

The Sinfulness of Man's Natural State

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Introduction to the Doctrine

Man's Nature is Now Wholly Corrupted

The Corruption of the Understanding

The Corruption of the Will

The Corruption of the Affections

The Corruption of the Conscience

The Corruption of the Memory

The Corruption of the Body

God Takes Special Notice of our Natural Corruption

Men Overlooking their Natural Sin

Original Sin to be Specially Noticed

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

We have seen what man was, as God made him; a lovely and happy creature. Let us view him now as he has unmade himself; and we shall see him a sinful and a miserable creature. This is the sad state we are brought into by the fall; a state as black and doleful as the former was glorious; and this we commonly call 'The State of Nature,' or 'Man's Natural State'; according to that of the apostle (Eph 2.3), 'And were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.' — And herein two things are to be considered: 1. The sinfulness 2. The misery of this

state, in which all the unregenerate live. I begin with the sinfulness of man's natural state, whereof the text gives us a full, though short, account.

The scope and design of these words is, to clear God's justice in bringing the flood on the old world. There are two particular causes taken notice of in the preceding verses: 1. Mixed marriages (verse 2), 'The sons of God,' the posterity of Seth and Enos, professors of the true religion, married with 'the daughters of men,' the profane, cursed race of Cain. They did not carry the matter before the Lord, that He might choose for them (Psa 48.14), but without any respect to the will of God, they chose, not according to the rules of their faith, but of their fancy; they 'saw that they were fair;' and their marriage with them occasioned their divorce from God. This was one of the causes of the deluge, which swept away the old world. Would to God that all professors in our day could plead not guilty. But though that sin brought on the deluge, yet the deluge has not swept away that sin, which as of old, so in our day, may justly be looked upon as one of the causes of the decay of religion. It was an ordinary thing among the Pagans, to change their gods, as they changed their condition into a married lot: many sad instances the Christian world affords of the same; as if people were of Pharaoh's opinion, That religion is only for those who have no other care upon their heads (Exod 5.17). 2. Great oppression (verse 4), 'There were giants in the earth in those days;' men of great stature, great strength, and monstrous wickedness, 'filling the earth with violence' (verse 11). But neither their strength, nor treasures of wickedness, could profit them in the day of wrath. Yet the gain of oppression still causes many to forget the terror of this dreadful example. Thus much for the connexion, and what particular crimes that generation was guilty of. But every person that was swept away by the flood could not be guilty of these things; and 'shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?' Therefore, in my text, there is a general indictment drawn up against them all, 'The wickedness of man was great in the earth,' and clearly proved, for God saw it. Two things are here laid to their charge:

1: Corruption of life, wickedness, great wickedness. I understand this of the wickedness of their lives; for it is plainly distinguished from the wickedness of their hearts. The sins of their outward conversation were great in the nature of them, and greatly aggravated by their attendant circumstances: and this not only among those of the race of cursed Cain, but those of holy Seth; the wickedness of man was great. And then it is added, 'in the earth:' 1. To vindicate God's severity, in that He not only cut off sinners, but defaced the beauty of the earth, and swept off the brute creatures from it, by the deluge; that as men had set the marks of their impiety, God might set the marks of His indignation, on the earth. 2. To shew the heinousness of their sin, in making the earth, which God had so adorned for the use of man, a sink of sin, and a stage whereon to act their wickedness, in defiance of heaven. God saw this corruption of life: He not only

knew it, and took notice of it, but He made them to know that He took notice of it, and that He had not forsaken the earth, though they, had forsaken heaven.

