

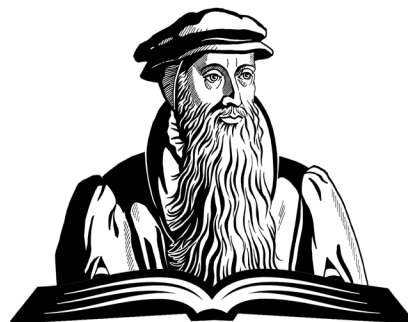
VIDEO SERMON SERIES

Sermons on the Heidelberg Catechism

by Rev. Bartel Elshout

Sermon #4, Lord's Day 3

The Total (Radical) Depravity of Man



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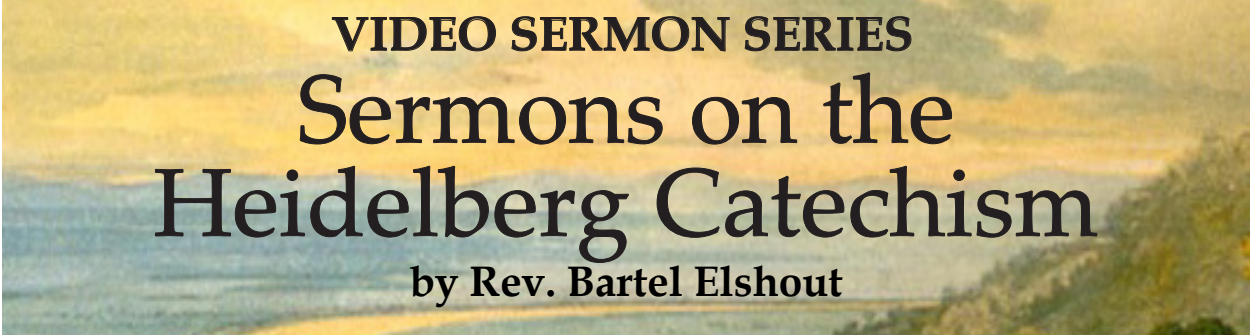
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Bartel Elshout is pastor of the Kalamazoo Reformed Church of Kalamazoo, Michigan. He previously served as pastor of the Heritage Reformed Congregations of Jordan (Ontario), Chilliwack (British Columbia), and Hull (Iowa). He continues to serve as a part-time instructor at Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary in Grand Rapids, Michigan. He previously served as the founding principal of the Netherlands Reformed Christian School in Pompton Plains, New Jersey and as an evangelist in Denver, Colorado. He is also the translator of Wilhelmus à Brakel's *The Christian's Reasonable Service*, *The Christian's Only Comfort in Life and Death* by Theodorus van der Groe, and Alexander Comrie's *The Distinctive Marks of Saving Faith*. He was previously married to his late wife, Joan, with whom he has two children, David and Sarah, and seven grandchildren. He is presently married to Clarice.

