

THE  
**NATIONAL PREACHER.**

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No. 6.

NEW-YORK, NOVEMBER, 1830.

VOL. V.

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**SERMON XCI.**

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**HUMAN DEPRAVITY, AND ITS REMEDY.**

JOHN, xv. 3. *Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you.*

THE word *clean* is often figuratively used in Scripture to express moral or spiritual purification. In this sense it is evidently used in this passage. The disciples, to whom Christ originally addressed the text, were once depraved, destitute of holiness, under the power of sin, prone to evil, and averse to all good. But they had all been cleansed from this original depravity, and had become habitually holy. The means or instrument by which this great moral change had been wrought upon them, was the word of Christ.

The same is true of all who are now the real disciples of Christ; they were once depraved, and they have been cleansed or made holy through the instrumentality of the word of Christ.

The text teaches, by implication, man's depravity; and instructs us how it may be remedied.

The object of the ensuing discourse will be,

I. To establish the fact of human depravity.

II. To speak of the remedy presented in the Gospel.

VOL. 5.—NO. 6.

I. As to the fact ; this is implied in the text. That the disciples had been made clean through the word of Christ which had been spoken unto them, evidently implies that they had previously been unclean, or destitute of holiness, and positively corrupt or depraved : and this is true of all mankind. By nature, or in their natural state, all are depraved—destitute of holiness—prone to evil, and averse to good continually.

. This is proved by the declarations of the word of God, and by facts.

In the Scriptures we read, “ The imagination of man’s heart is evil from his youth.” “ Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean ? not one.” “ What is man that he should be clean ? and he that is born of a woman that he should be righteous ?” “ The heart of the sons of men is full of evil, and madness is in their heart while they live.” “ That which is born of the flesh is flesh.” “ The carnal mind is enmity against God ; for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.” “ There is none righteous, no, not one : there is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way ; they are together become unprofitable : there is none that doeth good, no, not one. Their throat is an open sepulchre ; with their tongues they have used deceit ; the poison of asps is under their lips : whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness : their feet are swift to shed blood : destruction and misery are in their ways : and the way of peace have they not known : there is no fear of God before their eyes.” Such is the testimony of God, in his word, respecting the native character of man ; and it does unequivocally establish the universal and total depravity of human nature.

This testimony is abundantly confirmed by facts. The history of the world, in all ages, is a history of human depravity. The historic page is continually polluted with human crime.

But we need not recur to ages past for evidence of human depravity ; the painful proof is ever before our eyes ; we meet it constantly in our intercourse with our fellow-men. What do the deceptions and frauds so frequently witnessed in the commerce of men with each other, and by which multitudes are injured, and even ruined in their estates prove ? They prove human depravity. The same is proved by the lying, and slander, and backbiting, and tale-bearing so common in society, and so destructive of social enjoyment. Mingle in society, and your ears are often assailed with oaths, and curses, and blasphemies—every one of them painfully illustrating the depraved and ruined character of man. Look at the awful profanation of

the Sabbath, in disregard of the solemn command of Jehovah, to "remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy;" and here again we behold striking evidences of man's depravity, and alienation from God. On every steamboat moving upon our waters on this sacred day, freighted with worldly and pleasure-seeking mortals, may be seen, written in broad capitals, **HUMAN DEPRAVITY**. The same is inscribed on all public and private vehicles, used in violating the Sabbath; and on every field, and shop, and dwelling where this day is profaned by secular business. And it is written on the forehead of every stroller in our streets and elsewhere, on this holy day. If men had the fear of God before their eyes they would not act thus; and were they not depraved, they would reverence God supremely.

Behold the multitude of human beings, who are impairing reason and destroying health, usefulness, reputation, property, peace of families, and life, by intemperance; and here again you may see abundant evidence of human depravity. Look at the numerous dram shops in our cities, towns, and villages, which, for the sake of gain, afford the means, and hold out temptations to this destroying sin—they are so many monuments of human depravity. Read the accounts weekly, and almost daily published, of forgeries, and thefts, and robberies, and murders, and then say, is not human nature depraved; and that to a dreadful degree?

Pass through the land, and survey our numerous prisons.—Every one of these is a monument of human depravity; for if man were not depraved, there would be no need of such places of punishment or confinement. The watchmen who patrol the streets of our cities and towns, and the very locks and bolts on our doors—all prove human depravity; for there would be no need of these, if men were upright and pure.

I might proceed multiplying facts in proof of human depravity. But it must be unnecessary. Every person must be convinced that man is a corrupt being; and that many have gone to dreadful enormities.

