

WHAT MAN REFUSES TO BELIEVE ABOUT HIS HEART?

God's examination of man's heart as found in the Bible.

God has given us His Word that we might come to know our true selves in light of His Holy Spirit's teaching. And that we might come to know His Son Jesus Christ who is the only acceptable sacrifice for Sin.

God's Description of Human Nature:

What the Devil doesn't want you to know and what man refuses to believe about his own nature, his heart? A truth so terrifying that if God were to allow you to see beyond even the surface of your own nature it would drive you insane. The Bible's description of every man's heart as revealed in Holy Scripture.

You will remember, before the flood, in the sixth chapter of Genesis, it is written, "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" Genesis 6:5. After the flood, it is just the same. The description in the sixth chapter belonged to the entire antediluvian race. You might have hoped that after so terrible a judgment when only a few, a chosen and favored few, that is eight, were saved by water, that then as man began anew with a better stock, the old branches that were sere and rotten being cut away, that now the nature of man would be improved. It is not one whit so; the same God who, looking at man, declared that his imaginations were evil before the flood, pronounces the very same verdict upon them afterward. Oh God! How hopeless is human nature! How impossible it is that the carnal mind should be reconciled to God! How needful it is that you should give us new hearts and right spirits, seeing that the old nature is so evil that even the floods of your judgments cannot cure it of its evil imaginations! I would have you studiously notice the words used in these passages, the antediluvian and the postdiluvian verdict of God. Look at the fifth verse of the sixth chapter, God saw not only outward sin, that was great and multiplied, and cried to him for vengeance; he saw sin in the sons of men, the descendants of Cain; worse still, he saw treachery and departure from God in the sons of the chosen one, the sons of Seth had gone astray also. The sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair, and the two races became mingled resulting in monsters of iniquity. But, worse than that, he saw that the thoughts of men's hearts were evil: man could not think without being evil; indeed, more, the substratum which underlies actual thought, unformed, unfashioned thought, the eggs, the embryos of thought, called here the imagination of the thought, the first conception, the infant motions of the soul, all these he found to be evil. But observe, he says they were "only evil." Not one trace of good, no gold amidst the dross, and no light amidst the darkness, they were "only evil." And then he adds that word "continually." What, never any repentance, never any yearning towards the right. No pure drops of holiness now and then? No, never. "Every imagination," notice that word. The whole verse is most clear, a broom that sweeps man clean of all boasted good. "Every imagination," when he was at his best, when he stood at God's altar when he tried to be right, even then his thoughts had evil in them. Spurgeon says, "All man's thoughts, all his desires, all his purposes are evil, expressly or by implication; because the subject of them is avowedly sinful, or because they do not proceed from a holy principle, and are not directed to a proper end. It is not occasionally that the human soul is thus under the influence of

depravity, but this is its habit and state. It seems impossible to construct a sentence which should more distinctly express its total corruption than this.” Look at this other passage which is our text; you will see it gives a different phase of the very same evil, but it does not abate one jot or tittle of it; it is still “the imagination of man’s heart,” it is still the inward character, the essence, the pith, the marrow of mankind which God is dealing with. It is not the stream which comes from man that is foul, but the fountain of man, the innermost source of the fountain, the imagination of his heart is evil: and we are told here what we are not told in the other text, that his thoughts are evil from his youth, that is to say, from his earliest childhood; and it would not be evil from his childhood in every case if there were not certain seeds of evil sown before that, and therefore we can go further, and in the words of Holy Scripture, we can confess with sorrowful truthfulness, “Behold I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me.” From the very earliest imaginable period in which human nature exists it is a defiled, tainted thing, and only worthy of God’s utter abhorrence; and if it were not that he smells a sweet savor in the sacrifice of Christ, he would say, as he did say in the sixth chapter, “He repented that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him in his heart. And the Lord said, “I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth.”

