

The Total Depravity of Man Chapter 9 EXTENT

by A.W. Pink

Transcript

The Total Depravity of Man

Chapter 9

EXTENT

Neither the scientist, the philosopher, nor the psychologist can correctly diagnose the fatal malady which has seized all mankind, and still less is any of them able to gauge its full extent. For a right and true knowledge of this we are dependent on what the Holy Spirit has revealed in Holy Writ. There we are shown that man has become not only fallen and corrupt but totally depraved; that he is not only a criminal before the divine law, but a foul and repulsive object in the eyes of his Maker. There are two inseparable effects of sin: pollution and guilt, neither of which can be avoided. Where there is sin there is a stain. Uncleaness, ugliness, filthiness, and similar characteristics, indicate not only a property of sin but also the effect it produces in its subjects. It defiles, leaving the impress of its odious features, making the soul the reflection of its own hideousness. Wherever it touches, it leaves its filthy slime, making its subject hateful and abominable. Biblical Description of Sin No representations of sin are more common in the Scriptures than those taken from its defiling effects. Throughout it is portrayed as ugly and revolting, unclean and disgusting. It is pictured by leprosy, the most loathsome disease which can attack the human frame. It is likened to wounds, bruises and putrefying sores. It is compared to a cage of unclean birds. The inseparable connection of the beautiful and good and the ugly and sinful pervades the moral teaching of both Testaments. That connection is ethical and not aesthetic. To reverse the order would be to reduce righteousness to a matter of taste, and to regulate authority according to its appeal to our sentiments. As someone has said, the aesthetic sentiment is a reflection from the moral sphere, a transfer to our senses of those perceptions found in their purity only in the realm of the spiritual and divine. Sin is really and originally all that is ugly; nothing else is ugly except as a result of its connection with sin. The ugliness which it creates is its own blot. It has deranged the whole structure of the soul, and morally ulcerated man from head to foot. "We are all as an unclean thing" (Isa. 64:6). Thus God's Word describes us: foul and filthy. That pollution is deep and unmistakable, likened to crimson dye (Isa. 1:18), or to the blackness of the Ethiopian (Jer. 13:23), which cannot be washed away by the niter of positive thinking or the soap of reformation (Jer. 2:22). It is an indelible pollution, for it is "written with a pen of iron, and with the point of a diamond: it is graven upon the table of ... [the] heart" (Jer. 17:1). The great deluge did not wash it from the earth, nor did the fire that came down upon Sodom burn it out. It is ineradicable. Even the fire of hell through eternity will not take away the stain of sin in the souls there. This pollution spreads, like leaven

and leprosy. It is universal, and has defiled all the faculties of the inner man, so that there is "no soundness in it" (Isa. 1:6). Soul and body alike are contaminated, for we read of the "filthiness of the flesh and spirit" (II Cor. 7:1). It extends to the thoughts and imaginations, as well as to words and deeds. It is malignant and deadly, "the poison of asps" (Rom. 3:13). "I said unto thee when thou wast in thy blood, Live; yea, I said unto thee when thou wast in thy blood, Live" (Ezek. 16:6). The doubling of that expression shows the deadly nature of the pollution. Sin is as loathsome as it is criminal; it is like a foul stench in the nostrils of the Lord. Thus the day man corrupted himself, his Maker could no longer endure him, but drove him out of the garden (Gen. 3:24). The Scriptures liken man to foxes for their subtlety, to wild bulls for their intractableness, to briars and thorns for their hurtfulness, to pigs for their greediness and filthiness, to bears and lions for their cruelty and bloodthirstiness, to serpents for their hatefulness. However unpleasant and forbidding this subject, it is an integral part of "the counsel of God" which His ministers are not at liberty to withhold. They are not free to pick and choose their themes, still less to tone them down. Rather each one is told by his Master, "Speak unto them all that I commanded thee: be not dismayed at their faces" (Jer. 1:17). Asylums, prisons and cemeteries are depressing sights, yet they are painful facts of human history. Refusal to consider fallen man's condition helps no one. Until we are brought to realize this truth we shall never despair of self and look away to Another. This solemn side of the picture is indeed dark, yet it is the necessary background to redemption. Biblical Description of Sinful Man The effects of the fall are not only more terrible but much more wide-reaching than are commonly supposed. Yet this would not be the case were our thoughts formed by the teaching of Holy Writ. God's Word is plain enough: "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" (Gen. 6:5). Those words are as impressive as they are solemn. In Genesis 1:31 we read, "And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good." But here the omniscient One is portrayed as taking a universal survey of the condition of mankind, and recording His righteous verdict of their condemnation. They announce His unerring diagnosis of their inward state in terms which fully explain their outward conduct. The spring of all their actions is thoroughly corrupt. The translators of the Authorized Version have given a marginal note informing us that the Hebrew word for "imagination" included the purposes and desires. The very fount of man's being was defiled, and it was a most offensive sight to the holy One. The heart is the moral center from which all the issues or outgoings of life proceed, and none but God knows how evil it is. The thoughts formed within such a heart are vain and sinful. The imagination or formation of them, their very first stirrings, are evil. As we stated, the Hebrew word for "imagination of the heart" signifies a matrix, the frame in which our thoughts are cast. Observe that every imagination is evil. No good ideas are intermingled; all are unrelieved badness—not simply the outward acts, but also the first movements of the soul toward an object. There we have the source from which all the wickedness of men proceeds. The corrupt moods within us are in a constant fermentation. Man's heart is such that, left to itself, it will always be producing inordinate affections and emotions. Men are "only evil" without exception, wholly so; there is not a single virtuous one among them. Furthermore, they are "evil continually," without intermission all the days of their lives, therefore all their works are evil and fruitless. "The imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth" (Gen. 8:21). Genesis 6:5 described human nature and conduct as it was prior to the flood; this verse shows what man still was after it. The great deluge had swept away all of that corrupt generation to which Enoch had prophesied and Noah had preached in vain, but it had not cleansed man's nature. That remained as vile as before. Man continued to be conceived in iniquity and born in sin, and what is bred in the bone always comes out in the flesh. From the first moment of his existence, every descendant of Adam is a defiled creature, fit only for God's abhorrence. His very instincts while in embryo are essentially evil. The Hebrew word for "youth" is translated "childhood" in I Samuel 12:2; both personal experience and

