

The Total Depravity of Man Chapter 11

EVIDENCES

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Transcript

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After the ground we have already covered in the preceding chapters it might be thought there is no need for a separate section to furnish proof that man is a fallen and depraved creature who has departed far from his Maker and rightful Lord. Though the Word of God needs no confirming by anything outside itself, it is not without value or interest to find that the teaching of Genesis 3 is substantiated by the hard facts of history and observation. But since there is no point on which the world is so dark as that concerning its own darkness, we feel it necessary to demonstrate the fact. All natural men, unrenewed in their minds by the saving operation of the Holy Spirit, are in a state of darkness with respect to any vital knowledge of God. No matter how learned and skillful they are in other things, in spiritual matters they are blind and stupid. But when that fact is pressed upon them their ire is aroused. Proud intellectuals, who consider themselves so much wiser than the humble and simple believer, regard it as just the empty conceit of illiterates when told that "the way of peace they have not known." Such souls are quite ignorant of their very ignorance.

Signs of Man's Ruin

Even in Christendom the average churchgoer is fully satisfied if he learns by rote a few of the elementary principles of religion. By so doing he comforts himself that he is not an infidel, and since he believes there is a God (though it may be one which his own imagination has devised) he prides himself that he is far from being an atheist. Yet as to having any living, spiritual, influential and practical knowledge of the Lord and His ways he is a stranger, altogether unenlightened. Nor does he feel the least need of divine illumination. He has no taste or desire for a closer acquaintance with God. Never having realized himself to be a lost sinner, he has never sought the Saviour. Only those who are aware of sickness value a physician, just as none but those who are conscious of soul starvation yearn for the bread of life. Men may proudly boast that this twentieth century is an age of enlightenment, but however true that may be in a material and mechanical sense, it is certainly far from being the case spiritually. It is often averred by those who ought to know better that men today are more eager in their quest for truth than in former days,

but hard facts give the lie to such an assertion.

In Job 12:24-25 we are told that "the chief people of the earth... grope in the dark without light." How evident that is to those whose eyes have been anointed by the Holy Spirit. Who but those blinded by prejudice and incapable of seeing what is right before them would still believe in "the progress of man" and "the steady advance of the human race"? And yet such postulates are made daily by those who are regarded as being the best educated and the greatest thinkers. The idle dreams of idealists and theorists should have been dispelled by the happenings of the past fifty years, when millions of earth's inhabitants have engaged in life-and-death struggles in which the most barbarous inhumanities have been perpetrated, thousands of peaceful citizens killed in their homes, thousands more maimed for the rest of their days, and incalculable material damage done. But so persistent is error, and so radically is it opposed to that which we are here contending for, that no efforts should be spared in exposing the one and establishing the other. We thus present some of the abundant evidence which testifies clearly to the utterly ruined condition of fallen mankind.

These proofs may be drawn from the teaching of Holy Writ, the records of historians, our own observations and personal experience. Genesis 3 describes the origin of human depravity. In the very next chapter the bitter fruits of the fall quickly begin to be manifested. In chapter 3 we see sin in our first parents; in chapter 4, sin in their firstborn, who very soon supplied proof of his having received an evil nature from them. In Genesis 3 the sin was against God; in Genesis 4 it was both against Him and against a fellowman. That is always the order: Where there is no fear of God, there will be no genuine respect for the rights of our neighbors. Yet even at that early date we discern the sovereign and distinguishing grace of God at work, for it was by God-given faith that Abel presented an acceptable sacrifice to the Lord (Heb. 11:4); whereas in blatant self-will and self-pleasing, Cain brought the fruit of the ground as an offering. Upon the Lord's rejection of the sacrifice, "Cain was very wroth" (Gen. 4:5) because he could not approach and worship God according to the dictates of his own mind, and thereby displayed his native enmity against Him. Jealous of God's approval of Abel, Cain rose up and murdered his brother.

