

What Saith the Scripture?

<http://www.WhatSaithTheScripture.com/>

Moral Depravity- No. 1

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

from "The Oberlin Evangelist" Publication of Oberlin College

Lecture III
March 12, 1862

Public Domain Text
Reformatted by Katie Stewart

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."

The first inquiry is--

I. What is moral depravity?

II. The attributes or qualities of moral depravity.

III. What is the "carnal mind"?

IV. The "carnal mind" is a state of enmity against God.

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

VI. The carnal mind is a state of supreme opposition to God.

I. What is moral depravity?

- 1. The words "moral depravity" means, literally, crooked manners, from mos, manners, and pravus, crooked. The de is intensive. Hence, moral depravity means manners wholly crooked.
- 2. By manners is intended not merely the outward life, for the outward life has not in itself any morality or immorality. All that is strictly or properly moral, all that has moral character, belongs to the mind. Moral manners, therefore, are the manners of the inner will, the moral agent, the mind itself. The outward or bodily manners are only expressions of the inward or real manners of the subject.
- 3. When we speak of manners as crooked, we of necessity refer to something strait with which

the manners are compared. A thing may have a natural crookedness, or a physical crookedness, or a moral crookedness. Moral crookedness is a deviation from the strait rule of action prescribed by the moral law. It is crooked when compared with the moral straitness of the law of God.

Again, moral depravity lies entirely back of individual actions and volitions, and is the source from which these actions and volitions spring.

II. It behoves us to enquire into the attributes or qualities of moral depravity.

- 1. As already intimated, unlawfulness is a quality or attribute of moral depravity. This depravity must be a thing prohibited by the moral law. If it were not, it would not be morally crooked. Whatever has moral character, must be either in accordance with moral law or in violation of it.
- 2. Another attribute of moral depravity is sinfulness. Dr. Woods defines moral depravity as being "sinfulness." By this is meant that this state of mind called moral depravity, which is contrary to God's law, is sinful. This is the term by which we express its moral turpitude.
- 3. Another attribute of moral depravity, is blame-worthiness. It is not only contrary to God's law and sinful; but it is worthy of blame and of punishment, and justly brings the subject of it under the penalty of moral law.
- 4. Moral depravity is a violation of moral obligation. It is a state of mind the opposite of that which we are bound to be in. We ought not to be morally depraved. If it were not a violation of moral obligation, it would be neither unlawful or blame-worthy.
- 5. It is a state of mind that ought to be instantly abandoned. Of course, if it is sinful, if it is blame-worthy, if it is a violation of moral obligation, it ought to be instantly renounced.
- 6. Moral depravity is a state that can be instantly abandoned. It ought to be, and therefore it can be. To say that it ought to be abandoned, that we are under moral obligation to abandon it instantly, and yet to deny the possibility of abandoning it instantly, involves a gross contradiction.
- 7. I have said that moral depravity must be a state of mind. It cannot be a state of body. Depravity of body is physical depravity, not moral. It is simply disease.
- 8. You will observe that moral depravity consists in moral manners, that is, in mental action, and is no part or quality of soul or body. Whatever belongs to the essence or substance of either soul or body, must of necessity be in its nature physical; and if depraved, therefore, its depravity must be physical and not moral. It is plain that whatever is strictly constitutional in the sense of being an attribute, quality or part of soul or body, cannot have the distinctive characteristics of moral depravity. For example, it cannot be unlawful or contrary to the law of God, for the law legislates over man's mental activities, and not over the essential qualities of either body or mind.

Again, that which is a part or attribute of either soul or body, cannot be a violation of moral obligation. Nor can any attribute of body or mind be a violation of conscience. It cannot be a violation of duty; it cannot be instantly abandoned; it cannot be blame-worthy.

- 9. Again, moral depravity cannot consist in things created or transmitted, such as the appetites, passions, propensities. These have none of the attributes of moral depravity. They are not contrary to moral law. It is only their unreasonable indulgence that is contrary to moral law, and not the appetites or propensities themselves. They are not blame-worthy. They cannot be immediately abandoned so as to exist no longer. Their existence is no violation of moral obligation. Consequently, the existence in the constitution of these appetites and propensities is not moral depravity, is not bad manners.
- 10. Moral depravity should not be confounded with temptation, or excited feelings or propensities. I have just said that the existence of these sensibilities in the soul is not in itself sinful. Nor is an excited state of the propensities necessarily in itself sinful. If they are indulged unreasonably, this is sin; but no merely excited state of feeling, that does not secure the consent of the will, can be a violation of moral obligation.
- 11. From its very attributes, moral depravity must certainly be a voluntary state of mind. For whatever is involuntary, has none of the attributes of moral depravity.
- 12. Moral depravity is the state of mind called in the Scriptures--the wicked heart. It is that in us to which moral character belongs. I speak of it as a state of mind, to distinguish it from mere volitions, or mere executive acts of mind. It is that state of mind from which wicked words, and acts naturally proceed. Words and acts are means to an end. They proceed from a choice of an end, and have moral character only as they partake of the moral qualities of the choice that gives them existence.

