

Total Depravity by *Loraine Boettner*

1. STATEMENT OF THE DOCTRINE

IN the Westminster Confession the doctrine of Total Inability is stated as follows: — “Man, by his fall into a state of sin, hath wholly lost all ability of will to any spiritual good accompanying salvation; so as a natural man, being altogether averse from good, and dead in sin, is not able, by his own strength, to convert himself, or to prepare himself thereunto.”¹

Paul, Augustine, and Calvin have as their starting point the fact that all mankind sinned in Adam and that all men are “without excuse,” Rom. 2:1. Time and again Paul tells us that we are dead in trespasses and sins, estranged from God, and helpless. In writing to the Ephesian Christians he reminded them that before they received the Gospel they were “separate from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of the promise, having no hope and without God in the world,” 2:12. There we notice the five-fold emphasis as he piles phrase on top of phrase to stress this truth.

2. THE EXTENT AND EFFECTS OF ORIGINAL SIN

This doctrine of Total Inability, which declares that men are dead in sin, does not mean that all men are equally bad, nor that any man is as bad as he could be, nor that any one is entirely destitute of virtue, nor that human nature is evil in itself, nor that man’s spirit is inactive, and much less does it mean that the body is dead. What it does mean is that since the fallen man rests under the curse of sin, that he is actuated by wrong principles, and that he is wholly unable to love God or to do anything meriting salvation. His corruption is extensive but not necessarily intensive.

It is in this sense that man since the fall “is utterly indisposed, disabled, and made opposite to all good, and wholly inclined to all evil.” He possesses a fixed bias of the will against God, and instinctively and willingly turns to evil. He is an alien by birth, and a sinner by choice. The inability under which he labors is not an inability to exercise volitions, but an inability to be willing to exercise holy volitions. And it is this phase of it which led Luther to declare that “Free-will is an empty term, whose reality is lost. And a lost liberty, according to my grammar, is no liberty at all.”² In matters pertaining to his salvation, the unregenerate man is not at liberty to choose between good and evil, but only to choose between greater and lesser evil, which is not properly free will. The fact that fallen man still has ability to do certain acts morally good in themselves does not prove that he can do acts meriting salvation, for his motives may be wholly wrong.

Man is a free agent but he cannot originate the love of God in his heart. His will is free in the sense that it is not controlled by any force outside of himself. As the bird with a broken wing is “free” to fly but not able, so the natural man is free to come to God but not able. How can he repent of his sin when he loves it? How can he come to God when he hates Him? This is the inability of the will under which man labors. Jesus said, “And this is the judgment, that light is come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the light; for their works were evil,” John 3:19; and again, “Ye will not come to me, that ye may have life,” John 5:40. Man’s ruin lies mainly in his own perverse will. He cannot come because he will not. Help enough is provided if he were only willing to accept it. Paul tells us, “The carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can it be. So they that are in the flesh cannot please God,” Rom. 8:7.

To assume that because man has ability to love he therefore has ability to love God, is about as wise as to assume that since water has the ability to flow, it therefore has the ability to flow up hill; or to reason that because a man has power to cast himself from the top of a precipice to the bottom, he therefore has equal power to transport himself

from the bottom to the top.

Fallen man sees nothing desirable in "the One who is altogether lovely, the fairest among ten thousand." He may admire Jesus as a man, but he wants nothing to do with Him as God, and he resists the outward holy influences of the Spirit with all his power. Sin, and not righteousness, has become his natural element so that he has no desire for salvation.

Man's fallen nature gives rise to a most obdurate blindness, stupidity, and opposition concerning the things of God. His will is under the control of a darkened understanding, which puts sweet for bitter, and bitter for sweet, good for evil, and evil for good. So far as his relations with God are concerned, he wills only that which is evil, although he wills it freely. Spontaneity and enslavement actually exist together.

In other words, fallen man is so morally blind that he uniformly prefers and chooses evil instead of good, as do the fallen angels or demons. When the Christian is completely sanctified he reaches a state in which he uniformly prefers and chooses good, as do the holy angels. Both of these states are consistent with freedom and responsibility of moral agents.

Yet while fallen man acts thus uniformly he is never compelled to sin, but does it freely and delights in it. His dispositions and desires are so inclined, and he acts knowingly and willingly from the spontaneous motion of the heart. This natural bias or appetite for that which is evil is characteristic of man's fallen and corrupt nature, so that, as Job says, he "drinketh iniquity like water," 15:16.

