

Hamartiology -- Part 4

Proverbs 6:12-19 – A worthless person, a wicked man, is the one who walks with a perverse mouth, who winks with his eyes, who signals with his feet, who points with his fingers; who with perversity in his heart continually devises evil, who spreads strife. Therefore his calamity will come suddenly; Instantly he will be broken and there will be no healing.

There are six things which the LORD hates, yes, seven which are an abomination to Him: Haughty eyes, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that run rapidly to evil, a false witness who utters lies, and one who spreads strife among brothers.

Are some sins worse than others? Perhaps ... just as there were levels of sacrifice depending on the offense, Jesus said --

Matthew 11:20-24 -- Then He began to denounce the cities in which most of His miracles were done, because they did not repent. "Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles had occurred in Tyre and Sidon which occurred in you, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. Nevertheless I say to you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment than for you. And you, Capernaum, will not be exalted to heaven, will you? You will descend to Hades; for if the miracles had occurred in Sodom which occurred in you, it would have remained to this day. Nevertheless I say to you that it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for you."

Jesus talking about works in you, Sodom would have repented.

From: By Grace Alone

Sin hits at the very core of our personalities and character. Sin does not begin with an external action, such as drunkenness, sexual misconduct, murder, or the like. Sin begins in our hearts and those deeds are simply the manifestation of the rebellion that already thrives within. This ruinous nature does not simply render a man unwilling to do good, it

renders him utterly incapable of doing anything that would be considered pleasing in God's sight. That is the extent of his depravity. He not only enjoys his rebellion, he is unable to do anything on his own behalf in order to please or attract God.

Now, there is an important theological reality inherent in this fact. If this is true that men and women possess a fundamental incapability to do good or to please God, then despite modern traditions to the contrary, it is pointless, futile, illogical and obviously unscriptural to tell such totally depraved people to "believe and have faith," or to "make a decision for Christ." Fleshly creatures have no ability to muster up faith or think such good things. Their hearts and thoughts are "only evil continually."

So, how can they suddenly decide to choose eternal life and have faith in God?

Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? Then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil (Jeremiah 13:23).

The obvious answer is - "No, the Ethiopian and the leopard are powerless to change themselves. They are products of their nature. They were born that way and they are without choice." So likewise, the person born into a state of wickedness and ruin is powerless to act against his or her own nature and do something —anything—that is good.

.....

Total Inability

Jesus spoke of men not being able to follow Him. He declared that they would not only follow their natural inclination to rebel and misunderstand, but they were incapable of doing any differently! He spoke of them having eyes, but they could not see. He spoke of them having ears but they could not hear. He said that the reason they would not come to Him was because they could not come to Him!

"Why do ye not understand my speech? Even because ye cannot hear my word" (John 8:43).

“No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day” (John 6:44).

“A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit” (Matthew 7:18).

“Ye shall seek me, and shall not find me: and where I am, thither ye cannot come” (John 7:34).

Jesus answered and said unto him, “Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3).

Notice how emphatic Jesus’ statements are. He did not say that men would be responsible to view Him and then decide for themselves. He did not open up the possibility of choice or decision. He stated unequivocally that men would react in accordance with their complete inability.

Then Paul, the great interpreter of the Old Testament, carried this theme over into his epistles:

Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be (Romans 8:7).

So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God (Romans 8:8).

.....

But We Do Good Things

Depravity does not rule out the possibility that people may do relatively good things. We are not what theologians call “absolutely depraved.” We are capable of doing good works, as compared to other more evil works. It all depends on what we use as our measuring rod. Compared to the works of Hitler, the works of Mother Teresa look very good. However, compared to the works of Christ, in His perfect obedience and willing sacrifice, we all fall woefully short. And beyond that, when we are compared to the perfect holiness and righteousness of God—well, let’s let Job respond:

How then can man be justified with God? or how can he be clean that is born of a woman? Behold even to the moon, and it shineth not; yea, the stars are not pure in His sight. How much less man, that is a worm? And the son of man, which is a worm? (Job 25:4-6)

It is true that mankind does not rave about in unrestrained madness. God rules over every facet of His kingdom and restrains men from being wholly and completely taken over by their evil natures and running hog-wild.

Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee: the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain (Psalm 76:10).

In other words, men are not as bad as we could be. We are capable of doing charitable or kind acts. We may recognize that murder is wrong and therefore avoid killing. We may be loyal husbands and wives, generous providers, civil servants or socially conscious citizens.

However, these acts do not change our basic nature and they remain insufficient to please the high standard of a righteous, holy God. It takes more than fleshly works to please Him. It takes spiritual attributes, like faith.

Without faith it is impossible to please Him. For he that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him (Hebrews 11:6).

The natural man has no faith in God whatsoever. And his actions, however well intended, are not sufficient to make up for that lack of faith. Consequently, every fleshly activity of the natural man – regardless of its relative merit – is viewed by God as sin.

An high look, and a proud heart, and the plowing of the wicked is sin (Proverbs 21:4).

This proverb teaches us that arrogance and pride are sinful. That's easy to grasp. But, it also declares that just plowing a field, doing everyday chores and going about our natural lives, is sin in God's eyes. Therefore,

the relative merit or harm of individual actions does not determine sinfulness.

Sin is not just doing bad things. Sin is being how we are - sinful by nature. We are not sinners because we sin; we sin because we are sinners. One of the Greek words translated sin in the Bible is hamartia . It means falling short of God's perfection; missing the mark . Simply being less than God, in terms of perfection, holiness and righteousness is defined as sin. But, we are far beyond merely "missing the mark."

... verily every man at his best state is altogether vanity (Psalm 39:5).

At our best, we all come far short of perfection.

Destruction and misery are in their ways: and the way of peace have they not known: there is no fear of God before their eyes (Romans 3: 16-18).

That's the natural state of man. There is no fear of God before their eyes. And, according to Psalm 111:10, "the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom." And, to make matters worse, even our best works and righteous behavior amounts to nothing:

But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away. And there is none that calleth upon thy name, that stirreth up himself to take hold of thee: for thou hast hid thy face from us, and hast consumed us, because of our iniquities (Isaiah 64:6-7).

.....

The Endurance of Sin

An inherent characteristic of sin is that once it began, it became a force so powerful that only God Himself could control or eradicate it. Once Satan rebelled in Heaven and was cast down (Luke 10:18), he was powerless to turn from his wicked ways. Ultimately, God will bind him and cast him into the Lake of Fire in order to stop his perniciousness

(Matthew 25:41, Revelation 19:20). Likewise, children of devil will do exactly as their father does, refusing to turn from their rebellion and succumbing to condemnation.

“Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it. And, because I tell you the truth, ye believe me not” (John 8:44-45).

Even at the end of time, when God executes judgment on the world, the inhabitants of Earth will not cry out for mercy or “choose” to have faith and be saved. In the midst of terror and woe, men will exhibit their absolute inability to turn from their wickedness and will instead seek refuge from the face of God.

And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains; And said to the mountains and rocks, “Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: For the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?” (Revelation 6:15-17)

Now certainly, if all a man needs in order to “choose to believe” or to “repent and have faith” is an adequate inducement, these men have plenty!

But, they are completely unable to repent, so they run from the Lamb. For any man to be relieved from the pervasive pressure and guilt of sinfulness, God must perform a miraculous act of change. The fallen nature must be converted to an eternal, spiritual nature. Left to themselves, an individual is incapable of changing or even recognizing the desperation of his condition.

So, God must make the first move. Man is incapable. Thus, conversion and the activity of salvation rest in the hands of God.