observation sadly verify the solemn fact that, as Charnock said, there is "not a moment of a man's life wherein our hereditary corruption doth not belch its froth." "Behold, he putteth no trust in his saints [for they are but mutable creatures in themselves]; yea, the heavens are not clean in his sight. How much more abominable and filthy is man, which drinketh iniquity like water?" (Job 15:15-16). What a description of human nature: obnoxious to God, corrupt in itself! Man is thoroughly unclean, as his life bears witness, his very righteousness being "as filthy rags"-so impure that nothing but the blood of Christ can cleanse him. With such a character man is never weary of sinning: Even when worn out by age, his lusts are still active within. As Peter expressed it, "They cannot cease from sin" for it is their very nature to be sinful. Possessing a disposition which greedily craves indulgence, seeking satisfaction as passionately as parched throats in the burning desert long for the quenching of their thirst, man delights in iniquity and, so far as he is left to follow his inordinate propensities, he is continually seeking to take his fill of it. "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil" (Eccles. 8:11). Such is the perversity of corrupt human nature that it abuses the very patience and forbearance of God. Since divine judgment is not sent at once to evildoers, they set themselves against the Lord and promise themselves immunity. Thus it was with those in the days of Noah. God deferred the flood for one hundred and twenty years, giving them ample "space for repentance"; but instead of availing themselves of the opportunity they regarded His threats as idle, and became increasingly corrupt and violent. It was thus with Pharaoh, who only hardened his heart when respite was granted him. And it is still thus. Though the marks of divine displeasure against our generation are multiplied, men grow more and more daring and in defying God's law, sinning with a high hand and presuming on their security. "The heart of the sons of men is full of evil, and madness is in their heart while they live, and after that they go to the dead" (Eccles. 9:3). As Christ was and is "full of grace and truth" (John 1:14), the natural man is filled with unrighteousness and wickedness. He is filled with such enmity against God that as his corruptions kindle it, so divine and spiritual things stimulate it to action. That awful enmity comprises the sum of all evil. "Madness is in their heart"; men are so infatuated as to seek their pleasures in the things which God hates. They cast off all the restraints of reason and conscience (cf. Jer. 1:38) as their heady and violent passions press them forward into sin. Who but a madman would set himself against the Almighty and rush into evil heedless of danger and disaster? They are maddened by their lusts, mad against piety. The clause "after that they go to the dead" signifies more than the grave; they are gathered to their own company, the dead in sin, not to "the spirits of just men made perfect." The teaching of the Lord Jesus was of course in perfect harmony with that of the Old Testament. He never flattered human nature or extolled its excellences. Instead He painted it in the darkest colors, announcing that He had come to "seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10). Fallen man has lost all likeness to God, all communion with God, all love for God, all true knowledge of God, all delight in God, all favor with God, all power toward God, and has thrown off all subjection to God. The Saviour was not deceived by religious pretense or shallow profession. Even when many believed in His name as they saw the miracles which He did, "Jesus did not commit himself unto them... for he knew what was in man" (John 2:23-25) - By declaring, "I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (Matt. 9:13), He had not only intimated the need for His mission-for there would have been no occasion for His coming among men unless they were perishing-but inferred that there were none righteous, for He called upon all to repent (Mark 1:15; Luke 13:5). When Christ asserted, "Except a man be born again, he cannot enter the kingdom of God," He showed how desperate is man's plight; for the new birth is not a mere correcting of some defect, nor the righting of a single faculty, but an entire renovation of the soul. The same Spirit which formed Christ in the virgin's womb must form Him in our hearts to fit us for the presence of God. When Christ averred that "men loved darkness rather than light"