It is acknowledged, there are degrees in human depravity; and that some manifest much more than others. Still, however, depravity is universal. All, by nature, are vile. "That which is born of the flesh, is flesh," or "carnal." Many who condemn the conduct of others, would, in similar circumstances, act as they do. If they had had the same education, and the same temptations, they might have acted out the vileness of the vilest. And even now, a change of circumstances would probably lead many a moral man,

by degrees, to criminal conduct, at which he would at present shudder. Hazael, the servant of Benhadad, repelled with indignation the predictions of the prophet Elisha respecting the cruelties of which he should be guilty towards the Israelites, saying, "Is thy servant a dog, that he should do this great thing?" In this he was doubtless sincere. But Elisha explained the whole matter, by telling him his circumstances would be changed. "The Lord hath showed me that thou shalt be king over Syria."

Indeed the truth is abundantly evident, both from Scripture, and the conduct of mankind, that, in their natural state, men are universally destitute of holiness. Selfishness, and not the love of God, or a regard to his authority and glory, rules in the heart of every natural man.

This native depravity is the source of all the numerous evils which distress mankind. It is the source of the wretchedness which exists in society. It makes the individual unhappy in whose heart it reigns; it keeps him a stranger to all the enjoyments of religion; it brings upon him much positive misery in this world; it often leads him to do much injury to others; disturbing and sometimes destroying their happiness; and while it continues to reign, it seals him up under the curse of God; and should he die in this state, he must be completely, unspeakably, and for ever miserable.

II. We ought, therefore, with deep interest, to inquire, is there any remedy for this diseased state of the human soul? and if so, what is it? Our text answers the question, and presents a remedy devised by infinite wisdom.

This remedy is, *the word of Christ*—"Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you." It was through the word of Christ that the apostles were cleansed from their native depravity, and made holy and fit for the service and enjoyment of God. And it is by the same word that sinners are now changed, the reign of depravity put down in their hearts, their evil propensities subdued, and they made holy.

By the *word of Christ* we are to understand, not only the instructions he personally gave when on earth, but also those of his inspired apostles; and, indeed, all the instructions of the Scriptures contained in the Old and New Testaments. They are all his word. For "all Scripture is given by inspiration of God," and "holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." Now the Holy Ghost acted in subserviency to Christ in giving the Scriptures. The whole of them may therefore be called the

word of Christ. It is by means of the truth of Christ contained in the Holy Scriptures, that the depravity of man is removed, his evil propensities corrected, and he made holy.

But this is done by the word only *instrumentally*. The word, of itself, will never effect this great moral change in the human heart and character. The depravity is too great, and too deep-rooted to be thus overcome. The sinner is "dead in trespasses and sins," and he must be made spiritually alive. He is destitute of holiness, and a principle of holiness must be formed within him. This will be effected only by an Almighty power. The power that does effect this change is the Holy Spirit. He convinces of sin, righteousness, and judgment; renews the heart; sanctifies the soul; works within it the Christian graces, and preserves and strengthens these graces. But in performing this work he makes use of "the word," as the instrument.

The word of Christ is the fire and hammer, by which the Holy Spirit breaks and melts the rocky heart. The word is the sharp two-edged sword, which, in his hands, proves quick and powerful, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and becomes a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart. It is by the perfect law or word of the Lord, that the soul is converted. We are born of the Spirit; but "of his own will begat he us *with the word of truth*;" and we are sanctified by the word; as our Savior prayed for his disciples—"Sanctify them *through thy truth*; thy word is truth."

The word of God, revealed by Christ, the great prophet of his Church, is, in the hands of the Divine Spirit, the grand remedy for the moral maladies of our world, which we have so much cause to deplore: and it is the only remedy. The fountain is bitter, and bitterness; and the streams which issue from it will also be bitter and poisonous, until the fountain be made good. And the Holy Spirit only will ever make this bitter fountain sweet, or change the depraved heart; and this he does through the instrumentality of the word of Christ.

Nothing else will ever work an effectual change. Philosophy will not do it. It was for ages tried, and men grew worse and worse. Education which rejects the truths of the Bible will not do it. This also has frequently been tried by men who have presumed to be wiser than God; but it has uniformly failed. Human laws will not do it. They may, and in a measure do, restrain wicked men, and prevent many overt acts of wicked-

ness ; but they do not correct the depravity of the heart ; and men who are disposed to do wickedly, whenever a temptation is presented, and they have the prospect of eluding detection, will be likely to act out their depravity. Punishment will not do it. The inmates of our penitentiaries, instead of being reformed by their sufferings, when they have finished their term of confinement, often return to society more hardened in depravity, and prepared for increased atrocities.

We have heard of a great moral change having taken place, and still in progress, in the state prison of Connecticut. But if it is genuine, and this time must test, it has been effected, not by punishment, but avowedly by the Bible, read, and preached, and explained, and enforced, accompanied with the special operations of the Holy Spirit.

