

Total Depravity?

Today we begin a series on “Calvinism,” named after John Calvin. Before we begin, I need to connect Calvin to Augustine (5th century). I thought this was put well. “Augustine developed his theology within a philosophical framework heavily influenced by Neoplatonism. His interpretation of Romans 5:12 (*“in whom all sinned”* instead of *“because all sinned”* SB) was also shaped by a problematic Latin rendering. His mature doctrines of inherited sin, the will, and grace subsequently became highly influential in Western Christianity. Calvin adopted significant elements of that theological inheritance, even where he did not adopt Augustine's particular translation.” I really encourage your own research.

The following is taken from John Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, **Book II, chapter 1, section 8** (final Latin edition, 1559).

- *“But lest the thing itself of which we speak be unknown or doubtful, it will be proper to define original sin. (Calvin, in Conc. Trident. 1, Dec. Sess. 5). I have no intention, however, to discuss all the definitions which different writers have adopted, but only to adduce the one which seems to me most accordant with truth. Original sin, then, may be defined a hereditary corruption and depravity of our nature, extending to all the parts of the soul, which first makes us obnoxious to the wrath of God, and then produces in us works which in Scripture are termed works of the flesh. This corruption is repeatedly designated by Paul by the term sin (Gal. 5:19); while the works which proceed from it, such as adultery, fornication, theft, hatred, murder, revellings, he terms, in the same way, the fruits of sin, though in various passages of Scripture, and even by Paul himself, they are also termed sins. The two things, therefore, are to be distinctly observed—viz. that being thus perverted and corrupted in all the parts of our nature, we are, merely on account of such corruption, deservedly condemned by God, to whom nothing is acceptable but righteousness, innocence, and purity. This is not liability for another's fault. For when it is said, that the sin of Adam has made us obnoxious to the justice of God, the meaning is not, that we, who are in ourselves innocent and blameless, are bearing his guilt, but that since by his transgression we are all placed under the curse, he is said to have brought us under obligation. Through him, however, not only has punishment been derived, but pollution instilled, for which punishment is justly due. Hence Augustine, though he often terms it another's sin (that he may more clearly show how it comes to us by descent), at the same time asserts that it is each individual's own sin. And the Apostle most distinctly testifies, that “death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned,” (Rom. 5:12); that is, are involved in original sin, and polluted by its stain. Hence, even infants bringing their condemnation with them from their mother's womb, suffer not for another's, but for their own defect. For although they have not yet produced the fruits of their own unrighteousness, they have the seed implanted in them. Nay, their whole nature is, as it were, a seed-bed of sin, and therefore cannot but be odious and abominable to God. Hence it follows, that it is properly deemed sinful in the sight of God; for there could be no condemnation without guilt. Next comes the other point—viz. that this perversity in us never ceases, but constantly produces new fruits, in other words, those works of the flesh which we formerly described; just as a lighted furnace sends forth sparks and flames, or a fountain without ceasing pours out water. Hence, those who have defined original sin as the want of the original righteousness which we ought to have had, though they substantially comprehend the whole case, do not significantly enough express its power and energy. For our nature is not only utterly devoid of goodness, but so prolific in all kinds of evil, that it can never be idle . . . that everything which is in man, from the intellect to the will, from the soul even to the flesh, is defiled . . .”*

Calvin was stressing the serious condition of those born after the fall (including children). Their nature was corrupt and deserving of condemnation. The disease is a corrupt nature, and the fruit is the works of the flesh, which would eventually be seen. This corruption defied the whole person. Side note: Calvin distinguished between “total depravity” and “utter depravity,” meaning he acknowledged “good” done by others, but he still viewed it as a “grace” of God.

Romans 5:12

- They say, "'Because all sinned', yes, but you sin because of your sinful nature. That's why death comes to you. You inherited Adam's sinful nature."
- Their position *may* be right, but did Paul *mean* that?
 - Two terms: Exegete: Draw the meaning out of the text—asking what the author intended to communicate in context. Eisegete: Read meaning into the text—importing your own assumptions or theology that the text itself does not establish.
 - The first asks: "What does the passage say?" The latter asks: "How can I make the text say what I already believe?"
 - We understand we have to harmonize passages, but we've got to be very careful. We may find ourselves guilty of the latter.
- Rebuttal:
 - Paul wrote, "death spread to all men because all sinned." Connect that to vs. 18 and see who's consistent. (As I read more of Calvin's material, he focused on vs. 17 & 19 but skipped vs. 18. Do we now believe all experience justification? Jesus' action was greater than Adam's.
 - Paul's own experience in Romans 7:9.
 - Paul's statement in Romans 9:11.
 - Ezekiel's principle in chapter 18.

Romans 3:10-12

- They focus on "none is righteous, no, not one." This shows our sinful nature.
- Rebuttal:
 - How does one *turn aside* if they were born corrupt?
 - How does one *become* worthless if they were born evil?
 - Read vs. 13-15. Does that sound like children to you?

Psalms 51:5

- They're typically going to use the NIV: "Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me."
- Rebuttal:
 - ESV: "Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me." Was he sinful at birth? Was sin all around him? Did his mother sin by having him?
 - What about Psalm 22:9, "Yet you are He who took me from the womb; you made me trust You at my mother's breasts." So which is it? Was he a sinful, evil, condemned baby or a trusting baby chosen by God? What if he's neither? Is he not using poetic language?

Ephesians 2:1-3

- We're told we're sinners by nature.
- Rebuttal:
 - Is that what the passage says?
 - Which definition should we use? *Physis* can refer to what belongs to something according to its nature, natural condition, ordinary order, or characteristic state. Context has to tell you what sense is intended.
 - "Children of wrath" (*tekna orgēs*) is an idiomatic expression indicating people characterized by, destined for, or subject to divine wrath. In other words: by nature, you who act that way will experience God's wrath. That fits the context, doesn't it? It begins with the sin and ends with the consequence.