(John 3:19), He exposed their awful depravity. They were not only in the darkness, but delighted in it "because their deeds were evil." When He stated that "the wrath of God abideth on" the unbeliever, Christ testified to man's awful condition. When He said, "I know you, that ye have not the love of God in you" (John 5:42), He again revealed man's fearful state, for since all goodness or virtue consists in love to God and our neighbor, then where love is wanting, goodness or virtue has no existence. Christ's statement "No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him" (John 6:44) plainly showed the moral impotence of every descendant of Adam. This impotence consists of turpitude and baseness, of inveterate opposition to God due to bitter hatred of Him. No one seeks the company of a person he loathes: before he does so he must be given an entirely new disposition. "For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: all these evil things come from within, and defile the man" (Mark 7:21-23). Note that Christ used "heart" in the singular number, referring to the common and uniform heart of all mankind. Here the Lord made known what a loathsome place is the center of man's being, and what horrible crimes issue from its evil. They rise from that fountain which is poisoned by sin. The Son of God expressed His estimate of fallen mankind thus: "If ye then, being evil..." (Matt. 7:11). Men not only do that which is evil, but are so in their very nature. As the psalmist said, "Their inward part is very wickedness" (5:9) - Christ spoke not to open enemies but to His own disciples, and His language affirmed that by birth they were defiled both root and branch. How His words abase human pride! Those who prattle about the dignity and nobility of human nature meet with Christ's solemn verdict to the contrary. "The Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him" (John 14:17). What Christ said in His day, "Because I tell you the truth, ye believe me not" (John 8:45), is still true. Men are so infatuated with lies, they cannot receive the Spirit of truth. In those words the Son of God represented the unregenerate as not having the least degree of spiritual discernment and knowledge, as being completely destitute of holiness. Nothing but total depravity can make man so blind to spiritual things as to be thoroughly opposed to them. Our English word "depraved" is taken from depravatus, which means twisted, wrenched from the straight line. The root of this word is pravus, "crooked," "bad." Total depravity connotes that this distortion has affected all of man's being to such an extent that he has no inherent power of recovery left to restore himself to harmony with God, and that this is the case with every member of the race. Yet total depravity does not imply that sin has reached its highest intensity in a person so that it is incapable of augmentation, for men add to their sins (I Sam. 12:19). No, fallen man does not enter this world as bad as he can be, but he has "no good thing" in him (Rom. 7:18). Instead he is wholly corrupt, entirely vitiated throughout his constitution. The natural man has not one iota of holiness in him; rather he is horn with the seeds of every form of evil, radically inclined to sin. In our nature we are vileness itself, black as hell, and unless a miracle of grace is worked in us we must inevitably be damned for all eternity. It is not a case of man's having a few imperfections; he is altogether polluted. "an unclean thing" with "no soundness" (Isa. 1:6). Not only has man no holiness, but his heart is inveterately averse to it. The solemn doctrine of total depravity does not mean that there are no parents with genuine love for their children, and no children who respectfully obey their parents; that there are none imbued with a spirit of benevolence to the poor and kind sympathy for the suffering; that there are no conscientious employers or honest employees. But it does mean that, where the unregenerate are concerned, those duties are discharged without any love for God, any subjection to His authority, or any concern for His glory. Parents are required to bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, and children are to obey their parents in the Lord (Eph. 6:1, 4). Servants are to serve their masters "in singleness of heart, as unto Christ." Do the unconverted comply with those injunctions? No, therefore their performances not only possess no spiritual value, but are polluted. Every

act of the natural man is faulty. "The plowing of the wicked is sin" (Prov. 21:4) because it is for selfish ends. Then is it better not to plow at all? Wrong, for slothfulness is equally sinful. There are different degrees of enormity, but every act of man is sinful. The condition of the natural man is such that in the discharge of his first responsibility to his Maker he is utterly unfaithful. His chief obligation is to live for the glory of God and to love Him with all his heart; but while he remains unrenewed he does not have the least spiritual, holy, true love for Him. Whatever there may be in his domestic and social conduct which is admirable in the eyes of others, it is not prompted by any respect for the divine will. So far as man's self-recovery and self-recuperation are concerned, his depravity is total, in the sense of being decisive and final. Spurgeon stated: Man is fallen; every part and passion of his nature is perverted: he has gone astray altogether, is sick from the crown of his head to the soles of his feet: yea, is dead in trespasses and sins and corrupt before God. O pride of human nature, we plough right over thee! The hemlock standing in thy field must be cut up by the roots. Thy weeds seem like fair flowers, but the ploughshare must go right through them, till all thy beauty is shown to be a painted Jezebel, and all human glorying a bursting bubble.

What makes this awful view of man's total depravity yet more solemn is the fact that there is no exception to it, for it is universal. Corrupt nature is the same in all. The hand that writes these lines is as capable of perpetrating the foulest crime on the calendar, and the heart of the reader could devise the worst deed committed by the vilest wretch who ever lived. The only distinction of character among men is that which the sovereign power and grace of God effects. "We are all as an unclean thing" (Isa. 64:6); our original purity is gone. "There is no difference: for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." In his comments on Romans 3:10-18 Calvin said: In this terrible manner the apostle inveighs not against particular individuals, but against all the posterity of Adam. He does not declaim against the depraved manners of one or another age, but accedes the perpetual corruption of our nature. For his design in that passage is not simply to rebuke men in order that they may repent, but rather to teach us that all men are overwhelmed with an inevitable calamity, from which they can never emerge unless they are extricated by the mercy of God.

