

The Total Depravity of Man Chapter 14

SUMMARY

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Transcript

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The Entrance of evil into the domain of God is admittedly a deep mystery, nevertheless sufficient is revealed in the Scriptures to prevent our forming erroneous views. For instance, it is contrary to the Word of truth to entertain the notion that either the fall of Satan and his angels or that of our first parents took God by surprise or wrecked His plans. For all eternity God designed that this earth should be the stage on which He would display His perfections: in creation, in providence and in redemption (I Cor. 4:9). Accordingly, He foreordained everything which comes to pass in this scene (Acts 15:18; Rom. 11:36; Eph. 1:11). God is not idly looking on from a far-distant world at the happenings of this earth, but is Himself ordering and shaping everything to the ultimate promotion of His glory—not only in spite of the opposition of men and Satan, but by means of them, everything being made to serve His purpose. Nor did the introduction of evil into the universe take place simply by the bare permission of the Most High, for nothing can come to pass that is contrary to His decreed will. Rather, for wise and holy reasons, God foreordained to allow His mutable creatures to fall, thereby affording an occasion for Him to make a further and fuller exhibition of His attributes. God's Overruling From God's standpoint the result of Adam's probation was left in no uncertainty. Before He formed him out of the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, He knew exactly how the appointed testing of Him would eventuate. But more: God had decreed that Adam should eat of the forbidden fruit. That is certain from I Peter 1:19-20, which tells us that the shedding of Christ's blood was verily "foreordained before the foundation of the world" (cf. Rev. 13:8). As Witsius rightly affirmed of Adam's sin, "If foreknown it was also predestinated: thus Peter joins together 'the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God' (Acts 2, 23)." In full harmony with that fact, note that it was God Himself who placed in Eden the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Moreover, as Twisse, the celebrated moderator of the Westminster Assembly, asked in 1653, "Did not the Devil provoke Eve and Adam to sin against God in paradise? Could not God have kept the Devil off? Why did He not? Doth it not manifestly appear that it was God's will to have them tempted, to have them provoked unto sin? And why not?" God overruled it for a higher manifestation of His glory. Just as without night we could not admire the beauty of day, so sin was necessary as a dark background on which the divine grace and mercy should shine forth more resplendently (Rom. 5:20). It has been asserted dogmatically by some that

