

Doctrine #1- Radical Corruption

Written by Calvin Fox
Monday, 29 September 2008 20:56 -

It is clear that everyone sins, defined as transgressing the Ten Commandments. It is also clear in Scripture that the Final Judgment is based on the lives we have lived, upon our works. The wages earned by a life characterized by sinning will be death.

The wrath of God awaits sinners on Judgment Day.

Our sins will find us out in this life as well.

They have negative consequences now, as well as in Eternity.

That said, the Doctrine of Radical Corruption (old name: Total Depravity) is not about our sinning or the coming Judgment.

Rather, it is about the more fundamental problem of why we sin in the first place.

The explanation of that begins with Creation and the importance and goodness of being fully Human. God created human beings to be His representatives in His world. We “re-present” Him by the fact we image Him here on earth, as no other created thing can.

We have His faculties for rationality, creativity, morality, communality and spirituality.

The latter is most important.

We were created to be spirit beings as God is.

This makes possible our fellowship with Him.

We can communicate with each other. We were created for a communion with God that begins now and extends, way beyond this earth, into Eternity with God.

And we “represent” God as His “lieutenants” in the care and development of Earth and the Natural world. That is not the same as what is called Environmentalism and it includes developing Civilization and Culture in its broadest sense. In fact, Neo-calvinists call this the “Cultural Mandate”. We are meant to live here as “tenants”, never owners, and be in charge of the place in “lieu” of Him. We are qualified

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as human beings to do this because we have those God-like faculties mentioned above.

However, all changed when our original parents, Adam and Eve (real, actual people according to Jesus and Paul) chose to disobey a command God gave them. This act changed them and ruptured their relationship with God and scuttled the mission given them by Him at their creation. Taken together

this event is known as the "Fall" (a non-Biblical word).

According to Genesis 3, the immediate consequence of our Parents rebellion was "Death". This Death was spiritual, psychological, social, environmental and physical.

Death is separation and alienation within ourselves, from God, from each other, from the rest of creation and ultimately from our earthly bodies.

Traditionally, the result of the Fall is very confusingly known as Original Sin.

It has been defined by others as a sinful or fallen nature inherited and passed on, like some 'bad seed' or genetic disorder, by human beings ever since.

Sometimes it is explained by others as the guilt of Adam's sin or the loss of innocence or a diminution of the ability to live a righteous life.

Some believe that Baptism removes Original Sin, this inherited nature or guilt or weakness. Scripture does not say any of this.

Scripture (the Apostle Paul) does describe what all human beings inherited from Adam, as the result of his disobedience, as an irresistible propensity, inclination or drive in us to commit sins.

We sin because we have been constituted, in Adam, as sinners (Romans 1 and 7).

Paul also tells us the consequence of Adam's sin for all human beings is the condition of Death in all of its dimensions (Romans 5)

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Genesis 3 adds another consequence of the Fall. It is known as the Curse. Evidence of the Fall will be felt in marriages and families, but especially in connection with the natural world.

Human beings will be under a life time of assault by Satan and have to live with evil.

The entire natural world will be subject to corruption (including disease and disaster) and death.

As such, it will resist care and cultivation and bring hardship to humanity.

It is important to say that we remain human through all of this. The Fall did not change that. It is very misleading to say we now have a fallen or sinful nature as though this replaced our human nature. We are still essentially good (functionally and aesthetically).

We still have the good faculties to be all God created us to be: rational, creative, moral, communal and spiritual beings in communion with Him and in His service here on earth.

Trouble is, we don't want to.

We no longer desire to be what we were created and outfitted to be.

We have a different heart and attitude and purpose in life.

We want to be autonomous and live for our selves on our own terms, apart from our Creator.

We reject the Cultural Mandate (Even those activists who want to save the whales and the rest of what they consider to be endangered wildlife do not do so for God's sake or His purposes, but rather their own.)

We are intent on using our rational, creative, moral, communal and spiritual faculties for ourselves and for sinful purposes.

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In fact, there is now an animus in our hearts against God. We are not only alienated from Him, we want to be. His enemies. within us, we reject Him with distain (Romans 2). We have become Deep

We have radically changed in the core of our being.

