

Moral Depravity Entered into Voluntarily!

By [Charles G. Finney](#) *

FURTHER EXAMINATION OF THE ARGUMENTS ADDUCED IN SUPPORT OF THE POSITION THAT HUMAN NATURE IS IN ITSELF SINFUL.

The defenders of the doctrine of constitutional sinfulness, or moral depravity, urge as an additional argument:

That sin is a universal effect of human nature, and therefore human nature must be itself sinful.

Answer: This is a non sequitur. Sin may be, and must be, an abuse of free agency; and this may be accounted for, as we shall see, by ascribing it to the universality of temptation, and does not at all imply a sinful constitution. But if sin necessarily implies a sinful nature, how did Adam and Eve sin? Had they a sinful nature to account for, and to cause their first sin? How did angels sin? Had they also a sinful nature? Either sin does not imply a sinful nature, or a nature in itself sinful, or Adam and angels must have had sinful natures before their fall.

Again: Suppose we regard sin as an event or effect. An effect only implies an adequate cause. Free, responsible will is an adequate cause in the presence of temptation, without the supposition of a sinful constitution, as has been demonstrated in the case of Adam and of angels. When we have found an adequate cause, it is unphilosophical to look for and assign another.

Again: it is said that no motive to sin could be a motive or a temptation, if there were not a sinful taste, relish, or appetite, inherent in the constitution, to which the temptation or motive is addressed. For example, the presence of food, it is said, would be no temptation to eat, were there not a constitutional appetency terminating on food. So the presence of any object could be no inducement to sin, were there not a constitutional appetency or craving for sin. So that, in fact, sin in action were impossible, unless there were sin in the nature. To this I reply:

Suppose this objection be applied to the sin of Adam and of angels. Can we not account for Eve's eating the forbidden fruit without supposing that she had a craving for sin? The Bible informs us that her craving was for the fruit, for knowledge, and not for sin. The words are, "And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her, and he did eat" (Gen. 3:6). Here is nothing of a craving for sin. Eating this fruit was indeed sinful; but the sin consisted in consenting to gratify, in a prohibited manner, the appetites, not for sin, but for food and knowledge. But the advocates of this theory say that there must be an adaptedness in the constitution, a something within answering to the outward motive or

temptation, otherwise sin were impossible. This is true. But the question is, What is that something within, which responds to the outward motive? Is it a craving for sin? We have just seen what it was in the case of Adam and Eve. It was simply the correlation that existed between the fruit and their constitution, its presence exciting the desires for food and knowledge. This led to prohibited indulgence. But all men sin in precisely the same way. They consent to gratify, not a craving for sin, but a craving for other things, and the consent to make self-gratification an end, is the whole of sin.

The theologians whose views we are canvassing, maintain that the appetites, passions, desires, and propensities, which are constitutional and entirely involuntary, are in themselves sinful. To this I reply, that Adam and Eve possessed them before they fell. Christ possessed them, or He was not a man, nor, in any proper sense, a human being. No, these appetites, passions, and propensities, are not sinful, though they are the occasions of sin. They are a temptation to the will to seek their unlawful indulgence. When these lusts or appetites are spoken of as the "passions of sin," or as "sinful lusts or passions," it is not because they are sinful in themselves, but because they are the occasions of sin. It has been asked, Why are not the appetites and propensities to be regarded as sinful, since they are the prevalent temptations to sin? I reply:

They are involuntary, and moral character can no more be predicated of them, on account of their being temptations, than it could of the fruit that was a temptation to Eve. They have no design to tempt. They are constitutional, unintelligent, involuntary; and it is impossible that moral character should be predicable of them. A moral agent is responsible for his emotions, desires, etc., so far as they are under the direct or indirect control of his will, and no further. He is always responsible for the manner in which he gratifies them. If he indulges them in accordance with the law of God, he does right. If he makes their gratification his end, he sins.

Again: the death and suffering of infants previous to actual transgression, is adduced as an argument to prove, that infants have a sinful nature. To this I reply:

That this argument must assume, that there must be sin wherever there is suffering and death. But this assumption proves too much, as it would prove that mere animals have a sinful nature, or have committed actual sin. An argument that proves too much proves nothing.

Physical sufferings prove only physical, and not moral, depravity. Previous to moral agency, infants are no more subjects of moral government than brutes are; therefore, their sufferings and death are to be accounted for as are those of brutes, namely, by ascribing them to physical interference with the laws of life and health.