2: Corruption of nature: Every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. All their wicked practices are here traced to the fountain and springhead: a corrupt heart was the source of all. The soul, which was made upright in all its faculties, is now wholly disordered. The heart that was made according to God's own heart, is now the reverse of it, a forge of evil imaginations, a sink of inordinate affections, and a storehouse of all impiety (Mark 7.21,22). Behold the heart of the natural man, as it is opened in our text. The mind is defiled; the thoughts of the heart are evil; the will and affections are defiled: the imagination of the thoughts of the heart, that is, whatsoever the heart frames within itself by thinking, such as judgment, choice, purposes devices, desires, every inward motion; or rather the frame of the thoughts of the heart, namely the frame, make, or mould of these (I Chron 29.18), is evil. Yea, and every imagination, every frame of his thoughts, is so. The heart is ever framing something, but never one right thing: the frame of thoughts in the heart of man is exceedingly various; yet are they never cast into a right frame. But is there not, at least, a mixture of good in them? No, they are only evil; there is nothing in them truly good and acceptable to God: nor can any thing be so, that comes out of the forge where, not the Spirit of God, but 'the prince of the power of the air' works (Eph 2.2). Whatever changes may be found in them, are only from evil to evil; for the imagination of the heart, or frame of thoughts in natural men, is evil continually, or every day. From the first day to the last day, in this state, they are in midnight darkness; there is not the glimmering of the light of holiness in them; not one holy thought can ever be produced by the unholy heart. O what a vile heart is this! O what a corrupt nature is this! The tree that always brings forth fruit, but never good fruit, whatever soil it be set in, whatever pains be taken with it, must naturally be an evil tree: and what can that heart be, whereof every imagination, every set of thoughts, is only evil, and that continually? Surely that corruption is ingrained in our hearts, interwoven with our very natures, has sunk into the marrow of our souls, and will never be cured but by a miracle of grace. Now such is man's heart, such is his nature, till regenerating grace change it. God that searches the heart saw man's heart was so. He took special notice of it: and the faithful and true Witness cannot mistake our case; though we are most apt to mistake ourselves in this point, and generally do overlook it.

Beware that there be not a thought in your wicked heart saying, What is that to us? Let that generation of whom the text speaks, see to that. For the Lord has left the case of that generation on record, to be a looking-glass to all after generations, wherein they may see their own corruption of heart, and what their lives would be too, if he restrained them not: for 'as in water face answereth to face, so the heart of man to man' (Prov 27.19). Adam's fall has framed all men's

hearts alike in this matter. Hence the apostle (Rom 3. 10-18), proves the corruption of the nature, hearts, and lives of all men, from what the psalmist says of the wicked in his day (Psa 14.1-3; Psa 5.9; Psa 140.3; Psa 10.7; Psa 36.1); and from what Jeremiah says of the wicked in his day (Jer 9.3), and from what Isaiah says of those that lived in his time (Isa 57.7,8), and concludes (verse 19), 'Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law; that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.' Had the history of the deluge been transmitted unto us, without the reason thereof in the text, we might thence have gathered the corruption and total depravity of man's nature: for what other quarrel could the holy and just God have with the infants that were destroyed by the flood, seeing they had no actual sin? If we saw a wise man, who having made a curious piece of work, and heartily approved of it when he gave it out of his hand, as fit for the use it was designed for, rise up in wrath and break it all in pieces, when he looked on it afterwards; should we not thence conclude that the frame of it had been quite marred since it came out of his hand, and that it does not serve for the use it was at first designed for? How much more, when we see the holy and wise God destroying the work of His own hands, once solemnly pronounced by Him very good, may we not conclude that the original frame thereof is utterly marred, that it cannot be mended, but must needs be new made, or lost altogether? (Gen 6.6,7), 'And it repented the Lord that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart; and the Lord said, I will destroy man,' or blot him out; as a man doth a sentence out of a book, that cannot be corrected by cutting off some letters, syllables, or words, and interlining others here and there, but must needs be wholly new framed. But did the deluge carry off this corruption of man's nature? did it mend the matter? No, it did not. God, in His holy providence, 'that every mouth may be stopped,' and all the new 'world may become guilty before God,' as well as the old, permits that corruption of nature to break out in Noah, the father of the new world, after the deluge was over. Behold him, as another Adam, sinning in the fruit of a tree (Gen 9.20,21), 'He planted a vineyard, and he drank of the wine, and was drunken, and he was uncovered within his tent.' More than that, God gives the same reason against a new deluge, which he gives in our text for bringing that on the old world: 'I will not,' saith he, 'again curse the ground any more for man's sake; for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth' (Gen 8.21). Whereby it is intimated, that there is no mending of the matter by this means; and that if He should always take the same course with men that He had done, He would be always sending deluges on the earth, seeing the corruption of man's nature still remains. But though the flood could not carry off the corruption of nature, yet it pointed at the way how it is to be done; namely, that men must be 'born of water and of the Spirit,' raised from spiritual death in sin by the grace of Jesus Christ, who came by water and blood; out of which a new world of saints arise in regeneration, even as the new world of sinners out of the waters, where they had long lain buried, as it were, in the ark. This we learn from I Pet 3.20,21,

where the apostle, speaking of Noah's ark, says, 'Wherein few, that is, eight souls, were saved by water. The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us.' Now the waters of the deluge being a like figure to baptism, it plainly follows, that they signified, as baptism does, 'the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost.' To conclude then, those waters, though now dried up, may serve us still for a looking-glass, in which we may see the total corruption of our nature, and the necessity of regeneration.

