a profession of religion better his heart. It may indeed foster a spirit of hypocrisy, and cause him to take more pains to hide from the eyes of his fellowmen what he is by nature; but it will not cleanse his soul from indwelling sin. Thus, while there is more open wickedness in the profane world, there is far more secret and cloaked wickedness in the professing world. Error is bound to be much more popular than truth to the unregenerate; therefore, to make the truth in any way acceptable to them it has to be watered down, wrested and perverted. And there are always those who, for the sake of filthy lucre, are ready to perjure their souls. Hence heretical sects and systems abound on every side. 'What delusions are cherished about the character of God! 'What erroneous ideas are entertained about His way of salvation! 'What false opinions are held of man's dignity, greatness, free will, even by many who call themselves Christians! Because of the unbelief, selfishness and impiety of men's hearts, the false prophets, who speak smooth and flattering things, are assured of a ready hearing. Here, then, is the explanation of the babel of tongues which is now heard in Christendom. 'When the natural man takes it on him to handle the things of God, they are sure to be corrupted. How can those who are devoid of divine grace and in love with sin faithfully communicate the gospel which unsparingly condemns sin? For the same reason, those who are without true piety will prefer to hear and follow those whose preaching gives them the most license to gratify their carnality. Moreover, Satan will see to it that his emissaries cater to the worldly minded. What are Universalism and annihilationism but opiates to remove the dread of eternal punishment? 'What is Antinomianism, with its bald fatalism and repudiation of the moral law as the believer's rule of life, but an attempt to set aside the unpalatable truth of man's responsibility? What are the great majority of present-day "missions" and "revivals," with their musical attractions and sensational methods, but a pandering to those who love emotionalism and sensationalism? Higher criticism and modernism are simply devices to banish the authority of Holy Writ and get rid of the supernatural. Extreme Arminianism panders to human pride, for it is virtually the deification of man, making him the architect of his life and the determiner of his destiny. Infinite Patience of God The depravity of mankind makes evident the infinite patience of God. "The LORD is slow to anger, and great in power" (Nahum 1:3). How significant is the conjunction of those divine perfections! It is not because God is indifferent to men's wickedness that He does not speedily take vengeance on them; still less because He lacks the ability to do so God is not at the command of His passions as men are. He can restrain His anger when under great and just provocation to exercise it. His power over Himself is the cause of His slowness to execute wrath; nevertheless, His might to punish is as great as His patience to spare. What fearful provocations, insults and injuries God meets with daily from mankind. Charnock well states: How many millions of practical atheists breathe every day in God's air and live upon His bounty, who deserve to be inhabitants of hell rather than possessors of earth! An infinite holiness is opposed, and infinite justice provoked, yet an

infinite patience forbears the punishment, and infinite goodness relieves our wants.

What a wonder it is that God has protracted human history until now, and that He still "maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and unjust." Patience is as truly a divine attribute as are holiness, wisdom and faithfulness. What a mercy that God does not strike dead those who brazenly defy Him and take His holy name in vain! Why does He not suddenly cut off every blatant infidel, as He did Ananias and Sapphira? Why does He not cause the earth to open her mouth and swallow the persecutors of His people, as He did when Dathan and Abiram rebelled against Moses and Aaron? 'Why does He tolerate the countless abominations in Christendom which are being perpetrated under the holy name of Christ? Only one answer is possible: Because He endures "with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction" (Rom. 9:22). There are many ways in which the patience of God is manifested in this world. First, by publishing His vengeance before He strikes. "Because there is wrath, beware lest he take thee away with his stroke: then a great ransom cannot deliver thee" (Job 36:18), thereby affording them space to repent. Second, by delaying the judgments which He has threatened. Recall how long the ark was being prepared before He sent the great deluge (Gen. 6:3)! Third, in executing His judgments by degrees, as He sent plague after plague upon Egypt before He commissioned the angel of death to kill all her firstborn; and as the Shekinah glory departed slowly from apostate Israel, retiring stage by stage (Ezek. 9:3; 10:4, 19; 11:23), as though reluctant to leave. Consider how great our provocations against the Most High—against His authority and majesty. Consider how many are our transgressions against the law. Consider how long they have been continued. Each succeeding generation has been as bad as the former, or worse, "evil men and seducers waxing worse and worse." Consider how fearfully God is insulted and offended by the world's treatment of His gospel. He proclaims mercy to the worst of sinners, but they scoff at it. He entreats them to turn to Him that they may live, but they are determined to destroy themselves. 'What an indescribably dreadful state men must be in who prefer their idols to Christ, and have no desire to be saved from their sins! What proof of His long-suffering that God has already prolonged this day of salvation for almost five hundred years more than the Mosaic economy lasted! Yet far from appreciating such clemency the unregenerate misinterpret and abuse it. How it should astonish us that God not only preserves in this life such a multitude of monsters, but continues to spread their tables! Sure Wrath of God How clearly the depravity of mankind demonstrates the necessity for hell! What can be the future of stout-hearted rebels who throughout life defy their Maker and Ruler and die in impenitence? Shall such a Being be despised with impunity? If, by the common consent of all right-minded people, one who is guilty of treason against an earthly monarch is worthy of death, what punishment can be too great for those who prefer themselves to the King of kings, and daily invade His prerogatives? Sin is a challenge to the government of God, and insurrectionists must be dealt with. Sin has to be paid the wages which it has earned. Equity requires that each one should reap as he has sown. The time of God's patience has an end. He has wrath to punish as well as patience to bear. Because God is holy He hates all sin, and as the moral Governor it becomes Him to deal with revolters. How could He be the sum of all excellence were He to make no distinction between good and evil and to treat virtue and vice alike? Christ bade His hearers, "Fear him, which after he hath killed hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, Fear him" (Luke 12:5). He knew as none other did that God is the Enemy of sin and the Avenger of those who despise His counsels. God will yet fully vindicate His throne and make evident what a fearful thing it is to despise Him. It is right that He should display His governmental supremacy and subdue all those who rise up against Him. Though He "endures [not 'loves'] with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath, fitted to destruction," yet in the day to come He will show His wrath, and make known His power; and that wrath will be no greater than the mercy which men abused. The highest contempt merits the greatest anger, and it is fitting that those who refuse to make God their

