

THE DOCTRINES OF GRACE **(LESSON EIGHT)**

THE RADICAL CORRUPTION OF MAN **(PART TWO)**

As we noted in the previous lesson, the doctrine of the Radical Corruption of man does not mean that human beings are as wicked or as sinful as they could possibly be, nor does it mean that they are without a conscience or any sense of right or wrong. Neither does it mean that human beings do not do things that seem to be good when viewed from a human perspective or measured against a human standard. It does not even mean that man cannot do things that seem to conform outwardly to the law of God. What the Bible does teach and what Radical Corruption recognizes is that even the 'good' things that persons do are tainted by sin because they are not done for the glory of God and they are not done as a result of faith in Him (**Romans 14:23; Hebrews 11:6**).

While human beings look on outward acts and judge them to be good, God looks not only on outward acts but also on the inward motives that lie behind them, and because they proceed from a heart that is in rebellion against Him and they are not done for His glory, even these good deeds are like "*filthy rags*" in His sight. In other words, fallen man's good deeds are motivated not by a desire to please God but by our own self-interest and are thus, corrupted to the point where God declares that "*There is none righteous, no, not one*" and "*there is none that doeth good, no, not one!*"

Since scripture is very clear that every aspect of man's being is affected by sin and so much so that "*There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable,*" then how can anyone possibly be saved? The answer is that God must overcome our Radical Corruption in such a way that we are able to recognize our spiritual state and hopeless condition. Our spiritually blind eyes must be opened and the bondage of sin that renders us hopelessly enslaved must be broken so that we can respond in faith to the gospel message and the atoning work of Christ on the cross.

Some persons believe that God accomplishes this through some type of universal grace whereby God brings all persons to a condition where they have the ability to choose or reject Him. Others believe that for a man who is "*dead in trespasses and sins*" to be able to understand and respond to the gospel in faith, he must first be born again or regenerated by the Holy Spirit. This is the view that I believe the Word of God supports. **John 3:3-8** seems to support this opinion:

3 *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.*

4 *Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born?*

5 *Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.*

6 *That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.*

7 *Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again.*

8 *The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.*

It is only after God, by a sovereign act, breathes spiritual life into a dead sinner that he or she can "*see the kingdom of God.*" Those that are so resurrected by the power of Almighty God are born again but they are "*not born by human parents or by human desire or a husband's decision, but by God*" (**John 1:13 New English Translation**).

Unless and until God intervenes and breathes spiritual life into the dead sinner, his or her Radical Corruption manifests itself spiritually in their natural refusal of God's salvation. The lost, unregenerate person is not forced to this position by anything external to himself. When he or she refuses, they are merely exercising their freedom; but it is clear that this freedom, real as it is in the consciousness of the individual who exercises it, is actually a bondage. Augustine of Hippo whose writings influenced the development of Western Christianity and Western philosophy and who is viewed as one of the most important Church Fathers in Western Christianity, explained what happens when an unsaved person desires salvation. He said that, "Man is not converted because he wills: he wills because he is converted." The turning of the will necessarily precedes the willing acceptance, and this turning is a work of God, not of man. The following Old Testament passages underscore this very important point:

PSALM 80

- 1 Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, thou that leadest Joseph like a flock; thou that dwellest between the cherubims, shine forth.*
- 2 Before Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh stir up thy strength, and come and save us.*
- 3 Turn us again, O God, and cause thy face to shine; and we shall be saved.*
- 4 O Lord God of hosts, how long wilt thou be angry against the prayer of thy people?*
- 5 Thou feedest them with the bread of tears; and givest them tears to drink in great measure.*
- 6 Thou makest us a strife unto our neighbours: and our enemies laugh among themselves.*
- 7 Turn us again, O God of hosts, and cause thy face to shine; and we shall be saved.*
- 8 Thou hast brought a vine out of Egypt: thou hast cast out the heathen, and planted it.*
- 9 Thou preparedst room before it, and didst cause it to take deep root, and it filled the land.*
- 10 The hills were covered with the shadow of it, and the boughs thereof were like the goodly cedars.*
- 11 She sent out her boughs unto the sea, and her branches unto the river.*
- 12 Why hast thou then broken down her hedges, so that all they which pass by the way do pluck her?*
- 13 The boar out of the wood doth waste it, and the wild beast of the field doth devour it.*
- 14 Return, we beseech thee, O God of hosts: look down from heaven, and behold, and visit this vine;*
- 15 And the vineyard which thy right hand hath planted, and the branch that thou madest strong for thyself.*
- 16 It is burned with fire, it is cut down: they perish at the rebuke of thy countenance.*
- 17 Let thy hand be upon the man of thy right hand, upon the son of man whom thou madest strong for thyself.*
- 18 So will not we go back from thee: quicken us, and we will call upon thy name.*
- 19 Turn us again, O Lord God of hosts, cause thy face to shine; and we shall be saved.*

JEREMIAH 17:14

"Heal me, O Lord, and I shall be healed; save me, and I shall be saved: for thou art my praise."

LAMENTATIONS 5:20-21

"Wherefore dost thou forget us for ever, and forsake us so long time? Turn thou us unto thee, O Lord, and we shall be turned; renew our days as of old."

Man is free to choose salvation **if he wills it**. As **Revelation 22:17** indicates, whosoever will, may come. But **by nature**, fallen man does not will to come! It is not that any person **who desires to be saved** is denied salvation; it is simply that no man wills to be saved unless God turns his will around.

Furthermore, individuals are not saved whether they will or not. They are saved by the grace of God, because they will to be saved by the grace of God. They are, according to **Psalm 110:3**, “*made willing in the day of God’s power.*”

One of the most profound questions to occur in the mind of human beings is the question of the extent of their freedom. We recognize in ourselves and in others that we have a sense of making decisions where alternative choices are open to us. We are aware of our ability to choose. The whole concept of moral responsibility is deeply embedded in the culture of every society and that moral responsibility is based on the freedom of choice, on the ability, and therefore the responsibility, to choose what is right and reject what is wrong. In light of what we have stated concerning the Radical Corruption of man, the following questions may arise: “If a person is unable to do good, is he or she then to be held accountable for failing to do it?” “Can God judge persons for not obeying His commands if they are unable to obey them even if they want to?” “Is not ability to perform the test of duty?”

This is the view of the majority of persons. They are of the decided opinion that ability is always the measure of responsibility. They argue that if God commands people to repent and believe, it must be assumed that the people who are so commanded must be capable of repenting and believing, otherwise, God is unjust in his demands. The truth, however, is that the measure of our duty is not our ability to perform but God’s requirement of us, whether we can perform it or not. That we cannot perform it is our problem, not His; and there is no injustice in His refusal to lower his standard of requirement on account of our failure. Our inability does not absolve us from full responsibility. The reason that we are culpable is that we have willingly allowed ourselves to degenerate to the point of total incapacity. Human beings not only sin, we take pleasure in committing sins. **2 Thessalonians 2:12-14** is very instructive as it relates to this: “*That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness. But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth: Whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.*”

Human beings are not incapacitated against their will. Their bondage to sin is embraced willingly. It is in this way that they find freedom. Being slaves of corruption, human beings promise themselves liberty by accepting this corruption as normal. The apostle Peter makes this very point in **2 Peter 2:19**: “*While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption: for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage.*” When we sin, therefore, we are acting as truly free agents though we are in bondage. The most abject slave who willingly embraces his slavery, is no longer a slave by reason of force: he has found freedom in bondage.