Another argument for a sinful constitution is, that unless infants have a sinful nature, they do not need sanctification to fit them for heaven.

Answer:

This argument assumes, that, if they are not sinful, they must be holy; whereas they are neither sinful or holy, until they are moral agents, and render themselves so by obedience or disobedience to the moral law. If they are to go to heaven, they must be made holy or must be sanctified. This objection assumes, that previous sinfulness is a condition of the necessity of being holy. This is contrary to fact. Were Adam and angels first sinful before they were sanctified? But it is assumed that unless moral agents are at first sinners, they do not need the Holy Spirit to induce them to be holy. That is, unless their nature is sinful, they would become holy without the Holy Spirit. But where do we ascertain this? Suppose that they have no moral character, and that their nature is neither holy nor sinful. Will they become holy without being enlightened by the Holy Spirit? Who will assert that they will?

That infants have a sinful nature has been inferred from the institution of circumcision so early as the eighth day after birth. Circumcision, it is truly urged, was designed to teach the necessity of regeneration, and by way of implication, the doctrine of moral depravity. It is claimed, that its being enjoined as obligatory upon the eighth day after birth, was requiring it at the earliest period at which it could be safely performed. From this it is inferred, that infants are to be regarded as morally depraved from their birth.

In answer to this I would say, that infant circumcision was doubtless designed to teach the necessity of their being saved by the Holy Spirit from the dominion of the flesh; that the influence of the flesh must be restrained, and the flesh circumcised, or the soul would be lost. This truth needed to be impressed on the parents, from the birth of their children. This very significant, and bloody, and painful rite, was well calculated to impress this truth upon parents, and to lead them from their birth to watch over the development and indulgence of their propensities, and to pray for their sanctification. Requiring it at so early a day was no doubt designed to indicate, that they are from the first under the dominion of their flesh, without however affording any inference in favor of the idea, that their flesh was in itself sinful, or that the action of their will at that early age was sinful. If reason was not developed, the subjection of the will to appetite could not be sinful. But whether this subjection of the will to the gratification of the appetite was sinful or not, the child must be delivered from it, or it could never be fitted for heaven, any more than a mere brute can be fitted for heaven. The fact, that circumcision was required on the eighth day, and not before, seems to indicate, not that they are sinners absolutely from birth, but that they very early become so, even from the commencement of moral agency.

Again: the rite must be performed at some time. Unless a particular day were appointed, it would be very apt to be deferred, and finally not performed at all. It is probable, that God commanded that it should be done at the earliest period at which it could be safely done, not only for the reasons already assigned, but to prevent its being neglected too long, and perhaps altogether: and perhaps, also, because it would be less painful and dangerous at that early age, when the infant slept most of the time. The longer it was neglected the greater would be the temptation to neglect it altogether. So painful a rite needed to be enjoined by positive statute, at some particular time; and it was desirable on accounts that it should be done as early as it safely could be. This argument, then, for native constitutional moral depravity amounts really to nothing.

Again: it is urged, that unless infants have a sinful nature, should they die in infancy, they could not be saved by the grace of Christ.

To this I answer, that, in this case they would not, and could not, as a matter of course, be sent to the place of punishment for sinners; because that were to confound the innocent with the guilty, a thing morally impossible with God.

But what grace could there be in saving them from a sinful constitution, that is not exercised in saving them from circumstances that would certainly result in their becoming sinners, if not snatched from them? In neither case do they need pardon for sin. Grace is unearned favor a gratuity. If the child has a sinful nature, it is his misfortune, and not his crime. To save him from this nature is to save him from those circumstances that will certainly result in actual transgression, unless he is rescued by death and by the Holy Spirit. So if his nature is not sinful, yet it is certain that his nature and circumstances are such, that he will surely sin unless rescued by death or by the Holy Spirit, before he is capable of sinning. It certainly must be an infinite favor to be rescued from such circumstances, and especially to have eternal life conferred as a mere gratuity. This surely is grace. And as infants belong to a race of sinners who are all, as it were, turned over into the hands of Christ, they doubtless will ascribe their salvation to the infinite grace of Christ.

Again: is it not grace that saves us from sinning? What then is it but grace that saves infants from sinning, by snatching them away from circumstances of temptation? In what way does grace save adults from sinning, but by keeping them from temptation, or by giving them grace to overcome it? And is there no grace in rescuing infants from circumstances that are certain, if they are left in them, to lead them into sin?

