

DEPRAVITY'S NATURE and BONDAGE

Essays by Elder Vernon Johnson, Denton PBC, Texas

Depravity - Death Nature

The scriptures when describing our depraved natural state often use the word "dead" as evidenced by the following scriptures:

a. Eph. 2:1, "And you hath he quickened who were dead in trespasses and sins."

b. Rom. 8:2, "For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death."

c. John 5:25, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live."

d. Eph. 2:4, 5, "But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ (by grace ye are saved)."

e. Col. 2:13, "And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgive you all trespasses."

f. Rom. 7:6, "But now we are delivered from the law, that being dead wherein we were held; that we should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter."

g. II Cor. 5:14, "For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead."

h. 1 John 3:14, "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren."

The word, dead, can be defined as the absence of life and the opposite of life. The words, death and life, are diametrically opposed. In describing the total depravity of man in his natural state (before he is born again) the scriptures use the words, dead and death, to mean the absence of spiritual life. For instance in Eph. 2:1-3 man before he is born again (quickened) is described as following the course of this world, having the prince of the power of the air (Satan) working in him, having his conversation (lifestyle) in the lust of his flesh, and fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind. According to the scriptures, being the friend of the world is to be the enemy of God, to be possessed and directed by the spirit of Satan is sin,

and to fulfill the fleshly lusts is sin. Thus all our behavior before the new birth is sinful behavior. Paul said, "I know that in me, that is, in my flesh dwelleth no good thing." He also said in Rom. 8:7, 8, "Because the carnal (fleshly) mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God." Thus the absence of spiritual life renders one totally incapable of righteous behavior, of seeking after God, of knowing the things of the Spirit of God, or of pleasing God.

It is no wonder that the scriptures say, "By grace ye are saved." It had to be by the grace of God due to our "dead" nature. To be dead is to be without strength. A dead person has no strength whatsoever. If he is dead, he cannot as much as lift his little finger in response to an offer nor can he help anyone. Such was our condition when we were spiritually dead. Rom. 5:6 says, "For when we were without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly." Being dead in trespasses and sins makes us spiritually without strength. God's grace and God's power as well as his mercy and love were required to bring us out of this state: Eph. 2:4, 5, "But God who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved).

In contrast to death, actions are the evidence of life. John wrote, "We know we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren." Love is an evidence of spiritual life, of being born again. Gal. 5:22, 23, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance, against such there is no law." Fruit is borne on the tree. The tree must first be present before fruit can be borne. Fruit is the evidence and identifier of the tree. Anytime any one of the 9 above fruit are borne is evidence of the presence of the Spirit. We can bear this fruit because we have been born of the Spirit of God. For instance, we have faith because we have been born again. Since faith is a fruit of the Spirit, we must have the spirit before we can exhibit faith.

The Lord told us in John 5:25 how we were given spiritual life from the dead state we were in, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live." We know this has reference to the spiritually dead and not the dead bodies in the grave because the Lord said "the hour is coming and now is..." The resurrection of our dead bodies is coming, but its not now taking place. The resurrection to spiritual life of those spiritually dead in trespasses and sins is both taking place now and will continue to take place in the future till all that God calls are born again. Please note that it is the powerful "voice" of the Son of God that brings life from the dead. No man has this power in his voice or otherwise to raise the dead. If a man wants to convince me he has power to raise

the dead, he needs to go create a universe by speaking it into existence and then maybe I will believe him. As we said before only God has the power to raise the dead and such was our condition under the law of sin and death. He quickened us when we were dead. Praise be to His holy name.

Depravity's Bondage

One way to describe the effects of bondage is to declare what things those in bondage cannot do. For instance a typical prisoner in a Texas jail cannot go where ever he pleases, or see whom ever he pleases when ever he pleases. Furthermore, he cannot choose to do what ever he pleases. His bondage places severe restrictions on his actions.

We were in bondage to our sin-corrupt fleshly nature prior to being born again. Rom. 8:2, "For the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death." The "law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus" is the "new birth" and this "new birth" freed us from the "bondage" of "the law of sin and death."

Nature places restrictions on all living creatures and binds them to the limitations of their nature. For instance, birds can fly and snakes crawl on their underside. Just don't expect a snake to fly and a bird to crawl on its underside. Likewise, man before he is born from above (born again) is limited to the abilities of his sin-cursed nature. Paul said, "For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing..." (Rom. 7:18)

Let us now look at several things the scriptures tell us that man cannot do before he is born again:

a. Matt. 19:25, 26, "When his disciples heard it, they were exceedingly amazed, saying, Who then can be saved? But Jesus beheld them, and said unto them, With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible." With these 5 words (With men this is impossible) the Lord put to silence all the advocates who say that man can save himself from sin and cause himself to obtain eternal life. It simply is impossible for man to save himself.

b. 1 Cor. 2:14, "But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." Those that are born-again are two-fold men. They are natural men and they are spiritual men. Those who haven't been born again are one-fold, i.e., they are natural men only. In this natural state they cannot discern spiritual things nor can they receive the things of the spirit of God. This is why Paul said in 1 Cor. 1:18, "For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness..." Since the preaching of the cross is of the Spirit

of God and the natural man cannot receive the things of the Spirit of God it is no wonder he considers preaching of the cross to be foolishness.

c. Matt. 7:18, "A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit." Based on this statement it is no wonder Paul said of those under the law of sin and death in Rom. 3:12, "there is none that doeth good, no, not one." A person that is not born again possesses only the "corrupt tree" flesh nature and according to Gal. 5:19-21 all of his works are evil.

d. John 3:3, "Jesus answered and said unto him, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Due to the spiritual nature of God's church kingdom, and because he cannot discern spiritual things, the unborn again man cannot see (perceive) this church kingdom.