God could not have prevented the fall of our first parents without reducing them to mere machines. It is argued that since the Creator endowed man with a free will he must be left entirely to his own volitions, that he cannot be coerced, still less compelled, without destroying his moral agency. That may seem to be good reasoning, yet it is refuted by Holy Writ. God declared to Abimelech concerning Abraham's wife, "I also withheld thee from sinning against me: therefore suffered I thee not to touch her" (Gen. 20:6). It is not impossible for God to exert His power over man without destroying his responsibility, for there is a case in point where He restricted man's freedom to do evil and prevented him from committing sin. In like manner, He prevented Balaam from carrying out the wicked desires of his heart (Num. 22:38; 23:3, 20). Also, He prevented kingdoms from making war on Jehoshaphat (II Chron. 17:10). Why, then, did not God exert His power and prevent Adam and Eve from sinning? Because their fall served His own wise and blessed designs. But does that make God the Author of sin? The culpable Author, no; for as Piscator long ago pointed out, "Culpability is failing to do what ought to be done." Clearly it was the divine will that sin should enter this world, or it would not have done so. God had the power to prevent it. Nothing ever comes to pass except what He has decreed. As John Gill said, "Though God's decree made Adam's fall infallibly necessary as to the event, yet not by way of efficiency, or by force and compulsion on the will." Nor did God's decree in any way excuse the wickedness of our first parents or exempt them from punishment. They were left entirely free to the exercise of their nature, and therefore were fully accountable and blameworthy for their actions. While the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and the solicitations of the serpent to eat its fruit were the occasion of their sinning, yet they were not the cause. That lay in their voluntarily ceasing to be in subjection to the will of their Maker and rightful Lord. God is the efficient Author of whatever works of holiness men perform, but He is not the Author of their sins. God's decree that sin should enter this world was a secret hid in Himself. Our first parents knew nothing of it, and that made all the difference so far as their responsibility was concerned. Had they been informed of the divine purpose and the certainty of its fulfillment by their actions, the case would have been radically altered. They were unacquainted with the Creator's secret counsels. What concerned them was God's revealed will, and that was quite plain. He had forbidden them to eat of a certain tree, and that was enough. But He went further, even warning Adam of the dire consequences which should follow his disobedience. Death would be the penalty. Thus, transgression on his part was without excuse. God created Adam morally "upright," without any bias toward evil. Nor did He inject any evil thought or desire into Eve. "God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man" (James 1:13). Instead, when the serpent came and tempted Eve, God caused her to remember His prohibition. Consider the wonderful wisdom of God, for though He had predestinated the fall of our first parents, yet in no sense was He the Instigator or Approver of their sins, and their accountability was left entirely unimpaired. These two things we must believe if the truth is not to be repudiated: that God has foreordained everything that comes to pass; that He is in no way blamable for any of man's wickedness, the criminality thereof being wholly his. The decree of God in no way infringes on man's moral agency, for it neither forces nor hinders man's will, though it orders and bounds its actions. Both the existence and operations of sin are subservient to the counsels of God's will, yet that does not lessen the evil of its nature or the guilt of its committers. Someone has said that though God does not esteem evil to be good, yet He accounts it good that evil should be. Nevertheless sin is that "abominable thing" (Jer. 44:4) which the holy One always hates. In connection with the crucifixion of Christ there was the agency of God (John 19:11; Acts 4:27-28), the agency of Satan (Gen. 3:13; Luke 22:53) and the agency of men. Yet God neither concurred nor cooperated with the internal actions of men's wills, charging them with the wickedness of their deed (Acts 2:23). God overrules evil for good (Gen. 45:8; P5. 76:10), and therefore He is as truly sovereign over sin and hell as He is over holiness and heaven. God's Perfect Plan God cannot will or do anything that is wrong: "The LORD is righteous in all his ways, and holy

in all his works" (Ps. 145:17). He therefore stands in no need whatsoever of vindication by any of His puny creatures. Yet even the finite mind, when illumined by the Spirit of truth, can perceive how God's admittance of evil into this world provided an occasion for Him to display His ineffable perfections in the fullest manner and to the greatest degree. He thus magnified Himself by bringing a clean thing out of an unclean, and by securing to Himself a return of praise from redeemed sinners such as He does not receive from the unfallen angels. Horrible and terrible beyond words was the revolt of man against his Maker, and fearful and total the ruin which it brought upon him and all his posterity. Nevertheless, the wisdom of God contrived a way to save a part of the human race in a manner by which He is more glorified than by all His works of creation and providence; also, the misery of sinners is made the occasion of their greater happiness. This is a never ending wonder. That way of salvation, determined and defined in the terms of the everlasting covenant of grace, was one by which each of the divine Persons is exceedingly honored. Jonathan Edwards long ago pointed out: Herein the work of redemption is distinguished from all the other works of God. The attributes of God are glorious in His other works; but the three persons of the Trinity are distinctly glorified in no other work as in this of redemption. In this work every distinct person has His distinct parts and offices assigned personal properties, relations, and economical offices. The redeemed have an equal concern with and dependence upon each person in this affair, and owe equal honour and praise to each of Them. The Father appoints and provides the Redeemer, and accepts the price of redemption. The Son is the Redeemer and the price—He redeems by offering up Himself. The Holy Spirit immediately communicates to us the thing purchased; yea, and He is the good purchased. The sum of what Christ purchased for us is holiness and happiness. Christ was "made a curse for us... that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith" (Gal. 3: 13, 14). The blessedness of the redeemed consists in partaking of Christ's fulness, which consists in partaking of that Spirit which is not given by measure unto Him. This is the oil that was poured upon the Head of the Church, which ran down to the members of His body (Psalm 133, 2). It is a serious mistake to regard the Lord Jesus as our Saviour to the exclusion of the saving operations of both the Father and the Spirit. Had not the Father eternally purposed the salvation of His people, chosen them in Christ and bestowed them on Him; had He not entered into an everlasting compact with Him, commissioned Him to become incarnate, and redeemed them, His Beloved never would have left heaven in order that He might die, the just for the unjust. Accordingly, we find that He who loved the world so much that He gave His only begotten Son has ascribed to Him the salvation of the church: "Who hath saved us, and called us... according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began" (II Tim. 1:9). Equally necessary are the operations of the Holy Spirit to actually apply to the hearts of God's elect the good of what Christ did for them. He is the One who convicts of sin and imparts faith to them. Therefore their salvation is also ascribed to Him: "God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth" (II Thess. 2:13). A careful reading of Titus 3:4-6 shows the three Persons acting together in this connection: "God our Saviour" in verse 4 is plainly the Father. "He saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost" (v.5), "which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour" (v. 6). Compare the doxology of II Corinthians 13:14. It is very profitable to ponder the many promises which the Father made to and respecting Christ. Upon the Son's acceptance of the exacting terms of the covenant of grace, the Father agreed to invest Him with a threefold office, thereby authenticating His mission with the broad seal of heaven: the prophetic office (Deut. 18:15, 18; cf. Acts 3:22), the priestly office (Heb. 5:5; 6:20) and the kingly office (Jer. 23:5; P5. 89:27). Thus Christ did not run without being sent. God the Father promised to furnish and equip the Mediator with a plentiful effusion of the graces and gifts of the Holy Spirit (Isa. 42:1-2; cf. Matt. 12:27; Acts 10:38). He promised to strengthen Christ, supporting and protecting Him in His execution of the

