

Doctrinal Study #1

Depravity

Galatians 3:17-24

The average believer feels that doctrine belongs in the seminary classroom or on the shelf of the minister's library, but is not to be brought over into the pew or into the daily living of the child of God. Yet, apart from knowledge of the doctrines of the Word of God, we will continue in spiritual immaturity and will be tossed about by every wind of doctrine. There are certain great doctrinal concepts in the Word of God, which every believer ought to know. He ought to be able to state the teaching of Scripture on such doctrines as grace, regeneration, substitution, redemption, justification, sanctification, and security, to mention but a few. Therefore, it is our purpose in this series of *doctrinal studies* to present some of the truths of the Word of God, in a simple and understanding manner that will be the foundational stones upon which to build Christian lives. I trust that God will give you a hunger to enter into the truths of these great doctrines as we study.

The first great doctrine of the Word to which I would direct your attention is the doctrine of *depravity*, or as it is popularly referred to, *total depravity*. This doctrine has suffered from many misconceptions, for the average person would define *total depravity* by saying that it means man is as bad as he can be. However, if we adopt that as an acceptable definition, immediately our theology is brought into question because we know those persons who do not profess to be saved who are *not* as bad as they *can* be. The truth of the matter is that we know those folks who will tell you they don't believe in Christ, as yet, they are good men, kind men, generous men, and according to the world, they are really good people. Therefore, the *doctrine of depravity* says that man is as bad off as he wants to be. There is a vast difference between being as bad as he can be, and being as bad off as he chooses to be.

The doctrine of depravity has to do, not with man's estimation of man, but rather with God's estimation of man. We are the heirs of generations of the teaching of evolution, which sees man in an ever-ascending spiral, rising higher and higher from the depth from which he has sprung, until finally he will reach the stars. And that concept is so widely accepted that we have somehow come to feel that there is so much good in the worst of us that man is not so bad off after all. You see, when we measure men by man, we can always find someone who is lower than we are on the moral or ethical scale, and that comparison gives us a feeling of self-satisfaction. But the Scriptures do not measure men by man; they measure men by God who has created them. The creature is measured by the Creator and is found missing the mark.

The doctrine of depravity has to do not so much with man's conduct as with man's state. It has to do not so much with man's *behavior* as with his *condition before God*. In Galatians 3:22 we read, "...the Scripture has confined all under sin, ..." The Greek reads like this, "...the Scriptures declare that we are all prisoners of sin." In this passage we see that God has made a universal pronouncement, a pronouncement that characterizes every unsaved person. The entire human race is classified as being "under sin."

Now in order to understand what it means to be under sin, we have to understand something of the aspects of sin presented in the Scripture. There are three aspects of sin presented in the Word of God. First of all, there is the aspect of personal sin, which has to do with acts, which come from the individual, the manifestation of the exercise of the person's will. In Romans 3:23, we are told, "...all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." This is the divine characterization of the unsaved man's life – "All have sinned." When God looked down on the human race after the fall, He saw the race as a race of sinners, composed of those who are guilty of personal sin.

The Word of God uses a number of different words to describe the personal sins of the unsaved man. The word "transgression" is used in Scripture to refer to a man's *personal sin*. It pictures man as "stepping to one side," or "overstepping the bounds of decency" which God has marked off. The Bible uses the word "iniquity" which means "altogether wrong." The word "error" is used to mean the sinner's "disregard for which is right," or "deliberately going away from that, which is the norm." The word "sin" refers to "missing the mark." The word "wickedness" is used when speaking of the "evil nature of the unsaved person." The word "evil" is used to refer "to oppose that which is good and holy." The word "ungodliness" is used to refer for the lack of respect for the things and Person of God. The word "disobedience" is used to refer the "lost person's unwillingness to be guided in the ways of truth." The word "unbelief" is used to refer to the "lost person's failure to trust God." The word "lawlessness" refers to the "lost person's contempt for divine law and revelation. Now, these ten words, all which are used of the *unbeliever*, give us God's picture of the *lost person* and the aspects of *personal sin* of which the individual may be guilty.

The second aspect of sin, as it used in the Word of God, refers not to the acts, but rather to the nature, which produced the acts. This is often referred to as the *sin nature* within the *lost person*. When Adam was created and placed in the Garden of Eden, he was created a total person, with a full and complete personality. Adam was created with an untried innocence. Adam was created with the *capacity* for evil but was *not* created a *sinner* or a *sinful being*. A test of Adam's obedience was placed in the Garden, and Adam yielded to the

temptation of Satan and ate of the forbidden fruit. **As a result, the nature of Adam was changing from untried innocence to a nature confirmed in sin.** If I may use a common illustration, the nature of Adam in the Garden of Eden was like **uncongealed gelatin.** When Adam sinned, his nature was **congealed** and it became a **sin nature.** **When once that nature had taken on a permanent set, it was unalterable and unchangeable apart from divine grace.** The nature that was Adam's after the fall was a nature characterized by sin. When Adam's nature bore fruit, the fruit was characterized by God as being **sinful fruit.** **Adam could do good things: he could love his wife, he could faithfully till the garden, he could be a good father to his children, and he could be a good citizen in the society in which he moved.** But when viewed from the divine standpoint, all that came from the **root nature** of Adam was characterized by God as being **sin.** Since the root was corrupted, the fruit bore the corruption of that root.