We read that "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit, for they are foolishness to him; neither can he know them, for they are spiritually discerned," I Cor. 2:14. We are at a loss to understand how any one can take a plain common sense view of this passage of Scripture and yet contend for the doctrine of human ability. Man in his natural state cannot even see the kingdom of God; much less can he get into it. An uncultured person may see a beautiful work of art as an object of vision, but he has no appreciation of its excellence. He may see the figures of a complex mathematical equation, but they have no meaning for him. Horses and cattle may see the same beautiful sunset or other phenomenon in nature that men see, but they are blind to all of the artistic beauty. So it is when the Gospel of the cross is presented to the unregenerate man. He may have an intellectual knowledge of the facts and doctrines of the Bible, but he lacks all spiritual discernment of their excellence, and finds no delight in them. The same Christ is to one man without form or comeliness that he should desire Him; to another He is the Prince of life and the Savior of the world, God manifest in the flesh, whom it is impossible not to adore, love and obey.

This total inability, however, arises not merely from a perverted moral nature, but also from ignorance. Paul wrote that the Gentiles "walk in the vanity of their mind, being darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardening of their heart," Eph. 4:17, 18. And again, "The word of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us who are saved it is the power of God," I Cor. 1:18. When he wrote of "Things which eye saw not, and ear heard not, And which entered not into the heart of man, Whatsoever things God hath prepared for them that love Him," he had reference, not to the glories of the heavenly state as is commonly supposed, but to the spiritual realities in this life which cannot be seen by the unregenerate mind, as is made plain by the words of the following verse: "But unto us God revealed them through the Spirit," I Cor. 2:9, 10. On one occasion Jesus said, "No one knoweth the Son, save the Father; neither doth any know the Father save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son willeth to reveal Him," Matt. 11:27. Here we are plainly told that man in his unregenerate, unenlightened nature does not know God in any sense worthy the name, and that the Son is sovereign in choosing who shall come into this saving knowledge of God.

Fallen man then lacks the power of spiritual discernment. His reason or understanding is blinded, and the taste and feelings are perverted. And since this state of mind is innate, as a condition of man's nature, it is beyond the power of the will to change it. Rather it controls both the affections and volitions. The effect of regeneration is clearly taught in the divine commission which Paul received at his conversion when he was told that he was to be sent to the

Gentiles “to open their eyes, that they might turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan unto God,” Acts 26:18.

Jesus taught the same truth under a different figure when He said to the Pharisees, “Why do ye not understand my speech? Even because ye cannot hear my word. Ye are of your father the Devil, and the lusts of your father it is your will to do,” John 8:43, 44. They could not understand, nor even hear His words in any intelligible way. To them His words were only foolishness, madness; and they accused Him of being demon possessed (vss. 48, 52). Only His disciples could know the truth (vss. 31, 32); the Pharisees were children of the Devil (vss. 42, 44), and bondservants of sin (vs. 34), although they thought themselves free (vs. 33).

At another time Jesus taught that a good tree could not bring forth evil fruit, nor an evil tree good fruit. And since in this similitude the good and evil trees represent good and evil men, what does it mean but that one class of men is governed by one set of basic principles, while the other class is governed by another set of basic principles? The fruits of these two trees are acts, words, thoughts, which if good proceed from a good nature, and if evil proceed from an evil nature. It is impossible, then, for one and the same root to bring forth fruit of different kinds. Hence we deny the existence in man of a power which may act either way, on the logical ground that both virtue and vice cannot come out of the same moral condition of the agent. And we affirm that human actions which relate to God proceed either out of a moral condition which necessarily produces good actions or out of a moral condition which necessarily produces evil actions.

“In the Epistle to the Ephesians Paul declares that prior to the quickening of the Spirit of God each individual soul lies dead in trespasses and sins. Now it will surely be admitted that to be dead, and to be dead in sin, is clear and positive evidence that there is neither aptitude nor power remaining for the performance of any spiritual action. If a man were dead, in a natural and physical sense, it would at once be readily granted that there is no further possibility of that man being able to perform any physical actions. A corpse cannot act in any way whatever, and that man would be reckoned to have taken leave of his senses who asserted that it could. If a man is dead spiritually, therefore, it is surely equally as evident that he is unable to perform any spiritual actions, and thus the doctrine of man’s moral inability rests upon strong Scriptural evidence.”³

“On the principle that no clean thing can come out of what is unclean (Job 14:4), all that are horn of woman are declared ‘abominable and corrupt,’ to whose nature iniquity alone is attractive (Job 15:14-16). Accordingly, to become sinful, men do not wait until the age of accountable action arrives. Rather, they are apostates from the womb, and as soon as they are born go astray, speaking lies (Ps. 58:3); they are even shapen in iniquity, and conceived in sin (Ps. 51:5). The propensity of their heart is evil from their youth (Gen. 8:21), and it is out of the heart that all the issues of life proceed (Prov. 4:23; 20:11). Acts of sin are therefore but the expression of the natural heart, which is deceitful above all things and exceedingly corrupt (Jer. 17:9).”⁵

Ezekiel presents this same truth in graphic language and gives us the picture of the helpless infant which was cast out in its blood and left to die, but which the Lord graciously found and cared for (Ch. 16).