Like leprosy, sin contaminates, spreads, and produces death. Near the close of Genesis 4 we see sin corrupting family life, for Lamech was guilty of polygamy, murder and a spirit of fierce revenge (v.23). In Genesis 5 "death" is written in capital letters over the inspired record, for no less than eight times we read "and he died." But again we are shown grace super-abounding in the midst of abounding sin, for Enoch, the seventh from Adam, did not die, being translated without seeing death. That much of his time was spent in expostulating with and warning the wicked of his day is intimated in Jude 14-15 where we are told that he prophesied, "Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of His saints, to execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against him." Noah too was a "preacher of righteousness" (II Peter 2:5) to the antediluvians, but seemingly with little effect, for we read, "And GOD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually," that "all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth," and that the earth was "filled with violence through them" (Gen. 6:5, 12-13).

But though God sent a flood which swept away the whole of that wicked generation, sin was not eradicated from human nature. Instead, fresh evidence of the depravity of man was soon forthcoming. After such a merciful deliverance from the deluge, after witnessing such a fearful demonstration of God's holy wrath against sin, and after the Lord's making a gracious covenant with Noah, which contained most blessed promises and assurances, one would suppose that the human race would ever after adhere to the

ways of virtue. But the very next thing we read is that "Noah began to be an husbandman, and he planted a vineyard: and he drank of the wine, and was drunken; and he was uncovered within his tent" (9:20-21). Scholars tell us that the Hebrew word for "uncovered" clearly indicates a deliberate act, and not a mere unconscious effect of drunkenness. The sins of intemperance and impurity are twin sisters. The sad lapse of Noah gave occasion to his son Ham to sin; for, instead of throwing the mantle of charity over his father's conduct, he dishonored him, manifesting disrespect for him. In consequence Ham brought on his descendants a curse, the effects and results of which are apparent to this very day (v.25).

Genesis 9 brings the inauguration of a new beginning, causing our minds to turn back to the very beginning of the human race. A careful comparison of the two reveals a series of most remarkable parallels between the histories of Adam and Noah. Adam was placed on an earth which came up out of "the great deep" (Gen. 1:2); Noah came forth onto an earth which had just emerged from the waters of the great deluge. Adam was made lord of creation (1:28); into the hand of Noah God delivered all things (9:2). Adam was "blessed" by God and told to "be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth" (1:28); in like manner Noah was blessed and told to "be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth" (9:1). Adam was placed by God in a garden to "dress and keep it" (2:15); Noah "began to be an husbandman, and he planted a vineyard" (9:20). It was in the garden that Adam transgressed and fell ; the product of the vineyard was the occasion of Noah's sad fall. The sin of Adam resulted in the exposure of his nakedness (3:7); likewise Noah "was uncovered within his tent" (9:21). Adam's sin brought a terrible curse on his posterity (Rom. 5:12); so did Noah's (9:24-25). Immediately after Adam's fall a remarkable prophecy was given, containing in outline the history of redemption (3:15); immediately after Noah's fall a remarkable prophecy was uttered, containing in outline the history of the great divisions of our race.

The Carnal World System

Genesis 10-11 takes up the history of the post-diluvian earth. These chapters show us something of the ways of men in this new world—revolting against God, seeking to glorify and deify themselves. They make known the carnal principles by which the world system is now regulated. Since Genesis 10:8-12 and 11:1-9 interrupt the course of the genealogies given there, they should be regarded as an important parenthesis, the former one explaining the latter. The first is concerned with Nimrod : 1. He was a descendant of Ham, through Cush (10:8), therefore of that branch of Noah's family on which the curse rested. 2. His name means "the rebel." 3. "He began to be a mighty one in the earth," which implies that he struggled for preeminence and by force of will obtained it. 4. "In the earth" intimates conquest and subjugation, becoming a leader of and ruler over men. 5. He was a mighty hunter (10:9): three times in Genesis 10 and again in I Chronicles 1:10 is the term "mighty" used of him, the Hebrew word also being rendered "chief" and "chieftain." 6. He was a "mighty hunter before the LORD"; comparing that with "the earth also was corrupt before God" (6:11) we get the impression that this proud rebel pursued his ambitions and impious designs in brazen defiance of the Almighty. 7. Nimrod was a king and had his headquarters in Babylon (10:10).