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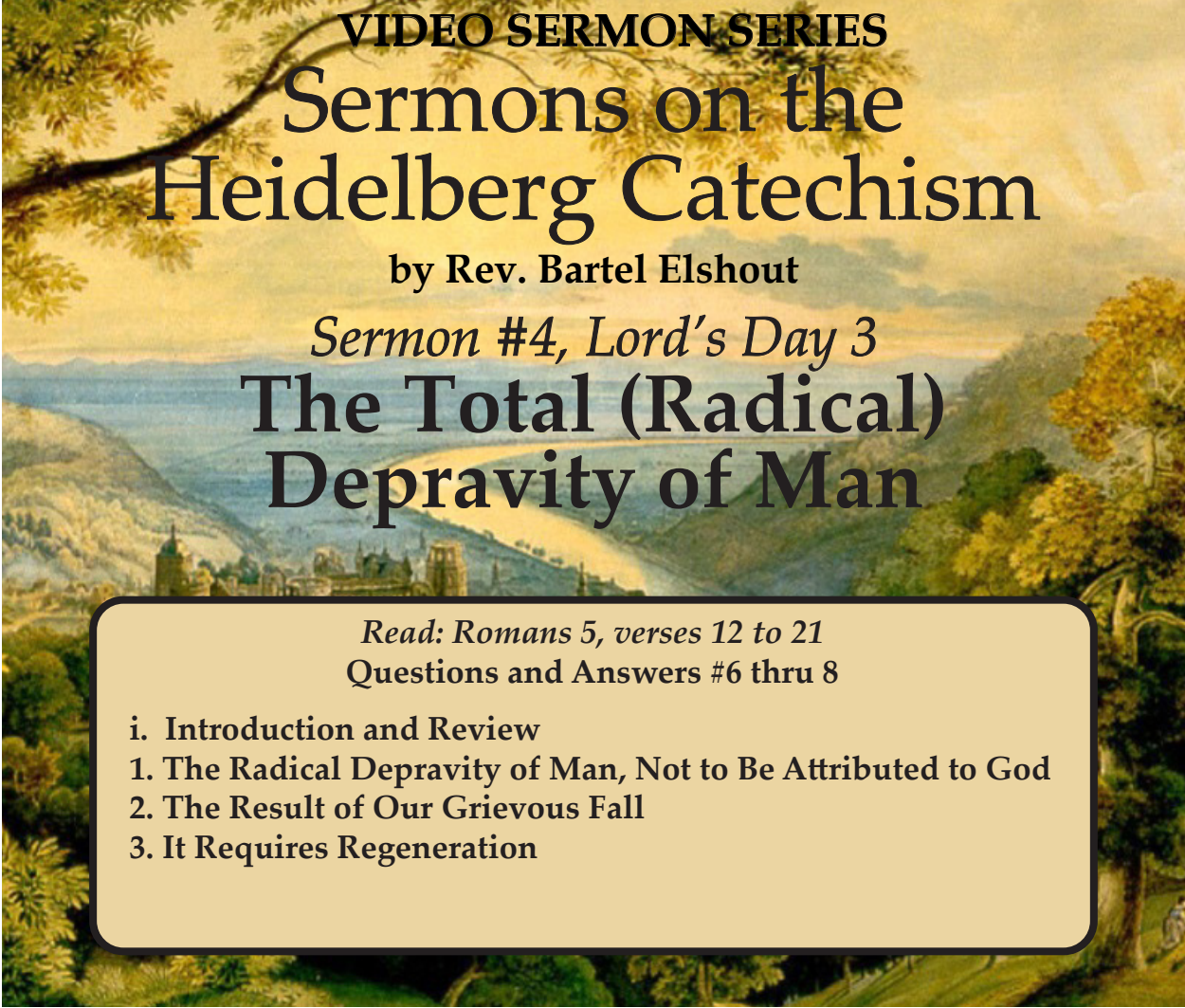
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Sermon #4, Lord's Day 3

The Total (Radical) Depravity of Man

Read: Romans 5, verses 12 to 21
Questions and Answers #6 thru 8

i. Introduction and Review

1. The Radical Depravity of Man, Not to Be Attributed to God
2. The Result of Our Grievous Fall
3. It Requires Regeneration

Introduction and Review

Congregation, turn with me for a moment to Luke 5, verse 12, and there, we read God's Word: "And it came to pass, when he"—that is, Jesus—"was in a certain city, behold a man full of leprosy: who seeing Jesus fell on his face, and besought him, saying, Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean." So boys and girls, what was it that brought this man to Jesus? Well, it tells us he was *full* of leprosy. It doesn't just say that he had leprosy; he was *full* of leprosy. And I think some of you know that leprosy was that awful disease that caused people to be covered with ugly sores, made them unclean. As a result, they were not able to dwell with their loved ones. They were banished, as it were, from society. They had to live as outcasts. Sometimes they would live in such a colony for many, many years. That this disease could be lingering, and it would gradually get worse, until finally, their bodies would literally rot and be corrupt, and they would finally perish. So this indicates that this man had had leprosy for some time. And now he was full of leprosy, and what that means, he now realized that the end was coming. Perhaps, all those years he had entertained a thought that maybe he might yet be healed. But now, when he looked at himself, and he saw how grievous the sores of his body were, the stench that came from his body, he realized, my end is near. He was full of leprosy.

And that's when he heard about Jesus of Nazareth. That's what he heard increasingly that there was one who was able to heal all that came to him. Oh, he heard the good news, that no matter what anyone's condition was, whether they were blind, or whether they were deaf, or whether they were lame, or whatever their calamity was, he heard that whoever came to this Jesus, they never came in vain, and he healed them. And he finally realized, "I am a man full of leprosy. And therefore there is but one option left for me. I must go to Jesus." And so it was a recognition that his case was hopeless, that his case was beyond all human cure, that finally he realized that there was but one name given under heaven whereby he could be cured, and whereby he could be healed. And it was the recognition of his desperate plight that brought him to Jesus. As we read there, he did not come in vain, because Jesus "put forth his hand, and touched him, saying, I will: be thou clean" (verse 13).