Our hearts have hardened against Him.

We are no longer being the humans we were created to be.

We have been radically corrupted.

This is traditionally known as Total Depravity.

That word originally meant, completely crooked.

It does not mean totally evil or wicked as the word has come to mean today.

The original meaning of “depraved” is close to the word “deformed” or misshaped.)

God formed us, Sin de-formed us- what God has created remains essentially good, we humans still image many of the characteristics of God, but they are misdirected and misused by our sinful hearts.

We have become completely twisted into something other than God intended.

(Later, we shall see how we can be re-formed in Christ.)

Most people do not know any of this about themselves. The common view is that people are good hearted, do good and can always be and do even better.

We are told to take pride in ourselves, build self-esteem.

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We can become whatever we want to be- just do it.

Education and determined effort are usually considered to be the key.

But we seek all of this apart from God!

We define and judge ourselves completely apart from Him.

This is why we do not know the meaning of being human.

That we do this is itself evidence of just how radical our inner "corruption" is.

We don't measure ourselves by the state of our relationship with our Creator.

We may do very well and do much good by society's standards, but all the while we are alienated and estranged from God and that is acceptable to us.

We live, but we are really dead.

The bad news is there is absolutely nothing we can do about this condition. We can try to discipline and control or suppress our sinning, our Self centeredness and Self indulgence. We can try to educate or cultivate ourselves and sublimate what really drives us into doing good works and productive members of our society.

We can simply deny our propensity to sin, to transgressing God's Law, or we blame it on our circumstances or the abuse or bad influence received from our parents or other people.

Nothing works in the long run. Our corrupt hearts will always dominate us. It will make us do things we hate doing.

People love personal freedom, especially the freedom to choose. This is one of the most valued and important values most people have.

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Our consumer and democratic society is built on this concept.

That is why this doctrine of the bondage of the will is unacceptable to many.

Yet, it remains true.

Our Parents were created with freedom of choice.

Their will was free to do whatever they wanted, but they lost that freedom with their disobedience. Technically, we are still born with freedom of choice, but our will, our volition, is under the control of our sinful heart. Our will is in deep bondage to it.

We can make choices, but we will choose according to our character. Unregenerate people will always choose according to the inclinations of their rebellious heart. That human beings live in this bondage to Sin within (Romans 7-8) is a far more serious and grievous condition than that of those who are suffering the worst of disease or poverty.

I do not say that lightly by any means!

Our deepest need as human beings is to be delivered from this bondage, from the power and control of Sin. Being forgiven for our sins is not enough. That is temporary relief. We will fall back into the same sins. The root must be attacked. Sin within must be confronted, reviled and dealt with in no uncertain terms! We were
formed by God.

Sin has de-formed us as persons.

We must be re-formed. All effort to really change the world for the better (to build a new house and not just paint the old one and rearrange the furniture in it) must, absolutely must, begin with this change within ourselves.

The most difficult truth to accept is that we (all people, rich and poor, powerful or oppressed, educated or not) are utterly helpless to re-form ourselves, to make this necessary change. Only God can help us. Only He can free us from this bondage of our will to the presence and power of Sin within.

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Popular evangelism loves to assure people that whosoever will may come to God and experience this deliverance. Sinners are exhorted just to choose Christ. All they have to do is make a decision to repent of their sin and accept Jesus. However, the very bondage we have describes precludes and prevents us from making such a decision for Christ.

“Whosoever will may come” is true, but the reality is we will not and can not choose to come Him, because of our innate stubborn animus against Him.

When non-Christians speak of being spiritual or seeking spirituality they are simply being human. They are pursuing one dimension of their human nature in the same way as people pursue intellectual or creative interests or seek life in community. As these latter pursuits are not equivalent to seeking or finding the God of the Bible, neither is being spiritual.

The Bible is emphatic about this.

Though we were made to seek the God of Abraham and Father of Jesus, none do, not even one.

All of this is what Neocalvinists (and Scripture) mean by the Doctrine of “Total Depravity” or, as I prefer to say, Radical Corruption. It is at least, what I mean by the term.