Partial reformations may, and doubtless sometimes do, take place, in individuals, under the influence of some affliction, and from other causes, without the instrumentality of the truths of the Bible. But these reformations are seldom permanent ; the subjects of them, generally, soon relapse into their former habits ; and they never produce holy action. Depravity still reigns in the heart.

The word of God, accompanied by the power of the Holy Spirit, is the only effectual remedy for human depravity ; and this has effected great moral changes. Many facts might be adduced in support of this position. At the first introduction of the Gospel, notwithstanding the multitudes who rejected it, the general change in favor of morality was very great. The same was true in regard to the countries in which the principles of the Reformation were promulgated and generally received. And in the present day, very great changes for the better have been made and are making, in society, at missionary stations in pagan countries. This is the case in the Sandwich and Society Islands ; in Ceylon ; and among the Hottentots in South Africa.

Farther, the power of the word of Christ to correct human depravity may be seen from a comparison of the state of society in general, in places in Christian lands where the stated and faithful preaching of the Gospel, and other means of acquaintance with the word of Christ, are enjoyed, with places where these means are not enjoyed, or only occasionally. And farther, the same is proved by the great and total changes, which we have seen this word, accompanied by the power of the Holy Spirit, produce in individuals. We have seen it make the drunkard sober ; the profane

swearer fear an oath; the covetous man liberal; the fretful patient; the quarrelsome and revengeful mild; the vindictive forgiving; and the fraudulent honest. We have seen it restore peace and prosperity to suffering families; and we have seen it restore to the fond embraces of parents, a prodigal son, over whom they had often wept with almost hopeless anxiety.

Thus the word of Christ, contained in the Scriptures, through the power of the Holy Spirit accompanying it, has effected numerous and great changes for the better, in individuals, neighborhoods, and nations. It has effectually corrected human depravity; and it is the only thing that will do it. Both the Scriptures and the history of the world abundantly prove this position.

We ought therefore highly to prize the Bible. It contains the only remedy that has ever yet been found, or that ever will be found, to cleanse depraved man from his pollutions, and heal his moral diseases. It is the only thing which will allay and remove the vicious fever of his mind; restore him to righteousness, to his God, and to happiness; and fit him for heaven hereafter. And it is the only thing which will effectually meliorate the condition of society, and remove the evils which disturb its peace, and which many, even of those who are not the real disciples of Christ, deplore.

What enemies, therefore, to human happiness must those be, who slight the Bible, and who will not lend their aid to measures to diffuse a knowledge of it? and still more, those who reject it, and would lead others to do the same? Or who, while they profess to believe its divine authenticity, pervert its truths, and teach as its doctrines sentiments subversive of its convincing, renewing, and sanctifying influence? Such are scattering through society arrows, firebrands, and death. It is to the influence of the principles of those who oppose the Bible, or who, while they profess friendship for it, pervert its great truths, that we are to ascribe the prevalence of crime in the present day.

Would you, my hearers, arrest human depravity, and lessen crime in society? then diffuse, by every means in your power, a knowledge of the word of Christ. Not only a spirit of benevolence, which should lead you to seek the present and eternal good of others, urges to this; but also the peace and happiness of yourselves and your families. Let men universally be brought under the influence of the principles of the Gospel, and the crimes which now disturb society will be in a great measure unknown. Our ears will not then be pained with the language of profane men, nor our eyes with the sight of fellow-beings, reduced below the brutes by intoxi-

cation. Parents will not have their hearts wrung with agony over prodigal children; nor wives and children be starved and abused by profligate husbands and fathers; and our property and lives will be safe. No person under the influence of gospel principles will rob you of your property or good name, or burn your house, or commit violence upon your person.

The only effectual remedy for the numerous evils we deplore in society then is, the diffusion of a knowledge of the word of Christ. Let the Bible, therefore, be put into the hands of every family. Let competent and faithful ministers of the gospel be stationed in every part of the land, to proclaim, illustrate, and enforce the truths of the Bible. Let the dissemination of religious tracts on important truths of the Bible be generally encouraged. Let means of education be provided for the ignorant and destitute; and in every school let the principles of the Bible be taught and inculcated. Let Sabbath Schools be every where established and patronised: and teachers be faithful to the pupils committed to their charge. Let parents and heads of families be faithful in the religious education of their children and household. Let every thing in society which turns men away from the instructions of the word of Christ, and prejudices and hardens them against them, be discountenanced. And let all these means be used with a sense of dependence on the Holy Spirit to give them efficiency, and with prayer for his influences to accompany them. Such a course will meliorate the character and condition of society, and correct the moral evils we deplore; and this alone will do it. Every friend of man, therefore—every friend to the peace, order, and happiness of society, will be an efficient friend to institutions for inculcating and diffusing a knowledge of the word of Christ: while, on the other hand, the man who would hinder the influence of Gospel principles, is alike the enemy of his country and his God.