I have thus brought out distinctly I hope, before you, this painful fact. It is true both before and after the flood. If you want any proof of its being true now, turn to the scores of passages of Scripture which all prove it. I think, however, if our time were limited as it is this morning, I should prefer to mention the third chapter of Paul’s Epistle to the Romans. It is the most sweeping description of the universality of human depravity that could possibly have been penned. I will read starting at the ninth verse, “What then? Are we better than they? No, in no wise: for we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin; as it is written, „there is none righteous, no, not one: there is none who understands, there is none who seeks after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are all together become unprofitable; there is none who does good, no, not one. Their throat is an open sepulcher; with their tongues they have used 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 they have not known the way of peace: there is no fear of God before their eyes.” Now we know that whatever things the law says, it says to those who are under the law: so that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God” Romans 3:9-19. Jonathan Edwards says upon this passage, “If the words which the Apostle uses here do not most fully and determinately signify a universality no words ever used in the Bible, or elsewhere, are sufficient to do it.” I might challenge any man to produce any one paragraph in the Scripture, from the beginning to the end, where there is such repetition and accumulation of terms, so strongly, and emphatically, and carefully to express the most perfect and absolute universality or any place to be compared to it. What instance is there in the Scripture, or indeed any other writing, when the meaning is only the much greater part, where this meaning is written in such a manner by repeating such expressions, “They are all,” “they are all,” “they are all together,” “every one,” “all the world”; joined to multiplied negative terms, to show the universality to be without exception; saying, “There is no flesh,” “there is none, there is none, there is none, there is none,” four times over; besides the addition of “no, not one, no, not one,” once and again. “So that if this matter, universal depravity is not here plainly, expressly and fully described, it must be because no words can do it; and it is not in the power of language, or any manner of terms and phrases, however contrived and heaped one upon another, determinately to indicate any such

thing.” I may add that to make it more telling, the apostle insists upon it that the pollution is not just part of a man, but he sums up the different parts and powers of the body, intending by it to indicate the passions and qualities of the soul; you have the “feet,” “mouth,” “eyes,” “hands,” all depraved, all filthy, all vile. Truly if we cannot see the doctrine here, it is probable we never shall see it anywhere; and we have in ourselves, in our own blindness, a sure proof of how true it is. Such passages as these may tend to strengthen your minds, where Job says, “Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? Not one”; Job 14:4 and again, “What is man, that he should be clean? And he who is born of a woman, that he should be righteous?” Job 15:14. The fount from which we spring is obviously sinful. None of us have perfect mothers or perfect fathers, and how can we expect that a clean thing shall be brought out of an unclean thing? David says in the fourteenth Psalm, “The Lord looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any who did understand and seek God. They are all gone aside, they are all together become filthy: there is no one who does good, no, not one” Psalms 14:2-3. You know his own description of himself in the fifty-first Psalm, and therefore I scarcely need to refer to it. His son, the mighty preacher Solomon says about men in Ecclesiastes, “The heart of the sons of men is full of evil, and madness is in their heart while they live” Ecclesiastes 9:3. You have not forgotten the mournful description in the first chapter of Isaiah, “The whole head is sick, and the whole heart is faint. From the sole of the foot even to the head there is no soundness in it: but wounds and bruises, and putrefying sores” Isaiah 1:5-6. That passage in Jeremiah also stands out very prominently; “The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked, who can know it?” Jeremiah 17:9 and our Saviour has put in very strong language, his own view of the human heart in Matthew: “Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies” Matthew 15:19. Perhaps, after all, one of the strongest is that of Paul, where he says, “The carnal mind is enmity against God (is not reconciled to God) neither indeed can be” Romans 8:7. And James, the practical James says, “The spirit which is in us lusts to envy.” James 4:5 I have only culled one or two passages, as it were, out of the great teeming mass. If any man is determined to turn Scripture upside down and pervert the truth, he may escape from the doctrine of the total depravity of the human race; but surely if we take the Bible as it stands, we may boldly say that if it does not teach that man is evil, thoroughly evil, then it does not teach anything at all, the Book is without meaning of any kind. Man is thoroughly evil; the heart is bad through and through to its very core, it is infected with sin and hatred of God in its center and essence.