Moral depravity must consist in a settled ultimate choice, the choice of an end. It must consist in the voluntary devotion of the mind to self--self-interest and self-gratification. Human activity is rational and responsible. Men are moral agents--that is, they act under the responsibilities of moral obligation, are subjects of moral law and of moral government. Moral law requires of all moral agents sincere, perfect, universal devotion to God and to the interests of his kingdom. In other words, it requires perfect, universal, perpetual, unselfish benevolence.

Moral depravity is the opposite of what this law requires; or, more strictly, it is want of conformity to this law. It is primarily a withholding--a refusal to be devoted to God and to the interests of his kingdom. It sets up self above God. It deliberately prefers self-interests and self-will to God's interest and God's will. It practically makes self of supreme importance. In one word, it is selfishness. It is the mind's committed to self as the great supreme good of life.

Moral depravity is a standing choice as distinct from a volition. It is a choice of the supreme end to which the mind shall devote itself. It is the choice of an ultimate end, that

is, self-gratification is chosen for its own sake. We know from consciousness, that when the mind is made up and has decided upon the end to be secured, its whole activities will be directed to the accomplishment of that end. Volition, as distinguished from the choice of an end is the minds' effort to secure the end. When we speak of individual sins, we speak of volition and consequent action. When we speak of moral depravity as distinct from individual sinful acts, we mean that abiding and wrong, selfish choice from which these volitions proceed. Please observe the distinction I make between sinful acts and moral depravity. Moral depravity is originally a choice and therefore a mental act. It is the choice of an end, and therefore an abiding, standing choice. Volitions are individual efforts to secure the end chosen. Sinful acts are found in the life. Moral depravity lies back of the outward life, and back of volition, in a standing preference of self-interest over God's interests and all other interests.

III. What is the "carnal mind"?

- 1. It is not the substance of either soul or body. It has been common to speak of the "carnal mind" as being identical with the mind itself. I recollect that Dr. Griffin, in his Park Street Lectures, confounds the "carnal mind with the substance of the soul; and hence, since the Bible affirms the carnal mind to be enmity against God, he insists that the more clearly God is revealed to the mind, the more it will hate him; and also that there is nothing in the Gospel at all adapted to win the mind, but that the character of God as there presented, is adapted only to repel the soul. He maintains this on the ground that the soul of the sinner is, in its very substance, enmity against God. But this must be a great mistake.
- 2. The carnal mind must be a voluntary state. If you have Bibles with marginal references and readings, you will observe that in the margin it is written, "the minding of the flesh." The carnal mind is the fleshly mind, or the mind in a state of committal to the indulgence of the appetites, passions and propensities.
- 3. It is that state of mind into which Adam fell. It appears that, for a time, Adam preferred the will of God to his own, the pleasure of God to his own, and the interests of God to his own. But a temptation of peculiar nature was presented to him through Eve. The wily serpent addressed Eve--"Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?" She answered--"We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden; but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die. And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die: for God doth know, that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened; and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil. And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat; and gave also unto her husband with her, and he did eat."

Here two constitutional propensities, innocent in themselves, were strongly excited by this appeal of the tempter. The desire of knowledge is constitutional; the appetite for food is constitutional. These appetites are not wrong in themselves, nor is it morally wrong that they should be in an excited state. But the question as put by the tempter, amounted to a proposal to Eve and to Adam to gratify their appetites, although it involved

disobedience to God. This question was really fundamental to their moral character. They could not yield to this temptation without preferring their own self-gratification to the will of God, and their own pleasure to God's pleasure. To yield to this temptation would be to revolt from the government of God. It would break off their allegiance to him. In the very act they must decide to seek their own pleasure in their own way as their supreme good. This would really be a change of the supreme ultimate end of life. Instead of loving God supremely, they now love themselves supremely. They reject God's authority, God's rights, God's happiness and his glory, as all subordinate to their own gratification. You will observe that the temptation was not merely to put forth a single volition to secure some good, without any reference to the ultimate end in view. It was nothing else than a proposal from the tempter to set aside God as the great end for which they should live, and set up self-gratification as the supreme object of life. Yielding to this temptation, plunged them into a state of choice--a settled state of voluntary preference of self-interest above all other interests, and of self-gratification above all other good.