Well, congregation, boys and girls, I think you know that too, that leprosy, in the Bible, is often used as an illustration of our awful sinful condition. We also have a disease from which we will die. We have a spiritual leprosy that impacts every aspect of our being. And you know what the Bible teaches us, is that we are full of leprosy. In other words, that our case is a hopeless case. The sad thing is that, by nature, we don't realize that. By nature, we are blind to that reality. That's why it is necessary also to the preaching of the Word of God that time and again we are confronted with what the Bible tells us about ourselves—the Bible's assessment of our true spiritual condition. And that's the intent of the Heidelberg Catechism.

And so, the reason that Lord's Days 2, 3 and 4 focus on our misery, focus on our wretched plight as sinners, is that we would realize, when we are finished with it all, that we are full of leprosy, that our case is a hopeless case. Because the ultimate goal of the Catechism is to set the stage for the glorious unveiling of the Savior of sinners, namely, the Lord Jesus Christ. Although Jesus Christ said it himself, those that are whole have no need of a physician (Matthew 9:12). So what does that mean in our language, boys and girls? Those that are whole—that means, when you are healthy, you don't need a doctor. As long as you feel healthy and well, why would you go see a doctor? But when you are ill and you don't feel well, then you will go and seek out a doctor.

This is the reason why the Pharisees were so offended by the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ—they thought they were whole. They thought very highly of themselves. Just listen to the Pharisee praying in the temple, where he is really praising himself, and is basically saying that God should be so delighted that there was such a righteous man as he was (Luke 18:9–14). And yet, we know that that prayer was a stench in the holy nostrils of God. And that's why Jesus, of course, when he began his Sermon on the Mount, he made that stunning statement that stunned the people to whom he preached. He said, "Unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall in no wise enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:20). And the people needed to hear that.

So what Christ was saying, he says the righteousness of the Pharisees is worthless in the sight of God. And that's why you and I need to be confronted with our misery, not only intellectually, not only doctrinally, but the Spirit of God has to so work in our hearts that we recognize experientially that we too are full of leprosy, in order that we would recognize that our only hope is in this precious Savior of sinners, who came to seek and to save that which is lost; a Savior who was so willing and able to save to the uttermost; a Savior who did not send this leper away; but a Savior who touched this man who was unclean, and by doing this, Jesus took upon himself the uncleanness of that leper. He identified himself with that leper, and he made him clean.

And so, therefore, we will continue to consider what the Bible has to say about our misery, or,

to use the illustration I used last week, we're going to keep looking at this X-ray, this biblical X-ray that tells us the true story of who we really are in the sight of God. So let's read together Lord's Day 3 of the Heidelberg Catechism.

Question #6: *Did God then create man so wicked and perverse?*

And of course, what the Answer to Question #5 said, the Question was, *Are we able to keep the law of God perfectly?* And the Answer was, No, but instead, it says, we are inclined to hate God and to hate our neighbor. And so, hence, this Question, *Did God then create man so wicked and perverse?*

The Answer is: *By no means—absolutely not; but God created man good, and after His own image, in true righteousness and holiness, that he might rightly know God his Creator, heartily love Him and live with Him in eternal happiness to glorify and praise Him.*

Question #7: *Whence then proceeds this depravity of human nature?*

The Answer is: *From the fall and disobedience of our first parents, Adam and Eve, in Paradise;—the chapter we just read together, Genesis 3—hence our nature is become so corrupt that we are all conceived and born in sin.*

Question #8: *Are we then so corrupt that we are wholly incapable of doing any good, and inclined to all wickedness?*

And the Answer is: *Indeed we are—we are full of leprosy—except we are regenerated by the Spirit of God.*

And so, congregation, this Lord's Day focuses on *The Total or Radical Depravity of Man*. Radical is maybe a better word, because no sinner is as depraved as he can possibly be. By God's common grace, God restrains it, but it's a radical depravity. And the word "radical" of course, comes from the Latin word, "radix" that means we are depraved at the very core of our being. The very root of our being is corrupt and depraved.