When the Lord Jesus called Paul, He informed him that He was about to send him to the Gentiles "to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God" (Acts 26:18). In those words Christ indicated the character of the whole Gentile world; they were all as ignorant of God, and of the way of acceptance with Him, as blind men are of the true objects of sight. There were then, as now, devout religionists, esteemed poets and boastful philosophers who gloried in their wisdom, professing to teach what was the true happiness of man. There were renowned sages with innumerable disciples, whose schools were run solely for the study of virtue, knowledge and happiness. Nevertheless "the world by wisdom knew not God," and He declared, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent" (I Cor. 1:19-21), for it deceived and deluded them. The schools themselves were darkness, and the minds of their authors—men like Pythagoras and Plato, Socrates and Aristotle—were "blinded by the god of this world," completely under the control of the devil. "The LORD looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, and seek God" (Ps. 14:2). We quote Spurgeon again: Behold the eyes of Omniscience ransacking the globe, and prying among every people and nation. He who is looking down knows the good, is quick to discern it, would be delighted to find it; but as He views all the unregenerate children of men His search is fruitless, for of all the race of Adam no unrenewed soul is other than an enemy to God and goodness. "They are all gone out of the way." Without exception, all men have apostatized from the Lord their Maker, from His Laws, and from the eternal principles of right. Like stubborn heifers they have

sturdily refused to receive the yoke. The original speaks of the race as a totality, humanity as a whole has become depraved in heart and life. "They have altogether become filthy." As a whole they are spoiled and soured like corrupt leaven, or, as some put it, they have become putrid and even stinking. The only reason why we do not more clearly see this foulness is because we are accustomed to it, just as those who work daily among offensive odours at last cease to smell them.

Extent of Carnality That terrible indictment "The carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be" (Rom 8:7) is not restricted to particularly reprobate persons, but is an unqualified statement which applies to every individual. It is "the carnal mind," whatever mind may properly be designated "carnal," natural, unspiritual. The undeveloped mind of the infant is "enmity against God." Moreover, that description is true at all times, though it is not equally so evident. Though the wolf may sleep, he is still a wolf. The snake which lurks among the flowers is just as deadly as when it lies among noxious weeds. Furthermore, that solemn declaration is true of the whole mind, of all its faculties. It is true of the memory: nursery rhymes, silly jokes and foolish songs are retained without effort, whereas passages of Scripture and spiritual sermons are quickly forgotten. It is so with the affections: the creature is idolized and the Creator slighted. So of the judgment: what erroneous conceptions it forms of the Deity and how fearfully it wrests His Word! It is true even of the conscience, for there have been those who, while killing the saints, thought they did God a service (John 16:2), among them Saul of Tarsus. As might well be expected, fierce opposition has been made against this flesh-withering truth of the total depravity of man, and always will be where it is faithfully preached. When men are informed that they are suffering from something far more serious than a defect in their characters or an unhappy bias of disposition, namely, that their very nature is rotten to the core, it is more than human pride can endure. When told that the center of their moral being is corrupt, that their heart—the potent fountain from which issue their desires and thoughts—is desperately wicked, that it is inherently and radically evil from the first moment of their existence, hot resentment is at once aroused. It is indeed awful to contemplate that not only is sin the element in which the natural man lives, but the whole of his life is one unmixed course of evil. It is scarcely surprising that those who are not subject to the Word of truth should revolt at such a concept, especially as it is contrary to what appears in not a few characters who must be respected for many admirable qualities. Nevertheless, since all sin is a coming short of the glory of God, every act of fallen man has in it the nature of sin. Even in Christendom this doctrine has been strongly and steadily resisted. The great controversy between Augustine and Pelagius in the fifth century turned upon whether that moral corruption which pertains to all mankind is total or partial. If the latter, then of course it follows that man still has within him something which is good, something which is consistent with the divine law, something which enables him to at least partly discharge the obligations on him as a creature of God. Ever since the days of Augustine there have been those posing as Christians who, while acknowledging that man is a fallen and depraved creature, have flatly denied that he is totally depraved. Those who repudiate the inward and invincible call of the Spirit do not realize the actual state of man's soul, nor perceive that a miracle of grace is necessary before he is made willing to comply with the demands of the gospel. Arminians acknowledge the aid of the Spirit, but at once negate their admission by affirming that He can be successfully resisted after He has put forth all His efforts to woo the sinner to Christ. It is important to recognize that the principles of faith and love are not produced by mere moral persuasion, by the external presentation of Christ to a person. Rather they are accomplished by a miracle of divine power and grace in the soul. Such a glorious work must be done by an efficient agent. The natural man is blind and dead to spiritual things, and what mere persuasion can make the blind see or the dead act? Persuasion, far from giving a faculty, presupposes one; the use of it is not to confer a power, but to stir and move it to act. God is far more than an Orator beseeching men; He is a mighty Operator quickening men. His word is a