tremendous work of redemption (Isa. 42:1, 6; Ps. 89:21). This undertaking would be attended with such difficulties that creature power, though unimpaired by sin, would have been quite inadequate for it. Therefore the Father assured Christ of all needed help and power to carry Him through the opposition and trials He would encounter. Note how the incarnate Son rested upon those promises (Ps. 16:1; 22:10; Isa. 50:6-8; 69:4-7). The Father promised to raise the Messiah from the dead (Ps. 21:8; 102:23-24; Isa. 53:10), and it is blessed to observe how Christ laid hold of the promise (Ps. 16:8-11). Promise of His ascension was also made to Christ (Ps. 24:3, 7; 68:18; 89:27; Isa. 52:13). That promise too was appropriated by the Saviour while still on earth (Luke 24:26). Having faithfully fulfilled the terms of the covenant, Christ was highly exalted by God, and made to be Lord and Christ (Acts 2:36), God seating Him at His own right hand. That is an economical lordship, a dispensation committed to Christ as the God-Man. God has crowned with glory and honor the One whom men crowned with thorns. The "government" is upon His shoulder. Christ was assured of a "seed" (Isa. 53:10). His crucifixion must not be regarded as a dishonor to Him, since it was the very means ordained of God whereby He should propagate numerous spiritual progeny. He referred to this in John 12:24. The "seed" promised Christ occupies a prominent place in Psalm 89 (see vv. 3-4, 29-36; cf. 22:30). Thus, from the outset Christ was assured of the success of His undertaking. As there were two parts to the covenant, so the elect were given to Christ in a twofold manner. As He was to fulfill its terms, they were entrusted to Him as a charge; but in fulfillment of the covenant, the Father promised to bestow them on Him as a reward. In the former sense, they were regarded as fallen, and Christ was held responsible for their salvation. They were committed to Him as lost and straying sheep (Isa. 53:6) whom He must seek out and bring into the fold (John 10:16). In the latter sense, they are viewed as the fruit of His travail, the trophies of His victory over sin, Satan and death; as His crown of rejoicing in the day to come, when He shall be "glorified in his saints, and admired in all them that believe" (II Thess. 1:10); as the beloved wife of the Lamb. Finally, God made promise of the Holy Spirit to Christ. The Spirit was with Christ during the days of His flesh, anointing Him to preach the gospel (Isa. 61:1) and work miracles (Matt. 12:28). But He received the Spirit in another manner (Ps. 45:7; Acts 2:33) and for a different purpose after His ascension. He, as the God-Man Mediator, was given the administration of the Spirit's activities and operations toward the world in providence and toward the church in grace. John 7:39 and 16: 7 make it clear that the Spirit's advent was dependent on Christ's exaltation. That assurance was also appropriated by Christ before He left this scene. On the point of His departure, He said to His disciples, "Behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you" (Luke 24:49), which was duly accomplished ten days later. In full accord with what has just been pointed out, we hear the Saviour saying from heaven, "These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God" (Rev. 3:1). He "hath," to communicate to His redeemed individually and to His churches corporately. The grand design in the Spirit's descent to this earth was to glorify Christ (John 16:14). He is here to witness to the Saviour's exaltation, Pentecost being God's seal upon the Messiahship of Jesus. The Spirit is here to take Christ's place. That is clear from Christ's words to the apostles: "I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever" (John 14:16). Until then the Lord Jesus had been their Comforter, but He was on the eve of returning to heaven. Nevertheless, He graciously assured them, "I will not leave you orphans: I will come to you" (John 14:18, margin). This promise was fulfilled spiritually in the advent of His Deputy. The Spirit is here to further Christ's cause. The word Paraclete (translated "Comforter" in John's gospel) is rendered "advocate" at the beginning of the second chapter of his first epistle, and an advocate is one who appears as the representative of another. The Spirit is here to interpret and vindicate Christ, to administer for Christ in His kingdom and church. He is here to make good His redeeming purpose, by applying the benefits of His sacrifice to those in whose behalf it was offered. He is here to endue Christ's servants (Luke 24:49). It is of first importance to recognize and realize that