From the opening verses of Genesis 11 it is clear that Nimrod had an inordinate desire for fame, that he lusted after supreme dominion or the establishment of a world empire (cf. 10:10-11), and that he headed a great confederacy in open rebellion against Jehovah. Babel means "the gate of God," but afterward, because of the divine judgment inflicted on it, it came to mean "confusion." By putting together the different details supplied by the Spirit, there can be little doubt that Nimrod not only organized an imperial government, over which he presided as king, but also instituted a new and idolatrous worship. Though he is not mentioned by name in Genesis 11, it is evident from the foregoing chapter that he was the leader of

the movement here described. The topographical reference in 11:2 is just as morally significant as is "going down into Egypt" and "up to Jerusalem." "They journeyed from the east" connotes that they turned their backs on the sunrise. God had commanded Noah to "multiply, and replenish the earth." But we read : "And they said, Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth" (11:4). That was directly contrary to God, and He at once intervened, brought Nimrod's scheme to naught, and scattered them "abroad upon the face of all the earth" (v. 9).

At the Tower of Babel another crisis had arrived in the history of the human race. There mankind was again guilty of apostasy and outright defiance of the Most High. The divine confounding of man's speech was the Origin of the different nations of the earth, and after the overthrow of Nimrod's effort we get the formation of the "world" as it has existed ever since. This is confirmed in Romans 1, where the apostle supplies proof of the guilt of the Gentiles. In verse 19 we read of "that which may be known of God"-through the display of His perfections in the works of creation. Verses 21-23 go further and state, "When they knew God [i.e., in the days of Nimrod], they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools [in connection with the Tower of Babel] , and changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man." It was then that idolatry commenced. In what follows we are told three times that "God gave them up" (vv. 24, 26, 28). It was then that He abandoned them and "suffered all nations to walk in their own ways" (Acts 14:16).

The next thing after the great crisis in human affairs recorded in Genesis 11 was the divine call of Abraham, the father of the nation of Israel. But before turning to that, let us consider some of the effects of the nations going their own evil ways. The first of the Gentile nations about which Scripture has much to say are the Egyptians, who made their depravity clear by mistreating the Hebrews and defying the Lord. The seven nations which inhabited Canaan when Israel entered that land in the days of Joshua were devoted to the most horrible abominations and wickedness (Lev. 18:6-25; Deut. 9:5). The characters of the renowned empires of Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece and Rome are intimated in Daniel 7 :4-7, where they are likened to wild beasts. Outside the narrow bounds of Judaism the whole world was heathen, completely dominated by the devil. Having turned their backs on Him who is light, they were in total spiritual darkness, given up to ignorance, superstition and vice. One and all sought their happiness in the pleasures of earth, according to their various desires and appetites. But whatever "happiness" was enjoyed by them was sensual and fleeting, utterly unworthy of creatures made for eternity. They were quite insensible of their real misery, poverty and blindness.

It is true that the arts were developed to a high degree by some of the ancients and that there were famous sages among them, but the masses of the people were grossly materialistic, and their teachers propagated the wildest absurdities. They all denied a divine creation of the world, holding for the most part that matter is eternal. Some believed there was no survival of the soul after death, others in the theory of transmigration—the souls of men passing into the bodies of animals. In short, "the world by wisdom knew not God" (I Cor. 1:21). Where there is ignorance of Him there is always ignorance of ourselves. They did not realize they were victims of the great deceiver of souls, who blinds the minds of those who do not believe. No ancient nation was as highly educated as the Greeks, yet the private lives of her most eminent men were stained by the most revolting crimes. Those who had the ear of the public and talked most about setting men free from their passions, although held in the highest esteem as the teachers of truth and virtue, were themselves the abject slaves of sin and Satan. Morally speaking, society was rotten to the

core.