All that can be justly said in either case is, that if infants are saved at all, which I suppose they are, they are rescued by the benevolence of God from circumstances that would result in certain and eternal death, and are by grace made heirs of eternal life. But after all, it is useless to speculate about the character and destiny of those who are confessedly not moral agents. The benevolence of God will take care of them. It is nonsensical to insist upon their moral depravity before they are moral agents, and it is frivolous to assert, that they must be morally depraved, as a condition of their being saved by grace.

We deny that the human constitution is morally depraved, because it is impossible that sin should be a quality of the substance of soul or body. It is, and must be, a quality of choice or intention, and not of substance. To make sin an attribute or quality of substance is contrary to God's definition of sin. "Sin," says the apostle, "is anomia," a "transgression of, or a want of conformity to, the moral law." That is, it consists in a refusal to love God and our neighbor, or, which is the same thing, in loving ourselves supremely.

To represent the constitution as sinful, is to represent God, who is the author of the constitution, as the author of sin. To say that God is not the direct former of the constitution, but that sin is conveyed by natural generation from Adam, who made

himself sinful, is only to remove the objection one step farther back, but not to obviate it; for God established the physical laws that of necessity bring about this result.

But how came Adam by a sinful nature? Did his first sin change his nature? or did God change it as a penalty for sin? What ground is there for the assertion that Adam's nature became in itself sinful by the fall? This is a groundless, not to say ridiculous, assumption, and an absurdity. Sin an attribute of nature! A sinful substance! Sin a substance! Is it a solid, a fluid, a material, or a spiritual substance?

I have received from a brother the following note on this subject: "The orthodox creeds are in some cases careful to say that original sin consists in the substance of neither soul nor body. Thus Bretschneider, who is reckoned among the rationalists in Germany, says: 'The symbolical books very rightly maintain that original sin is not in any sense the substance of man, his body or soul, as Flacius taught, but that it has been infused into human nature by Satan, and mixed with it, as poison and wine are mixed.'

"They rather expressly guard against the idea that they mean by the phrase 'man's nature,' his substance, but somewhat which is fixed in the substance. They explain original sin, therefore, not as an essential attribute of man, that is, a necessary and essential part of his being, but as an accident, that is, somewhat which does not subsist in itself, but as something accidental, which has come into human nature. He quotes the Formula Concordantiae as saying: 'Nature does not denote the substance itself of man, but something which inheres fixed in the nature or substance.' Accident is defined, 'what does not subsist by itself, but is in some substance and can be distinguished from it.'"

Here, it seems, is sin by itself, and yet not a substance or subsistence not a part or attribute of soul or body. What can it be? Does it consist in wrong action? No, not in action, but is an accident which inheres fixed in the nature of substance. But what can it be? Not substance, nor yet action. But if it be anything, it must be either substance or action. If it be a state of substance, what is this but substance in a particular state? Do these writers think by this subtlety and refinement to relieve their doctrine of constitutional moral depravity of its intrinsic absurdity?

I object to the doctrine of constitutional sinfulness, that it makes all sin original and actual, a mere calamity, and not a crime. For those who hold that sin is an essential and inseparable part of our nature, to call it a crime, is to talk nonsense. What! A sinful nature the crime of him upon whom it is entailed, without his knowledge or consent? If the nature is sinful, in such a sense that action must necessarily be sinful, which is the doctrine of the Confession of Faith, then sin in action must be a calamity, and can be no crime. It is the necessary effect of a sinful nature. This cannot be a crime, since the will has nothing to do with it.

Of course it must render repentance, either with or without the grace of God, impossible, unless grace sets aside our reason. If repentance implies self-condemnation, we can never repent in the exercise of our reason. Constituted as we are, it is impossible that we should condemn ourselves for a sinful nature, or for actions that are unavoidable. The doctrine of

original sin, or of a sinful constitution, and of necessary sinful actions, represents the whole moral government of God, the plan of salvation by Christ, and indeed every doctrine of the gospel, as a mere farce. Upon this supposition the law is tyranny, and the gospel an insult to the unfortunate.

It is difficult, and, indeed, impossible for those who really believe this doctrine to urge immediate repentance and submission on the sinner, feeling that he is infinitely to blame unless he instantly comply. It is a contradiction to affirm, that a man can heartily believe in the doctrine in question, and yet truly and heartily blame sinners for not doing what is naturally impossible to them. The secret conviction must be in the mind of such an one, that the sinner is not really to blame for being a sinner. For in fact, if this doctrine is true, he is not to blame for being a sinner, any more than he is to blame for being a human being. This the advocate of this doctrine must know. It is vain for him to set up the pretence that he truly blames sinners for their nature, or for their conduct that was unavoidable. He can no more do it, than he can honestly deny the necessary affirmations of his own reason. Therefore the advocates of this theory must merely hold it as a theory, without believing it, or otherwise they must in their secret conviction excuse the sinner.

