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Moral Depravity- No. 2

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Text.--Rom. 8:7: "Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can it be."

V. The carnal mind is a state of mortal enmity against God.

By this I mean that the human mind is so firmly entrenched against God, and so utterly opposed to him that, sooner than be governed by him, it would take his life if this were possible. Rebellion against any government always implies this.

Again, the crucifixion of Christ demonstrated this fact so far as it is possible for human beings to make such demonstration. Christ was God manifest in the flesh. They slew his human nature, and, no doubt, they would have slain his divine, if they could. It does not answer this, to say that it was only the Jews, highly prejudiced against him, that slew him; nor is it any answer to say that, if the Jews had known that he was God, they would not have crucified him; for, we see now on every side that those who acknowledge Jesus to be God, yet reject his authority and give the most unmistakable evidence that they would oppose him to the death sooner than be governed by him.

VI. The carnal mind is a state of supreme opposition to God, that is, it is more deeply set in opposition to God than to any other being in the universe.

God is infinitely holy, and the carnal mind is in a state of entire sinfulness. These two things are infinitely opposed, the one to the other. There is nothing in the universe to which the sinner is so much opposed as real holiness, and there is nothing in heaven to which he is so much opposed as to infinite holiness.

Again, it is seen that all other enmities besides this can be subdued by a change of circumstances, without the interposition of the Holy Spirit. But so intensified is the enmity of the carnal mind against God, that sinners complain that it is utterly impossible for them to love God unless the Holy Ghost induces them to do so. I do not admit that it is impossible, as they pretend; but I do admit that, without divine influence, they never will love him, whatever the consequences might be of their refusal.

REMARKS.

1. The human mind is manifestly in a physically diseased state. By this I mean that sin has deranged its developments, insomuch that there are various tendencies in the constitution that result in selfishness. But let it be remembered, this is a physical and not a moral depravity. To illustrate this: Many persons come in to being with depraved appetites--a strong natural appetite, say, for strong drink, or some other sensual enjoyment. Now, these appetites, although in a diseased state, yet being constitutional, are not in themselves sinful. It is only their unlawful indulgence that is sinful. In fact, no appetite of man can be sinful that is strictly constitutional and normal, nor can it become in itself sinful by being in an unhealthy or depraved condition. The sin must consist in its unlawful indulgence. Adam and Eve had constitutional appetites for knowledge and for food. These were not sinful, not even when strongly excited by the temptation to indulgence. It was only the consent of the mind to indulge them in a prohibited manner, that constituted their sin.

2. It has been very common to confound temptation and sin. None of the constitutional appetites or propensities can be in themselves sinful, because they are involuntary and are a part of our nature. Nevertheless, these appetites and propensities, when excited, are of course temptations to seek their indulgence. It must be their unlawful indulgence and this only that constitutes sin. But it has been very common to speak of their very existence, and especially of their excited state, as sin.

Now, unless the soul, by an act of will, indulges this excitement, there can be no sin. If the mind resists the excitement, suppresses it so far as possible, and refuses to gratify it, there can be no sin. Indeed, when the appetite is strongly excited, but yet resisted, we cannot possibly deny that the virtue is the higher, as the temptation is the greater, and the mind more strongly and perseveringly resists it.

3. It is a great mistake to confound physical depravity with moral. It is very curious to see how the Bible has been interpreted on the question of constitutional sinfulness. It seems to me that men often interpret it without the least reference to any sound principles of biblical criticism. For example, one of these principles is, that no passage is to be so interpreted as flatly to contradict human reason, unless it is so irresistibly plain that it can bear no other interpretation.

Now I have no time to examine all the passages that have been misinterpreted on this subject. But take one, generally made very prominent in the attempt to prove from Scripture that the human constitution is morally depraved, to-wit--Psalm 51:5.

"Behold, I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me."

What is this text quoted to prove?

That the human constitution, or in other words, the very nature of all men, is morally depraved.

But this dogma is certainly contrary to human reason. If by moral depravity we mean something sinful, it is certainly inconceivable by reason that that should be morally blame-worthy over which the man never had any control--a thing that belongs to his very constitution as he came from the hand of his Maker. That any human soul should be blame-worthy for such a constitution--should be guilty of

moral wrong for possessing it, is certainly as contrary as possible to human reason.

