

The Total Depravity of Man

IDOLATERS BLIND BY CHOICE — *“To Isaiah it is evident that the only reason why a person would not see the obvious contradictions in the picture he has just drawn is that, for some reason, they cannot. In the normal course of human intelligence, the implications would surely be plain. So what has happened? Why do they not know? The answer is familiar to him: They have become blind and insensitive.... [T]his covering over was not arbitrary, but in response to the freely chosen acts of the idolaters. In this, Calvin and all the rest of us are following the lines laid out by Paul in Romans 1. Humans could have done differently, but we did not want to. We did not, and do not, want a sovereign God to whom we owe grateful and total obedience. We want a universe in our own image, whose limits and benefits are dictated by us. That end, according to Isaiah and the other biblical writers, demands intellectual suicide, since this is so obviously not the case, but the end has always seemed worth it to us. So God visits on the pagan mind the gathering darkness it has freely chosen.”* [Oswalt, *Isaiah*] *“God is just and never punishes anyone without just cause, and does not blind a man unless he deserves it and voluntarily shuts his eyes.”* [Calvin, *Isaiah*] *“So irrational is idolatry; but yet, through self-hardening, they have fallen under the judgment of hardness of heart (Isa 6:9-10; 19:3; 29:10), and have been given up to a reprobate mind (Rom 1:28).”* [K&D, *Isaiah*] We buried my mother on Thursday, August 2, 2001. Her heart had stopped while in the hospital recovering from a surgery. Although they started her heart again she was deprived of oxygen for an unknown period of time and her upper brain had severe damage. She died a week later. This depravity of human nature was clearly evidenced during one of the conferences with a neuro-surgeon who was called in to evaluate my mother. This doctor specializes in the most complex organ known to man yet made a comment about the ‘modern’ part of the brain as compared with animals (evolution). *How could this doctor, without doubt a brilliant and well-studied man, after years of studying the brain, believe it happened by accident?!?* The only answer which might be given is the blindness of the unbelieving heart.

‘TOTAL DEPRAVITY’ (outline taken from A. H. Strong’s Systematic Theology) — *By [total depravity] we mean, on the one hand, the lack of original righteousness or of holy affection toward God and, on the other hand, the corruption of the moral nature or bias toward evil....* Depravity is both negative (absence of love and of moral likeness to God) and positive (presence of manifold tendencies to evil.) By the total depravity we mean:

A. Negatively —

(a) sinners are not without remorse or destitute of conscience — *“And they, when they heard it, went out one by one, beginning from the eldest, even unto the last.”* — Jn 8:9

(b) sinners are not without goodness (as man defines goodness) — *“A son honoreth his father and a servant his master: if then I am a father, where is mine honor? and if I am a master where is my fear?”* — Mal 1:6 A ruined temple may have beautiful fragments of fluted columns, but it is no proper habitation for the god for whose worship it was built.

(c) sinners are capable of any sin but that does not mean they do all sins, for certain sins excludes other sins — *“ye tithe mint and anise and cumin, and have left undone the weightier matters of the law, justice and mercy, and faith: but these ye ought to have done, and not to have left the other undone”* — Matt 23:23; — *“when Gentiles that have not the law do by nature the things of the law, these, not having the law, are the law unto themselves; in that they show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness therewith.”* — Rom 2:14; the sin of a miser may exclude the sin of luxury.

(d) sinners are not as bad as they can be for they are capable of getting worse — “the iniquity of the Amorite is not yet full” – Gen 15:16; “evil men and impostors shall wax worse and worse.” – 2 Tim 3:13. Depravity is not so much a state as a tendency.

B. Positively —

(a) sinners are without love to God which is the summation of the law — “But I knew you, that ye have not the love of God in yourselves.” – Jn 5:42

(b) sinners put self before God — “lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God” – 2 Tim 3:4

(c) sinners possess a hatred of God which may not always be actively seen but becomes evident when God’s will is seen — “the mind of the flesh is enmity against God.” – Rom 8:7

(e) sinners are corrupted in every faculty — “darkened in their understanding...hardening of their heart” – Eph 4:18; “both their mind and their conscience are defiled” – Titus 1:15; “defilement of flesh and spirit” – 2 Cor 7:1; “an evil heart of unbelief” – Heb 3:12

(f) sinners are credited with no thought, emotion or act that divine holiness can fully approve — “in me, that is, in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing.” – Rom 7:18

(g) sinners are not able to resist their depravity — “to will is present with me, but to do that which is good is not” – Rom 7:18; “law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity under the law of sin which is in my members.” – Rom 7:23

The sinner seeks to secure his own interests rather than God’s. Even so called religious acts he performs with preference of his own good to God’s glory. He disobeys, and always has disobeyed, the fundamental law of love. He is like a railway train on a downgrade and God must apply the brakes or destruction is sure. There are latent passions in every heart which if let loose would curse the world.... “The depravity which sin has produced in human nature extends to the whole of it. There is no part of man’s nature which is unaffected by it. Man’s nature is all of a piece, and what affects it at all affects it altogether. When the conscience is violated by disobedience to the will of God, the moral understanding is darkened and the will is enfeebled. We are not constructed in watertight compartments, one of which might be ruined while the others remained intact.” [Strong’s Systematic Theology]