The whole world festered in its corruption. Sensual indulgence was everywhere carried to its highest pitch, gluttony was an art, fornication was indulged in without restraint. The Prophet Hosea shows (chap. 4) that where there is no knowledge of God there is no mercy or truth. Instead, selfishness, oppression and persecution bear down on all. There is scarcely a page in the annals of the world which does not furnish tragic illustrations of the greed and grind, the injustice and chicanery, the avarice and consciencelessness, the intemperance and immorality to which fallen human nature is so horribly prone. What a sad spectacle history presents of our race. It abundantly bears witness to the divine declaration, "Surely men of low degree are vanity, and men of high degree are a lie : to be laid in the balance, they are altogether lighter than vanity" (Ps. 62:9). Modern infidels may paint a beautiful picture of the virtues of many of the heathen, and out of their hatred of Christianity exalt them to the highest seats of intellectual attainment and moral excellence, but the clear testimony of history definitely refutes them.

The earth has been deluged with blood by its murders and fightings. "The dark places of the earth are full of the habitations of cruelty" (Ps. 74:20). In ancient Greece, parents were at liberty to abandon their children to perish from cold and hunger, or to be eaten up by wild beasts; and though such exposures were frequently practiced they passed without punishment or censure. Wars were prosecuted with the utmost ferocity, and if any of the vanquished escaped death, lifelong slavery of the most abject kind was the only prospect before them. At Rome, which was then the metropolis of the world, the court of Caesar was steeped in licentiousness. To provide amusement for his senators, six hundred gladiators fought hand-to-hand mortal combat in the public theater. Not to be outdone, Pompey turned five hundred lions into the arena to battle an equal number of his braves, and "delicate ladies" sat applauding and gloating over the flow of blood. Aged and infirm citizens were banished to an island in the Tiber. Almost two-thirds of the "civilized" world were slaves, their masters having absolute power over them. Human sacrifices were frequently offered on the temple altars. Destruction and misery were commonplace, and the way of peace was unknown (Rom. 3:16-17).

The Deists of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries made much of the charming innocence of the tribes which lived in the "sylvan bowers of primeval forests," untainted by the vices of civilization, unpolluted by modern commerce. But when the woods of America were entered by the white man, he found the Indians as ferocious and cruel as wild beasts. As someone expressed it, "The red tomahawk might have been emblazoned as the red man's coat of arms, and his eyes of glaring revenge regarded as the index of his character." When travelers penetrated into the interior of Africa, where they hoped to find human nature in its primitive excellence, they found instead primitive devilry. Take the milder races. To look into the gentle face of the Hindu one would suppose him incapable of brutality and bestiality, but let the facts of the Sepoy Rebellion of the nineteenth century be read, and one will find the mercilessness of the tiger. Look at the placid Chinaman. The Boxer outbreak and atrocities at the beginning of this century produced similar inhumanities. If a new tribe were discovered, we should know it too must be depraved and vicious. Simply to be informed that they were men would oblige us to conclude that they were "hateful, and hating one another."

Depravity of Jews as Well as Gentiles

The depravity of the Gentiles may not excite surprise, since their religions, instead of restraining vice, furnished a stimulus to the most horrible practices, in the examples of their profligate gods. But were the Jews any better? In considering their case we shall turn from the general to the particular, examining that

people designed by God to be a specimen of human nature. The divine Being singled out and separated them from all other nations. He showered His benefits upon them, strengthened them with many encouragements, wrought miracles on their behalf, awed them with the most fearful threatenings, chastised them severely and frequently, and inspired His servants to give us an accurate account of their response. And what a wretched response it was. Except for the conduct of a few individuals among them, which, being the effect of divine grace, proves nothing against what we are here demonstrating-in fact only serves to intensify the sad contrast-the entire history of the Jews was nothing but a series of rebellions and continued departures from the living God. No other nation was so highly favored and richly blessed by heaven, and none so wretchedly repaid the divine goodness.

