

a lusty flesh and do the desires of the fleshly mind (Eph. 2:3).

The Natural Light in man

Man, nonetheless, retains some non-saving knowledge of God, of natural things, and of and right and wrong (Rom. 2:13-16; Cod 3-4.4). It is for this reason that even fallen men are able to speak the truth and make some general sense out of God's creation. Similarly, God's law reveals to fallen men sin's greatness but does not provide a remedy (Cod 3-4.5). Because of God's common grace man is not absolutely depraved-if he was this world would be hell.

The Penalty for Man

Original sin, in itself suffices to condemn the whole human race (Romans 5:12,16; 6:23; R.E. 3-4.1). For this reason Paul calls all people "children of wrath" (Eph. 2:3; Cod 3-4.3). In the New Testament the word "wrath" often describes God's judgment. All fallen men are liable to the wrath of God because of the sin that mars their nature.

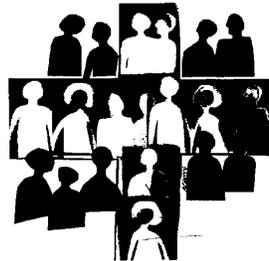
Total depravity is a dark message! But it provides the perfect backdrop to the gospel. Because believers understand the true nature of their guilt and of God's grace, "a sense of (their) corruption should make believers often to sigh, desiring to be delivered from this body of death" (Belgic Confession Art. XV; Rom. 7). Believers, along with all creation, groan to be delivered from the futility to which we have been subjected because of the fall (2 Cor. 5:1-8). This groaning is an expression of the hope that we who trust in Christ will one day be remade, becoming unable to sin (Rom. 8:18-30). Lord hasten the day!

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A panel discussion



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PROCLAMATION

Promoting robust, religious thought in the tradition of orthodox, historic, Christianity
August 2013, Issue 50

THE FIVE POINTS OF CALVINISM (4)



BY WILLIAM BOEKESTEIN

The first three articles in this series on the Canons of Dort (CoD; popularly known as the Five Points of Calvinism) focused on the historical context, and the first two heads of doctrine (unconditional election and limited atonement, respectively).

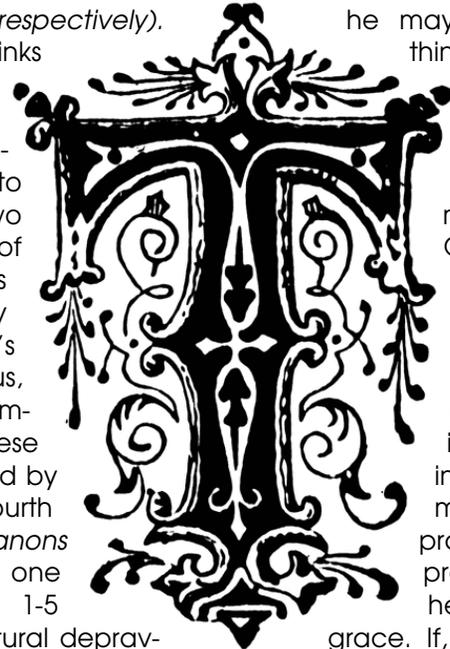
Like the many links of a single chain, the Five Points of Calvinism are integrally connected to each other by two inescapable truths of Scripture: Man's complete ruin by sin, and God's perfect, gracious, and sovereign remedy in Christ. These truths are introduced by the third and fourth points which the Canons combine into one subject (articles 1-5 focus on man's natural depravity; articles 6-17 consider the Holy Spirit's irresistible work in the lives of God's elect).

Unlike many of their theological heirs, the original Arminians had a rather biblical view of man's fall.

They denied that fallen man can either do or think anything that is truly good. They affirmed that he must "be born again of God in Christ through his Holy Spirit, and renewed in understanding...in order that he may rightly understand, think, will, and effect what is truly good." The problem is the Arminians also taught that man must cooperate with God in order to be saved; something totally depraved people cannot do.

The topics of man's depravity and irresistible grace are intimately linked. If man is totally depraved and has a proclivity to resist God he needs an irresistible grace. If, on the other hand, man is only partially depraved a resistible grace that requires his cooperation will do.

Far from an "ivory tower" issue, the question of the extent of man's depravity is extremely relevant.



The Issues at Stake

First, those who misunderstand man's depravity cannot understand unbelievers. Unbelievers sin because at their root, they are sinners. They are bound in the chains of sin with no earthly hope of deliverance (John 8:34). Because of man's radical sin problem education and socialization will always be incomplete remedies.

Second, a true appreciation of man's radical depravity produces greater thanksgiving in the hearts of the redeemed. Believers are instructed to "put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness" (Eph. 4:24). Salvation is a re-creation. When we see our tragic condition as sinners, our total inability to fix ourselves, and how much God has done for us, we will give him the glory he deserves. God's grace doesn't make sick people well. It makes dead people live!

