

WHAT IS MAN?

April 7, 2019

Romans 3:1-20

“What is man, that thou art mindful of him?” Psalm 8:4

“Our first parents, being seduced by the subtlety and temptations of Satan, sinned, in eating the forbidden fruit. This their sin, God was pleased, according to His wise and holy counsel, to permit, having purposed to order it to His own glory. By this sin they fell from their original righteousness and communion, with God, and so became dead in sin, and wholly defiled in all the parts and faculties of soul and body.

“They being the root of all mankind, the guilt of this sin was imputed; and the same death in sin, and corrupted nature, conveyed to all their posterity descending from them by ordinary generation. From this original corruption, whereby we are utterly indisposed, disabled, and made opposite to all good, and wholly inclined to all evil, do proceed all actual transgressions.

“This corruption of nature, during this life, does remain in those that are regenerated; and although it be, through Christ, pardoned, and mortified; yet both itself, and all the motions thereof, are truly and properly sin. Every sin, both original and actual, being a transgression of the righteous law of God, and contrary thereunto, does in its own nature, bring guilt upon the sinner, whereby he is bound over to the wrath of God, and curse of the law, and so made subject to death, with all miseries spiritual, temporal, and eternal” (Westminster Confession of Faith, Article VI: Of the Fall of Man, of Sin, and the Punishment Thereof).

We have all transgressed God’s law, which is revealed in Scripture. We have all transgressed God’s law written in our conscience. We have all resisted confession of guilt when confronted with our transgression. Desire for Christ does not arise within our consciousness; it must be brought to us by outside forces. When presented to us, our first response is resistance. We will not come to God without a power stronger than ourselves redirecting us. Jesus said, “No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him . . . no man can come unto me, except it were given unto him of my Father ” (John 6:44, 65).

These facts reveal the true nature of man. We are “dead in trespasses and sins . . . by nature the children of wrath” (Ephesians 2:1, 3). “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” (Romans 3:10-16).

Scripture teaches, “by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned . . . death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam’s transgression . . . for if through the offence of one many be dead, much more the grace of God, and the gift by grace, which is by one man, Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many” (Romans 5:12, 14, 15). Assuredly, Adam’s influence was not simply a bad example; it was a thoroughgoing corruption if his nature and of all who would descend from him, Jesus Christ the only exception.

Pelagius (354) taught that man was not dead in sin, but only influenced by the bad example of Adam. The Council of Carthage (418) condemned his error, recognizing that man’s sinful condition is inherited from Adam. Arminius (1560) resurrected the error of Pelagius, which was rejected at the Synod of Dort (1618/19).