Let us remember the confessions of God’s people. You never heard a saint on his knees yet tell the Lord that he had a good nature, that he did not need renewing. Saints, as they grow in grace, are made to feel more and more acutely the evil of their old nature. You will find that those who are most like Christ have the deepest knowledge of their own depravity, and are most humble while they confess their sinfulness. Those men who do not know their own hearts may be able to boast, but that is simple ignorance, for if you will take down the biographies of any people esteemed among us for holiness and for knowledge in the things of God, they will find them frequently crying out under a sense of inward carnality and sin. If I may return to Scripture I cannot help quoting David, “Behold I was born in sin and shapen in iniquity” Psalms 51:5. It is a most villainous thing that some people try to slander David’s mother, and to suppose that there was something irregular about his birth, which made him speak as he has done, whereas there cannot be the slightest imputation upon that admirable woman. David himself speaks of her with intense respect, and says, “Save the son of your handmaid” as though he felt it no discredit to be

the son of such a woman. She was, doubtless, one of the excellent of the earth, and yet, excellent as she was, it could only be that her son was conceived in sin. Let us not at all attempt to escape from the force of what David says. He is using no hyperbolic expressions; there is no indication of hyperbole throughout the whole Psalm; he is a broken-hearted man on his knees; he is confessing his own sin with Bathsheba, and is not likely either to bring all accusation against his own mother or to use exaggerated terms. Beloved, it is so; all of us, the best of us, still have to bear the marks of the unclean person from whom we sprang. Take Paul again, was there ever a man who knew more of what sanctity of nature means, or who was brought nearer to the image of Christ, and yet he cries out, "Oh, wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death"; and finds no joy, until he can say, "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord."

Still, I think we have another proof, namely, our own observation. We have lived long enough to observe with our own eyes, and by our reading, that sin is the universal disease of manhood. Is it not certain, according to observation, that man's heart is evil? They used to tell pretty tales about the charming innocence of men dwelling in the sylvan bowers of primeval forests, untainted by the vices of civilization, unpolluted by the inventions of commerce and art. The woods of America were searched, and no such sweet babes of grace were discovered. The ferocity and cruelty of the Indians justify me in saying that they were hateful and hating one another. The blood red tomahawk might have been emblazoned as the Red man's coat of arms, and his eyes glaring with revenge, might be taken as the true index of his character. Travelers have recently penetrated into the center of Africa, where we may expect to see nature in its primitive excellence, and what is the report that is brought back to us? Why it is nature in its primitive devilry that is all. Let such abominable tyrants as Messrs. Grant and Speke describe to us, indicate to us what man is when he is left in his primeval state, untainted by civilization: he is simply a greater devil, he is naked and he is not ashamed; in this only is he like our unfallen parents. Again, try the mild people groups. There is the mild Hindu. You look into his gentle face, and you cannot suppose him to be capable of cruelty. Trust well that mild Hindu, subdued by British arms so speedily, and so cheerfully bowing his neck to the yoke; but you may as well trust the sleek and cunning tiger from his jungle; let the story of the Sepoy rebellion of a few years ago show us the gentleness of the mild Hindu; live among the mild Hindus, and, if you dare read the first chapter of Paul's Epistle to the Romans, remember that it is a decent account of what in ordinary life is practiced among the Hindus, but which could not be more clearly described, because the mouth of modesty would refuse to speak it, and the ears of modesty would tingle at its hearing. The life of the most respectable Hindu is tainted with vices too vile to mention. "Yes, but still," one says, "We must look at children, because sin may enter into us through education, let us look at children." Very well, I am willing to look at children, and I am unwilling that anyone should say a word that is harsh or severe against a child's nature; but I will say that any man who declares children to be born perfect never was a father; for if he would only watch his own child, not merely when that child has its toys around him and is pleased and happy, but when his little temper is ruffled, he would soon perceive evil nestling there. Your child without evil! You without eyes, you mean! If you will only look and listen you will soon discover, if no other fault, this one, "they go astray from the womb; speaking lies," one of the earliest vices of children which needs to be corrected with most constant and wise rigor is the tendency towards falsehood. It is all very well for people to talk about the innocence of children, but I would like them to have to keep one of the nursery schools like those around us, where the children are left while the mothers are at work, and they would soon discover in their pulling one