commanding power. As He said, "Let light be," and there was light, so He calls for a new heart and brings it into existence. God is no mere Helper, but a Creator. "We are his workmanship," not our own. It is God who makes us new creatures, and not we ourselves. We are "born, not... of the will of man, but of God" (John 1:13). To say that we are in part born of our own wills is to blaspheme the Author of our spiritual being and to place the crown on nature instead of grace. The evolutionist emphatically denies the total depravity of man, for the only fall he believes in is an upward one. He is loud in insisting that there is a divine spark of life in the soul of every human being, burning very feebly in some, yet capable of being fanned into a flame if the right influences are brought to bear on it. Others term it a divine "seed" of goodness, a seed which only needs cultivating for the ultimate development of a noble and virtuous character. This is a point-blank repudiation of the teaching of Christ that the human race is essentially "corrupt." Since the whole system of redemption rests upon the basic fact of man's total depravity, and since every false system of religion originates in the repudiation of that fact, it is incumbent on us to expose the fallacy of those objections which are commonly made against it. Some attempt to show that we do not enter this world in a defiled condition. The engaging simplicity, dependence and harmlessness of infants are stressed, and reference is even made to Scripture in support of the contention that they are born in a state of innocence. But this need not detain us very long, for it scarcely presents even an apparent force. Appeal is made to this statement: "And shed innocent blood, even the blood of their sons and of their daughters, whom they sacrificed unto the idols of Canaan" (Ps. 106:38), which simply means they sacrificed their little ones, who had not been active participants in their idolatry. "For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil" (Rom. 9:11) is not to the point, for those words refer not to their nature but to a time before they committed any deeds. While in contrast with adults infants possess a relative innocence in that they are guiltless of personal transgressions, yet it is clear that they partake of original sin (Ps. 51:5; 58:3; Prov. 22:15). Scripture never contradicts itself. Others insist that there is some good in the very worst, that even the most confirmed villains shudder and turn away from certain deeds of wickedness when first tempted to do them. The conclusion is drawn that, deeply buried under the ashes of a life of unbridled crime, the sparks of some power of goodness still remain. But that is to confuse the faint stirrings of man's moral nature with potential spirituality. Confusion of thought leads people to infer that because there are degrees of wickedness there must be a modicum of good. Because one stage of depravity is lower than another, this does not warrant the denial that the first stage is degraded. The development of wickedness is one thing; the presence of any measure of holiness or virtue is another. The absence of certain forms of sins does not imply any innate purity. It might as well be affirmed that a recent corpse, which is less loathsome, is therefore less dead than one which is far gone in decay and putrefaction. Voice of Conscience Many have argued that the strivings of conscience in the unregenerate demonstrate that they are not totally depraved. They point out that every man is possessed of the faculty which bears witness within him in countless instances of what is right and wrong. They state that this inward monitor exerts considerable influence even on wicked men, impelling them to perform actions which are relatively good, and deterring them from actions which are evil. That is freely admitted, but it does not minimize the truth we are here contending for. While conscience is necessary to the performance of both good and evil, it does not enter into either the one or the other. It is that part of the mind which takes cognizance of the virtue or vice of our actions but is quite distinct from both. It is that ethical instinct which passes judgment on the lawfulness or unlawfulness of our desires and actions. The conscience itself needs instructing, for its dictates go no farther than the knowledge it possesses. It does not reveal anything, but simply declares the character of what is presented to the mind's eye, according to the light it has. The conscience is not in itself a standard of duty, for that of a heathen speaks very differently from that of a Christian, who is taught by the Holy Spirit. The conscience is an ear to hear, and