The doctrine of Radical Corruption does not deny that human beings are free to make choices. Human beings are not puppets, for obviously, a puppet cannot choose to be a puppet. Human beings not only choose to be sinners, but by nature they prefer to remain sinners. As originally created, Adam was free in the absolute sense that he could choose to either obey or disobey the command of God. The important thing is that he had freedom of choice in either direction, upwards or downwards. As Augustine put it: “It was possible for him not to sin but not impossible for him to sin.” But when man made his fatal decision to disobey God, he destroyed this absolute freedom and left himself, thereafter, with freedom in only one direction - downward. This is still freedom but a greatly restricted freedom. When the redeemed finally reach heaven, they will still have freedom only in one direction, but this time it will be in the opposite direction - upwards. They will be constitutionally unable to sin, even as now they are constitutionally unable not to sin. The chart shown hereunder, may help us to grasp the sequence more clearly:

MAN IN EDEN	FALLEN MAN	MAN REDEEMED	MAN IN HEAVEN
Need Not Sin	Cannot But Sin	Can Sin But Need Not	Cannot Sin
Freedom to do ↑ Good ----- Evil ↓	Freedom to do only ↓ Evil ----- ↓	Freedom and preference ↑ To do good but ----- still has freedom to do evil ↓	Freedom only to do good ↑

That a person can be free and yet not free is a difficult concept to grasp until we realize what it means. **Hebrews 6:18** informs us that God cannot lie. There is, therefore, something that God cannot do. This, however, does not mean that God is not free; it means that God is free from the possibility of sin. In our fallen state we ourselves are, as Paul said in **Romans 6:20**, “free from righteousness.” What this means is that, whereas, in his innocence man need not have sinned, now in his fallen state, so long as he is acting freely - so long as he is acting according to his nature - man can do nothing else.

This tendency towards sin and unrighteousness is like gravity. We fall freely. No doubt, if falling objects had consciousness, they would claim to be falling without compulsion. It is only when the free-falling man attempts to go in the opposite direction - upwards that he realizes his freedom is in one direction - downward. As long as he does not attempt to resist it, he lives with a sense of complete freedom even though in reality he is subject to gravity. Every time a person says, “I will do as I please,” he or she accelerates his or her degeneration. In this natural state, we are conscious of making choices, but most of the time, we do not ask why we make the choices we do. We never know the force of any evil passion or principle within us until we begin to resist it.

Why, then, does God command of us what we cannot possibly do? He does so because his requirement is the true measure of our duty, not our ability or our preference. God’s command is not His expectation of us but rather, His judgment of our fallen nature, the condemnation of our unrighteousness.

When God saves a person by His grace, He restores the ability that Adam had before the Fall to choose in either direction, to disobey or obey the will of God. But something more than this is accomplished in us by the Holy Spirit. We are not merely given alternatives where we formerly had no alternative, but we are given a desire for righteousness. We are not merely transformed from a negative to a neutral position, but from a negative to a positive one. If we walk in His light and allow His grace to work in our hearts, we will increasingly be drawn upwards by choice, for it is God who is working in us not merely to do but also to will his will. **Philippians 2:12-13** clearly indicates this: “What I’m getting at, friends, is that you should simply keep on doing what you’ve done from the beginning. When I was living among you, you lived in responsive obedience. Now that I’m separated from you, keep it up. Better yet, redouble your efforts. Be energetic in your life of salvation, reverent and sensitive before God. That energy is **God’s** energy, an energy deep within you, God himself willing and working at what will give him the most pleasure” (**The Message**).

God intervenes and turns us around and converts us as to the direction of our will. **Hebrews 8:6-12** illustrates this graphically and beautifully:

6 But now hath he obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also he is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises.

7 For if that first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second.

8 For finding fault with them, he saith, Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah:

9 Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they continued not in my covenant, and I regarded them not, saith the Lord.

10 For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people:

11 And they shall not teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest.

12 For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more.

What a transformation! Instead of the bondage of self being written in both our minds and hearts, the Law of God is written in both our understanding of his will (mind) and our willingness to do it (heart). This is the new covenant which God makes with us. Yet **Romans 7:7-24** testifies to the fact that the downward tendency remains, though it is no longer representative of our true selves. Not until we reach heaven shall we be truly free, in such total bondage to righteousness that to will downwardly will be constitutionally impossible. Hallelujah!