And first of all, we will see that that depravity is not to be attributed to God. God did not make us that way. Secondly, that that depravity is the result of our grievous fall in Adam, from the fall and disobedience of our first parents. Hence, our nature has become so corrupt. And then thirdly, is that it required regeneration. It requires a divine miracle. It requires the work of God's Spirit in making a fallen sinner a new creature, so desperate is our plight by nature. So, *The Radical Depravity of Man, Not to be Attributed to God; The Result of Our Grievous Fall; That Requires Regeneration.*

1. The Radical Depravity of Man, Not to Be Attributed to God

Did God then create man so wicked and perverse? Stop and think about that Question. Because what's implied here, what we have heard throughout all the history of man, that ultimately are always those who would suggest that this is God's doing, that God is to be blamed for the fact that this world is a world filled with wickedness and with depravity, implying that God is ultimately the author of sin. And the Catechism gives a radical answer and says, By no means, do not even go there.

So, the question, of course, is, did the fall of man then happen outside of God's sovereign and overruling government? Of course, that's makes this a very difficult question. It's a question that has been wrestled with throughout the ages, namely, the origin of evil. Why is it that God, who created the whole universe, of which he said that he was very good, why did God permit evil to enter that perfect creation? Well, congregation, that's a question that we cannot answer. And yet, we cannot for one moment suggest that this is something that took God by surprise. Nothing ever

happens outside of his sovereign purpose. Because, if that were the case, then God would not be God. That means that things are happening in this universe that are beyond his control. And we know from what the Scriptures reveal to us about God that that is an impossibility. But then there's the other truth, that God is holy, perfect, and pure, and that because of his very nature, he cannot possibly be the author of evil. And so, we have to maintain both of these truths without trying to solve them. Because, with our tiny, puny minds, we cannot grasp why, in God's overarching purpose, he allowed evil to enter for a season, ultimately to overcome it, and to conquer it in a most glorious and a most magnificent way. I think sometimes we forget that, in God's eternal existence, his eternal being from everlasting to everlasting, the history of this world is but a very brief moment in his eternal existence. And sovereignly, sovereignly, in his wisdom, his unsearchable wisdom, he allowed evil to enter for a season.

But the point is this on Question #6, do not, even for a moment, entertain the idea that the wickedness and the perversion of man, which is so prevalent, which is so evident throughout the world, was the result of God having created man with a flaw. There was no flaw in man's creation. God saw that everything he had made was very good. *God created man good, and after His own image, in true righteousness and holiness.* And so, here, beautifully, the Catechism summarizes how God made us and for what purpose he made us. And it's important for us to grasp that, because only then will we realize how grievous the fall is, and only then will we comprehend what God's ultimate goal, his ultimate objective is, in saving and redeeming sinners. Because the whole purpose of the marvelous work of redemption is that, through his Son the Lord Jesus Christ, God restores man to what he originally created him to be.

And of course, the very first thing we read about man in the Word of God is that we were created in his image. So let's read those verses together, Genesis 1, verses 26 through 27. Genesis 1, the very, very first mention of man in Scripture: "And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness." And then move on to verse 27: "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them." And so, in the space of two verses, the Bible emphasizes four times that God created us in his image. So that defines who we are as human beings. That defines the very purpose for which we were made.

And that's why, congregation, man was truly the crowning piece of God's creation. We know that all of creation was made by God's Son and for God's Son. We know that all of creation reflected the glory of God's only begotten Son. That's why, when God looked upon his work, when he looked upon his creation, he saw that it was very good. But there was only one creature in that creation that was capable of knowing the very God who had made him. That's what made man so very unique. And so, if it is true of all of creation, that God made it by his Son, and for his Son—why? because the Father loves his Son—and because he loves his Son, he created the universe for the glory of his Son, this is especially true of man. And when it says here that we were made in God's image, in God's likeness; we were created in such a way that there would be a reflection of God's own being in man, it ultimately points us again to God's only begotten Son. Because if it is true for all of creation that it was made by him and for him, this is especially true of man. Because we know from the New Testament, if we compare Scripture to Scripture, that ultimately that means that God created man in the image of his only begotten Son. That's why we read in Romans chapter 8 that we are predestined to be conformed to the image of God's Son. That's why John writes that when Christ returns, ultimately on the last day, in 1 John 3, that we shall be like him, because we were created to be like him. We were created to reflect his glory.