A voluntary state as distinguished from a voluntary act, is a matter familiar to us all. We all know what is meant by choosing a partner for life, and abiding in that choice; and we know that when that choice is settled and abiding, the volitions and the outward life flow from it. The choice, abiding, gives direction to all the subsequent life.

Just so of this choice made by Adam. It became a fixed state of mind. He lapsed into a state of supreme selfishness, which is nothing else than a strong committal of the will, and consequently of the whole being, to self-gratification.

- 4. This carnal mind, or state of minding the flesh, reveals itself in fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind. As is said in Ephesians 2:1-3, "And you hath he quickened who were dead in trespasses and sins; wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience; 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."

The mind being settled in its great ultimate aim and end, the supreme choice being to gratify the deepest desires and propensities, it will of course reveal itself in all the myriad ways of self-indulgence in which unconverted sinners actually live.

- 5. The carnal mind has all the attributes of moral depravity. It is directly contrary to moral law; it is utterly sinful; it deserves punishment; it ought to be instantly abandoned; it can be instantly abandoned; to abandon it would be a change of heart.

IV. The "carnal mind" is a state of enmity against God. I say a state, that is, an abiding choice.

It is enmity against God,

- 1. Because it is the exact opposite of what his law requires. His law requires us to love Him

supremely and to make his glory, pleasure, will and interests, the supreme object of our lives. But this minding of the flesh is making self-indulgence the supreme object of our lives. This is not only a refusal to obey his law, but a state of mind the direct opposite of it.

- 2. This minding of the flesh is directly opposite to the whole character of God.
- 3. It is a state of voluntary alienation from God, and of intense committal against him. It is the wicked heart. It is so treated in the Bible itself. It is spoken of in the chapter of our text as being "in the flesh," and a state of mind in which it is impossible to please God. Furthermore, in this same chapter it is affirmed to be a state of death in sin. "To be carnally minded is death." Also in Ephesians 2:1-3, this carnal mind is represented as a state of spiritual death, of bondage to the flesh, of enmity against God.
- 4. I observe again that this carnal mind is a state of total moral depravity. As is said in verse 8: "So then they that are in the flesh cannot see God."
- 5. This carnal mind reveals itself in the neglect of God. This is the reason why sinners neglect worship, prayer, and communion with God, and why they do not love to think of him or speak of him.
- 6. The carnal mind reveals itself also in contempt for God's authority. The Psalmist enquires --"Wherefore do the wicked contemn God?" I answer, Just because they are wicked. And their wickedness consists in this carnal-mindedness.

But, perhaps you will say--I do not contemn the authority of God.

But how much do you care for this authority? Do you, in fact, treat it as if it were of the slightest importance? You will set aside the authority of God for the most trifling indulgence. See that young man smoking that cigar. Do you think, young man, that that is right? Do you think God wants you to smoke that cigar? Do you believe he is pleased with it? You know he is not; and yet you care less for God's authority than you do for smoking that cigar. Every day you live, you gratify yourself in ways which you know to be unlawful, without the slightest regard to God's authority. What do you mean, then, by saying that you do not contemn the authority of God? Is there anything in the world that you treat as of less importance than the authority of God? Your daily conduct is equivalent to saying, "What do I care for the authority of God? Who is God that I should obey him, or what profit should I have if I should pray unto him?"

- 7. The carnal mind reveals itself in opposition to God's people and cause. Who does not know that unconverted sinners are always picking at God's people, and in a multitude of ways manifesting opposition to them, magnifying their faults and publishing them as widely as possible, ridiculing their piety, accusing them of hypocrisy, and in every way manifesting opposition to them. Now this is not because they have received any injury from God's people nor is it really because God's people are worse than other people; but it is because of their own enmity to God, that they oppose him in his people.

- 8. This carnal mind also reveals itself in a want of confidence in God. Sinners very well know that they have every reason to confide in him, but yet they do not. They have not the slightest confidence in all his professions of love for them, nor are they at all inclined to trust him.
- 9. This carnal mind reveals itself in a total want of sympathy with God. In every way, this state of mind shows itself the opposite of God's state of mind. His revealed will and way are an abomination to them, and their will and way are an abomination to him. As He says--"They loathe me, and I abhor them."
- 10. The carnal mind reveals itself in a whole life of rebellion against God. That unconverted men are in a state of rebellion against the authority of God, is one of the plainest facts that lie on the face of society.

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)*.