In Conclusion

To review, the Doctrine of Total Depravity tells us:

- When Adam fell, all of mankind was present in our representative father and we all share in the curse that accompanied his rebellion. The wages of sin is “death” (Romans 6:23). We know that men continue to be accounted sinful because men continue dying.
- Even though there are some relatively “good” acts which men are capable of performing, such activities are nothing more than filthy rags. They count for nothing in the councils of Heaven.
- Man is totally incapable of helping himself. He is dead in trespasses and sins. He is a slave to sin. He has a deceitful, wicked heart and he will act on the lusts and desires of his heart every time. As such, he cannot “choose,” “decide,” be intellectually stimulated, persuaded, or coerced into activating his own faith. We cannot understand the Bible, or “the love that drew salvation’s plan” until we understand this point. And, we cannot understand anything about the other Doctrines of Grace until we understand this one.

We will never truly appreciate the humility of Christ and how far down He reached to save us until we “look unto the rock whence ye are hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence ye are digged” (Isaiah 51:1). When Jesus heard it, he saith unto them, “They that are whole have no need of the physician, but they that are sick: I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance” (Mark 2:17).

It all stands or falls right here. Healthy men do not need a physician (Luke 5:31). Quickened men do not need a resurrection. Alive men do not need to be “born again.” Jesus came to seek and to save them that were lost. He came to heal the sick and raise the dead - not reward the good and encourage the well able.

Hamartiology Part 5

Read Romans 7:23

The knowledge of our sinful estate eliminates any possibility of synergistic salvation, since we have nothing we could add or include that would be good, right, moral, or beneficial. Being dead in sin means we cannot choose, cannot stir ourselves up, and cannot obligate God.

According to Louis Berkhof –

The Essential Nature of Sin. At present many substitute the word 'evil' for 'sin,' but this is a poor substitute, for the word 'sin' is far more specific. It denotes a kind of evil, namely, a moral evil for which man is responsible and which brings him under a sentence of condemnation. The modern tendency is to regard it merely as a wrong done to one's fellow-beings misses the point entirely, for such a wrong can be called sin only in so far as it is contrary to the will of God. Sin is correctly defined by Scripture as "lawlessness," I John 3:4. It is lack of conformity to the law of God, and as such the opposite of that love which is required by the divine law. It is first of all guilt, making men liable to punishment, and then it is also inherent corruption or moral pollution. All men are guilty in Adam, and are therefore born with a corrupt nature. As Job 14:4 says, "Who can make the clean out of the unclean? No one!" Sin has its seat in the heart of man, and from this center influences the intellect, the will, and the affections, in fact the whole man, and finds expression through the body. In distinction from the Roman Catholics we maintain that it does not consist in outward acts only, but includes evil thoughts, affections, and intents of the heart.

Sin in the Life of the Human Race.

Three points deserve consideration here:

a. The connection between Adam's sin and that of his descendants. This has been explained in three different ways.

(1) The earliest explanation is called the realistic theory, which is to the effect that God originally created one general human nature, which in course of time divided into as many parts as there are human individuals. Adam possessed the whole of this general human nature; and through his sin it became guilty and polluted. Naturally, every individual part of it shares this guilt and pollution.

(2) In the days of the Reformation the representative theory came to the foreground. According to this view Adam stood in a twofold relation to his descendants: he was their natural head, and he was their representative as the head of the covenant. When he sinned as their representative, this sin was also imputed to them, and as a result they are all born in a corrupt state. This is our Reformed view.

(3) A third theory, not as well known, is that of mediate imputation. It holds that the guilt of Adam's sin is not directly placed to our account. His corruption is passed on to his descendants, and this makes them personally guilty. They are not corrupt because they are guilty in Adam, but guilty because they are corrupt.

b. Original and Actual Sin. We distinguish between original and actual sin. All men are born in a sinful state and condition, which is called original sin, and is the root of all the actual sins that are committed.