From the text, thus explained, this weighty point of doctrine arises, which he that runs may read in it, namely:

DOCTRINE: Man's nature is now wholly corrupted

There is a sad alteration, a wonderful overturning in the nature of man: where, at first, there was nothing evil, now there is nothing good. In treating on this doctrine, I shall,

I: Confirm it.

II: Represent this corruption of nature in its several parts.

III: Shew you how man's nature comes to be thus corrupted.

IV: Apply this doctrine.

I: I shall confirm the doctrine of the corruption of nature.

I shall hold the glass to your eyes, wherein you may see your sinful nature; which, though God takes particular notice of it, many quite overlook. Here we shall consult the Word of God, and men's experience and observation.

For Scripture proof, let us consider,

1: How the Scripture takes particular notice of fallen Adam's communicating his image to his posterity (Gen 5.3), 'Adam begat a son in his own likeness, after his image, and called his name Seth.' Compare with this the first verse of that chapter, 'In the day that God created man, in the likeness of God made he him.' Behold here, how the image after which man was made, and the image after which he is begotten, are opposed. Man was created in the likeness of God; that is, the holy and righteous God made a holy and righteous creature, but fallen Adam begat a son, not in the likeness of God, but in his own likeness; that is, corrupt sinful Adam begat a corrupt sinful son. For as the image of God bore righteousness and immortality in it, as was shewn before; so this image of fallen Adam bore corruption and death in it (I Cor 15.49,50, compare verse 22). Moses,

in that fifth chapter of Genesis, giving us the first bill of mortality that ever was in the world, ushers it in with this, that dying Adam beget mortals. Having sinned, he became mortal, according to the threatening; and so he beget a son in his own likeness, sinful, and therefore mortal. Thus sin and death passed on all. Doubtless he beget both Cain and Abel in his own likeness, as well as Seth. But it is not recorded of Abel, because he left no issue behind him, and his falling the first sacrifice to death in the world, was a sufficient document of it: nor of Cain, to whom it might have been thought peculiar, because of his monstrous wickedness; and besides, his posterity was drowned in the flood: but it is recorded of Seth, because he was the father of the holy seed; and from him all mankind since the flood have descended, and fallen Adam's own likeness with them.

2: It appears from that text of Scripture (Job 14.4), 'Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? Not one.' Our first parents were unclean, how then can we be clean? How could our immediate parents be clean? how can our children be so? The uncleanness here referred to, is a sinful uncleanness; for it is such as makes man's days full of trouble: and it is natural, being derived from unclean parents: 'Man is born of a woman' (verse 1), 'And how can he be clean, that is born of a woman?' (Job 25.4). The omnipotent God, whose power is not here challenged, could bring a clean thing out of an unclean, and did so in the case of the man Christ: but no other can. Every person that is born according to the course of nature is born unclean. If the root be corrupt, so must the branches be. Neither is the matter mended, though the parents be sanctified ones; for they are but holy in part, and that by grace, not by nature, and they beget their children as men, not as holy men. Wherefore, as the circumcised parent begets an uncircumcised child, and after the purest grain is sown, we reap chaff with the corn; so the holiest parents beget unholy children, and cannot communicate their grace to them, as they do their nature; which many godly parents find true, in their sad experience.

3: Consider the confession of the psalmist David (Psa 51.5), 'Behold, I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.' Here he ascends from his actual sin, to the fountain of it, namely, corrupt nature. He was a man according to God's own heart, but from the beginning it was not so with him. He was begotten in lawful marriage: but when the lump was shapen in the womb, it was a sinful lump. Hence the corruption of nature is called the 'old man;' being as old as ourselves, older than grace, even in those that are sanctified from the womb.

3: Hear our Lord's determination of the point (John 3.6), 'That which is born of the flesh is flesh.' Behold the universal corruption of mankind — all are flesh! Not that all are frail, though that is a sad truth too: yea, and our natural frailty is an evidence of our natural corruption, but that is not the sense of the text. The

meaning of it is — all are corrupt and sinful, and that naturally. Hence our Lord argues that because they are flesh, therefore they must be born again, or else they cannot enter into the kingdom of God (verses 3-5). And as the corruption of our nature shows the absolute necessity of regeneration, so the absolute necessity of regeneration plainly proves the corruption of our nature; for why should a man need a second birth, if his nature were not quite marred in his first birth?