So we can say of Adam, that Adam was the created son of God, who bore the image of the eternal

Son of God. That's why man was the supreme object of God's delight. And Satan understood that, you see. Satan understood that God would be supremely glorified by a creature that would bear the image of his only begotten Son. That's why Satan, as we will see also next week, targeted man, because ultimately he was trying to take vengeance. He was trying to revenge himself for having been cast out of the presence of God, and he targeted man as God's image-bearer.

The Catechism beautifully describes the purpose of all of this: Created in God's image, created in the image of God's Son, so *that he might rightly know God his Creator, heartily love Him and live with Him in eternal happiness to glorify and praise Him*. Now, we read, of course, in Colossians 3 and Ephesians 4, and let me read those passages to you, what that image consisted of—the image of God, the reflection of the glory of God's Son. So what do we read in Colossians 3, verse 10? It says, “And have put on the new man, which is renewed”—which is made again what he was meant to be—“renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him.” Then Ephesians 4, verse 24, we read: “And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.”

So when we take those two passages together, which, throughout the ages, theologians have done, we say that that image, that reflection of God's character, that reflection of God's Son had three major components, namely, knowledge, righteousness, and holiness. And that matches exactly with how God made us. That matches exactly the faculties of our human soul. Because God created us with a soul. And when we talk about the soul, we say that our soul has three faculties: our intellect, and we have our affections, and we have our will. And that matches exactly those three points components of God's image.

And so, to make it really simple for you, boys and girls, what does all of that mean, is that means this: God created us capable, first of all, of knowing him. And so the reason God created us with an intelligent mind, the reason we have intelligence, are born with intelligence, is that we would be capable of knowing the very God who has made us. So God created us capable of knowing him. Secondly, he created us to have a right relationship with him, a righteous relationship. And that's the beauty of it all. When God made us, there was nothing between God and man. God and man were completely compatible. That means God could freely embrace a human being that reflected his own character. So capable of knowing God, capable of having a right relationship with God, and capable of serving God, in the way of perfect holiness, in the way of perfect obedience.

Again, let me simplify this. Because, boys and girls, I realize that I'm talking about some difficult things here. I'm going to give you three things, and let me summarize what I'm saying. Because I think you will be able to understand this. God made us to know God, the God who made us, to know him; and to love him, and to serve him. Try to remember those three things. He made us to know him, and to love him, and to serve him; in that order.

In other words, that's the beauty of it all. As God created Adam, and as God communed with Adam, and as he increasingly knew his Maker, the more he knew of Him, the more he loved Him; and the more he loved Him, the more he desired to serve Him. And of course, all of that, all of that was lost when man fell, all of it.

2. The Result of Our Grievous Fall

And so, as fallen creatures, we are now ignorant of God. As fallen creatures, we are no longer righteous. We no longer have a righteous relationship with God. We don't know our Maker; we no longer love our Maker; and we no longer desire to serve our Maker. That's our fallenness. That the result of having lost the image of God. And the marvelous thing, as we will focus briefly on

regeneration, is that when the Holy Spirit works in us savingly, he makes us a “new creature in Christ.” That’s what Paul calls it in 2 Corinthians 5, “a new creature in Christ.” So when the Holy Spirit makes us a new creature, then all of this begins to function again. Then it becomes our desire to know our Maker, and to know more of him, and then we begin to love him, and it becomes our desire to serve him.

And so, I can ask a question to all of you, to our boys and girls too: Does that describe us? Can you say today that by the grace of God, your desire is to know God, to know him as he has revealed himself in his Word; to know him as he has revealed himself in his only begotten Son? Is that your chief desire, to know God and to know more of him? And do you love him? Do you love that God who has revealed himself in his Word, that God who has revealed himself especially in the Lord Jesus Christ? Do you love him? Do you love the God you know? And do you desire to serve him? Do you desire to live a life that honors him? You see, that’s how we were made. We were made—boys and girls, I’m going to say it again—we were made, we were created by God, we were equipped by God, to know him, to love him, and to serve him, as God’s image-bearers.

And then comes the dreadful reality. If that’s true, Question #7 says, if that’s true, if that’s how God made us, *Whence then proceeds this depravity of human nature?* Whence then proceeds this corruption, this perversion? Where does all of this wickedness come from? Because, congregation, we live in a world where that depravity, that wickedness, that corruption is manifesting itself in most alarming ways. It has been the story of the history of the human race, ever since man fell.