This doctrine of original sin supposes that fallen men have the same kind and degree of liberty in sinning under the influence of a corrupt nature as have the Devil and the demons, or that the saints in glory and the holy angels have in acting rightly under the influence of a holy nature. That is, men and angels act according to their natures. As the saints and angels are confirmed in holiness, — that is, possessed of a nature which is wholly inclined to righteousness and adverse to sin, — so the nature of fallen men and of demons is such that they cannot perform a single act with right motives toward God. Hence the necessity that God shall sovereignly change the person’s character in regeneration.

The Old Testament ceremonies of circumcision of the new-born child, and of purification of the mother, were designed to teach that man comes into the world sinful, that since the fall human nature is corrupt in its very origin.

Paul stated this truth in another and, if possible, even stronger way in II Cor. 4:3, 4: “And if our Gospel is veiled it is veiled to them that perish; in whom the god of this world (by which he means the Devil) hath blinded the minds of the unbelieving, that the light of the Gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should not dawn upon them.” In a word, then, fallen men without the operations of the Spirit of God are under the rule of Satan. They are led captive by him at his will, II Tim. 2:26. So long as this “strong man fully armed” is not molested by the “stronger than he,” he keeps his kingdom in peace and his captives willingly do his bidding. But the “stronger than he” has overcome him, has taken his armor from him, and has liberated a part of his captives (Luke 11:21, 22). God now exercises the right of releasing whom He will; and all born-again Christians are ransomed sinners from that kingdom.

The Scriptures declare that fallen man is a captive, a willing slave to sin, and entirely unable to deliver himself from its bondage and corruption. He is incapable of understanding, and much less of doing, the things of God. There is what we might term “the freedom of slavery,” — a state in which the subject is free only to do the will of his master, which in this case is sin. It was this to which Jesus referred when He said, “Every one that committeth sin is the bondservant of sin,” John 8:34.

And such being the depth of man’s corruption, it is wholly beyond his own power to cleanse himself. His only hope of an amendment of life lies accordingly in a change of heart, which change is brought about by the sovereign recreative power of the Holy Spirit who works when and where and how He pleases. As well might one attempt to pump a leaking ship while the leak is still unattended, as to reform the unregenerate without this inward change. Or as well might the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots, as he who is accustomed to do evil correct his ways. This transfer from spiritual death to spiritual life we call “regeneration.” It is referred to in Scripture by various terms: “regeneration,” a “making alive,” a “calling out of darkness into light,” a “quickening,” a “renewing,” a taking away of the heart of stone and giving the heart of flesh, etc., which work is exclusively that of the Holy Spirit. As a result of this change a man comes to see the truth and gladly accepts it. His very instincts and intimate impulses are transferred to the side of law, obedience to which becomes but the spontaneous expression of his nature. Regeneration is said to be wrought by that same supernatural power which God wrought in Christ when He raised Him from the dead (Eph. 1:18-20). Man does not possess the power of self-regeneration, and until this inward change takes place, he cannot be convinced of the truth of the Gospel by any amount of external testimony. “If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded if one rise from the dead.”

3. THE DEFECTS IN MAN’S COMMON VIRTUES

The unregenerate man can, through common grace, love his family and he may be a good citizen. He may give a million dollars to build a hospital, but he cannot give even a cup of cold water to a disciple in the name of Jesus. If a drunkard, he may abstain from drink for utilitarian purposes, but he cannot do it out of love for God. All of his common virtues or good works have a fatal defect in that his motives which prompt them are not to glorify God, — a defect so vital that it throws any element of goodness as to man wholly into the shade. It matters not how good the works may be in themselves, for so long as the doer of them is out of harmony with God, none of his works are spiritually acceptable. Furthermore, the good works of the unregenerate have no stable foundation, for his nature is still unchanged; and as naturally and as certainly as the washed sow returns to her wallowing in the mire, so he sooner or later returns to his evil ways.

In the realm of morals it is a rule that the morality of the man must precede the morality of the action. One may speak with the tongues of men and of angels; yet if he is lacking that inward principle of love toward God, he is become as sounding brass, or a clanging cymbal. He may give all his goods to feed the poor, and may give his body to be burned; yet if he lacks that inward principle, it profits him nothing. As human beings we know that an act of service rendered to us (by whatever utilitarian motives prompted) by someone who is at heart our enemy, does not merit our love and approbation. The Scripture statement that “Without faith it is impossible to be well-pleasing unto God,” finds its explanation in this, that faith is the foundation of all the other virtues, and nothing is acceptable to

God which does not flow from right feelings.

