

The Doctrine of Hereditary Total Depravity

by Bill Crews

One of the most God-dishonoring doctrines ever devised by those who profess to be faithful followers of the Son of God is the doctrine of hereditary total depravity. It teaches that every baby born into this world is born totally depraved, "opposite to all good and wholly inclined to all evil." It teaches that this condition is an inherited condition, the result of the sin of Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden. It teaches that when Adam and Eve sinned against God, they then became totally depraved. It teaches that, as one of the consequences of their sin, their guilt and their total depravity were passed on to all of their posterity. Reader friend, do you believe that the Bible teaches this doctrine? It is sometimes called "original sin." Most of the churches of today teach that we are born lost and that we inherit a depraved nature, a bent to sin, and they call it an "Adamic nature" or "sin nature." They think that this is necessary to explain the sinful lives that nearly all people live. They need to be asked, "How do you explain the sin of Adam and Eve in the first place? Did they sin because God made them with a 'sin nature'?"

The one passage that is used more than any other, the passage that is supposed to teach this doctrine, is Psalm 51:5. Psalm 51 sheds more light on his repentance; please read all of it. In pouring out his soul unto God and freely acknowledging the enormity of his wretched sins, David makes the statement found in verse 5. "*Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me.*" David was not giving a theological discussion of sin, nor was he teaching that his mother committed adultery when she conceived him, nor was he teaching that he was a sinner at the moment of his conception. He was rather using poetic language (remember that the Psalms were written in the style of Hebrew poetry) to acknowledge his sins. So sinful had he become in the matter for which he was rebuked, and he would not deny that he had committed other sins, that it is as if he were born in sin or even conceived in sin. Compare it with Psalm 58:3, also Hebrew poetry: "*The wicked are estranged from the womb: they go astray as soon as they are born, speaking lies.*" Do you think that is *literally* true or a *poetic figure of speech* to emphasize how soon, how often, and how much so many people choose to sin? And what about Acts 2:8, "*And how hear we, every man in our own language wherein we were born?*" Does that mean that these men could speak their native languages as soon as they were born?

I think that one reason that men came up with the doctrine of hereditary total depravity was to explain the very sinful lives that most people live and how young they are when they begin. Well, how do we explain how a perfect and sinless man and woman, created as such by God, so soon after God created them transgressed the one prohibition that God gave them? They did it because they fell for the devil's lies and **chose** to do it, not because they were depraved or had a sinful nature. Please read Genesis 3. They were innocent and pure until they chose to sin, and then they were spiritually dead to God or separated from their fellowship with God. But even then, they were not totally depraved, unable to do anything good. Their descendants, from Cain and Abel on, are born innocent and do not become sinners separated from God until they choose to sin. But even as sinners they are not totally depraved, doing only evil.

In Ezekiel 18:20 God says, "*The soul that sinneth, it shall die: 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*

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