And here’s the Answer: *From the fall and disobedience of our first parents, Adam and Eve, in Paradise.* And so clearly the Catechism is here echoing the Word of God, namely, that what happened in Paradise, when Adam and Eve disobeyed God’s commands, that this compacted not only them, but ultimately the entire human race. We read it together from Romans 5, did we not? Romans 5, verse 12: “Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.” This is the reality revealed to us in the Word of God. This is the truth of the Word of God. And we would not know this, were it not for the Word of God. The world out there is scrambling to figure out why the human race never improves itself, why the human race continues to be depraved and corrupt. The Bible gives us the answer. We read it together in Romans 5, and of course, reflecting on Genesis 3. *From the fall and disobedience of our first parents, Adam and Eve.*

And so, when Adam and Eve disobeyed God, Adam and Eve who had been so highly favored by God—and of course, the question always arises: How long did they live in that enjoyment? How long did they live sinlessly. And we don’t know that with absolute certainty, and I cannot be dogmatic about it either, but I’m inclined to believe that this was a period of forty days. The first time it occurred to me when I was reading the commentary of Andrew Bonar¹ on the book of Leviticus,² where he suggested in the footnotes that that state of rectitude lasted for forty days. Because the number forty is a very important number in Scripture, and it is especially important in the life of Christ. Three times in the life of Christ, the number forty occurs at significant moments. At the beginning of his life, when is he presented in the temple?—after forty days. Why?—and this is why Bonar commented on it in the book of Leviticus—God required that, when a man child was born, that the mother would be unclean for forty days, and the child could not be presented to God

1 Andrew Bonar (1810–1892), was ordained a minister in the Church of Scotland, in 1835, and joined the Free Church of Scotland in 1843 at the Disruption. He authored and edited several books, and was acquaintance with Robert Murray M’Cheyne.

2 *Commentary on the Book of Leviticus.*

until the forty days had been completed. And of course, that repeated itself with every man child. That symbolism was repeated with every man child after forty days. Then, of course, we read about him being tempted in the wilderness for forty days. And what happens at the end of those forty days? Satan comes to him and he tempts him with a threefold temptation. He tempts him in the exact same way he tempted the first Adam. But the first Adam failed. The first Adam fell for that temptation. But the second Adam succeeds where the first Adam failed, after forty days. And boys and girls, when did Jesus return to heaven? The day of his resurrection? No, he abode for how long?—for forty days. For forty days he remained on earth. And then what happened? For forty days, the gates of Paradise open for him after forty days. He said to the thief, “To day thou shalt be with me in Paradise.” After forty days, the gates had to yield, and the second Adam returns into the presence of God, and carries with him the redeemed sons and daughters of Adam for whom he had given his life.

And so, in light of the significance of the number forty in the life of Christ, I’m inclined to agree with what Bonar is suggesting. Because what that means, congregation, that makes the fall even all the more grievous. If that is indeed the case, if that is the case, that means that for forty days, for almost six weeks, they enjoy daily fellowship and daily communion with God. And then to fall for Satan’s lie, when he came, after all of that privilege, all of that enjoyment in the garden, then to fall for his lie, for that wretched suggestion, “Hath God said?” And or parents fell for it.

But you see, because Adam represented the entire human race, as he fell, the whole human race fell with him. It’s like when a tree is cut down. When a tree is cut down, when that tree falls, everything that’s connected with that tree falls with it. And so, in Adam, the whole human race fell. Of course, some people always have difficulty with that. They say, “Is it really fair that we now have to reap the consequences of what Adam did?” And of course, the reality is that, by nature, you and I are just as inclined to do what Adam did, as what he did. But you see, as Thomas Boston³ points out, in his *Fourfold State*, if we have a problem with Adam’s representation, then we should also have a problem with Christ’s representation. That’s, of course, why we read also Romans 5, where the Apostle Paul clearly makes the parallel between the first Adam and the second Adam. And so, it’s not for us here to argue about the representation. The biblical fact remains that in Adam, we all fell.