5: Man certainly is sunk very low now, in comparison of what he once was. God made him but a 'little lower than the angels:' but now we find him likened to the beasts that perish. He hearkened to a brute, and is now become like one of them. Like Nebuchadnezzar, his portion in his natural state is with the beasts, 'minding only earthly things' (Phil 3.19). Nay, brutes, in some sort, have the advantage of the natural man, who is sunk a degree below them. He is more negligent of what concerns him most, than the stork, or the turtle, or the crane, or the swallow, in what is for their interest (Jer 8.7). He is more stupid than the ox or ass (Isa 1.3). I find him sent to school to learn of the ant, which has no guide or leader to go before her; no overseer or officer to compel or stir her up to work; no ruler, but may do as she lists, being under the dominion of none; yet 'provideth her meat in the summer and harvest' (Prov 6.6-8); while the natural man has all these, and yet exposes himself to eternal starving. Nay, more than all this, the Scriptures hold out the natural man, not only as wanting the good qualities of these creatures, but as a compound of the evil qualities of the worst of the creatures; in whom the fierceness of the lion, the craft of the fox, the unteachableness of the wild ass, the filthiness of the dog and swine, the poison of the asp, and such like, meet. Truth itself calls them 'serpents, a generation of vipers;' yea, more, even 'children of the devil' (Matt 23.33; John 8.44). Surely, then, man's nature is miserably corrupted.

6: 'We are by nature the children of wrath' (Eph 2.3). We are worthy of, and liable to, the wrath of God; and this by nature: therefore, doubtless, we are by nature sinful creatures. We are condemned before we have done good or evil; under the curse, before we know what it is. But, 'will a lion roar in the forest when he hath no prey?' (Amos 3.4); that is, will the holy and just God roar in His wrath against man, if he be not, by his sin, made a prey for His wrath? No, He will not; He cannot. Let us conclude then, that, according to the Word of God, man's nature is a corrupt nature.

If we consult experience, and observe the case of the world, in those things that are obvious to any person who will not shut his eyes against clear light, we shall quickly perceive such fruits as discover this root of bitterness. I shall propose a few things that may serve to convince us in this point:

1: Who sees not a flood of miseries overflowing the world? Whither can a man go where he shall not dip his foot, if he go not over head and ears, in it? Every one at home and abroad, in city and country, in palaces and cottages, is groaning under some one thing or other, distasteful to him. Some are oppressed with poverty, some chastened with sickness and pain, some are lamenting their losses, every one has a cross of one sort or another. No man's condition is so soft, but there is some thorn of uneasiness in it. At length death, the wages of sin, comes after these its harbingers, and sweeps all away. Now, what but sin has opened the sluice of sorrow? There is not a complaint nor sigh heard in the world, nor a tear that falls from our eye, but it is an evidence that man is fallen as a star from heaven; for 'God distributeth sorrows in his anger' (Job 21.17). This is a plain proof of the corruption of nature: forasmuch as those who have not yet actually sinned, have their share of these sorrows; yea, and draw their first breath in the world weeping, as if they knew this world at first sight to be a Bochim, the place of weepers. There are graves of the smallest, as well as of the largest size, in the churchyard; and there are never wanting some in the world, who are, like Rachel, weeping for their children because they are not (Matt 2.18).

2: Observe how early this corruption of nature begins to appear in young ones. Solomon observes, that 'even a child is known by his doings' (Prov 20.11). It may soon be discerned what way the bias of the heart lies. Do not the children of fallen Adam, before they can go alone, follow their father's footsteps? What a vast deal of little pride, ambition, sinful curiosity, vanity, wilfulness, and averseness to good, appears in them? And when they creep out of infancy, there is a necessity of using the rod of correction, to drive away the foolishness that is bound in their hearts (Prov 22.15), which shows that, if grace prevail not, the child will be as Ishmael — 'a wild ass-man,' as the word is (Gen 16.12).

3: Take a view of the manifold gross outbreakings of sin in the world: the wickedness of man is yet great in the earth. Behold the bitter fruits of the corruption of our nature (Hos 4.2). 'By swearing, and lying, and killing, and stealing, and committing adultery, they break out (like the breaking forth of waters), and blood toucheth blood.' The world is filled with filthiness, and all manner of lewdness, wickedness, and profanity. From whence comes the deluge of sin on the earth, but from the breaking up of the fountains of the great deep, the heart of man? out of which proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, &c. (Mark 7.21,22). You will, it may be, thank God with a whole heart, that you are not like these other men; and indeed you have more reason for it than, I fear, you are aware of; for 'as in water face answereth to face, so the heart of man to man' (Prov 27.19). As, looking into clear water, you see your own face; so, looking into your heart, you may see other men's there; and, looking into other men's, in them you may see your own. So that the most vile and profane wretches that are in the world, should

serve you for a looking-glass, in which you ought to discern the corruption of your own nature: and if you were to do so, you would, with a heart truly touched, thank God, and not yourselves, indeed, that you are not as other men in your lives; seeing the corruption of nature is the same in you as in them.