At the time of creation God established the principle that like begets like: each was to produce after its kind. When Adam and Eve begot children, it was early manifested that those children were **"after their kind,"** for Cain murdered his brother. The **son** received the **nature, which his father had to pass on to him,** and it was a **sinful nature** that manifested its true character in hatred that produced murder.

In Romans 7:25, Paul speaks of the nature that is in an individual by his natural birth, **"In my mind I really want to obey God's law, but because of my sinful nature I am a slave to sin."** And in Romans 8:2 he says, **"...the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death."** **Now, the "law of sin" (7:25), and the "law of sin and death" (8:2), is the principle, or nature, which operates through the unregenerate individual.** The fruits of the nature of man are characterized by God as **"sin and death."** In Romans 3:10-18 the Apostle catalogues some of the fruits of that nature, **"As it is written: "There is none righteous, no, not one; there is none who understands; there is none who seeks after God. They have all turned aside; they have together become unprofitable; there is none who does good, no, not one. Their throat is an open tomb; with their tongues they have practiced deceit"; the poison of asps is under their lips; whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood; destruction and misery are in their ways; and the way of peace they have not known. There is no fear of God before their eyes."** Again, in Galatians 5:19-21 the Apostle shows us **"...the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God."** The Greek gives us this insight, **"When you follow the desires of your sinful nature, the results are very clear: sexual immorality, impurity, lustful pleasures, idolatry, sorcery, hostility, quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of**

anger, selfish ambition, dissension, division, envy, drunkenness, wild parties, and other sins like these. Let me tell you again, as I have before, that anyone living that sort of life will not inherit the Kingdom of God.” Remember, Paul is speaking of the unsaved person, and as such, Paul presents the truth that a man is not only *guilty of personal sin*, and therefore under judgment, but man has within him a fallen, *sin-nature* that prompts and produces *personal sins*; and for this nature man has come under judgment.

There is a third aspect of sin, referred to in Galatians 3:22. Listen to what Paul says, “...the scripture has concluded all under sin...” The unsaved person has been placed by an act of God. **The unsaved person is not only guilty of personal sin, and not only harbors a sin-nature within his breast, but man has been placed by God in the state of sin.** Again we find this same truth presented in Romans 3:9 where the Apostle says, “...we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin.” **Man, in the Garden of Eden, was in a state of untried innocence.** Man was in a state where fellowship with God was possible. Man was in a state where righteousness was obtainable. **But when man disobeyed God and ate of the forbidden fruit, man was placed in the state of sin.** That was his condition, his environment. You are an earthling, and live in the environment of this sphere; your whole being is conditioned to the atmosphere in which you live. **The fish were designed for a different sphere and so differs greatly from a human being because it was designed to live in a different atmosphere.** Man, by creation, was designed to live in the sphere of God. But when man disobeyed God, man’s whole being was changed and he came to be in an entirely different atmosphere. **His whole life now conforms to that atmosphere into which he was plunged by his sin.** Man is not only a sinner by *practice* and a sinner by *nature*, but God has concluded, or God has set, all men in the *state of sin*. That is the divine classification. **In Romans 11:32 the Apostle points out, as he did in Galatians 3:22, that men are in the state of sin by a divine decree.** God has concluded them all in unbelief that He might have mercy upon all. In order that God’s grace might be manifested toward men, God put all men in one classification or category. **And God decreed men to be in the state of sin so that He might redeem all men equally.** If you refuse to accept God’s divine judgment and decree that you are a sinner by practice, and possess a sin-nature, and have been placed in the state of sin, there is no redemption possible for you. From the Word of God, then, we learn this first great fact that contributes to our understanding of the doctrine of depravity - men are “under sin.”

The second great fact about men is that they are “spiritually dead.” In Ephesians 2:1 Paul affirms this fact, “And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins,”

At the time of the creation of man, God affixed a penalty for man's disobedience. The penalty for disobedience was *spiritual death*. *Physical death* was the result of *spiritual death*. God gave this promise in Ezekiel 18:4, "...the soul that sins, it shall die." In Romans 6:23 Paul says, "...the wages of sin is death..." **This is a truth, which is well known and needs little repetition at this point.** Let me remind you of Paul's teaching on this fact in Romans 5:12 where he says, "Wherefore, as by one man (that is Adam) sin entered into the world, and death (physical death) by sin; and so death (physical death) passed upon all men, for all have sinned." Now, when Paul says, "...all have sinned," he is not saying all have committed personal sins. **Paul is simply teaching that all sinned in Adam: we were in Adam at the time that Adam sinned, and because of that, Adam's spiritual death passed to us.** That is why we were born spiritually dead. Paul affirms the fact that men do not die physically because they commit sin, but rather that they die physically because they died in Adam. **And spiritual death is a part of this doctrine of depravity.** We are not only under sin, but we are spiritually dead because we are in Adam.

Finally, all of this adds up to the fact that a man in his natural state is lost – LOST. Perhaps the lostness of man outside of Christ is nowhere as thoroughly presented as in Ephesians 2:12 where the Apostle writes of the condition of the Gentiles who were outside of Christ, "That at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world." The word that God uses to describe the man without Christ is *lost*.

There is something about being lost. If we loose one of our children, or if we hear of a neighbor's child, we look until we find them. The same is true spiritually.

Beloved, God has the answer to man's depravity. It is the Person of Jesus Christ who delivers from the state of sin, who removes condemnation, who gives life for death, who brings us into His own family as the sons of God. I direct you to Him, the Savior for depraved man.