the character of what it hears—whether true or false—is the measure of its intelligence. In proportion to the tutoring of this inward eye will be the truthfulness of its perceptions. The term defines itself: con-science, "with knowledge"—to know with oneself. Conscience informs and impresses us with the difference between good and evil, But since all duty consists of and is contained in love (of God and our neighbor), good and evil must consist entirely in the disposition of the heart. Since the mere dictates of conscience include no such dispositions, neither good nor evil can be predicated on those dictates. Both men and demons will forever possess consciences witnessing to them what is good and evil, even in hell itself where, as all must allow, they will be utterly destitute of any virtue or goodness. We do indeed read in God's Word of a good conscience and an evil one. We also read of "an evil eye," yet there is neither good nor evil in the sight of the eye, except as it is under the influence of a holy or unholy disposition of the soul. So it is with the dictates of the conscience. The conscience bears solemn witness to the loss of man's purity and the presence of depravity. But to regard the resistance of conscience to each successive stage of sin as an evidence of innate goodness is to ignore the very real distinction between the authority of conscience and a soul's love for God. The conscience certainly remonstrates and enforces the right in the form of an unconditional and absolute imposition; it also threatens man with the destruction of his peace if he persists in his course of wrongdoing. But the remonstrance and threatening come to him as a restraint, as a force, as something against which the current of his soul is set. There is no love for God in it, no respect to His will declared by it, no regard for His honor. The struggle is not between good and evil (as is the case in a saint), but between sinful inclination and positive prohibition. To know duty and yet be reluctant to perform it is no evidence of any goodness of heart. Even to find satisfaction in performing a duty at the dictate of conscience proves no reverence whatever for God Himself. The conflicts which the natural man experiences are most certainly not between any love he has for God and the inordinate desires of his fallen nature, but rather between his conscience and his lusts. Any remorse which he may suffer is not sorrow for having offended his Maker, but vexation at the sense of his degradation and the injury done to his pride. There is no grief before God for having been a reproach to Him. Nor does the wretchedness which dissipation produces in any way dispose its subject to a more favorable reception of the gospel. The groaning under the chains which sinful habits forge and the sighing for deliverance are not longings to be freed from sin, but rather desires to escape from its painful consequences both to the conscience and to the body. Mental tranquility and physical health are coveted, not the approbation of the Lord. Any misery suffered by the natural man is not from having offended God, but because he cannot defy Him with impunity and immunity. None but the Holy Spirit can produce a hatred of sin as sin; that is something the conscience never does. Though evolutionists and even openly avowed infidels cannot get away from the fact that man is a very imperfect creature, they are far from allowing that he is totally depraved—averse to all that is good, prone to all that is evil. Such a declaration is much too humbling and humiliating for any natural heart honestly to accept and be duly affected by it. Plain and insistent as is God's Word on the subject, not a few professing Christians find it so distasteful that, if they do not repudiate it in toto, they go to great lengths in order to blunt its sharp edge and remove its most cutting features. The language of Hazeal well expresses their resentment against the dark picture which the divine Artist has drawn of them. When this Syrian saw Elijah weeping, and inquired what was the occasion of his distress, God's servant replied, "Because I know the evil that thou wilt do unto the children of Israel: their strong holds wilt thou set on fire, and their young men wilt thou slay with the sword, and wilt dash their children, and rip up their women with child" (II Kings 8:12). So little was Hazeal aware of the vileness of his nature that he became highly indignant, and answered, "But what, is thy servant a dog, that he should do this great thing?" He fondly imagined himself to be incapable of such foul deeds. Nevertheless the sad sequel fully vindicated the prophet, for although Hazeal supposed himself to be as gentle as a

lamb, when he came into power he proved himself to be as fierce as a savage dog and as cruel as a tiger. He not only murdered his royal master, usurped the throne of Syria, burned the cities of Israel and killed their inhabitants with the sword, but barbarously massacred the women and children. As II Kings 13:7 states, he went on destroying Israel till he "had made them like the dust by threshing." Unacceptability Of Every Carnal Act Every passage in the Word of truth which declares the impossibility of the natural man doing anything acceptable to God (e.g., Jer. 13:23; Matt. 7:18; Rom. 8:8; Heb. 11:6) demonstrates man's total depravity. If men performed any part of their duty toward God it would be pleasing to Him, for He is not a capricious or hard Master, but delights in righteousness wherever He sees it. But, as the Lord Jesus pointed out, men will gather grapes of thorns and figs of thistles before unrenewed nature will yield any fruit to God. Every passage in the Bible which insists on the necessity of the new birth emphasizes the total depravity of man, for if there were any degree of virtue in the human heart it could be cultivated and increased, and regeneration would be obviated, since the development and improvement of what is already in man would suffice. But our Lord informed a devout religionist, a master in Israel, that unless he were born again he could not enter the kingdom of God. Likewise, every passage which calls on men to repent and believe the gospel presupposes their present sinful and lost condition, for they that are well do not need a physician. "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish" (Luke 13:5) was the decisive verdict of Christ. This truth is repudiated in varied and numerous ways, for unbelief is very fertile. That is another way of saying that the carnal mind is enmity against God, and at no one point is that enmity more active and evident than in its antipathy to God's Word in general. Its opposition is particularly directed to those aspects of the Word which expose and condemn mankind. When men are told that all the actions of the unregenerate are not only mixed with sin, but are in their own nature sinful, many sneeringly reply that such is a palpable absurdity. They argue that there are many actions performed by men, such as eating and drinking in moderation, which, being merely natural actions, can have in them neither moral good nor moral evil. But that is a bare assertion rather than a logical argument, and is easily refuted. When we affirm that all the actions of the unregenerate are sinful, we refer only to those which are performed voluntarily, and which are capable of being exercised for a good purpose. Whatever falls in that category is not merely a natural but a moral action. That eating and drinking and all other voluntary exercises are moral actions is evident, for Scripture expressly exhorts us, "Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God" (I Cor. 10:31). In an irrational being, such actions would be merely natural, but in a moral agent they are otherwise—the manner in which he attends to them making them good or evil. The motive largely determines the quality of the act. Eating and drinking are virtuous when, from a gracious motive, one thankfully acknowledges God as the Giver, prayerfully asks His blessing on the food, and purposes to use the strength from it to His praise. But the unregenerate lack that gracious principle, eating and drinking out of no respect to God's authority, without any love to Him in their hearts, and with no concern for His glory. They do so merely to satisfy their appetites and to provide fuel for the further gratification of their lusts. If every act of the unregenerate is sinful, how is it that God regards favorably and even rewards some of the performances of the wicked, such as the case of Ahab and the repentance of the Ninevites at the preaching of Jonah? We must distinguish between God's governmental ways in connection with this world, and what He requires for admittance to heaven. Though the Most High knows the secrets of all hearts, He does not always proceed accordingly in His administration of the affairs of earth. When God approves of any of the deeds of the wicked, it is not because He regards the deeds as theirs, but because those deeds tend to further His own wise counsels. Andrew Fuller said: God rewarded Nebuchadnezzar for his long siege against Tyre, in giving him the land of Egypt, yet Nebuchadnezzar did nothing in that undertaking which in its own nature could approve itself unto God. The only reason why he was thus rewarded was, that what he had done subserved the Divine purpose in punishing Tyre for her