another's hair, and scratching at one another's eyes, and such as pretty little diversions and innocent freaks, that they are not altogether the sweet babes of innocence they are supposed to be. "Well," one says, "still human nature may have some spiritual good in it. Look at the men who make the page of history illustrious, look at Socrates, for instance, religion did nothing for Socrates, but yet what a fine character he was." Who told you that? I will venture to say that the philosopher's character would not bear description in a decent assembly. We know from undoubted authority that the purest philosophers at times indulged in bestiality and filth. Solon and Socrates were no exceptions. When infidels hold up these sages as being such patterns of what human nature might become, history is dead set against them.

"The whole head is sick, and the whole heart is faint; there is no soundness in it." And this, maybe it remembered, is without an exception in the long history of humanity, of about six thousand years; there is not one that has escaped contamination, not one who has come into the world clean, not one who dares go before his Maker's judgment bar, and say, "Great God, I have never sinned, but have kept your law from my youth up."

God's Extraordinary Reasoning:

Now I want you to notice, in the second place, a most extraordinary thing, when I noticed it yesterday I was surprised and overwhelmed with grateful admiration, that is, God's Extraordinary Reasoning.

Good reasoning, but most extraordinary. He says, "I will not again curse the ground any more for man's sake; for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth." Strange logic! In the sixth chapter he said man was evil, and therefore he destroyed him. In the eighth chapter, he says man is evil from his youth, and therefore he will not destroy him. Strange reasoning! Strange reasoning! To be accounted for by the little circumstance at the beginning of the verse, "The Lord smelled a sweet savor." There was a sacrifice there; that makes all the difference. When God looks on sin apart from sacrifice, Justice says, "Strike! Strike! Curse! Destroy!" But when there is a sacrifice God looks on sin with eyes of mercy, and though Justice says, "Strike," he says, "No, I have struck my dear Son; I have struck him and will spare the sinner." Mercy looks to see if she cannot find some loophole, something that she can make into an excuse why she may spare mankind. Is natural depravity an excuse for sin then? Does God use it as such? No, beloved: that our heart is vile is rather an aggravation of the vileness of our action than any excuse for it. Yet there is this one thing, we are born sinners, and God sees there, I will say, a sort of loophole. Rightly upon the terms of Justice, there is no conceivable reason why he should have mercy upon us, but grace makes and invents a reason. Oh, may I be helped, while I try to show you where I think the basis of mercy here lies? Demons fell separately; we have every reason to believe that every fallen angel sinned on his own account and fell, and it is very likely that on this account there was no possibility, as we know of, of their restoration; every separate fallen spirit was given up forever to chains, and darkness, and flames of fire. But men! Men did not fall separately and individually. Our case is a somewhat different one from that of fallen angels. All of us fell without our own consent, without having, in fact, any finger in it actually. We fell federally in our covenant head; it is in consequence of our falling in Adam, that our heart becomes evil from our youth. Now it looks to me as if God's mercy caught that. He seemed to say, "These my creatures have according to my arrangement of the federation, fallen