Provided with a law which was drawn up and proclaimed by God Himself, which was enforced by the most winsome and also the most awesome sanctions, the whole nation within a few days of its reception was engaged in obscenely worshipping a golden calf. To them were entrusted the divine oracles and ordinances, which were neither appreciated nor heeded. In the wilderness they greatly provoked the holy One by their murmuring, their lusting after the plenty of Egypt when supplied with "angels' food" (Ps. 78:25), their prolonged idolatry (Acts 7:42-43) and their unbelief (Heb. 3:18). After they received the land of Canaan for an inheritance, they soon evinced their base ingratitude, so that the Lord had to say to His sorrowing servant, "They have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them" (I Sam. 8:7). So averse were they to God and His ways that they hated, persecuted and killed the messengers which He sent to turn them from their wickedness. "They kept not the covenant of God, and refused to walk in his law" (Ps. 78:10). They declared, "I have loved strangers, and after them will I go" (Jer. 2:25).

After furnishing proof in Romans 1 of the total depravity of the Gentile world, the apostle turned to the case of privileged Israel, and from their own Scriptures demonstrated that they were equally polluted, equally beneath the curse of God. He asked, "What then? Are we better than they?" Then he answered, "No, in no wise: for we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin" (Rom. 3:9). So too in I Corinthians 1, where the utmost scorn is expressed for that which is highly esteemed among men, the Jew is placed on the same level as the Gentile. There we are shown how God views the arrogant pretensions of the worldly wise. When the apostle asks, "Where is the wise?" he is referring to the Grecian philosophers, who dignified themselves with that title. His question indicates contempt of their proud claims. "With all your boasted knowledge, have you discovered the true and living God?" They are challenged to come forth with their schemes of religion. "After all you have taught others, what have you accomplished? Have you found out the way to eternal felicity? Have you learned how guilty sinners may have access to a holy God?" God declares that, far from being wise men, such sages as Pythagoras and Plato were fools.

Then Paul asks, "Where is the scribe?" (I Cor. 1:20). The scribe was the wise man, the esteemed teacher, among the Jews. He was at just as great a distance from and just as ignorant of the true God. Far from possessing any true knowledge of Him, he was a bitter enemy of that knowledge when it was proclaimed by His incarnate Son. Though the scribes enjoyed the inestimable advantage of possessing the Old Testament Scriptures, they were in general as ignorant of God's salvation as were the heathen philosophers. Instead of pointing to the death of the promised Messiah as the grand sacrifice for sin, they taught their disciples to depend on the laws and ceremonies of Moses, and on traditions of human invention. When Christ was manifested before them, far from being the first to receive Him, they were His most bitter persecutors. His appearing before them in the form of a servant did not suit their proud hearts.

Though He was "full of grace and truth," they saw no beauty in Him that they should desire Him. Though He announced glad tidings, they refused to listen to them. When Christ performed miracles of mercy before them, they would not believe in Him. Though He sought only their good, they returned Him nothing but evil. Their reaction was "We will not have this man to reign over us" (Luke 19:14).