Now remember, we are never to interpret any passage of Scripture so as to make it teach a doctrine palpably contrary to human reason, if it will bear any other interpretation. I say contrary to human reason, and not merely above its reach.

Now, the doctrine that the human constitution is in itself sinful, blame-worthy, morally wrong, morally depraved--is not so much above reason as opposite to the irresistible decisions of the human reason. It cannot therefore be proved, unless from passages unequivocally clear, explicit, and incapable of any other interpretation.

Let us now apply these remarks to the passage above quoted. What does it say?

1. The thing it is quoted to prove is universal--to-wit: that moral depravity is constitutional and pertains to the entire human race. But this verse affirms no universal proposition whatever. "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me." Surely this affirms nothing of mankind in general, and we are not to extend and torture the passage to make it teach so absurd a doctrine.

2. In this verse, the Psalmist does not even affirm his own sin. If he accused any one of sin, it was his mother. "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me."

3. This is the language of poetry. The Psalmist was smarting bitterly, and was deeply moved under a sense of his great sin in the matter of Bathsheba and Uriah. As is natural in such cases, he has expressed himself in a highly figurative and poetic manner, and undoubtedly had a strong sense of his great sinfulness, and meant to say that he had been a sinner ever since he was capable of being so. Now, surely, to make such a passage teach so monstrous a dogma as the universal sinfulness of human nature, is a flagrant perversion of God's word. It cannot be made to teach any such thing without greatly over-straining what is really said in the passage. But most surely no passage should be over-strained to make it teach an unreasonable dogma. You must not force strong poetical expressions to mean more than they really say, when this super-addition is contrary to reason.

4. The usual interpretation of this passage totally perverts the real meaning of the Psalmist. He was greatly agonized in view of his own sinfulness, and was confessing his own sin to God. He was far from being in a state to accuse anybody else, or to make any apology for his own sin. But the usual interpretation would represent him as searching for some excuse for his sin, and really charging the blame upon God, as if he had said--

"O Lord, thou hast given me a sinful nature, and how am I to blame for my sin?"

This is a gross misrepresentation of the meaning of the passage, and of the spirit of its author.

Ephesians 2:3, is another passage extensively quoted to prove that nature is itself sinful.

"Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others."

Upon this verse I remark,

1. The apostle represents the sinfulness of men as consisting in fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and not in the desires themselves. This is the same view of moral depravity that I have given in this discourse. Paul does not represent these desires as being in themselves wrong; it is only their sinful indulgence which makes men children of wrath.

2. Another remark is due here to show why Paul uses the words "by nature."

Suppose a child were born with a natural appetite for strong drink. This natural appetite does not make him a drunkard before he indulges it. But suppose he grows up to manhood, does indulge himself and becomes a drunkard. Now, looking to the occasion of his fall, we should naturally say, he was a drunkard "BY NATURE."

The same is true with those who have a natural propensity (as some have) to lie and steal. If they were born with a natural tendency in those directions, and we knew it, we should speak of them as liars or thieves "by nature." By this language we should not mean that they were actually guilty of any of these crimes before they had indulged these physically depraved propensities; much less should we assume that these inherited propensities were sins of their own.

There is no doubt in my mind that this is the real meaning of the apostle in this passage. The constitutional desires (Epithumiai, Greek,) were natural to man, and in this sense men are "by nature children of wrath." The appetites being constitutional to man in his physically depraved state, it is quite natural to speak of him as being by nature a sinner, when really we can mean no more than that he inherits the temptation to sin, and not that the temptation is itself sin. The desires are natural to him; the fulfilling or indulging of them is voluntary, and therefore sinful.

Now this is all that this passage can be made to mean by a fair interpretation. I say of this and of all the passages that are quoted to prove the doctrine of constitutional sinfulness, as I have said of Psalms 51:5--that they have not been soberly interpreted. They have been made to teach a most irrational doctrine by straining them and making them mean more than they say. They naturally mean no more than that men inherit a physically depraved constitution. Certainly no one of them asserts in language that can admit no

other interpretation, that human nature is itself sinful. I have quoted the two strongest passages on this point that are to be found (as I suppose) in the Bible, and surely it requires no great ingenuity to show that these passages naturally admit a very different interpretation from that which has been generally given them.