A moral act is to be judged by the standard of love to God, which love is, as it were, the soul of all other virtue, and which is bestowed upon us only through grace. Augustine did not deny the existence of natural virtues, such as moderation, honesty, generosity, which constitute a certain merit among men; but he drew a broad line of distinction between these and the specific Christian graces (faith, love and gratitude to God, etc.), which alone are good in the strict sense of the word, and which alone have value before God.

This distinction is very plainly illustrated in an example given by W D. Smith. Says he:

In a gang of pirates we may find many things that are good in themselves. Though they are in wicked rebellion against the laws of the government, they have their own laws and regulations, which they obey strictly. We find among them courage and fidelity, with many other things that will recommend them as pirates. They may do many things, too, which the laws of the government require, but they are not done because the government has so required, but in obedience to their own regulations. For instance, the government requires honesty and they may be strictly honest, one with another, in their transactions, and the division of all their spoil. Yet, as respects the government, and the general principle, their whole life is one of the most wicked dishonesty. Now, it is plain, that while they continue in their rebellion they can do nothing to recommend them to the government as citizens. Their first step must be to give up their rebellion, acknowledge their allegiance to the government, and sue for mercy. So all men, in their natural state, are rebels against God; and though they may do many things which the law of God requires, and which will recommend them as men, yet nothing is done with reference to God and His law. Instead, the regulations of society, respect for public opinion, self-interest, their own character in the sight of the world, or some other worldly or wicked motive, reigns supremely; and God, to whom they owe their heart and lives, is forgotten; or, if thought of at all, His claims are wickedly rejected, His counsels spurned, and the heart, in obstinate rebellion, refuses obedience. Now it is plain that while the heart continues in this state the man is a rebel against God, and can do nothing to recommend him to His favor. The first step is to give up his rebellion, repent of his sins, turn to God, and sue for pardon and reconciliation through the Savior. This he is unwilling to do, until he is made willing. He loves his sins, and will continue to love them, until his heart is changed.

Smith continues,

The good actions of unregenerate men, are not positively sinful in themselves, but sinful from defect. They lack the principle which alone can make them righteous in the sight of God. In the case of the pirates it is easy to see that all their actions are sin against the government. While they continue pirates, their sailing, mending, or rigging the vessel, and even their eating and drinking, are all sins in the eyes of the government, as they are only so many expedients to enable them to continue their piratical career, and are parts of their life of rebellion. So with sinners. While the heart is wrong, it vitiates everything in the sight of God, even their most ordinary occupations; for the plain, unequivocal language of God is, 'Even the lamp of the wicked, is sin,' Prov. 21:4."⁵

It is this inability which the Scriptures teach when they declare that "They that are in the flesh cannot please God," Rom. 8:8; "Whatsoever is not of faith is sin," Rom. 14:23; and "Without faith it is impossible to be well-pleasing to Him," Heb. 11:6. Hence even the virtues of the unregenerate man are but as plucked and fading flowers. It was because of this that Jesus said to His disciples, "Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven." And because those virtues are of this nature, they are only temporary. The one who possesses them is like the seed which falls on the stony soil, which perhaps springs up with promise of fruitage, but soon withers in the sun because it has no root in itself.

It follows also from what has been said that salvation is ABSOLUTELY AND SOLELY OF GRACE, — that God is free, in consistency with the infinite perfections of His nature, to save none, few, many, or all, according to the sovereign good pleasure of His will. It also follows that salvation is not based on any merits in the creature, and that it depends on God, and not on men, who are, and who are not, to be made partakers of eternal life. God acts as a

sovereign in saving some and passing by others who are left to the just recompense of their sins. Sinners are compared to dead men, or even to dry bones in their entire helplessness. In this they are all alike. The choice of some to eternal life is as sovereign as if Christ were to pass through a graveyard and bid one here and another there to come forth, the reason for restoring one to life and leaving another in his grave could be found only in His good pleasure, and not in the dead themselves. Hence the statement that we are foreordained according to the good pleasure of His will, and not after the good inclinations of our own; and in order that we might be holy, not because we were holy (Eph. 1:4, 5). "Since all men alike deserved only God's wrath and curse, the gift of His only begotten Son to die in the stead of malefactors, as the only possible method of expiating their guilt, is the most stupendous exhibition of undeserved favor and personal love that the universe has ever witnessed."⁶