This doctrine naturally and necessarily leads its advocates, secretly at least, to ascribe the atonement of Christ rather to justice than to grace to regard it rather as an expedient to relieve the unfortunate, than to render the forgiveness of the inexcusable sinner possible. The advocates of the theory cannot but regard the case of the sinner as rather a hard one, and God as under an obligation to provide a way for him to escape a sinful nature, entailed upon him in spite of himself, and from actual transgressions which result from his nature by a law of necessity. If all this is true, the sinner's case is infinitely hard, and God would appear the most unreasonable and cruel of beings, if He did not provide for their escape. These convictions will, and must, lodge in the mind of him who really believes the dogma of a sinful nature. This, in substance, is sometimes affirmed by the defenders of the doctrine of original sin.

The fact that Christ died in the stead and behalf of sinners, proves that God regarded them not as unfortunate, but as criminal and altogether without excuse. Surely Christ need not have died to atone for the misfortunes of men. His death was to atone for their guilt, and not for their misfortunes. But if they are without excuse for sin, they must be without a sinful nature that renders sin unavoidable. If men are without excuse for sin, as the whole law and gospel assume and teach, it cannot possibly be that their nature is sinful, for a sinful nature would be the best of all excuses for sin.

This doctrine is a stumbling-block both to the church and the world, infinitely dishonorable to God, and an abomination alike to God and the human intellect, and should be banished from every pulpit, and from every formula of doctrine, and from the world. It is a relic of heathen philosophy, and was foisted in among the doctrines of Christianity by Augustine, as every one may know who will take the trouble to examine for himself. This view of moral depravity that I am opposing, has long been the stronghold of Universalism. From it, the Universalists inveigh with resistless force against the idea that sinners should be sent to an eternal hell. Assuming the long-

defended doctrine of original or constitutional sinfulness, they proceeded to show, that it would be infinitely unreasonable and unjust in God to send them to hell. What! Create them with a sinful nature, from which proceed, by a law of necessity, actual transgressions, and then send them to an eternal hell for having this nature, and for transgressions that are unavoidable! Impossible! They say; and the human intellect responds, Amen.

From the dogma of a sinful nature or constitution also, has naturally and irresistibly flowed the doctrine of inability to repent, and the necessity of a physical regeneration. These too have been a sad stumbling-block to Universalists, as every one knows who is at all acquainted with the history of Universalism. They infer the salvation of all men, from the fact of God's benevolence and physical omnipotence! God is almighty, and He is love. Men are constitutionally depraved, and are unable to repent. God will not, cannot send them to hell. They do not deserve it. Sin is a calamity, and God can save them, and He ought to do so. This is the substance of their argument. And assuming the truth of their premises, there is no evading their conclusion. But the whole argument is built on "such stuff as dreams are made of." Strike out the erroneous dogma of a sinful nature, and the whole edifice of Universalism comes to the ground in a moment. We come now to consider:

2. The proper method of accounting for moral depravity.

We have more than once seen that the Bible has given us the history of the introduction of sin into our world; and that from the narrative, it is plain, that the first sin consisted in selfishness or in consenting to indulge the excited constitutional propensities in a prohibited manner. In other words, it consisted in yielding the will to the impulses of the sensibility, instead of abiding by the law of God, as revealed in the intelligence. Thus, the Bible ascribes the first sin of our race to the influence of temptation.

The Bible once, and only once, incidentally intimates that Adam's first sin has in some way been the occasion, not the necessary physical cause of all the sins of men (Rom. 5:12-19). It neither says nor intimates anything in relation to the manner in which Adam's sin has occasioned this result. It only incidentally recognizes the fact, and then leaves it, just as if the *quo modo* was too obvious to need explanation. In other parts of the Bible we are informed how we are to account for the existence of sin among men. James says, that a man is tempted when he is drawn aside of his own lusts, (*epithumia*-"desires") and enticed (James 1:14). That is, his lusts, or the impulses of his sensibility, are his tempters. When he or his will is overcome of these, he sins. Paul and other inspired writers represent sin as consisting in a carnal or fleshly mind, in the mind of the flesh, or in minding the flesh. It is plain that by the term flesh they mean what we understand by the sensibility, as distinguished from intellect, and that they represent sin as consisting in obeying, minding, the impulses of the sensibility. They represent the world, and the flesh, and Satan, as the three great sources of temptation. It is plain that the world and Satan tempt by appeals to the flesh, or to the sensibility. Hence, the apostles have much to say of the necessity of the destruction of the flesh, of the members, of putting off the old man with his deeds, etc. Now, it is worthy of remark, that all this painstaking, on the part of