Third, when we understand what the Bible teaches about the old man, or the natural flesh we will grasp the seriousness of the war that exists in the believer between flesh and spirit. "For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish" (Gal. 5:17). If we trust our own strength to conquer sin, we don't understand our natural depravity. Even after he was remade according to the glory of Christ, Paul still sought God's help for deliverance against the body of death (Rom. 7:24). Sanctification is a war only God can win (1 Cor. 1:2).

Fourth, an unbiblical view of the transmission of Adam's sin to his posterity undercuts the reality of the imputation of Christ's righteousness in

salvation. Romans 5 stresses an essential parallelism between Christ's righteousness and Adam's sin.

Humanity before the Fall

We must understand pre-fall man because when God's children are recreated in Christ, their goal reflects that for which God first made man; to "truly know God our creator, love him with all our heart, live with him in eternal happiness and praise and glorify him" (Heidelberg Cat. LD 3).

Adam Was Not Created Morally Neutral
Some medieval theologians claimed that after he was created, but before he fell, Adam earned the favor of God by an act of obedience performed according to his purely natural capacities. In this view, perfect knowledge, righteousness, and holiness were not part of Adam's created nature. Accordingly, when Adam fell into sin, what he lost was his "merited" grace which left him again in a morally neutral relationship with God. Into this same situation each of us is born, so the position goes. If personal righteousness did not belong to man's original constitution then man did not lose this righteousness in the fall, and is, therefore, not totally depraved (Rejection of Errors (R.E.) 3-4.2).

Man Is Made in the God's Image

As the image of God, man reflected the wise, righteous and holy character of God—the whole man was holy! "His understanding was adorned with a true and saving knowledge of his Creator, and of spiritual things" (Eph. 4:24; CoD 3-4.1). Adam understood God. He walked with him and talked with him. His heart and will were upright and positively inclined toward

God. He agreed with God and had no enmity toward him. All his affections were pure. Because Adam had no mixed motives, resisting sin was easy. His spiritual warfare was not like that of a believer today who agonizes over temptation. For Adam, holiness came naturally.

Humanity in the Fall

Adam's Revolt

By sinning, Adam willingly revolted from God, forfeiting his gifts in exchange for darkness of mind and wickedness of heart (CoD 3-4.1). Having sinned, Adam fled from God proving that he had fallen from his precious position of uprightness. In his flight from God he also demonstrated, in principle, the death of which God had warned (Gen. 2:17).

Adam's Revolt and His Posterity

All of Adam's offspring, Christ excepted, share his corrupt nature. This is true, first, because of the principle of heredity. "Man after the fall begat children in his own likeness. A corrupt stock produces a corrupt offspring. ...All the posterity of Adam (except Christ) have derived corruption from their original parent, not by imitation but by the propagation of a vicious nature..." (CoD 3-4.2).

But Adam shared his corrupt nature also because of the principle of imputation. The relationship between God and Adam has all the marks of a covenant. As the first man, then, Adam wasn't simply an individual; he was a covenant representative of all men (Rom. 5:18-19). In such an arrangement one man stands or falls for many—think of the clash between David and Goliath as an illustration.

Adam did not share his corruption merely by his bad example, as

the Pelagians taught (CoD 3-4.2). If it were possible to keep a child from every negative influence, he would still grow up to be a sinner. Sin is in our DNA. This reality is proved by that great enemy death. The curse of death against sin is so powerful that it extends even to the pre-born, who have done neither right nor wrong. People die because they are sinners; they are sinners because they share in Adam's sin.

Humanity after the Fall

The Corruption of Man

Because of Adam's fall all people after him are conceived in sin (Ps. 51:5; CoD 3-4.3). In Psalm 51 David is not suggesting that he sinned as an embryo. He is reflecting on the state in which he came to be. He neither began life in uprightness, nor in moral neutrality, but in sin.

Adam's fall also produced a heritage of people incapable of saving good (Rom. 3:9-20; CoD 3-4.3) God considers the best work the flesh can muster to be "filthy rags" (Is. 64:6).

Contrary to modern assumptions all of Adam's descendants are, likewise, unable and unwilling to seek God and "offer the sacrifice of a contrite and broken spirit, which is pleasing to God" (R.E. 3-4.4). Such are attributes only of the regenerate (Ps. 51:17; Matt. 5:6). As Charles Hodge said, "The rejection of the gospel is as clear a proof of moral depravity as the inability to see the sun is a proof of blindness"

Finally, all Adam's children are prone to evil (Gen. 6:5; 8:21), and dead in and enslaved to sin (Eph. 2:1,5, 2:3; CoD 3-4.3). The natural heart is "deceitful above all things, and it is exceedingly corrupt (Jer. 17:9). The sons of disobedience have