Contempt for Christ

The general neglect and contempt which the Lord Jesus experienced among the people afford a very humbling view of what our fallen human nature is. But the awful depths of human depravity were most plainly evidenced by the scribes and Pharisees, the priests and elders. Though well acquainted with the prophets, and though professing to wait for the Messiah, with desperate and merciless malignity they sought His destruction. The whole course of their conduct shows that they acted against their convictions that Jesus Christ was the Messiah. Certainly they had full knowledge of His innocence of all which they charged against Him. This is evident from the plain intimation of the One who read their hearts, and who knew that they were saying within themselves, "This is the heir; come, let us kill him" (Matt. 21:38). They were as untiring as they were unscrupulous in their malice. They, or their agents, dogged Christ from place to place, hoping that in His more unguarded fellowship with His disciples they might more readily trap Him, or find something in His words or actions which they could distort into a ground of accusation. They seized every opportunity to poison the minds of the public against Him and, not content with ordinary aspersions of His character, inferred that He was ministering under the immediate inspiration of Satan. What was the source of such wicked treatment of the Son of God? What but their corrupt hearts? "They hated me without a cause" (John 15:25), declared the Lord of glory. There was nothing whatever in either His character or conduct which merited their vile contempt and enmity. They loved the darkness and therefore hated the light. They were infatuated by their evil lusts and delighted to gratify them. So too their deluded followers gave a ready ear to false prophets who said, "Peace, peace" to them, flattered them, and encouraged them in their carnality. Consequently they could not tolerate that which was disagreeable to their depraved tastes and condemned their sinful ways. Therefore "the people" as well as their chief priests and rulers cried out, "Away with this man, and release unto us Barabbas" (Luke 23:18). After they had hounded Him to a criminal's death, their ill will pursued Him to the grave, for they came to Pilate and demanded that he seal His sepulcher. When their effort was proved to be in vain, the high Sanhedrin of Israel bribed the soldiers who had attempted to guard the tomb, and with premeditated deliberation put a lie in their mouths (Matt. 28:11-15).

Nor did the enmity of Christ's enemies abate after He left this scene and returned to heaven. When His ambassadors went forth to preach His gospel, they were arrested and forbidden to teach in the name of Jesus, and then released under threat of punishment (Acts 4). Upon the apostles' refusal to comply, they were beaten (Acts 5:40). Stephen was stoned to death. James was beheaded, and many others were scattered abroad to escape persecution. Except where God was pleased to lay His restraining hand on those in whom He worked a miracle of grace, Jews and Gentiles alike despised the gospel and willfully opposed its progress. In some cases their hatred of the truth was less openly displayed than in others, yet it was nonetheless real. It has been the same ever since. However earnestly and winsomely the gospel is preached, most of those who hear it reject it. For the most part they are like those of our Lord's day who "made light of it, and went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandise" (Matt. 22:5). The great majority are too unconcerned to seek after even a doctrinal knowledge of the truth. Many regard this carelessness of the unsaved as mere indifference, but actually it is something much worse than that, namely, dislike for the things of God, direct antagonism to Him.

The hostility of the unsaved is made evident by the way they treat the people of God. The closer the believer walks with his Lord, the more he will grate on and be mistreated by those who are strangers to Him. But "blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake" (Matt. 5:10). As one pointed out, "It is a strong proof of human depravity that man's curses and Christ's blessings should meet on the same persons. Who would have thought a man could be persecuted and reviled, and have all manner of evil said of him for righteousness' sake?" But do the ungodly really hate justice and integrity, and love those who defraud and wrong them? No, they do not dislike righteousness as it respects their own interests, only that species of it which own the rights of God. If the saints would be content with doing justly and loving mercy, and would give up walking humbly with God, they might go through the world not only in peace but with the approbation of the unregenerate; but "all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (II Tim. 3:12) because such a life reproves the ungodliness of the wicked. If compassion moves the Christian to warn his sinful neighbors of their danger, he is likely to be insulted for his pains. His best actions will be ascribed to the worst motives. Yet, far from being cast down by such treatment, the disciple should rejoice that he is counted worthy to suffer a little for his Master's sake.

Disowning of God's Law

The depravity of men appears in their disowning of the divine law set over them. It is the right of God to be the acknowledged Ruler of His creatures, yet they are never so pleased as when they invade His prerogative, break His laws, and contradict His revealed will. How little we realize that it is one and the same to repudiate His scepter and to repudiate His being. When we disown His authority we disown His Godhead. There is in natural man an averseness to having any acquaintance with the rule under which their Maker has placed them: "Therefore they say unto God, Depart from us; for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways. What is the Almighty, that we should serve him? And what profit should we have, if we pray unto him?" (Job 21:14-15). That aversion is seen in their unwillingness to use the means for obtaining a knowledge of His will. However eager they are in their quest for all other kinds of knowledge, however diligent in studying the formation, constitution and ways of creatures, they refuse to acquaint themselves with their Creator. When made aware of some part of His will, they attempt to shake it off, as they do not "like to retain God in their knowledge" (Rom. 1:28). If they do not succeed, they avoid considering such knowledge, and do their utmost to dismiss it from their minds.

