

“The Sin Nature with Which We Are Born”

Canons of Dort: Third-Fourth Head, articles 1-4; Bible reference: Romans 1:18-25; 3:9-18

By Pastor Rand Lankheet, at New Horizon URC, Second sermon, on April 1, 2018

Introduction: How to describe sin? How to explain what it does to us, and in us?

One word that helps us understand sin is the word “twisted” (扭曲的) or “crooked” (弯曲的) or “bent.” Think of a large piece of wood, a wooden beam for the foundation of a home. If a carpenter uses a twisted foundation beam (梁木) , then the walls, attached to the foundation, will become twisted. If the foundation is twisted or crooked, the walls will have gaps.

And where the roof attaches to the walls, there will be open spaces.

With a twisted, crooked foundation, the entire structure will become weak.

In the Latin language, the word for crooked or bent, is the word “pravus.” “Pravus.”

That Latin word is the root of the English word de-pravus, de-pravity (败坏 , 堕落) .

Literally, it means, “of crookedness” or “in a condition of being bent or twisted.”

The Bible tells us that God created the first man and woman perfectly good. Like a good piece of wood, everything was “straight” in their thoughts, in their words, in their actions. Everything in their desires and attitudes, was fit together perfectly. They were rightly connected to God their Creator, and to one another, as husband and wife.

But Adam and Eve fell into sin. At that moment, they become “bent,” “twisted,” or “crooked.”

They became “depraved.” (堕落的 , 邪恶的) De-pravus. Depraved in their inner selves, depraved in soul and spirit and mind. Adam and Eve, as depraved parents, produced depraved children.

So it has continued from generation to generation.

So today every human being enters this world with a depraved, sinful nature. By nature, for example, no one knows God, not the true God. Oh, people are born with some sense of God. They are still born with some sense that there must be a Higher Power. Yet, the true knowledge of the true God has been lost.

[Read vs. 18. It starts, you see, with people who by nature, “suppress” (压制) the truth about God. To suppress means to “push down.” By nature, everyone born into this world “pushes down” the right knowledge of the true God. Though there is some sense of God in everyone, yet, everyone pushes down the true knowledge of God.

And with that twisted, depraved foundation, everything else goes bad. [Read Rom. 1:20-24.

Without a true knowledge of the true God, people are “futile” (无用的 , 无结果的) in their thoughts.

The word “futile” means, “having no good result or no good effect.” The thoughts of sinful people ultimately have no good result, spiritually (属灵意义上) . And people become “darkened” in their minds. It is like they are walking in the dark, blindly. Though people claim to be wise, yet, without knowing the true God, they become “foolish.” They also display unclean desires... unholy desires.

They dishonor their own bodies. [Read Third-Fourth Head, article 3.

In Romans, the apostle (使徒) Paul describes more of the results of the sin nature.

[Read Romans 3:9-18.

2. We are studying these so-called “Doctrines of Grace.” We need grace, God’s sovereign (主权的) grace , because in ourselves, by nature, we are spiritually dead.

We've come to the doctrine which is sometimes called "Total Depravity." (人的全然败坏) Depravity. Remember the root meaning of the English word, "depravity"? "Pravus," means, "crooked, twisted, bent." In our sin nature, all of us, by nature, are inwardly crooked, twisted, bent.

The Arminian group in the 17th century agreed with the Bible that all people are born with a sin nature (罪性) . They believed that when Adam and Eve fell into sin, they became sinners. And they passed on their sin nature to all their descendants.

But the Arminians (阿民念主义信奉者) taught that sinful human beings still have some natural powers to search for God, for the true God. They located that natural power in the "will." (意志) It is by our "will" that we choose either good things, or bad things. The Arminians taught that the "will" of human beings had not become completely twisted, completely crooked. The Arminians taught that all people still have some spiritual ability in their "will."

And with that ability, they said that people could choose for God, or choose against God. That people, unbelieving people, still had much power in their free will.

Power to choose for God, or against God.

Power to put some faith (信心) in Jesus, or not to put some faith in Jesus.

They explained it in this way. That if people did their best to search for God, with their natural ability, then God would give them more ability. If people took one step towards God, then God would give them more power to take more steps toward Him.

Maybe you have heard the expression: "God helps those, who help themselves." [Repeat. Now, in some things in life this is true. Especially for people who are already Christians.

The Bible talks about us keeping in step with the Holy Spirit. But that applies to people who are already converted (被转变的) . People who are already born again (被重生) , by the power of the Spirit.

But the Arminians would apply this ability to unbelievers. They would say this to an unbeliever: "take your first step towards God, and God will give you more strength, to take the next steps." In other words, the unbeliever is cooperating with God, to become saved.

The unbeliever cooperates with God to become born again. That's the Arminian teaching.

And, may I say, it is still the majority opinion among evangelical (福音派的) Christians today.

It is also the viewpoint in the Roman Catholic Church (罗马天主教) .

Out of this wrong understanding, many wrong practices developed. For example, in the 19th century, there was a movement known as revivalism (属灵复兴运动) . Led by men like Charles Finney and others. In this movement, an evangelist (传道人) or a preacher would come to town, and would hold special evangelistic meetings (布道会) . Evangelists were trained in moving unbelieving people to tears, to work on people's emotions. They would try to move people to come forward, from their seats in the back, to take a seat in the front. This was called, "the anxious bench." The idea was that preachers could move unbelievers to take the first step, in their own power. To exercise their own free will (自由意志) , to take that step.