insulting treatment toward His people (Ezek. 26, 1-7; 29, 17-20). God rewarded Cyrus with the treasures of Babylon (Isaiah 14, 3), not because he did anything that was pleasing in His sight, for his motive was the lust of dominion, but because what he did effected the deliverance of Judah, and fulfilled the Divine predictions upon Babylon.

God's Dealings with Man In God's governmental dealings with men, actions which appear to have no intrinsic goodness in them may well be rewarded without any compromise of holiness and righteousness. God does not always deal with men according to His omniscience. Rather He generally treats them in this life according to what they profess and appear to be. Thus, the Lord's design in punishing wicked Ahab and his house was to show His displeasure of their idolatries. If, when Ahab humbled himself and tore his garments, God had acted toward him on the ground of His omniscience, knowing him to be destitute of godly sorrow, and had made no difference in His treatment of him, that purpose would not have been answered. Whatever Ahab's motives, they were unknown to men. And had no difference appeared in the divine treatment, they would have concluded it was vain to repent and serve God. It therefore seemed good to Jehovah to deal with Ahab in this life as though his reformation were sincere, leaving his insincerity to be called to account in the day to come. As Fuller pointed out, there is a case much resembling that of Ahab in the history of Abijah the son of Rehoboam. In II Chronicles 13 we read of his wars with Jeroboam, king of Israel, and how he addressed the apostate Israelites previous to the battle. Having reproached them for forsaking the God of their fathers and turning to idolatry, he added, "But as for us, the LORD is our God, and we have not forsaken him; and the priests, which minister unto the LORD, are the sons of Aaron, and the Levites wait upon their business: and they burn unto the LORD every morning and every evening burnt-sacrifices and sweet incense: the shewbread also set they in order upon the pure table; and the candlestick of gold with the lamps thereof, to burn every evening: for we keep the charge of the LORD our God; but ye have forsaken him" (vv. 10-11). To all appearances this prince was very zealous for the Lord, and one might conclude that the signal victory given him over Jeroboam was an expression of divine approbation. But if we consult the account of his reign in I Kings 15 (where he is called Abijah), we learn that he was a wicked king, and that he walked in all the sins of his father. Although God granted success to his army, it was not out of regard for him, but for David's sake, and for the establishment of Jerusalem. Much of what we have said about Ahab holds good of the Ninevites, and of Pharaoh too. There might have been sincere and spiritual penitents among the Ninevites for all we know; but whether godly sorrow or slavish fear actuated them, they professed and appeared to be humbled before God, displaying the external marks of contrition. For God to respond to their apparently sincere repentance was an exemplification of the divine wisdom, for it magnified His righteous and merciful government in the sight of the surrounding nations. In like manner, the acknowledgments of Pharaoh's sins, and his requests for Moses to entreat the Lord on his behalf, were repeatedly followed by the removal of those judgments which so appalled his proud spirit; yet who would insist that there was any good or spirituality in Egypt's king? Not only God but Moses himself perceived Pharaoh's evident insincerity. Nevertheless the Most High removed His rod when that guilty tyrant made confession, even though He knew that Pharaoh, gaining his point, would laugh up his sleeve at Moses. In their argument against the doctrine of man's total depravity some have appealed to Christ's words in Mark 12:28-34, where He assured the scribe who had discreetly answered Him, "Thou art not far from the kingdom of God." They argue that though he was unsaved, yet our Lord found in his character something which was praiseworthy. But if the passage is read attentively it is found that Christ was not approving of his spirit or his conduct, but was simply commending his confession of faith. When this Jew acknowledged that the love of God and man was of more importance and value than whole burnt offerings—that the moral law was more excellent than the ceremonial, which was soon to be abolished—he gave utterance to sound

doctrine, and came so close to the spirit of the gospel dispensation that Christ very properly informed him he was not far from the kingdom of God. In other words, the principles which the scribe had avowed, if truly embraced and duly pursued, would lead him to the very heart of Christianity, for it is by the law that a knowledge of sin is obtained and the need for mercy is discovered. The things to which the scribe assented were the very ones Christ insisted on in His teaching.

