

## Total Depravity, pt. 2

NKJ Ephesians 2:1 And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins,  
 2 in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience,  
 3 among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.

Romans 3:9 What then? Are we better than they? Not at all. For we have previously charged both Jews and Greeks that they are all under sin.

10 As it is written: "There is none righteous, no, not one;  
 11 There is none who understands; There is none who seeks after God.  
 12 They have all turned aside; They have together become unprofitable; There is none who does good, no, not one."  
 13 "Their throat is an open tomb; With their tongues they have practiced deceit"; "The poison of asps is under their lips";  
 14 "Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness."  
 15 "Their feet are swift to shed blood;  
 16 Destruction and misery are in their ways;  
 17 And the way of peace they have not known."  
 18 "There is no fear of God before their eyes."  
 19 Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.  
 20 Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin.

By now you will probably have noticed that I often use the phrase, "the natural man" in preaching and by that I do not mean the "outdoorsy, woodsy type" or someone who only eats organically grown food, or even the counterpart of what Aretha Franklin was singing about when she said *"You make me feel like a natural woman."*

No, when I speak of the "natural man" I am using this as a term of contrast with the born again or regenerated Christian man. When I speak of the natural man I am speaking of men in the spiritual condition in which they are born, which is as we saw last week, a condition of spiritual deadness. They may be physically alive, but spiritually they are unregenerate, they are "dead in trespasses and sins."

This condition of spiritual deadness became man's natural state the moment Adam sinned, it is part of the curse that came from Adam's breaking of the covenant of works, and is the fulfillment of what God said when he warned Adam of the consequences of breaking the Covenant of Works:

***"but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."* (Gen. 2:17)**

At the moment Adam first sinned, he fell, and all his offspring, his posterity fell with him. Men went from being friends of God to being rebels and enemies, intractably opposed. Speaking of the consequences of Adam's sin, John Calvin identified 5 results:

1st. His apostasy from God was complete. God demands perfect obedience. Adam was now a rebel in arms.

2d. That the favor and communion of God, the sole condition of his spiritual life, was withdrawn.

3d. A schism was introduced into the soul itself. The painful reproaches of conscience were excited, and could never be allayed without an atonement. This led to fear of God, distrust, prevarication, and, by necessary consequence, to innumerable other sins.

4th. Thus the whole nature became depraved. The will being at war with the conscience, the understanding became darkened; the conscience, in consequence of constant outrage and neglect, became seared; the appetites of the body inordinate, and its members instruments of unrighteousness.

5th. There remained in man's nature no recuperative principle; he must go on from worse to worse, unless God interpose. Thus the soul of man being essentially active, although one sin did not establish a confirmed habit, it did alienate God and work confusion in the soul, and thus lead to an endless course of sin.

Now while we can speak of this as man's natural condition, and total depravity as universal, in other words affecting all men – "**There is none righteous, no, not one;**" and "**All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way**" (Is. 53:6) we shouldn't think of that as a *normal* condition. Sin is not right, sin is abnormal. But it will help to understand the world if we understand that since the fall man has been profoundly abnormal. Sin just ain't right.

There are a couple of things though that we do need to mention about total depravity lest there be any misunderstanding. It *is* total in the sense that it effects all men, with the sole exception of Christ the God man, and that it effects all the parts of every man. There is not one part of man that is left in an unfallen condition.

For instance: Total depravity affects

- 1) *the mind or the understanding* – "because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened." And 1 Cor. 2:14 "But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned."

The natural man denies what even his senses tell him about God so that he denies, refuses to accept the testimony of *natural revelation*. He even revels in this denial of the true God of Creation, he thinks it is a positive quality. For instance, I remember reading a quote from Stephen Pinker a self-proclaimed atheist and "Darwinian fundamentalist" which perfectly brings that out, he wrote:

*"Recently I visited an exhibition on spiders at the Smithsonian. As I marveled at the Swiss-watch precision of the joints, the sewing machine motions by which it drew silk from its spinnerets, the beauty and cunning of the web, I thought to myself, 'How could anyone see this and not believe in natural selection!'" At that moment a woman standing next to me exclaimed, 'How could anyone see this and not believe in God!'" We agreed a priori on the facts that needed to be explained, though we disagreed on how to explain them."*

Actually, Pinker's *anti-theism* makes it impossible for him to understand the Spider at all. He can make observations about them, but he denies their creator, their purpose, and so on.

The natural man also does not believe and cannot understand God's *special revelation* – the bible. 1 Cor. 2:14 " 14 But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." That is why it is so painful to read the interpretations of the Bible given to us by unregenerate men.

2) ***Total Depravity also affects the Will*** – Romans 8:7 "Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be." The natural man assumes his own sovereignty and always chooses his own will over the will of God, he will invariably do what seems right to him. " As Judges 21:25 summarizes it "everyone did what was right in his own eyes."