4. THE FALL OF MAN

The fall of the human race into a state of sin and misery is the basis and foundation of the system of redemption which is set forth in the Scriptures, as it is the basis and foundation of the system which we teach. Only Calvinists seem to take the doctrine of the fall very seriously. Yet the Bible from beginning to end declares that man is ruined — totally ruined — that he is in a state of guilt and depravity from which he is utterly unable to deliver himself, and that God might in justice have left him to perish. In the Old Testament the narrative concerning the fall is found in the third chapter of Genesis; and in the New Testament direct references are made to it in Romans 5:12-21; I Cor. 15:22; II Cor. 11:3; I Tim. 2:13, 14, etc., although the New Testament emphasizes not the historic fact that man fell, but the ethical fact that he is fallen. The New Testament writers interpreted it literally and based their theology upon it. To Paul Adam was as real as Christ, the fall as real as the atonement. It may be maintained that the apostles were in error, but that this was their position cannot be denied.

Dr. A. A. Hodge has given us a very good statement of the doctrine of the fall which we shall take the privilege of quoting: —

As a fair probation could not, in the nature of the case, be given to every new member in person as it comes into existence an undeveloped infant, God, as guardian of the race and for its best interests, gave all its members a trial in the person of Adam under the most favorable circumstances making him for that end the representative and personal substitute of each one of his natural descendants. He formed with him a covenant of works and of life; i.e., He gave to him for himself, and in behalf of all whom he represented, a promise of eternal life, conditioned upon perfect obedience, — that is, upon works. The obedience demanded was a specific test for a temporary period, which period of trial must necessarily be closed either by the reward consequent upon obedience, or the death consequent upon disobedience. The 'reward' promised was eternal life, which was a grace including far more than was originally bestowed upon Adam at his creation, the grant of which would have elevated the race into a condition of indefeasible holiness and happiness for ever. The 'penalty' threatened and executed was death: 'The day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.' The nature of the death threatened can be determined only from a consideration of all that was involved in the curse actually inflicted. This we know to have included the instant withdrawal of the divine favor and spiritual intercommunion upon which man's life depended. Hence the alienation and curse of God; the sense of guilt and corruption of nature; consequent actual transgressions, the miseries of life, the dissolution of the body, the pains of hell.⁷

The consequences of Adam's sin are all comprehended under the term **death**, in its widest sense. Paul gives us the summary statement that "The wages of sin is death." The full import of the death which was threatened to Adam can only be seen by considering all the evil consequences which have since befallen man. It was primarily spiritual death, or eternal separation from God, which was threatened; and physical death, or the death of the body, is but one of the first fruits and relatively unimportant consequences of that greater penalty. Adam did not die physically for 930 years after the fall, but he did die spiritually the very moment he fell into sin. He died just as really as the fish dies when taken from the water, or as the plant dies when taken from the soil.

In general we cherish a very wrong idea as to how Adam fell. . . . Adam was not tempted by Satan in a direct way. . .

. Eve was tempted by Satan, and Eve fell, being deceived. But we have inspired evidence to prove that Adam was not deceived (I Tim. 2:14). He was caught by no wiles of Satan, but that which he did, he did wilfully and deliberately. And in the full consciousness of what he was doing, and with a perfect realization of the solemn consequences which were involved, he deliberately chose to follow his wife in her act of sinful disobedience. It was this deliberate wilfulness of man's sin which constituted its heinous character. Had he been attacked by Satan, and forced to yield through some overwhelming power being brought against him, we might have tried to find some excuse for his fall. But when, with eyes wide open, and with mind perfectly conscious and fully aware of the awful nature of his act, he used his free will to respond to the claims of the creature in defiance of the Creator, no excuse can be found for his fall. His act, in reality, was wilful, defiant rebellion, and by it he openly transferred his allegiance from God to Satan.⁸

And has there not been a fall — a fearful fall? The more we see of human nature as it is manifested in the world about us, the easier it is to believe in this great doctrine of original sin. Consider the world as a whole, filled as it is with murders, robberies, drunkenness, wars, broken homes, and crimes of all kinds. The thousand ingenious forms which crime and vice have assumed in the hands of regular practitioners are all tokens telling a fearful tale. A large portion of the human race today, as in all past ages, is left to live and die in the darkness of heathenism, hopelessly astray from God. Modernism and denial of every kind is rampant even in the Church. Even the religious press, so called, is strongly tinged with unbelief. Observe the general disinclination to pray, or to study the Bible, or to speak of spiritual things. Is not man now, as his progenitor Adam, fleeing from the presence of God, not wanting communion with Him, and with enmity in his heart for his Creator? Surely man's nature is radically wrong. The daily newspaper accounts of events, even in such an enlightened land as America, show that man is sinful, lost from God, and actuated by unholy principles. And the only adequate explanation of all this is that the penalty of death, which was threatened on man before the fall, now rests on the human race.