4: Cast your eye upon those terrible convulsions which the world is thrown into by the lusts of men! Lions make not a prey of lions, nor wolves of wolves: but men are turned lions and wolves to one another, biting and devouring one another. Upon how slight occasions will men sheath their swords in one another! The world is a wilderness, where the clearest fire that men can carry about with them will not frighten away the wild beasts that inhabit it (and that because they are men and not brutes); but one way or other they will be wounded. Since Cain shed the blood of Abel, the earth has been turned into a slaughter-house; and the chase has been continued since Nimrod began his hunting; on the earth, as in the sea, the greater still devouring the lesser. When we see the world in such a ferment, every one attacking another with words or swords, we may conclude there is an evil spirit among them. These violent heats among Adam's sons show the whole body to be distempered, the whole head to be sick, and the whole heart to be faint. They surely proceed from an inward cause (James 4. 1), 'lusts that war in our members.'

5: Consider the necessity of human laws, guarded by terrors and severities; to which we may apply what the apostle says (I Tim 1.9), that 'the law is not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and for sinners.' Man was made for society; and God Himself said of the first man, when He had created him, that it was 'not meet he should be alone;' yet the case is such now, that, in society, he must be hedged in with thorns. And that from hence we may the better see the corruption of man's nature, let us consider: 1. Every man naturally loves to be at full liberty himself; to have his own will for his law; and, if he were to follow his natural inclinations, he would vote himself out of the reach of all laws, divine and human. Hence some, the power of whose hands has been answerable to their natural inclination, have indeed made themselves absolute, and above laws; agreeably to man's monstrous design at first, to be as gods (Gen 3.5). 2. There is no man that would willingly adventure to live in a lawless society: therefore even pirates and robbers have laws among themselves, though the whole society casts off all respect to law and right. Thus men discover themselves to be conscious of the corruption of nature; not daring to trust one another, but upon security. 3. How dangerous soever it is to break through the hedge, yet the violence of lust makes many daily adventure to run the risk. They will not only sacrifice their credit and conscience, which last is lightly esteemed in the world; but for the pleasure of a few moments, immediately succeeded with terror from within, they will lay themselves open to a violent death by the laws of the land wherein they live. 4. The laws are often made to yield to men's lusts. Sometimes whole societies run into such

extravagances, that, like a company of prisoners, they break off their fetters, and put their guard to flight; and the voice of laws cannot be heard for the noise of arms. And seldom is there a time, wherein there are not some persons so great and daring, that the laws dare not look their impetuous lusts in the face; which made David say, in the case of Joab, who had murdered Abner, 'These men, the sons of Zeruah, be too hard for me' (2 Sam 3.39). Lusts sometimes grow too strong for laws, so that the law becomes slack, as the pulse of a dying man (Hab 1.3,4). 5. Consider what necessity often appears of amending old laws, and making new ones; which have their rise from new crimes, of which man's nature is very fruitful. There would be no need of mending the hedge, if men were not, like unruly beasts, still breaking it down. It is astonishing to see what a figure the Israelites, who were separated unto God from among all the nations of the earth, make in their history; what horrible confusions were among them, when there was no king in Israel, as you may see from the eighteenth to the twenty-first chapter of Judges: how hard it was to reform them, when they had the best of magistrates! and how quickly they turned aside again, when they got wicked rulers! I cannot but think, that one grand design of that sacred history, was to discover the corruption of man's nature, the absolute need of the Messiah, and His grace; and that we ought, in reading it, to improve it to that end. How cutting is that word which the Lord has to Samuel, concerning Saul (I Sam 9.17), 'The same shall reign over' — or, as the word is, shall restrain — 'my people!' O the corruption of man's nature! the awe and dread of the God of heaven restrains them not; but they must have gods on earth to do it, 'to put them to shame' (Judges 18.7).