Inspiration, to intimate the source from whence our sin proceeds, and to apprise us of the proper method of accounting for it, and also of avoiding it, has probably been the occasion of leading certain philosophers and theologians who have not carefully examined the whole subject, to take a view of it which is directly opposed to the truth intended by the inspired writers. Because so much is said of the influence of the flesh over the mind, they have inferred that the nature and physical constitution of man is itself sinful. But the representations of Scripture are, that the body is the occasion of sin. The law in his members, that warred against the law of his mind, of which Paul speaks, is manifestly the impulse of the sensibility opposed to the law of the reason. This law, that is, the impulse of his sensibility, brings him into captivity, that is, influences his will, in spite of all his convictions to the contrary.

Moral depravity consists, remember, in the committal of the will to the gratification or indulgence of self in the will's following, or submitting itself to be governed by, the impulses and desires of the sensibility, instead of submitting itself to the law of God revealed in the reason.

This definition of the thing shows how it is to be accounted for, namely: the sensibility acts as a powerful impulse to the will, from the moment of birth, and secures the consent and activity of the will to procure its gratification, before the reason is at all developed. The will is thus committed to the gratification of feeling and appetite, when first the idea of moral obligation is developed. This committed state of the will is not moral depravity, and has no moral character, until the idea of moral obligation is developed. The moment this idea is developed, this committal of the will to self-indulgence must be abandoned, or it becomes selfishness, or moral depravity. But, as the will is already in a state of committal, and has to some extent already formed the habit of seeking to gratify feeling, and as the idea of moral obligation is at first but feebly developed, unless the Holy Spirit interferes to shed light on the soul, the will, as might be expected, retains its hold on self-gratification. Here alone moral character commences, and must commence. No one can conceive of its commencing earlier.

This selfish choice is the wicked heart the propensity to sin that causes what is generally termed actual transgression. This sinful choice is properly enough called indwelling sin. It is the latent, standing, controlling preference of the mind and the cause of all the outward and active life. It is not the choice of sin itself, distinctly conceived of, or chosen as sin, but the choice of self-gratification, which choice is sin.

Again: It should be remembered, that the physical depravity of our race has much to do with our moral depravity. A diseased physical system renders the appetites, passions, tempers, and propensities more clamorous and despotic in their demands, and of course constantly urging to selfishness, confirms and strengthens it. It should be distinctly remembered that physical depravity has no moral character in itself. But yet it is a source of fierce temptation to selfishness. The human sensibility is, manifestly, deeply physically depraved; and as sin, or moral depravity, consists in committing the will to the gratification of the sensibility, its physical depravity will mightily strengthen moral depravity. Moral depravity is then universally owing to temptation. That is, the soul is

tempted to self-indulgence, and yields to the temptation, and this yielding, and not the temptation, is sin or moral depravity. This is manifestly the way in which Adam and Eve became morally depraved. They were tempted, even by undepraved appetite, to prohibited indulgence, and were overcome. The sin did not lie in the constitutional desire of food, or of knowledge, nor in the excited state of these appetites or desires, but in the consent of the will to prohibited indulgence. Just in the same way all sinners become such, that is, they become morally depraved, by yielding to temptation to self-gratification under some form. Indeed, it is impossible that they should become morally depraved in any other way. To deny this were to overlook the very nature of moral depravity.

To sum up the truth upon this subject in few words, I would say:

1. Moral depravity in our first parents was induced by temptation addressed to the unperverted susceptibilities of their nature. When these susceptibilities became strongly excited, they overcame the will; that is, the human pair were over-persuaded, and fell under the temptation. This has been repeatedly said, but needs repetition in a summing up.

2. All moral depravity commences in substantially the same way. Proof:

(1.) The impulses of the sensibility are developed, gradually, commencing from the birth, and depending on physical development and growth.

(2.) The first acts of will are in obedience to these.

(3.) Self-gratification is the rule of action previous to the development of reason.

(4.) No resistance is offered to the will's indulgence of appetite, until a habit of self-indulgence is formed.