the Lord Jesus obtained for God's people not only redemption from the penal consequences of sin, but also their personal sanctification. How little this is emphasized today. In far too many instances those who think and speak of the "salvation" which Christ has purchased attach no further idea to the concept than that of deliverance from condemnation, omitting deliverance from the love, dominion and power of sin. But the latter is no less essential, and is as definite a blessing as the former. It is just as necessary for fallen creatures to be delivered from the pollution and moral impotence which they have contracted as it is to be exempted from the penalties which they have incurred, so that when reinstated in the favor of God they may at the same time be capacitated to love, serve and enjoy Him forever. And in this respect also the divine remedy meets all the requirements of our sinful malady (see II Cor. 5:15; Eph. 5:25-27; Titus 2:14; Heb. 9:14). This is accomplished by the gracious operations of Christ's Spirit, begun in regeneration, continued throughout their earthly lives, consummated in heaven. God's Honor Not only is the triune God more honored by redemption than He was dishonored by the defection of His creatures, but His people also are greatly the gainers. That too magnifies the divine wisdom. It would have been wonderful indeed had they been merely restored to their original state; but it is far more wonderful that they should be brought to a much higher state of blessedness—that the fall should be the occasion of their exaltation! Their sin deserved eternal wretchedness, yet everlasting bliss is their portion. They are now favored with a greater manifestation of the glory of God and a fuller discovery of His love than they would have had otherwise, and in those two things their happiness principally consists. They are brought into a much closer and endearing relation to God. They are now not merely holy creatures but heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ. The Son having taken their nature upon Him, they have become His "brethren," members of His body, His spouse. They are thereby provided with more powerful motives and inducements to love and serve Him than they had in their unfallen condition. The more of God's love we apprehend, the more we love Him in return. Throughout eternity the knowledge of God's love in giving His dear Son to and for us, and Christ's dying in our stead, will fix our hearts upon Him in a manner which His favors to Adam never could have done. It is in the gospel that the wonderful remedy for all our ills is made known. That glorious gospel proclaims that Christ is able to save to the uttermost them that come to God by Him. It tells us that the Son of Man came to seek and to save that which was lost. It announces that sinners, even the chief of sinners, are the ones that are freely invited to come. It publishes liberty to Satan's captives and the opening of doors to sin's prisoners. It reveals that God has chosen the greatest of sinners to be the everlasting monuments of His mercy. It declares that the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanses believers from all sin. It furnishes hope to the most hopeless cases. The miracles which Christ performed in the bodies of men were types of His miracles of grace on sinners' souls. No case was beyond His healing. He not only gave sight to the blind and cleansing to the leper, but delivered the demon-possessed and bestowed life on the dead. He never refused a single appeal made to His compassion. Whatever the sinner's record, if he will trust in the atoning sacrifice of Christ he will be saved, now and forever.

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