A class of the unregenerate who are exceptions to the general rule are those who attend church, make a profession of religion, and become "Bible students." Motivated by pride of intellect and reputation, they are ashamed to be regarded as spiritual ignoramuses, and want to have a good standing in religious circles. Thus they secure a cloak of respectability, and often the esteem of God's own people. Nevertheless, they are devoid of God's grace. They "hold the truth in unrighteousness" (Rom. 1:18); they hold it, but it does not grip, influence and transform them. If they ponder the truth, it is not with delight; if they take pleasure in it, it is only because their store of information is increased and they are better equipped to hold their own in a discussion. Their design is to inform their understanding, not to quicken their affection for God. There is far more hypocrisy than sincerity within the pale of the church. Judas was a follower of Christ because he "had the bag, and bare what was put therein" (John 12:6), not out of love for the Saviour. Some have the faith or truth of God "with respect of persons" (James 2:1); they do not receive it from the fountain, but from the channel. Often the truth delivered by another is rejected; but that same truth, coming from the mouth of their idol, is regarded as an oracle. They make man and not God their rule, for though they acknowledge the truth, they do not receive it for love of the truth, but rather because they admire the instrument.

The depravity of human nature is seen in the sad and general reversion to darkness of a people after being favored with the light. Even where God has been made known and His truth proclaimed, if He leaves men to the working of their evil hearts, they quickly fall back into a state of ignorance. Noah and his sons lived for centuries after the flood to acquaint the world with the perfections of God, yet all knowledge of Him soon disappeared. Abram and his father were idolaters (Joshua 24:2). Even after a man has experienced the new birth and become the subject of immediate divine influence, how much ignorance and error, imperfection and impropriety, still remains—just because he is not completely subject to the Lord. The backslidings and partial apostasies of genuine Christians are an awful demonstration of the corruption of human nature. Our proneness to fall into error after divine enlightenment is solemnly illustrated by the Galatians. They had been instructed by Paul, and through the power of the Spirit had believed in the Saviour he proclaimed. They were so happy that they received him "as an angel of God" (4:14). Yet in the course of a few years many of those converts gave such credence to false teachers, and so far renounced biblical principles, that the apostle had to say of them, "I stand in doubt of you" (4:20). Look at Europe, Asia, Africa, after the preaching of the apostles and those who immediately followed them. Though the light of Christianity illuminated most sections of the Roman Empire, it was speedily quenched, and gave place to the darkness. The greater part of the world fell victim to Rome and Islam.

Nothing more forcibly exhibits the sinfulness of man than his proneness to idolatry. No other sin is so strongly denounced or so severely punished by God. Idols are simply the work of men's hands, and therefore inferior to them. How irrational then to worship them! Can human madness go further than for men to imagine they can manufacture gods? Those who have sunk so low as to confide in a block of wood or stone have reached the extreme of idiocy. As Psalm 115 points out, "They have mouths, but they speak not: eyes have they, but they see not... They that make them are like unto them"—as stupid, as incapable of hearing and seeing those things which pertain to their salvation.