We live in a lost world, a world which if left to itself would fester in its corruption from eternity to eternity, — a world reeking with iniquity and blasphemy. The effects of the fall are such that man's will in itself tends only downward to acts of sin and folly. As a matter of fact God does not permit the race to become as corrupt as it naturally would if left to itself. He exercises restraining influences, inciting men to love one another, to be honest, philanthropic, and considerate of each other's welfare. Unless God exercised these influences, wicked men would become worse and worse, overlapping conventions and social barriers, until the very zenith of lawlessness would soon be reached, and the earth would become so utterly corrupt that the elect could not live on it.

5. THE REPRESENTATIVE PRINCIPLE

It is easy for us to understand how a person may act through a representative. The people of a state act in and through their representatives in the Legislature. If a country has a good president or king, all of the people share the good results; if a bad president or king, all suffer the consequences. In a very real sense parents stand representative for, and to a large extent decide the destinies of, their children. If the parents are wise, virtuous, thrifty, the children reap the blessings; but if they are indolent and immoral the children suffer. In a thousand ways the well-being of individuals is conditioned by the acts of others, so inwrought is this representative principle into our human life. Hence in the Scripture doctrine that Adam stood as the official head and representative of his people we have only the application of a principle which we see at work all about us.

Dr. Charles Hodge has very ably treated this subject in the following section: —

This representative principle pervades the whole Scriptures. The imputation of Adam's sin to his posterity is not an isolated fact. It is only an illustration of a general principle which characterizes the dispensations of God from the beginning of the world. God declared Himself to Moses as one who visits the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children unto the third and to the fourth generation, Ex. 34:6, 7. . . . The curse pronounced on Canaan fell on his posterity. Esau's selling his birthright, shut out his descendants from the covenant of promise. The children of Moab and Ammon were excluded from the congregation of the Lord forever, because

their ancestors opposed the Israelites when they came out of Egypt. In the case of Dathan and Abiram, as in that of Achan, 'their wives, and their sons, and their little children' perished for the sins of their parents. God said to Eli, that the iniquity of his house should not be purged with sacrifice and offering for ever. To David it was said, 'The sword shall never depart from thy house; because thou hast despised me, and hast taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be thy wife.' To the disobedient Gehazi it was said: 'The leprosy of Naaman shall cleave unto thee and unto thy seed forever.' The sin of Jeroboam and of the men of his generation determined the destiny of the ten tribes for all time. The imprecation of the Jews, when they demanded the crucifixion of Christ, 'His blood be on us and on our children,' still weighs down the scattered people of Israel. . . . This principle runs through the whole Scriptures. When God entered into covenant with Abraham, it was not for himself only but also for his posterity. They were bound by all the stipulations of the covenant. They shared its promises and its threatenings, and in hundreds of cases the penalty of disobedience came upon those who had no personal part in the transgressions. Children suffered equally with adults in the judgments, whether famine, pestilence, or war, which came upon the people for their sins.

And the Jews to this day are suffering the penalty of the sins of their fathers for their rejection of Him of whom Moses and the prophets spoke. The whole plan of redemption rests on this same principle. Christ is the representative of His people, and on this ground their sins are imputed to Him and His righteousness to them. . . . No man who believes the Bible can shut his eyes to the fact that it everywhere recognizes the representative character of parents, and that the dispensations of God have from the beginning been founded on the principle that the children bear the iniquities of their fathers. This is one of the reasons which infidels assign for rejecting the divine origin of the Scriptures. But infidelity furnishes no relief. History is as full of this doctrine as the Bible is. The punishment of the felon involves his family in his disgrace and misery. The spend-thrift and drunkard entail poverty and wretchedness upon all connected with them. There is no nation now existing on the face of the earth, whose condition for weal or woe is not largely determined by the character and conduct of their ancestors . . . The idea of the transfer of guilt or of vicarious punishment lies at the foundation of all the expiatory offerings under the Old Testament, and of the great atonement under the new dispensation. To bear sin, is in Scriptural language to bear the penalty of sin. The victim bore the sin of the offerer. Hands were imposed upon the head of the animal about to be slaughtered, to express the transfer of guilt. That animal must be free from all defect or blemish to make it the more apparent that its blood was shed not for its own deficiencies but for the sin of another. All this was symbolical and typical. . . . And this is what the Scriptures teach concerning the Atonement of Christ. He bore our sins; He was made a curse for us; He suffered the penalty of the law in our stead. All this proceeds on the ground that the sins of one man can be justly, on some adequate ground, imputed to another.⁹

The Scriptures tell us that, "By one man's disobedience the many were made sinners," Rom. 5:19. "Through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin; and so death passed unto all men, for that all sinned," Rom. 5:12. "Through one trespass the judgment came unto all men to condemnation" Rom. 5:18. It is as if God had said: If sin is to enter, let it enter by one man, so that righteousness also may enter by one man.