Difference Among the Depraved If all men alike are totally depraved, then how is it that some lead less vicious lives than others? In examining this question it is necessary to revert to our definition of terms, and bear in mind that total depravity does not consist in what a man does, but what he is in himself. It also consists in a man's relation and attitude to God. Because particular persons are not swearers, morally unclean, drunkards or thieves, they are very apt to imagine they are far from being wholly corrupt; in fact, they consider themselves good and respectable people. These are described in Proverbs 30:12: "There is a generation that are pure in their own eyes, and yet is not washed from their filthiness." However irreproachable may be the walk of the natural man, his nature is polluted and his heart thoroughly defiled. And the very fact that he is quite unaware of his vileness is sad proof of the binding power of indwelling sin. The total depravity of human nature does not mean that it actually breaks forth into open acts of all kinds of evil in any one man. There are marked differences among the unregenerate in the eruption of sin in their conduct. Some are more honest, sober and benevolent than others, running into less "excess of riot"; nevertheless the seeds of all evils are present in every human breast. "As in water face answereth to face, so the heart of man to man" (Prov. 27:19). It has been truly said of all men that if they were in Cain's or Pharaoh's or Judas' circumstances, and God should allow them, they would do the same. If they were in the same circumstances as the fallen angels, they would be as devilish as they. True, the enmity against God and the hatred against their fellowmen (Titus 3:3) are less openly displayed by some than by others, yet that is not because they are any better in themselves than those who are flagrantly irreligious and cast off all pretenses of decency. Their moderation in wickedness must be attributed to the greater restraints which the Governor of this world places on them, either by the secret workings of His Spirit upon their hopes and fears or by His external providences, such as a godly home, early education, the subduing influence of pious companions. But none is born into this world with the smallest spark of love to God in him. Instead, "their poison is like the poison of a serpent" (Ps. 58:4). It should be borne in mind—for our humbling—that there is very much evil within each of us that God does not allow to break out into particular acts of sin, sovereignly preventing temptations and opportunities to do them. All men are equally depraved, but that depravity shows itself in many different forms and ways. It is a fatal delusion to suppose that, because divine power and mercy keep me from certain crimes, I am less corrupt than my fellowmen, and less a criminal in His sight. God does not judge as man does. Capernaum was more obnoxious to Him than Sodom! Many who do not act a brutish part act a diabolical one; there is a filthiness of the spirit as well as of the flesh (II Cor. 7:1). Though some do not give free rein to their sensual lusts, yet they are under the dominion of mental lusts: pride, covetousness, envy, contempt of others, malice, revenge. God restrains both the internal and external workings of sin as best serves the outworking of His eternal purpose, permitting different degrees of iniquity in different individuals, though all are "clay of the same lump." None by nature possesses the slightest degree of holiness. Different measures of wickedness issue from the same individual at different times. The fact that I have been kept from certain sins in the past is no guarantee that I shall not be guilty of them in the future. Finally, some contend that if man is so totally depraved as to be entirely incapable of doing anything that is pleasing to God, then there can be no ground for a challenging sermon, no motives for exhorting the unregenerate to cease from evil and do good, and certainly no encouragement left for them to comply. We reply that no minister of the gospel is warranted to entertain the slightest degree of hope of success from his endeavors merely on the ground of

the pliability of the hearts of his hearers. Their corrupt state excludes any such expectation. Unless the preacher's confidence is based alone on the power and promise of God, his hopes are certain to be disappointed. But if the objector means that in view of men's total depravity it is unreasonable to exhort them to do good, this can by no means be admitted, for it would follow that if total depravity removes all ground for a rational address, then a partial one would take it away in part; in other words, in proportion as we perceive men to be disinclined to good, we are to cease warning and dealing with them. This is a self-evident absurdity. While men are rational creatures they are justly accountable for all they do, whatever the disposition of their hearts. And, so long as they are not yet consigned to a hopeless perdition, their responsibility is to be enforced, and they are to be regarded as fit subjects of a gospel address. Nor can it be truly asserted that there are no motives by which they may properly be exhorted to cease to do evil and learn to do good. The proper motives for these things retain all their original force, independent of the inclination or disinclination of men's hearts to comply. God's rights, His authority, His law, are unchanged no matter what change has taken place in the creature. The example of Christ and His apostles is too plain to be misunderstood. Neither the one nor the other toned down their demands upon fallen sinners. Repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ were the grand duties on which they insisted; and far from hesitating to exhort their unregenerate hearers to do what was spiritually good, it may be safely affirmed that they never exhorted to do anything else. God still requires nothing less than the heart. The violent antagonism of men against this truth is precisely what might be expected. Instead of causing us doubt it should be a strong confirmation. Indeed it would be surprising if a doctrine so humbling and distasteful were not resisted. Nor need we be dismayed by its widespread repudiation by preachers and professing Christians. When the Lord Jesus averred, "I am come into this world, that they which see not might see; and that they which [pretend to] see might be made blind" (John 9:39), the Pharisees haughtily asked, "Are we blind also?" (v.40). When He declared that human nature is in love with sin and possessed of enmity against God, and insisted, "No man can come unto me, except it were given unto him of my Father," we are told that "from that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him" (John 6:65-66). The rejection which this doctrine meets with demonstrates how dense is that darkness which is not dispelled by so clear a light, and how great is the power of Satan when the testimony of divine revelation does not carry conviction. Every effort to tone it down verifies the fact that "the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked."

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/aw-pink/the-total-depravity-of-man-chapter-9-extent/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net