5. You can see from this subject why men need regeneration, and also what regeneration is. It is the giving up of the carnal mind, a ceasing to mind the flesh, and giving up the whole mind to obey God. It is a change from being committed to self-gratification, to the committal of the whole soul to obedience to God.

7. Physical depravity, or a diseased state of the constitution, is no doubt the occasion (not the cause) of moral depravity. The propensities are no doubt depraved. They act as a temptation, to which, as a matter of fact, mankind at first universally yield.

8. Many persons who think they are the friends of God are deceived. They have never been converted. It is a great mistake, and they need only die to know it. It were far better to learn it and correct it here.

GLOSSARY

of easily misunderstood terms as defined by Mr. Finney himself.

Compiled by Katie Stewart

1. **Complacency, or Esteem:** "Complacency, as a state of will or heart, is only benevolence modified by the consideration or relation of right character in the object of it. God, prophets, apostles, martyrs, and saints, in all ages, are as virtuous in their self-denying and untiring labours to save the wicked, as they are in their complacent love to the saints." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE VII)*. Also, "approbation of the character of its object. Complacency is due only to the good and holy." *Lectures to Professing Christians (LECTURE XII)*.
2. **Disinterested Benevolence:** "By disinterested benevolence I do not mean, that a person who is disinterested feels no interest in his object of pursuit, but that he seeks the happiness of others for its own sake, and not for the sake of its reaction on himself, in promoting his own happiness. He chooses to do good because he rejoices in the happiness of others, and desires their happiness for its own sake. God is purely and disinterestedly benevolent. He does not make His creatures happy for the sake of thereby promoting His own happiness, but because He loves their happiness and chooses it for its own sake. Not that He does not feel happy in promoting the happiness of His creatures, but that He does not do it for the sake of His own gratification." *Lectures to Professing Christians (LECTURE I)*.
3. **Divine Sovereignty:** "The sovereignty of God consists in the independence of his will, in consulting his own intelligence and discretion, in the selection of his end, and the means of accomplishing it. In other words, the sovereignty of God is nothing else than infinite benevolence directed by infinite knowledge." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE LXXVI)*.
4. **Election:** "That all of Adam's race, who are or ever will be saved, were from eternity chosen by

God to eternal salvation, through the sanctification of their hearts by faith in Christ. In other words, they are chosen to salvation by means of sanctification. Their salvation is the end- their sanctification is a means. Both the end and the means are elected, appointed, chosen; the means as really as the end, and for the sake of the end." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE LXXIV)*.

5. **Entire Sanctification:** "Sanctification may be entire in two senses: (1.) In the sense of present, full obedience, or entire consecration to God; and, (2.) In the sense of continued, abiding consecration or obedience to God. Entire sanctification, when the terms are used in this sense, consists in being established, confirmed, preserved, continued in a state of sanctification or of entire consecration to God." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE LVIII)*.
6. **Moral Agency:** "Moral agency is universally a condition of moral obligation. The attributes of moral agency are intellect, sensibility, and free will." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE III)*.
7. **Moral Depravity:** "Moral depravity is the depravity of free-will, not of the faculty itself, but of its free action. It consists in a violation of moral law. Depravity of the will, as a faculty, is, or would be, physical, and not moral depravity. It would be depravity of substance, and not of free, responsible choice. Moral depravity is depravity of choice. It is a choice at variance with moral law, moral right. It is synonymous with sin or sinfulness. It is moral depravity, because it consists in a violation of moral law, and because it has moral character." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE XXXVIII)*.
8. **Human Reason:** "the intuitive faculty or function of the intellect... it is the faculty that intuits moral relations and affirms moral obligation to act in conformity with perceived moral relations." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE III)*.
9. **Retributive Justice:** "Retributive justice consists in treating every subject of government according to his character. It respects the intrinsic merit or demerit of each individual, and deals with him accordingly." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE XXXIV)*.
10. **Total Depravity:** "Moral depravity of the unregenerate is without any mixture of moral goodness or virtue, that while they remain unregenerate, they never in any instance, nor in any degree, exercise true love to God and to man." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE XXXVIII)*.
11. **Unbelief:** "the soul's withholding confidence from truth and the God of truth. The heart's rejection of evidence, and refusal to be influenced by it. The will in the attitude of opposition to truth perceived, or evidence presented." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE LV)*.