happiness should be made to feel everlastingly the misery of their separation from Him. Eternal life and eternal death were plainly set before them, and since they chose the latter they cannot justly blame any but themselves when they are consigned to it. God's veracity requires Him to fulfill His threatenings; and His very goodness requires Him to separate eternally the wicked from the righteous, for the latter could not enjoy perfect peace and happiness if they lived forever with the reprobate. It is just that those who freely serve the devil should be cast into the same prison and tormented with him. How could those who hate God, whose very natures are averse to Him, be admitted into heaven? 'What must be the portion of those who would destroy the Deity were it in their power to do so? The total depravity of our race sheds much light on Providence. Many of God's dealings with men present insoluble riddles unto carnal reason. There is a divine handwriting on the wall of human affairs which, like that in Belshazzar's palace, is indecipherable by human wisdom. To those who are unacquainted with what is recorded in Genesis 3, God's ways with our race cannot but be most mysterious. But the whole subject is at once illumined when the doctrine of human depravity is understood. The whole brood of ills which now afflicts mankind has sprung from the pregnant womb of sin. The wrecked and wretched condition in which man now finds himself is the inevitable consequence of his fall. The frowning aspect of Providence which so often darkens this scene and appalls us receives its only adequate solution in the fact that Adam's offense fearfully changed the relation of God and the creature. Our nature being what it is, we cannot expect history to be written in any other inks than those of tears and blood. Hospitals and prisons, the discords and strifes among men, the warring between nations, unprincipled politicians, conscienceless preachers—all are the effects of the corruption of human nature. Here is the key to the problem of suffering. All the misery in the world proceeds from sin. But not only are the governmental ways of God with men what they are because of what the race is, they are also designed to make more evident the real character of fallen man. 'While Providence sets bounds to the exercise of human depravity, at the same time it permits sufficient manifestations thereof to leave no candid observer in doubt. God causes men to reveal what they are by suffering their insubjection to His law, their rejection of His gospel, their perverting of His truth, their persecutions of His people. How many others, who were regarded as upright, are by some sudden temptation shown to have been all along corrupt at heart. Many a merchant, lawyer, bank official, even minister of the gospel, who was highly respected is permitted to fall into open sin, that the long-cherished depravity of his soul might be exposed. How remarkably does Providence often bring to light the hidden things of darkness, as in the case of Abraham's deception, of Joseph's brethren's hatred, of Judah's secret sin, as well as Achan's and David's. Belief of this doctrine ought to have a beneficial effect on the children of God. A sense of our native depravity should engender deep humility. 'What a state we were in when God plucked us as brands from the burning! The realization of that ought to make us take and maintain a very lowly place before Him. "That thou mayest remember, and be confounded, and never open thy mouth any more [in self-praise] because of thy shame, when I am pacified toward thee for all that thou hast done, saith the Lord GOD" (Ezek. 16:63). We have no reason for being proud. That acknowledgment of Jacob's should be our constant confession: "I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which thou hast shewed unto thy servant" (Gen. 32:10). As we look back to the pit from which we were dug, what fervent praise and thanksgiving should be awakened in our hearts! How we should adore the One who opened our prison doors, for none but His hand could loose the bolts and open the many locks which held us captive. Our hearts should be melted and filled with wonderment at the amazing grace which has saved us from the dominion of Satan and made us kings and priests to God, which has elevated beggars to be "heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ." This solemnizing doctrine ought to convince the saint that he cannot keep himself alive. If, being a mutable creature, sinless Adam, when left to himself, brought about his destruction, how much more would the mutable believer,

with a fallen and corrupt nature still within him, unless an Almighty hand preserved him! So perverse are we by nature, and so weak as Christians, that without Christ we can do no good thing (John 15:5). Sustaining and preserving grace must be sought by us hourly. We are treading a slippery path and need to pray, "Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe" (Ps. 119:117). Finally, the knowledge of this truth ought to produce in us a spirit of complete dependence on God. How beautifully is that state depicted in the description given of the church: "Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness, leaning upon her beloved?" (Song of Sol. 8:5). So ignorant and wayward are we that "we know not what we should pray for as we ought" (Rom. 8:26). Only by the gracious operations of the Spirit are our affections raised above this world, is our faith strengthened, are we enabled to lay hold of a divine promise. So shut up are we to God that in all things He must work in us "both to will and to do of his good pleasure."

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