Adam was made not only the father but also the representative of the whole human race. And if we fully understood the closeness of the relation between him and them we would fully realize the justice of the transmission of his sin to them. Adam's sin is imputed to his descendants in the same way that Christ's righteousness is imputed to those who believe in Him. Adam's descendants are, of course, no more personally guilty of his sin than Christ's redeemed are personally meritorious of His righteousness.

Suffering and death are declared to be the consequence of sin; and the reason that all die is that "all sinned." Now we know that many suffer and die in infancy, before they have committed any sin themselves. It follows that either God is unjust in punishing the innocent, or that those infants are in some way guilty creatures. And if guilty, how have they sinned? It is impossible to explain it on any other supposition than that they sinned in Adam (I Cor. 15:22; Rom. 5:12, 18); and they could not have sinned in him in any other way than by representation.

But while we are not personally guilty of Adam's sin, we are, nevertheless, liable to punishment for it. "The guilt of

Adam's public sin," says Dr. A. A. Hodge,

is by a judicial act of God immediately charged to the account of each and every one of his descendants from the moment he begins to exist, and antecedently to any act of his own. Hence all men come into existence deprived of all those influences of the Holy Spirit upon which their moral and spiritual life depends. . . . and with an antecedent prevailing tendency in their natures to sin; which tendency in them is itself of the nature of sin, and worthy of punishment. Human nature since the fall retains its constitutional faculties of reason, conscience and free agency, and hence man continues to be a responsible moral agent. Yet he is spiritually dead, and totally averse to and incapable of the discharge of any of these duties which spring out of his relation to God, and entirely unable to change his own evil dispositions or innate moral tendencies, or to dispose himself to such a change, or to cooperate with the Holy Spirit in effecting such a change.¹⁰

And to the same general effect, Dr. R. L. Dabney, the outstanding theologian of the southern Presbyterian Church, says:

The explanation presented by the doctrine of imputation is demanded by all except Pelagians and Socinians, Man's is a spiritually dead and a condemned race. See Eph. 2:1-5, et passim. He is obviously under a curse for something, from the beginning of his life. Witness the native depravity of infants, and their inheritance of woe and death. Now, either man was tried and fell in Adam, or he has been condemned without trial. He is either under the curse (as it rests on him at the beginning of his existence) for Adam's guilt, or for no guilt at all. Judge which is most honorable to God, a doctrine which, although a profound mystery, represents Him as giving man an equitable and most favored probation in his federal head; or that which makes God condemn him untried, and even before he exists."¹¹

6. THE GOODNESS AND SEVERITY OF GOD

A survey of the fall and its extent is humiliating work. It proves to man that all his claims of goodness are unfounded, and it shows him that his only hope is in the sovereign grace of Almighty God. The "graciously restored ability" of which the Arminian talks is not consistent with the facts. The Scriptures, history, and Christian experience by no means warrant such a favorable view of the natural moral condition of man as the Arminian system teaches. On the contrary each of these gives us a very gloomy picture of a fearful corruption and universal inclination to evil, which can only be overcome by the intervention of divine grace. The Calvinistic system teaches a far deeper fall into sin and a far more glorious manifestation of redeeming grace. From these depths the Christian is led to despair of himself, to throw himself unconditionally into the arms of God, and to lay hold on unmerited grace, which alone can save him.

We should see God's mercy and also His severity in the spiritual and physical realms. Life is full of hard facts which, unpleasant though they may be, must simply be faced and admitted. Throughout the Scriptures, and especially in the words of Christ Himself, the final torments of the wicked are described in such ways as to show us that they are indescribably awful. In the gospel of Matthew alone see 5:29, 30; 7:19; 10:28; 11:21-24; 13:30, 41, 42, 49, 50; 18:8, 9, 34; 21:41; 22:14; 24:51; 25:12, 30, 41; and 26:24. Surely a doctrine which received such emphasis from the lips of Christ Himself cannot be passed over in silence, distasteful though it may be. In the next world the wicked, with all restraint removed, will go headlong into sin, blaspheming and cursing God, growing worse and worse as they sink deeper and deeper into the bottomless pit. Endless punishment is the penalty of ENDLESS sinning. Furthermore, it is as much the glory of God that He punishes the wicked as that He rewards the righteous. Much of the easy-going indifference toward Christianity in our day is due to the failure of Christian ministers to emphasize these doctrines which Christ taught so repeatedly.