6: Consider the remains of that natural corruption in the saints. Though grace has entered, yet corruption is not expelled: though they have got the new creature, yet much of the old corrupt nature remains; and these struggle together within them, as the twins in Rebekah's womb (Gal 5.17). They find it present with them at all times, and in all places, even in the most retired corners, If a man has a troublesome neighbour, he may remove; if he has an ill servant, he may put him away at the term; if a bad yoke-fellow, he may sometimes leave the house, and be free from molestation that way: but should the saint go into a wilderness, or set up his tent on some remote rock in the sea, where never foot of man, beast, or fowl had touched, there will it be with him. Should he be with Paul, caught up to the third heaven, it will come back with him (2 Cor 12.7). It follows him as the shadow does the body; it makes a blot in the fairest line he can draw. It is like the fig-tree on the wall, which however closely it was cut, yet still grew, till the wall was thrown down: for the roots of it are fixed in the heart, while the saint is in the world, as with bands of iron and brass. It is especially active when he would do good (Rom 7.21), then the fowls come down upon the carcases. Hence often, in holy duties, the spirit of a saint, as it were, evaporates; and he is left before he is aware, like Michal, with an image in the bed instead of a husband. I need not stand to prove to the godly the

corruption of nature in them, for they groan under it; and to prove it to them, were to hold out a candle to let them see the sun: as for the wicked, they are ready to account mole-hills in the saints as big as mountains, if not to reckon them all hypocrites. But consider these few things on this head: 1. 'If it be thus in the green tree how must it be in the dry?' The saints are not born saints, but made so by the power of regenerating grace. Have they got a new nature, and yet the old remains with them? How great must that corruption be in others, in whom there is no grace! 2. The saints groan under it, as a heavy burden. Hear the apostle (Rom 7.24), 'O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?' What though the carnal man lives at ease and quiet, and the corruption of nature is not his burden, is he therefore free from it? No, no; it is because he is dead, that he feels not the sinking weight. Many a groan is heard from a sick bed, but never any from a grave. In the saint, as in the sick man, there is a mighty struggle; life and death striving for the mastery: but in the natural man, as in the dead corpse, there is no noise, because death bears full sway. 3. The godly man resists the old corrupt nature; he strives to mortify it, yet it remains; he endeavours to starve it, and by that means to weaken it, yet it is active. How must it spread then, and strengthen itself in that soul, where it is not starved, but fed ! And this is the case of all the unregenerate, who make 'provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof.' If the garden of the diligent afford him new work daily, in cutting off and rooting up, surely that of the sluggard must needs be 'all grown over with thorns.'

7: I shall add but one observation more, and that is, that in every man, naturally, the image of fallen Adam appears. Some children, by the features and lineaments of their face, do, as it were, father themselves: and thus we resemble our first parents. Every one of us bears the image and impression of the fall upon him: and to evince the truth of this, I appeal to the consciences of all, in these following particulars:

1: Is not sinful curiosity natural to us? and is not this a print of Adam's image? (Gen 3.6). Is not man naturally much more desirous to know new things, than to practise old known truths? How much like old Adam do we look in this eagerness for novelties, and disrelish of old solid doctrines? We seek after knowledge rather than holiness, and study most to know those things which are least edifying. Our wild and roving fancies need a bridle to curb them, while good solid affections must be quickened and spurred on.

2: If the Lord, by His holy law and wise providence, puts a restraint upon us, to keep us back from any thing, does not that restraint whet the edge of our natural inclinations, and make us so much the keener in our desires? And in this do we not betray it plainly, that we are Adam's children? (Gen 3.2-6). I think this cannot be denied, for daily observation evinces, that it is a natural principle, that 'stolen waters are sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant' (Prov 9.17). The

very heathens were convinced that man was possessed with this spirit of contradiction, though they knew not the spring of it. How often do men let themselves loose in those things, in which, had God left them at liberty, they would have bound up themselves! but corrupt nature takes a pleasure in the very jumping over the hedge. And is it not a repeating of our father's folly, that men will rather climb for forbidden fruit, than gather what is shaken off the tree of good providence to them, when they have God's express allowance for it?

3: Which of all the children of Adam is not naturally disposed to hear the instruction that causeth to err? And was not this the rock our first parents split upon? (Gen 3.4-6). How apt is weak man, ever since that time, to parley with temptations! 'God speaketh once, yea twice, yet man perceiveth it not' (Job 33.14), but he readily listens to Satan. Men might often come fair off, if they would dismiss temptations with abhorrence, when first they appear; if they would nip them in the bud, they would soon die away, but, alas! though we see the train laid for us, and the fire put to it, yet we stand till it runs along, and we are blown up with its force.

4: Do not the eyes in our head often blind the eyes of the mind? And was not this the very case of our first parents? (Gen 3.6). Man is never more blind than when he is looking on the objects that are most pleasing to sense. Since the eyes of our first parents were opened to the forbidden fruit, men's eyes have been the gates of destruction to their souls; at which impure imaginations and sinful desires have entered the heart, to the wounding of the soul, wasting of the conscience, and bringing dismal effects sometimes on whole societies, as in Achan's case (Joshua 7.21). Holy Job was aware of this danger from these two little rolling bodies, which a very small splinter of wood can make useless; so that, with the king who durst not, with his ten thousand, meet him that came with twenty thousand against him (Luke 14.31,32), he sendeth and desireth conditions of peace, 'I made a covenant with mine eyes' (Job 31.1).