And, *Hence*, is says, *our nature is become so corrupt that we are all conceived and born in sin*. David confessed it in Psalm 51, verse 5, did he not? We sang it together when we sang Psalter 143. “Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me.” And I’m sure you’ve noticed that when you read Genesis 5. What a remarkable chapter that is. Following the record of the fall in Genesis 3, following chapter 4, where we see the immediate manifestation of that depravity when Cain murders his brother. And then follows chapter 5. And chapter 5 begins by telling us that Adam begat a son in his image. And then the rest of the chapter, we read about all his descendents, and over and over again, the entire chapter, and it says, “and he died,” “and he died.” Confirming that what God had said to Adam, the day you eat thereof, the day you disobey me, the day you ignore my word, the day you transgress, the day you divorce yourself from me, “You will surely die.” And so, *Hence our nature is become so corrupt that we are all conceived and born in sin*.” In Jeremiah 17, verse 9, we have one of the most striking statements in Scripture about the heart of man as a fallen creature. We read, in chapter 17, verse 9: “The heart is deceitful above all

3 Thomas Boston (1676–1732), a Scottish Presbyterian church leader in the Church of Scotland, theologian, philosopher, and author, especially known for his work, *Human Nature in its Fourfold State*. A man of singular piety and amiability, he took a leading role in what was known as the “Marrow Controversy.”

things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?”—desperately wicked.

The moment we were severed from God, the moment that wonderful love relationship, that covenant relationship was broken. We died in Adam. And we lost God’s image. And as I said before, rather than knowing God, we are ignorant of God. Rather than loving God, we now hate him. Rather than serving him, we now serve ourselves and live for ourselves. Instead of being a temple of the Holy Ghost, we’ve now become the synagogue of Satan. Instead of being worshippers of God, living for His glory, man now lives for himself. And our hearts are deceitful above all things and desperately wicked.

Congregation, boys and girls, has it ever dawned on you, has it ever dawned on you that this is true? Have you ever discovered painfully that this is the description of your heart, and this is the description of my heart? This is a truth we don’t want to hear. That’s why the biblical gospel is so offensive to the natural man. Because the biblical gospel implies this truth. The biblical gospel implies that we are so hopelessly and desperately lost, that our only hope is in the Lord Jesus Christ to save us from our sins.

And that brings us to Question #8: *Are we then so corrupt that we are wholly incapable of doing any good, and inclined to all wickedness?* In other words, is it so bad, is that depravity so bad, are the consequences of the fall so serious that we are wholly or completely incapable of doing any good? Do you believe that about yourself? Do you agree with that? Has that become your painful and experiential understanding of yourself—wholly incapable of doing any good? You might say, “Aren’t there people doing good things?” Yes, by human standards. But here, we’re talking about God’s standards, by God’s perfect standard, by the standard of his perfect law that he has given. By that standard, you and I are wholly incapable of doing any good, and inclined to all wickedness. Do you believe that about yourself?—inclined to all wickedness. Do you believe that you are capable of the vilest thing imaginable? That’s what that means, the vilest thing imaginable.

3. It Requires Regeneration

Every day we are confronted with human depravity. We hear it in the news. We hear about wicked and evil deeds. We read about horrendous crimes. Do you believe that you are potentially capable of doing precisely that, that your heart is so depraved by nature, so corrupt, so wholly corrupt? David discovered that in a very painful way. If you had told him that morning that by the time the day was over, and by the time the week was over, he would have committed adultery with Bathsheba, and he would have arranged for the murder of her husband, he would not have believed it. And so, congregation, even as believers, even as God’s children, we are still capable of all wickedness, with one sin excepted—namely, the sin against the Holy Ghost. So depraved is our human heart. And so, the Answer is, *Indeed we are.*

You know the story of king Hazael? I’ve mentioned it before, maybe. King Hazael, the king of Syria—when Elisha met him, and Elisha anointed him, when Elisha told him what he would actually do, what he would do towards the people of Israel, how brutal his actions would be, he said, “Do you think I’m a dog?” He didn’t believe it.

Congregation, none of us believe it by nature. Because, by nature, we think highly of ourselves. It is the Holy Spirit alone who will make us realize and acknowledge that we really are who we are. It is the Holy Spirit alone who can bring us to that point, where we say with David, when he then confessed, in Psalm 51, when Nathan came to him and said, “Thou art the man,” then he said, “Lord, against thee, and thee only have I done this evil in thy sight.”