And if they did that, God would give them more power. To move towards faith in Jesus.

In this system, unbelievers were said to cooperate with God in their conversion.
[Turn to page... Rejection of Errors, paragraph 4 and 5. Read.

The delegates at Dort (多特) rejected that Arminian teaching.

Studying the Bible, they concluded this. [Go back to articles 3-4.

-Now, here's something else important. When we use the label, "total depravity," it is important to understand the adjective, "total." We are not saying that people by nature are ABSOLUTELY depraved, ABSOLUTELY sinful. As bad as they could be. If they were, well, civilization (文明) could not continue. The Bible says that in His providence (上帝的护理之工) God restrains (节制) the effects of sin. So that unbelievers can live in society, reasonably well.

By the adjective, "total" we mean that people "in their totality" have fallen into sin.

Every aspect of human beings, including their will, has become twisted, crooked, corrupt.

Disagreeing with the Arminian group, we say that no one has natural power to come to God.

Ephesians 2:1 says that unbelievers are "dead" in our sins and trespasses (过犯) .

Dead doesn't mean "sick." Or "weak." No, dead means dead. A dead body cannot move, not even a finger. So a dead soul, a dead will, cannot take one step towards the true God. Rather, it takes the power of God to give life to the dead soul. To give power to the dead will.

3. Now let me close with ONE ADDED APPLICATION. Next week, we will continue this topic, and bring out more applications (应用) . But for now, just this one point.

Instead of applying this to unbelievers, out in the world, we are going to apply it to ourselves. As believers. Please understand the nature of the sin that is within you. And within me. Try to understand the depth and the complexity (复杂性) of your sin nature.

Sometimes Christians will say that certain sins are just not "normal." Or Christians want to make some sins to be so bad, so abnormal. But, listen. There is nothing "normal" with ANY of us. In our sin nature, all of us, all of us, are twisted. In our sin nature, our thoughts are twisted, our desires are bent, our motives are corrupt.

Yes, some them get put right when we become Christians.

But sin continues inside every Christian. Affecting every area of our being.

So, for us that means there is always some sin in our marriages, in our friendships, in our families. There remains some sin in our Christian children, in our Christian parents.

Do you believe that? For yourself? Do you admit that there is still some sin in your desires, even in your desire to serve God? Do you admit that there is still some sin in your motives (动机) , even in your motive to want to live for Jesus?

A young man, for example, might want to become a missionary (宣教士) to a far-away country.

He says it is God's calling on him. Well, that could be. But, it could be other things going on. Some sinful things. Maybe he wants, also, to get away from his Christian parents. That he has had difficulty in respecting his parents. So now he wants to go to a distant country, to get far away from them. /

Or, maybe, he thinks he is smarter than some people in some other country. That he has great wisdom, and that he wants to show those people, in that primitive (原始的) culture, how they should be more like him. In other words, he can be filled with cultural pride. Or racial pride.

You see, we don't even know our own desires, our own motives, our own thoughts. Not fully.

Sin lies deep within each of us. And it is often disguised (伪装的) , and covered up. We often cannot detect it in ourselves. That's one reason why it is always important to have good and godly friends, who can help us probe our attitudes, our desires, our goals. That they can help us see ourselves in a way that we should. That's why we should also respect our pastors and elders, who also can give us Christian advice.

Let me give you another illustration (比喻) .

Some people, for example, continue to look for a right church. But what is really going on, inside of some people, is an inner dissatisfaction (不满意) . Or a hyper-critical spirit. They focus on things that are not so good in their church, and they hope the next church will be better.

But, actually, the problem is within them. With a critical, negative spirit. But most Christians will not admit that. They will blame everyone else...but they will never blame themselves.

And so it is, often, in our lives, in our marriages, in our relationships.

We rarely will admit our own fault, our own sin.

So, you see, sinful depravity is not only out there, in the world of unbelief.

Sinful depravity, sinfulness in the totality of our being, is in here, inside each of us!

So, brothers and sisters, {and I am also preaching to myself} let us humble (谦卑的) ourselves before God. Continually humble ourselves. And we must continue to seek God's truth, God's wisdom, God's love. The love of God in Jesus Christ which has saved us, from our sin, our depravity.

We do not take the first step towards God. As unbelievers, God must take the first step towards us. God must put new life in our spiritually dead souls. He must enliven our dead wills, or inability to choose Him. Our powerlessness to put faith in Jesus.

And that, our God has done for us, who have come to faith in Jesus. Praise the Lord.

Though we have been totally depraved, though we had no power, no life, God gave us life.

He has given us new life, by His Word and Spirit.

And not only that. But once God has saved us, once He has given us the gift of faith, to trust in Jesus, God continues to strengthen us. God continues to show us how twisted and bent and crooked we are. And by His grace, He continues to humble us. To confess our sin. To admit our foolishness. To see how "abnormal" we still are. Because of the sin that still dwells in us.

And by His grace, God continues to forgive us our sins. As believers.

We must pray daily: "Forgive us our debts. Forgive us our sins. Our sins before you, O God. And our sins towards others."

And may our daily confession (认罪) , help us form in ourselves a more humble spirit.

That each day we may keep on looking to Jesus. Our Saviour who has died for us on the cross. And who has risen from the dead. AMEN.