e. John 3:5, "Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." Without a spiritual nature man is unable not only to see the kingdom of God, but also to enter the kingdom of God.

f. John 6:44, "No man can come to me except the Father which sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day." The word, draw, comes from a Greek word meaning "to drag." The meaning is illustrated by a horse drawn carriage. The carriage is inanimate and does nothing to move itself. All the effort to move the carriage is performed by the horse. Before we are born again we cannot come to Jesus. We must be drawn (dragged) of the Father in order to come to Jesus. It is not our effort that brings us to Jesus, but God's drawing that brings us to Jesus.

g. John 8:43, 47, "Why do ye not understand my speech? Even because ye cannot hear my word. He that is of God heareth God's words: ye therefore hear them not, because ye are not of God." Before we are born-again, we were not of God, thus we could not hear (perceive) God's words. After we were born again we had the ability to perceive spiritual things and therefore could perceive God's words.

h. John 12:39, 40, "Therefore they could not believe, because that Esaias said again, He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their hearts; that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them." The Lord told some unbelievers in John 10:26, "But ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep, as I said unto you." Before we are born again we cannot believe. Faith is one of the nine-fold fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22) and comes as a result of the new birth.

i. Rom. 8:7, "Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be." The "law of God" is the "law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:2). Before we are born-again we have only a carnal mind and that mind is the very enemy of God. With that carnal mind we do not seek after God, we do not fear God, and we do not desire God.

j. Rom. 8:8, "So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God." Thus before we are born again we are completely unable to please God and furthermore have no desire to please God.

k. II. Peter 2:14 speaks of the unborn-again in this manner, "Having eyes full of adultery, and that cannot cease from sin..." An unborn-again person possesses only a fleshly nature and will only walk after the course of this world and the prince of the power of the air, seeking to fulfill the desires of the flesh and mind (Eph. 2:2, 3) all of which is sin in the eyes of a just and Holy God.

As we see the bondage of our sin cursed depraved nature we can thank God for that "law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus" that has made us free from "the law of sin and death."

Depravity - Incapability of Understanding

One aspect of the total depravity of our human nature before we are born again that is strongly emphasized in the scriptures is that we were totally incapable of spiritual understanding. In describing the nature of men under the law of sin and death, Paul wrote in Rom. 3:11, "There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God." Paul uses the universal "none" to show us this is true of all mankind prior to the new "spiritual" birth.

The Lord told some unbelieving Pharisees in John 8:43, "Why do you not understand my speech? Even because ye cannot hear my words." He further expounded in verse 47, "He that is of God heareth God's words: ye therefore hear them not, because ye are not of God." The Lord obviously had reference to more than just natural hearing or natural discernment. Those to whom the Lord was speaking had natural ears and natural discernment. They, however, had no spiritual discernment. They could not "hear" the spiritual lessons being taught in God's words. To discern spiritual things, an individual must be born of God. Except we are of God, we cannot hear God's words.

Eight times in the gospels and eight times in the book of Revelation we have this or a very similar statement recorded, "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear..." This must have reference to the spiritual ear, not the natural ear. Paul wrote in 1 Cor. 2:9, "But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear

heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him." All men, unless deformed, have natural eyes, natural ears, and a natural heart. These three sensory organs (sight, sound, feel) are incapable of sensing what God has prepared for them that love him. If we relied on our natural sensory organs to know then we could never know the things God has prepared... Some, indeed, have thought these things just simply can't be known of men. Verse 11, however, tells us that we who are of God know, "But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searches all things, yea, the deep things of God." We know the things God has prepared for them that love him, because the Spirit has revealed them unto us! Now did the Spirit reveal them unto us through our natural sensory organs (eye, ear, heart)? No because they are incapable of receiving them. Verse 11 reads, "For what man knoweth the things of man, save the spirit of man which is in him? Even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God." Man naturally has a nature (spirit) that enables him to understand the things of man. However, this nature cannot transcend the human nature and understand spiritual things. How then can fallen depraved man ever understand the things of the Spirit of God? The answer lies in verse 12, "Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God." We received this "spirit which is of God" when we were "born again." God imparted to us in the new birth a spiritual receiver that "we might know the things that are freely given to us of God." When we were born again God gave us spiritual eyes, spiritual ears, and a spiritual heart. Now these spiritual sensory organs are attuned to receive spiritual things. Furthermore, they also act as spiritual transmitters as we read in v.13, "Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual." Also we gather from this verse that the new birth not only gives us a spiritual receiver and a spiritual transmitter, but it also gives us spiritual "reasoning ability" to be able to compare spiritual things with spiritual things.

Next, Paul summarizes the total incapability of natural man for spiritual discernment in verse 14, "But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." Things we cannot know or discern are foolishness unto us. We haven't time for such things. Is it any wonder then that Paul wrote in 1 Cor. 1:18, "For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish, foolishness..." Why is the preaching of the cross to the unregenerate (those not born again) foolishness? Because the preaching of the cross is of the Spirit of God and these unregenerate have no spiritual receivers. In actuality it works like this: The unregenerate have "no fear of God" thus cannot be convicted in

their hearts of sin. Because they do not feel the curse or burden of sin in their heart they reason that they have no need of a savior, then they reason that this preaching of salvation from sin by Jesus at the cross is just foolish prattle by superstitious men.

In contrast, we who have been born again, now having the fear of God in our hearts do feel the curse or burden of our sins in our heart. When we hear (with the spiritual ear of the new birth) the preaching of the cross, this message brings to our (spiritual) hearts how that Jesus died to deliver us from our sins and as Paul wrote in the last half of 1 Cor. 1:18, "but unto us which are saved it is the power of God." This with our spiritual eyes we see (discern) that God thru Christ saved us from our sins at the cross.

Thanks be to God for this marvelous gift of the new birth.