In the physical realm we see God's severity in wars, famines, floods, disasters, diseases, sufferings, deaths, and crimes of all kind which come upon the just and the unjust alike. All of these exist in a world which is under the complete control of a God who is infinite in His perfections.

“Behold then the goodness and severity of God,” Rom. 11:22. Naturalism does justice to neither of these. Arminianism magnifies the first but neglects the second. Calvinism is the only system which does justice to both. It alone adequately sets forth the facts in regard to the eternal and infinite love of God which caused Him to provide redemption for His people, even at the great cost of sending His only-begotten Son to die on the cross; and also in regard to the awful abyss which exists between sinful man and the holy God. It is true that “God is love,” but along with this must be placed the other statement that “our God is a consuming fire,” Heb. 12:29. Any system which omits or under-emphasizes either of these truths will be a mutilated system, no matter how plausible it may sound to men.

This doctrine of the Total Inability of man is terribly stern, severe, forbidding. But it is to be remembered that we are not at liberty to develop a new system suited to our liking. We must take the facts as we find them. Such exhibitions of the true state of mankind are, of course, offensive to unregenerate men generally; and many have tried to find out a system of doctrines more palatable to the popular mind. The state of fallen man is such that he readily listens to any theory which makes him even partly independent of God; he wishes to be the master of his fate and the captain of his soul. The lost, ruined, and helpless state of the sinner needs to be constantly set before him; for until he is brought to feel it, he will never seek help where alone it is to be found. Poor man! truly carnal and sold under sin, not only without power but without inclination to move toward God; and what is more awful still, an actual rebel, a presumptuous, blasphemous rival of the Great Jehovah.

This doctrine of Total Inability, or Original Sin, has been treated at some length in order to set forth the fundamental basis upon which the doctrine of Predestination rests. This side of the picture is dark, very dark indeed; but its supplement is the glory of God in redemption. Each of these truths must be seen in its true light before the other can be adequately appreciated.

7. SCRIPTURE PROOF

- I Cor. 2:14: The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him; and he cannot know them, because they are spiritually judged.
- Gen. 2:17: But of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it; for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.
- Rom. 5:12: Therefore, as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin; and so death passed unto all men, for that all sinned.
- II Cor. 1:9: Yea, we ourselves had the sentence of death within ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God who raiseth the dead.
- Eph. 2:1-3: And you did He make alive, when ye were dead through your trespasses and sins, wherein ye once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the powers of the air, of the spirit that now worketh in the sons of disobedience; among whom ye also all once lived in the lusts of your flesh, doing the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.
- Eph. 2:12: Ye were at that time separate from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.
- Jer. 13:23: Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots? Then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil.
- Ps. 51:5: Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity; And in sin did my mother conceive me.
- John 3:3: Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except one is born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God.
- Rom. 3:10-12: As it is written, There is none righteous, no not one; There is none that understandeth, There is none that seeketh after God; They have all turned aside, they are together become unprofitable; There is none that doeth good, no, not so much as one.
- Job 14:4: Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? not one.
- I Cor. 1:18: For the word of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us who are saved it is the power of God.

- Acts 13:41: Behold, ye despisers, and wonder and perish; For I work a work in your days, A work which ye shall in no wise believe, if one declare it unto you.
- Prov. 30:12: There is a generation that are pure in their own eyes, And yet are not washed from their filthiness.
- John 5:21: For as the Father raiseth the dead and giveth them life, even so the Son also giveth life to whom He will.
- John 6:53: Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink His blood, ye have not life in yourselves.
- John 8:19: They said therefore unto Him, Where is thy Father? Jesus answered, Ye know neither me, nor my Father; if ye knew me, ye would know my Father also.
- Matt. 11:25: I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou didst hide these things from the wise and understanding, and didst reveal them unto babes.
- II Cor. 5:17: if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature. John 14:16: (And I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter, that He may be with you forever,) even the Spirit of truth: whom the world cannot receive; for it beholdeth Him not, neither knoweth Him; ye know Him; for He abideth with you, and shall be in you.
- John 3:19: And this is the judgment, that light is come unto the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the light; for their works were evil.

Notes

1. Ch. IX, sec. III.
2. *Bondage of the Will*, p. 125.
3. Warburton, *Calvinism*, p. 48.
4. Warfield, *Biblical Doctrines*, p. 440.
5. *What is Calvinism*. pp. 125-127.
6. A. A. Hodge, pamphlet, "Presbyterian Doctrine", p. 23.
7. A. A. Hodge, pamphlet, "Presbyterian Doctrine", pp. 19. 20.
8. Warburton, *Calvinism*, p. 34.
9. *Systematic Theology*, II, pp. 198, 199. 201.
10. *Presbyterian Doctrine*, p. 21.
11. *Theology*, p. 330.

Author

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