representatively; then I can save them representatively.” They perished in one, Adam I will save them in another. They do not fall by their own overt act, although indeed their own overt acts have added to this and deserved my wrath, but their first fall was not through themselves; they are sinful from their very infancy. Therefore he says, “I will deliver them by another since they fell by another.” I do not know whether I can make it any clearer. I do not think that this was any reason before the bar of justice why God should save us, for I believe that he might justly have condemned the whole race of Adam on account of Adam’s sin and their own guilt, but I do think that this was a blessed loophole through which his mercy could as it were come fairly to the sons of men, “There,” he says, “I do not make them distinct individuals but a race; they fell as a race, they shall rise as an elect race. „Just as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. “Just as by the transgression of one many were made sinners, so by the righteousness of one shall many be made righteous””. I think you will see the drift of it, then. Man’s being sinful, is in the logic of justice, a reason for punishment; man’s being sinful from his youth by inheritance from his federal head, becomes through mercy a reason why sovereign grace should light upon men while fallen angels are left to perish forever. Oh! I bless God that I did not first of all fall by myself. I do bless the day now that I fell in Adam, for it may be if I had never fallen in Adam I should have fallen in myself, and then I must have been like fallen angels shut out forever from the presence of God in the flames of hell. One of the old divines used to say of Adam’s sin, “Beata culpa,” “Happy fault!” I dare not say that, but in one sense I will say, blessed fall that renders it possible for me to rise! Blessed way of ruin which renders it possible for the blessed way of salvation to be brought about, salvation by substitution, salvation by sacrifice; salvation by a new covenant head, who for us is offered up so that God may smell a sweet savor and may deliver us!

I hope no one will misconstrue what I have said, and say that I teach that human depravity is an excuse for sin, God forbid! It is only in the eye of grace that it becomes the door of mercy. You know if your child has offended you that you do not want to chastise him, and yet you feel he deserves it. How you do try, if you are a loving parent, to find some reason why you may let him go. There is no reason, you know that. If you deal with him in terms of justice, there is no reason why having sinned he should not smart for it. But you keep casting about for an excuse, perhaps it is his mother’s birthday, and you let him off for that; or else there was some little circumstance which softened the offense for which you may have him excused. I do not know whether the story is true, but it is said of Queen Victoria when she was just queen, quite a girl, she was asked to sign a death warrant for a person who, by court-martial, had been condemned to die, and she said to the Duke, “Can you not find any reason why this man should be pardoned?” The Duke said, “No, it was a very great offense, he ought to be punished.” “But was he a good soldier?” The Duke said he was a shamefully bad soldier, had always been noted as a bad soldier. “Well, can you not invent for me any reason?” “Well,” he said, “I have every reason to believe from the testimony that he was a good man as a man, although a bad soldier.” “That will do,” she said, and she wrote across it, “Pardoned,” not because the man deserved it, but because she wanted a reason for having mercy. So my God seems to look upon man, and after he has looked him through and through and cannot see anything, at last, he says, “He is evil from his youth,” and he writes “Pardoned.” He smells the sweet savor first, and his heart is turned towards the poor rebel; then he turns to him with mercy and blesses him.

It Is Impossible to Enter Heaven as We Are:

But now, thirdly, with your permission and patience, I shall have to lead you to a few needful inferences from the doctrine of the depravity of man. If the heart is so evil, then it is impossible for us to enter heaven as we are. We cannot suppose that those holy gates shall enclose those whose imaginations and thoughts are evil, only evil continually. No, if that is the place into which shall not enter anything that defiles, then no man being what he was in his first birth can ever stand there. Another step; then it is quite clear that if I am to enter heaven no outward reform will ever do, for if I wash my face, that does not change my heart; and if I give up all my outward sins, and become outwardly what I ought to be, yet still, if it is true that my heart is the villainous thing which Scripture says it is, then my outward reformation cannot touch that, and I am still shut out of heaven; if inside that cup and platter there is all this filthiness, I may cleanse the outside, but I have not touched what will exclude me from heaven. I go then a little further, and I observe that I must have a new nature, not new practice only, but a new nature, not new thoughts or new words, but a new nature, in order to become a totally new man. And when I draw the inference, I have Scripture to back me at once, for what does Jesus say to Nicodemus? "You must be born again." But what does it mean to be born again? To my first birth, I owe all I am by nature; I must have a second birth to which I am to owe all I am as I enter heaven. Multitudes of people have been saying,