The natural man simply will never choose Christ because his will is hopelessly inclined against God. He may tinker with the faith, but until his heart is replaced, he will always be in the situation described by the WCF in chapter 9 "***Man, by his fall into a state of sin, hath wholly lost all ability of will to any spiritual good accompanying salvation:[4] so as, a natural man, being altogether averse from that good,[5] and dead in sin,[6] is not able, by his own strength, to convert himself, or to prepare himself thereunto.[7]***"

3) ***Total Depravity also affects feelings or affections:*** The natural man the worldling does not love the things he should, he loves the things of the world. His heart is captivated by the lusts of the flesh and these things are essentially incompatible – 1John 2:15 Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

16 For all that is in the world -- the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life -- is not of the Father but is of the world.

The vitriol with which the unregenerate man despises the "holy rollers" surprises a lot of Christians. Frankly after the election a lot of Christians were shocked and hurt by the way that many members of the press wrote of how they despise evangelicals. I don't I fully understand it. *I despised Christians myself with an unreasonable hatred. I spoke the most hateful things about them. Why? Because I hated God, and I hated His Son Jesus Christ.*

I fully understand the reponse of the British author Kingsley Amis when he was asked whether he was an atheist, "***It's more than that. You see I hate Him.***" A Heart of Darkness does not love the Son nor Can it. *For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness?* (2 Cor. 6:14)

4) ***Total Depravity also affects The conscience:*** As Paul puts it in 1 Tim 4:2, the natural man "speaks lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron" and elsewhere in both Titus 1:15 and Romans 1:24-32 Paul asserts that it isn't only their mind but their consciences that are defiled. *How can they do these things?* We ask, how can they steep themselves in these things? Paul answers that the course of idolatry and atheism that comes with Total Depravity is inevitably that we become "***filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; they are whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful;***"

Now I know that many of you have been genuinely grieved to see family members and friends who love things that are ultimately dumb idols and which will consume them. They and their families are destroyed by an unreasonable lust for things like money, or drugs, or sex but without regeneration, it is impossible to turn their hearts from the world unto God. You can sometimes replace one idol with another, but the radical change that enables you to love what you once hated and hate what you once loved only happens with the rebirth that comes with regeneration.

Now that is what we *are saying* when we speak of total depravity –

What aren't we saying –

- 1) ***That all men are as bad as they could be.*** God restrains evil
- 2) ***That no natural man is ever charitable or philanthropic or that he never does anything that is properly virtuous*** – " But if it be allowed that many of these acts are of the true nature of virtue, how can man be called totally depraved? We mean, first, that as to the chief responsibility of the soul, to love God, every soul is totally recreant. No natural man has any true love for God as a spiritual, holy, true, good, and righteous Sovereign. But this being the pre-eminent duty over all others in the aggregate, utter dereliction here, throws all smaller, partial virtues wholly into the shade." – Dabney Psalm 10:4 " 4 The wicked in his proud countenance does not seek God; God is in none of his thoughts."
- 3) ***We also do not mean by total that it is irreversible*** – far from it! 18 "And they will go there, and they will take away all its detestable things and all its abominations from there. Ezek 11:19 "Then I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within them, and take the stony heart out of their flesh, and give them a heart of flesh, 20 "that they may walk in My statutes and keep My judgments and do them; and they shall be My people, and I will be their God.

***John 3:3 "3 Jesus answered and said to him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."***

***4 Nicodemus said to Him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?"***

***5 Jesus answered, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.***

***6 "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.***

***7 "Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.'***

***8 "The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit."***

***Finally Why must we teach and maintain this doctrine?***

I believe that Charles Haddon Spurgeon, the "Prince of Preachers," best explained why it is so needful:

"The withholding of the doctrine of the total depravity of man has wrought serious mischief to many who have listened to a certain kind of preaching. These people do not get a true healing because they do not know the disease under which they are suffering; they are never truly clothed because nothing is done towards stripping them. In many ministries there is not enough of probing the heart and arousing the conscience by the revelation of man's alienation from God, and by the declaration of the selfishness and the wickedness of such a state. Men need to be told that except divine grace shall bring them out of

their enmity to God they must eternally perish; and they must be reminded of the sovereignty of God, that he is not obliged to bring them out of this state that he would be right and just if he left them in such a condition, that they have no merit to plead before him, and no claims upon him, but that if they are to be saved it must be by grace, and by grace alone. The preacher's work is to throw sinners down in helplessness that they may be compelled to look up to him who alone can help them. To try to win a soul for Christ by keeping that soul in ignorance of any truth is contrary to the mind of the Spirit, and to endeavor to save men by mere claptrap, or excitement, or oratorical display is as foolish as to hope to hold an angel with bird-lime, or lure a star with music. The best attraction is the gospel in its purity. The weapon with which the Lord conquers men is the truth as it is in Jesus. The gospel will be found equal to every emergency: an arrow which can pierce the hardest heart, a balm which will heal the deadliest wound. Preach it, and preach nothing else. Rely implicitly upon the old, old gospel. You need no other nets when you fish for men; those your Master has given you are strong enough for the great fishes, and have meshes fine enough to hold the little ones. Spread these nets and no others, and you need not fear the fulfillment of his word, "I will make you fishers of men." "