5: Is it not natural to us to care for the body, even at the expense of the soul? This was one ingredient in the sin of our first parents (Gen 3.6). O how happy might we be, if we were but at half the pains about our souls, that we bestow upon our bodies! If that question, 'What must I do to be saved?' (Acts 16.30), ran but near as often through our minds as these questions do, 'What shall we eat? what shall we drink? wherewithal shall we be clothed?' (Mart 6.31), then many a hopeless case would become very hopeful. But the truth is, most men live as if they were nothing but a lump of flesh: or as if their soul served for no other use, but, like salt, to keep their body from corrupting. 'They are flesh' (John 3.6); 'they mind the things of the flesh' (Rom 8.5); 'and they live after the flesh' (verse 13 If the consent of the flesh be got to an action, the consent of the conscience is rarely waited for: yea, the body is often served, when the conscience has entered a protest against it).

6: Is not every one by nature discontented with his present lot in the world, or with some one thing or other in it? This also was Adam's case (Gen 3.5,6). Some one thing is always wanting; so that man is a creature given to changes. If any doubt this, let them look over all their enjoyments; and, after a review of them, listen to their own hearts, and they will hear a secret murmuring for want of something; though perhaps, if they considered the matter aright, they would see that it is better for them to want than to have that something. Since the hearts of our first parents flew out at their eyes, on the forbidden fruit, and a night of darkness was thereby brought on the world, their posterity have a natural disease which Solomon calls, 'The wandering of the desire,' or, as the word is, 'The walking of the soul' (Eccl 6.9). This is a sort of diabolical trance, wherein the soul traverses the world; feeds itself with a thousand airy nothings; snatches at this and the other created excellency, in imagination and desire; goes here, and there, and every where, except where it should go. And the soul is never cured of this disease, till conquering grace brings it back to take up its everlasting rest in God through Christ: but till this be, if man were set again in paradise, the garden of the Lord, all the pleasures there would not keep him from looking, yea, and leaping over the hedge a second time.

7: Are we not far more easily impressed and influenced by evil counsels and examples, than by those that are good! You will see this was the ruin of Adam (Gen 3.6). Evil example, to this day, is one of Satan's master-devices to ruin men. Though we have, by nature, more of the fox than of the lamb; yet that ill property which some observe in this creature, namely, that if one lamb skip into a water, the rest that are near will suddenly follow, may be observed also in the disposition of the children of men; to whom it is very natural to embrace an evil way, because they see others in it before them. Ill example has frequently the force of a violent stream, to carry us over plain duty, but especially if the example be given by those we bear a great affection to; our affection, in that case, blinds our judgment; and what we should abhor in others, is complied with, to humour them. Nothing is more plain, than that generally men choose rather to do what the most do, than what the best do.

8: Who of all Adam's sons needs be taught the art of sewing fig-leaves together, to cover their nakedness? (Gen 3.7). When we have ruined ourselves, and made ourselves naked to our shame, we naturally seek to help ourselves by ourselves: many poor contrivances are employed, as silly and insignificant as Adam's fig-leaves. What pains are men at, to cover their sin from their own conscience, and to draw all the fair colours upon it that they can! And when once convictions are fastened upon them, so that they cannot but see themselves naked, it is as natural for them to attempt to cover it by self-deceit, as for fish to swim in water, or birds to fly in the air. Therefore the first question of the convinced is, 'What shall we do?' (Acts 2.37). How shall we qualify ourselves? What shall we

perform? Not considering that the new creature is God's own workmanship or deed (Eph 2.10), any more than Adam considered and thought of being clothed with the skins of sacrifices (Gen 3.21).

9: Do not Adam's children naturally follow his footsteps, in biding themselves from the presence of the Lord? (Gen 3.8). We are quite as blind in this matter as he was, who thought to hide himself from the presence of God amongst the shady trees of the garden. We are very apt to promise ourselves more security in a secret sin, than in one that is openly committed. 'The eye of the adulterer waiteth for the twilight, saying, no eye shall see me' (Job 24.15). Men will freely do that in secret, which they would be ashamed to do in the presence of a child; as if darkness could hide from the all-seeing God. Are we not naturally careless of communion with God; aye, and averse to it? Never was there any communion between God and Adam's children, where the Lord Himself had not the first word. If He were to let them alone they would never inquire after Him; 'I hid me' (Isa 57.17). Did he seek after a hiding God? Very far from it: 'He went on in the way of his heart.'