"What is Regeneration?" Here they have been writing hundreds of pamphlets, and no two of them agree upon what Regeneration is, except that they say that a man may be regenerated and not converted. Here is an extraordinary thing! An unconverted man who is regenerated! One who is an enemy to God and yet he has in himself a new nature! Has been born again and yet is not converted to God. Oh, what a Regeneration that does not convert, a regeneration, in fact, that leaves men just where they were before! But to every babe in Christ, the word regenerate is as plain as possible he needs no definition, no description. "To be born again, why," he says, "I comprehend that it is to be made over again, a new creature in Christ Jesus. My first birth makes me a creature, my second birth makes me a new creature, and I become what I never was before." I must remember that what is needed in me is not to bring out and develop what is good in me, for, according to God's Word in the sixth of Genesis, there is nothing good, it is evil only. Grace does not enter to educate the germs of holiness within me, for there is no germ of good in man at all, he is "evil continually," and every imagination is "only evil." I must then die to sin; my old nature must be slain, it cannot be mended; it is too bad, too rotten to be patched up, that must die; by the death of Jesus it must be destroyed; it must be buried with Christ, and I must rise in resurrection life to conformity with my Lord Jesus. Well then, advancing one step further, it is clear if I must be this before I can enter heaven, that I cannot give myself a new nature. A crab tree cannot transform itself into an apple tree; if I am a wolf I cannot make myself a sheep; water can rise to its own proper level, but it cannot go beyond it without pressure. I must have then, something done in me more than I can do in myself, and this indeed is good scriptural doctrine. "Whoever is born of the flesh," what is it? When the flesh has done it's very best what is it? "Whoever is born of the flesh is flesh," it is filthy, to begin with, and filth comes from it, only "whoever is born of the Spirit is spirit, do not marvel that I said to you, "You must be born again."

My soul must come under the hand of the Spirit; just as a piece of clay is on the potter's wheel and is made to revolve and is touched by the fingers of the potter and molded into what he wishes it to be, so must I lie passively in the hand of the Spirit of God, and he must work in me

to will and to do of his own good pleasure, and then I shall begin to work out my own salvation with fear and trembling, but never, never until then. I must have more than nature can give me, more than my mother gave me, more than my father gave me, more than flesh and blood can produce under the most favorable circumstances. I must have the Spirit of God from heaven. Then this inquiry comes, "Have I received it? What is the best evidence of it?" The best evidence of it is this: Am I resting upon Christ Jesus alone for salvation? You generally find on potters' vessels that there is a certain mark so that you can know who made them; I want to know whether I am a vessel fit for the Master's use, molded by his hand, and fashioned by his Spirit. Now, every single vessel that comes out of God's hands has a cross on it. Do you have the cross on you? Are you resting upon Christ's bloody atonement made on Calvary? Is he your one rock of refuge for your soul, your one only hope? Can you say this morning nothing in my hands I bring, simply to your cross I cling: Naked, come to you for dress; Helpless, look to you for grace; Black, I to the fountain fly, Wash me, Saviour, or I die?

Then, my brother, you have a new heart and a right spirit, you are a new creature in Christ Jesus, for simple faith in Christ is what the old Adam never could attain; a simple faith in Jesus is the great, sure mark of a work of the Holy Spirit in your soul by which you are made to be a partaker of the inheritance of the saints in light. "Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God." Do you believe that Jesus is the Christ? Do you take him to be God's anointed to you? Do you trust yourself to him to plead for you, to work for you, to fulfill the law for you, to offer atonement for you? If so, if Jesus is the Christ to you, you are born by God. The Spirit which is in you now will drive out the old nature, slay it utterly, cut it up root and branch, and you shall one day bear the image of the heavenly, even as you have until now borne the image of the earthly.