The corruption of human nature discovers itself in little children. As the adage puts it, "That which is bred in the bone comes out in the flesh." And at what an early date it does! If there were any innate goodness in man, it would surely show itself during the days of his infancy, before virtuous principles were corrupted, before evil habits were formed by his contact with the world. But do we find infants inclined to all that is pure and excellent, and disinclined to whatever is wrong? Are they meek, tractable, yielding readily to authority? Are they unselfish, magnanimous when another child seizes their toy? Far from it. The unvarying result of growth in human beings is that as soon as they are old enough to exhibit any moral qualities in human action they display evil ones. Long before they are old enough to understand their own wicked tempers, they manifest self-will, greediness, deceitfulness, anger, spite and revenge. They cry and pout for what is not good for them, and are indignant with their elders on being refused, often attempting to strike them. Those born and brought up in the midst of honesty are guilty of petty pilfering before they ever witness an act of theft. These blemishes are not to be ascribed to ignorance, but to their variance with the divine law to which man's nature was originally conformed, to that horrible change which sin has made in the human constitution. Human nature is seen to be tainted from the beginning of its existence.

The universal prevalence of disease and death witnesses unmistakably to the fall of man. All the pains and disorders of our bodies, by which our health is impaired and our way through this world made difficult, are the consequences of our apostasy from God. The Saviour plainly intimated that sickness is an effect of sin when He healed the man with the palsy, saying, "Thy sins be forgiven thee" (Matt. 9:2). The psalmist also linked together God's pardoning the iniquities of His people and healing their diseases (103:3). There is one event that happens to all. Yes, but why should it? Why should there be wasting away and then

dissolution? Philosophy offers no explanation. Science can furnish no satisfactory answer, for to say that disease results from the decay of nature only pushes the inquiry farther back. Disease and death are abnormalities. Man is created by the eternal God, endowed with a never dying soul. Why then should he not continue to live here forever? Because of the fall; death is the wages of sin.

Man's ingratitude to his gracious Benefactor is still another evidence of his sad condition. The Israelites were a woeful sample of all mankind in this respect. Though the Lord delivered them from the house of bondage, miraculously conducted them through the Red Sea, led them safely across the wilderness, they did not appreciate it. Though He screened them with a cloud from the heat of the sun, gave them light by night in a pillar of fire, fed them with bread from heaven, caused streams to flow in the sandy desert, and brought them into the possession of a land flowing with milk and honey, they were continually murmuring and complaining. Men do not acknowledge or even recognize the hand that so bountifully ministers to their needs. No one is satisfied with the place and portion Providence has assigned him; he is forever coveting what he does not have. He is a creature given to changes; he is afflicted with a malady which Solomon termed "the wandering of the desire" (Eccles. 6:9).

Someone has said that every dog that snaps at us, every horse that lifts up its heel against us, proves that we are fallen creatures. The brute creation had no enmity toward man before the fall. Creation gave willing respect to Adam (Gen. 2:19). Eve no more dreaded the serpent than we would a fly. But when man shrugged off allegiance to God, the beasts by divine permission shook off allegiance to man. What a proof of man's degradation that the sluggard is exhorted to "go to the ant" and learn from a creature so much lower in the scale of being! Consider the necessity of human laws, fenced with punishments and terrors to restrain men's lusts. Yet in spite of the vast and costly apparatus of police forces, law courts and prisons, how little success follows their efforts to repress human wickedness! Neither education, legislation nor religion is sufficient.

Finally, take the unvarying experience of the saints. It is part of the Spirit's work to open blind eyes, to show souls their wretchedness, and to make them aware of their dire need of Christ. And when He thus brings a sinner to realize his ruined condition by an experiential knowledge of sin, that sinner's comeliness is at once turned to corruption, and he cries, "Behold, I am vile." Though grace has entered his heart, his native depravity has not been expelled. Though sin no longer has dominion over him, it rages and often prevails against him. There is ceaseless warfare within between the flesh and the spirit. There is no need for us to enlarge on this, for every Christian, because of the plague of his heart, groans within himself, "O wretched man that I am!" He is wretched because he does not live as he earnestly longs to do, and because he so often does the very things he hates, grieving daily over evil imaginations, wandering thoughts, unbelief, pride, coldness, pretense.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/aw-pink/the-total-depravity-of-man-chapter-11-evidences/>

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