(1) Original sin. This includes both guilt and pollution. The guilt of Adam's sin is imputed to us. Because he sinned as our representative, we are guilty in him. Moreover, we also inherit his pollution, and now have a positive disposition toward sin. Man is by nature totally depraved. This does not mean that every man is as bad as he can be, but that sin has corrupted every part of his nature and rendered him unable to do any spiritual good. He may still do many praiseworthy things in relation to his fellow-beings, but even his best works are radically defective, because they are not prompted by love to God nor done in obedience to God. This total depravity and inability is denied by Pelagians, Arminians, and Modernists, but is clearly taught in Scripture.

(2) Actual sin. The term 'actual sin' denotes not only sins consisting in outward acts, but also those conscious thoughts, desires, and decisions that proceed from original sin. They are the sins which the

individual performs in distinction from his inherited nature and inclination. While original sin is one, actual sins are manifold. They may be sins of the inner life, such as pride, envy, hatred, sensual lusts, and evil desires; or sins of the outer life, such as deceit, theft, murder, adultery, and so on. Among these there is one unpardonable sin, namely, the sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, after which a change of heart is impossible, and for which it is not necessary to pray, Matt. 12:31, 32; Mark 3:28-30; Luke 12:10; Heb. 6:4-6; 10:26, 27; I John 5:16.

c. The Universality of Sin. Scripture and experience both teach us that sin is universal. Even the Pelagians do not deny this, though they ascribe it to external conditions, such as a bad environment, evil examples, and a wrong kind of education. There are passages in which the Bible directly asserts the universality of sin, such as:

I Kings 8:46 – “When they sin against you—for there is no one who does not sin—and you become angry with them and give them over to their enemies, who take them captive to their own lands, far away or near;

Ps. 143: 2 – Do not bring your servant into judgment, for no one living is righteous before you.

Prov. 20:9 -- Who can say, “I have cleansed my heart,I am pure from my sin”?

Eccl. 7:20 – Indeed, there is not a righteous man on earth who *continually* does good and who never sins.

Gal 3:22 – But the Scripture has shut up everyone under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.

I John 1:8-10 -- If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us.

Moreover, it teaches that man is sinful from birth, so that this cannot be considered as the result of imitation,

Ps. 51:5 -- Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, And in sin my mother conceived me.

John 3:6 -- That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.

Even infants are considered sinful, for they are subject to death, which is the penalty for sin,

Rom. 5:12-14 – Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned — for until the Law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law. Nevertheless death reigned from Adam until Moses, even over those who had not sinned in the likeness of the offense of Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come.

All men are by nature under condemnation, and therefore need the redemption which is in Christ Jesus.

Rom. 5:18. "So then as through one trespass the judgment came unto all men to condemnation; even so through one act of righteousness the free gift came unto all men to justification of life."

Rom. 7:18, "For I know that in me, that is in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing; for to will is present with me, but to do that which is good is not."

Matt. 16:19. "For out of the heart come forth evil thoughts murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, railings."

Heb. 3:12. "Take heed, brethren, lest haply there shall be in any one of you an evil heart of unbelief, in falling away from the living God."

The resulting state of humankind after the fall:

Colossians 1:11-14 - May you be strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy, ¹² giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. ¹³ **He has delivered us from the domain of darkness** and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, ¹⁴ in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

Acts 26:16-18 -- 'But get up and stand on your feet; for this purpose I have appeared to you, to appoint you a minister and a witness not only to the things which you have seen, but also to the things in which I will appear to you; rescuing you from the *Jewish* people and from the Gentiles, to whom I am sending you, **to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God**, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me.'

Colossians 1:21 -- And although you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, *engaged* in evil deeds,

Romans 5:8 -- But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

Blind, in domain of darkness, under the dominion of Satan, dead in sins, walking after course of this world according to prince of the power of the air, indulging fleshly desires, by nature children of wrath, alienated from God and godliness, hateful, hostile in mind, engaged in wicked deeds.

Read Romans 6:12-23