

Total Depravity Considered

By Hiram Christopher

That Adam's moral nature was so thoroughly and organically depraved as to become transmissible to his offspring, is an assertion which no man can prove by fact or argument. That men may and do become depraved by sin, can not be questioned; for it is a matter of daily observation. But that this depravity, produced by a life of sin, is transmitted to offspring, is not true, never was true, never will be true, and can never be proved to be true. *What sins?* The body that is transmitted? Is the soul born of the soul, as the body is of the body? No. The body only is derived. The body may be the "instrument of unrighteousness;" *but it is not the sinner.* We repeat, then, *what sins?* And answer, the *spirit* of man; that being that will live after the death of the body. Is this spirit transmissible? Who will affirm as much? If so, then is man wholly an organic being, differing in no essential particular, as to his nature and being, from the animals that utterly and forever perish. This is materialism, and makes a resurrection as impossible for man as for animals. Until it can be demonstrated that the spirit of man is created with the body, and so organically united to it as to become as verily transmissible as any feature, form, or idiosyncrasy of the organism, the spirit must be regarded as a separate and distinct creation., but united with the body so long as the body lives. Created distinctly and separately, and living after the body has perished, and being again *invested* with a body – then immortal and imperishable- its virtues and vices can not, in the very nature of the case, be reproduced as are those of the body, and transmitted with it. These things being true, the moral depravity of a father, admitting it to exist, can not be transmitted to his offspring.

This theory of the transmitted depravity of the parent, assumes, of course, the depravity of Adam, for which there is no more reason than for the other assumption. It assumes as a fact what can not be proved to have been a fact, and which, moreover, is really disproved by facts taking place before our eyes every day. Did any one ever know a man to become depraved by one act of disobedience?¹ Never. The thing is simply impossible; and hence the assumption, that Adam's moral nature was so degraded by the one act of disobedience as to be characterized as depraved, is without reason, and contrary to what is observed of the influence of one sine (and that not of the moral class), on the moral nature of an innocent and guileless person.

As a theory, it is positively contradicted by two important facts, one of which is a matter of history, and the other of daily observation. The first is the character of Christ. He was without sin. But if the doctrine of the transmissibility of constitutional depravity be true, and it also be true that one sin depraved the moral nature of Adam to such a degree that his depravity was constitutional, or organic,

¹ Cain was a wicked man, and Abel a good man. The doctrine might account for the character of Cain; but would be contradicted by that of Abel.

and, therefor, transmissible, then the statement that Christ was without sin can not be true. Hence, if Christ was without sin, the theory must be false.

The theory is also proved to be false by the character of children. They are without sin; for "of such is the kingdom of heaven." If they become depraved in adult life, who can say that the depravity is, in any degree, connected, as cause and effect, with the one transgression of Adam, and not *wholly* the result of their own individual sins? If there were any such connection, it was certainly broken and interrupted during the innocency of childhood; and if so, by what means was the fracture adjusted, and the connection re-established?

Some seek to evade the force of these objections to the theory in question by another assumption, viz: that the sinless character of Christ is to be ascribed to the power and influence his divine nature exerted over his human, by which he was kept from sinning. But this assumption is contradicted by the plainest statements of the inspired scriptures. The apostle who affirms that Christ was without sin - "holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens" - affirms also that he was "tempted in all points like as we are."² What nature in him was tempted, the human or the divine? James says God cannot be tempted, and so says our common sense. Then it was his human nature that was tempted, and his human nature was awarded the merit. Under his temptations and sufferings, whence did he obtain strength? In the main, if not entirely, where his faithful disciples obtained it: "who in the days of his flesh offered up both prayers and supplications to him who was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared; *who*, though a son, yet learned obedience by the things he suffered." While he prayed and suffered in Gethsemane, an angel was sent to strengthen him. In all his trials and sufferings he met them as "the *man* Christ Jesus," overcame them as a man, and showed to the world that human nature *can* keep the law.

Contradicted by the sinless character of children, the theory then assumes that they are sinners because they are human, and the descendants of Adam; sinners because of, and through, the one transgression of Adam, as the representative head. But the scriptures expressly declare in the very words of God, that children are not sinners because their fathers were. "Doth the son bear the iniquity of the father?" By no means. "The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father; neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him. *The soul that sins shall die.*"³

The scriptures, therefore, attest that the notion that the moral nature of the race was depraved, or influenced, in any way or in any degree, by the transgression of Adam, is wholly and entirely false, and consequently insulting to the government of God.

The moral nature of man, as the moral nature of angels, is peccable by creation; and his capacity to sin is not developed or created by and act of sin. The power, inheres

² Heb. 4:15

³ Ezekiel 18 chap.

in his very being; a fault in his being, if it be so considered, for which he is in no way responsible or reprehensible. This moral nature is susceptible of degradation and exaltation to an indefinite extent; the first by a life of sin, and the latter by a life of righteousness. The *moral nature* of the race is no more depraved now than at the first; for children now are just as sinless in character, and ever will be, as were the children of Adam and Eve – Cain, Able, Seth, and the rest.

Once more: If the moral nature of the race was depraved by the transgression of Adam, then the moral nature of all Christians should be made sinless, or incapable of sinning by the obedience of Christ, the second Adam. But this is not true; consequently, the act of one man, though he be a representative head, can not effect the nature of the race either favorably or unfavorably. There is, and can be, no genetic connection between the act of one man or a million, and the moral nature of the race.

The *remote or incidental* consequences of Adam's transgression are such as have befallen the race in its preternatural state. Among these are disease, pain, sorrow, anguish, and death, following their natural and legitimate causes, most of which causes may be found in the life and circumstances of the individual, and in some instances arising from germs derived from parents or in some instances arising from germs derived from parents or ancestors. But there is no moral quality attachable to these effects, even though they result from sin in the individual. All these consequences the Christian suffers as much as the sinner. The virtues of the Atonement do not reach them. Christians, the best the world ever saw, suffer from poverty, disease, and pain, and die as all men die. The atonement does not affect them, because there is no sin in them. It has reference only to sin, and can not remove what is not sin. For man's salvation from these, other means are provided; means in the enjoyment of which he will be perfectly passive. As men are born now into a preternatural state, without any will or act of their own; as they were brought into this state of suffering and death by the act of another; so by the act of another will the whole race be taken out of this state, and placed in another, where the body shall be immortal and free from physical suffering. So far as the sufferings of the soul are connected with sin, these will continue after the resurrection, as they were not affected by the atonement. If the atonement be applied to these in this world, they will disappear in the world to come; if not, they will continue forever. There will be no more death to free them from mental suffering. "As the tree falls, so will it lie" forever.