10: How loth are men to confess sin, to take guilt and shame to themselves? Was it not thus in the case before us? (Gen 3.10). Adam confesses his nakedness, which could not be denied; but says not one word of his sin: the reason of it was, he would fain have hid it if he could. It is as natural for us to hide sin, as to commit it. Many sad instances thereof we have in this world, but a far clearer proof of it we shall get at the day of judgment, the day in which 'God will judge the secrets of men' (Rom 2.16). Many a foul mouth will then be seen which is now 'wiped, and saith, I have done no wickedness' (Prov 30.20).

II: Is it not natural for us to extenuate our sin, and transfer the guilt upon others? When God examined our guilty first parents, did not Adam lay the blame on the woman? and did not the woman lay the blame on the serpent? (Gen 3.12,13). Now Adam's children need not be taught this hellish policy; for before they can well speak, if they cannot get the fact denied, they will cunningly lisp out something to lessen their fault, and lay the blame upon another. Nay, so natural is this to men, that in the greatest sins, they will lay the fault upon God Himself; they will blaspheme His holy providence under the mistaken name of misfortune or ill luck, and thereby lay the blame of their sin at heaven's door. And was not this one of Adam's tricks after his fall? 'And the man said, The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat' (Gen 3.12). Observe the order of the speech. He makes his apology in the first place, and then comes his confession: his apology is long, but his confession very short; it is all comprehended in one word, 'and I did eat.' How pointed and distinct is his apology, as if he was afraid his meaning should have been mistaken! 'The woman,' says he, or 'that woman', as if he would have pointed the Judge to His own works, of which we read (Gen 2.22). There was but one

woman then in the world, so that one would think he needed not to have been so nice and exact in pointing at her: yet she is as carefully marked out in his defence, as if there had been ten thousand. 'The woman whom thou gayest me:' here he speaks, as if he had been ruined with God's gift. And, to make the gift look the blacker, it is added to all this, 'thou gayest to be with me,' as my constant companion, to stand by me as a helper. This looks as if Adam would have fathered an ill design upon the Lord, in giving him this gift. And, after all, there is a new demonstrative here, before the sentence is complete; he says not, 'The woman gave me,' but 'the woman, she gave me,' emphatically; as if he had said, she, even she, gave me of the tree. This much for his apology. But his confession is quickly over, in one word, as he spoke it, 'and I did eat.' There is nothing here to point out himself and as little to show what he had eaten. How natural is this black art to Adam's posterity! he that runs may read it. So universally does Solomon's observation hold true (Prov 19.3), 'The foolishness of man perverteth his way; and his heart fretteth against the Lord.' Let us then call fallen Adam, father; let us not deny the relation, seeing we bear his image.

To shut up this point, sufficiently confirmed by concurring evidence from the Lord's Word, our own experience, and observation; let us be persuaded to believe the doctrine of the corruption of our nature; and look to the second Adam, the blessed Jesus, for the application of His precious blood, to remove the guilt of our sin; and for the efficacy of His Holy Spirit, to make us new creatures; knowing that 'except we be born again, we cannot enter into the kingdom of God.'

1: I proceed to inquire into the corruption of nature in the several parts thereof. But who can comprehend it? who can take the exact dimensions of it, in its breadth, length, height, and depth? 'The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?' (Jer 17.9). However, we may quickly perceive as much of it as may be matter of deepest humiliation, and may discover to us the absolute necessity of regeneration. Man in his natural state is altogether corrupt: both soul and body are polluted, as the apostle proves at large (Rom 3.10-18). As for the soul, this natural corruption has spread itself through all the faculties thereof; and is to be found in the understanding, the will, the affections, the conscience, and the memory.

Author

Born into relative obscurity in 1676 in Duns, Berwickshire, Thomas Boston died in 1732 in the small parish of Ettrick in the Scottish Borders. But his 56 years of life, 45 of them spent in conscious Christian discipleship, lend credibility to the spiritual principle that it is not where, a Christian serves, but what quality of service he renders, that really counts.

It is as a loving, faithful, rigorously self-disciplined Christian pastor, and one deeply committed to the grace of God, that Boston is best remembered. Leaving his first charge at Simprin (where he served 1699-1707), he settled in Ettrick for a 25-year ministry that saw the number of communicants rise from 60 (in 1710) to 777 (in 1731). There he constantly taught them in season and out of season, in pulpit and in home.