Congregation, have you ever confessed that truthfully before God? Boys and girls, have you

ever confessed that before God? “Again thee, and thee only have I done this evil in thy sight.” That’s why it takes a supernatural work to confront us. Not only with this reality, but for us to be able to be willing to agree with it, to say, “Amen,” to this most troubling and disturbing assessment of the Word of God about who we really are in the sight of God. Wholly incapable of doing any good. That’s why we read in Job 14, verse 4: “Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? not one.” Psalm 58, verse 3: “The wicked are estranged from the womb: they go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies.” Romans 3, verse 12, the Apostle is quoting the Old Testament: “They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one.” And how wicked did that first world become? What did God say about that first world in Genesis 6, verse 5? He says, “And GOD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth,”—now listen to his assessment here—“and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.” That’s God’s assessment of who you and I are by nature.

That’s why it says here, *Except—Except we are regenerated by the Spirit of God*. That’s why all efforts throughout human history to improve humanity have always failed. You know, when the Enlightenment came in vogue, everybody thought that the twentieth century would be a century where man would have evolved to a level of great moral purity. And we know what a dreadful record the twentieth century is of human depravity, of massacre, of murder. Our only hope, your only hope, my only hope is that the Spirit of God regenerates us, that the Spirit of God makes us a new creature, that the Spirit of God takes us from spiritually dead to spiritually alive. That’s why Jesus said to Nicodemus, when he had his discussion with him, “Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God” (John 3:5).

But thanks be to God that the gospel unveils to us that which is impossible with man. And what is impossible with man? What is impossible with man is to remedy the radical depravity of man. And the language the Catechism uses is remarkable when you sum it all up. It uses the words: wicked, perverse, depravity, corruption, wholly incapable of doing any good, inclined to all wickedness. But the gospel unveils to us that in Christ, God has secured, from all eternity, the salvation of such radically depraved sinners as we are. Thanks be to God!

Congregation, we wouldn’t be here tonight if it weren’t for the fact that God has done this throughout the ages, and that he continues to do so until this day. And when the Spirit of God makes us a new creature, and we become spiritually alive, and what happens? We begin to see ourselves the way God sees us. It’s one thing to say, “I’m a sinner.” It’s another thing to say with David, “Against thee, thee only have I sinned and done this evil in thy sight.” The Holy Spirit has but one purpose in confronting with that, is to bring us to an end of ourselves, and to make us realize that my only hope lies outside of myself, in this magnificent Savior that is unveiled to us in the Word of God. And so it’s very unsettling when the Spirit of God convicts us of our sin. And his goal is to bring us to an end of ourselves. His goal is to make us realize that we are full of leprosy, that we have a condition that is beyond all human hope, and beyond all human repair, in order that we would do what the leper did. That we would flee to the Lord Jesus Christ, who has come to save such hopelessly, such radically depraved human beings, to save them to the uttermost, and to make us a new creature, so that ultimately, as God’s redeemed people, we will again answer to the purpose for which we were made, so that ultimately through his work, we may again rightly know our Maker, heartily love him, and live with him in eternal happiness to glorify and praise him.

And so, my dear congregation, have you already taken refuge to that Savior? Have you already seen how hopeless your condition is in the sight of God? Have you recognized how desperate your plight is as a sinner? And have you taken refuge to this willing and able Savior, this Savior, who

without hesitation touched that leper and said, “I will. Be thou clean”? That’s the purpose of these Lord’s Days. That’s why we are focusing on our misery. Because only against that background will we see the inexpressible beauty, the inexpressible preciousness of the Lord Jesus Christ. Only then will we value that faithful saying that is “worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners” (1 Timothy 1:15). Amen.

Let’s pray.

Gracious God in heaven, we have considered how magnificently we were made in Adam, and how dreadful our fall has been in Adam, how that because of our fall in Adam, we have become corrupt. We are born and conceived in sin, wholly incapable of doing any good, inclined to all evil. Lord, it is a truth that we do not want to accept by nature. But we pray, Lord, that by the work of thy Spirit, thou wouldst cause us to realize that such is indeed our true condition, such is indeed the diagnosis of thy Word, such is the indictment against us. And Lord, we pray that thou wouldst use this to make us realize how beautiful, how precious, how lovely the Lord Jesus Christ is, who is so willing, and ready, and able to save sinners who are full of the leprosy of sin, who promises in his Word that when we come to him, just like that leper did, that he will make us clean indeed. And so go with us now as we go homeward and go with us into this coming week. Wilt thou bless us in our daily calling, bless our children in school. Keep us safely. We pray for those who must travel. Keep them safely as well. And we pray that also this coming Lord’s Day, we may be privileged to gather here again. Forgive our sins of this day and of this hour, and hear us, for Christ’s sake alone. Amen.