(5.) When reason affirms moral obligation, it finds the will in a state of habitual and constant committal to the impulses of the sensibility.

(6.) The demands of the sensibility have become more and more despotic every hour of indulgence.

(7.) In this state of things, unless the Holy Spirit interpose, the idea of moral obligation will be but dimly developed.

(8.) The will of course rejects the bidding of reason, and cleaves to self-indulgence.

(9.) This is the settling of a fundamental question. It is deciding in favor of appetite, against the claims of conscience and of God.

(10.) Light once rejected, can be afterwards more easily resisted, until it is nearly excluded altogether.

(11.) Selfishness confirms, and strengthens, and perpetuates itself by a natural process. It grows with the sinner's growth, and strengthens with his strength; and will do so for ever, unless overcome by the Holy Spirit through the truth.

Remarks

1. Adam, being the natural head of the race, would naturally, by the wisest constitution of things, greatly affect for good or evil his whole posterity.

2. His sin in many ways exposed his posterity to aggravated temptation. Not only the physical constitution of all men, but all the influences under which they first form their moral character, are widely different from what they would have been, if sin had never been introduced.

3. When selfishness is understood to be the whole of moral depravity, its quo modo, or in what way it comes to exist, is manifest. Clear conceptions of the thing will instantly reveal the occasion and manner.

4. The only difficulty in accounting for it, has been the false assumption, that there must be, and is, something lying back of the free actions of the will, which sustains to those actions the relation of a cause, that is itself sinful.

5. If holy Adam, and holy angels could fall under temptations addressed to their undepraved sensibility, how absurd it is to conclude, that sin in those who are born with a physically depraved constitution, cannot be accounted for, without ascribing it to original sin, or to a nature that is in itself sinful.

6. Without divine illumination, the moral character will of course be formed under the influence of the flesh. That is, the lower propensities will of course influence the will, unless the reason be developed by the Holy Spirit.

7. The dogma of constitutional moral depravity, is a part and parcel of the doctrine of a necessitated will. It is a branch of a grossly false and heathenish philosophy. How infinitely absurd, dangerous, and unjust, then, to embody it in a standard of Christian doctrine, to give it the place of an indispensable article of faith, and denounce all who will not swallow its absurdities, as heretics!

8. We are unable to say precisely at what age infants become moral agents, and of course how early they become sinners. Doubtless there is much difference among children in this respect. Reason is developed in one earlier than in another, according to the constitution and circumstances.

A thorough consideration of the subject, will doubtless lead to the conviction, that children become moral agents much earlier than is generally supposed. The conditions of moral agency are, as has been repeatedly said in former lectures, the possession of the powers of moral agency, together with the development of the ideas of the good or valuable, of moral obligation or oughtness of right and wrong of praise and blameworthiness. I have endeavored to show, in former lectures, that mental satisfaction, blessedness or happiness, is the ultimate good. Satisfaction arising from the gratification of the appetites, is one of the earliest experiences of human beings. This no doubt suggests or develops, at a very early period, the idea of the good or the valuable. The idea is doubtless developed, long before the word that expresses it is understood. The child knows that happiness is good, and seeks it in the form of self-gratification, long before the terms that designate this state of mind are at all understood. It knows that its own enjoyment is worth seeking, and doubtless very early has the idea, that the enjoyment of others is worth seeking, and affirms to itself, not in words, but in idea, that it ought to please its parents and those around it. It knows, in fact, though language is as yet unknown, that it loves to be gratified, and to be happy, that it loves and seeks enjoyment for itself, and doubtless has the idea that it ought not to displease and distress those around it, but that it ought to endeavor to please and gratify them. This is probably among the first ideas, if not the very first idea, of the pure reason that is developed, that is, the idea of the good, the valuable, the desirable; and the next must be that of oughtness, or of moral obligation, or of right and wrong, etc. I say again, these ideas are, and must be developed, before the signs or words that express them are at all understood, and the words would never be understood except the idea were first developed. We always find, at the earliest period at which children can understand words, that they have the idea of obligation, of right and wrong. As soon as these words are understood by them, they recognize them as expressing ideas already in their own minds, and which ideas they have had further back than they can remember. Some, and indeed most persons, seem to have the idea, that children affirm themselves to be under moral obligation, before they have the idea of the good; that they affirm their obligation to obey their parents before they know, or have the idea of the good or of the valuable. But this is, and must be a mistake. They may and do affirm obligation to obey their parents, before they can express in language, and before they would understand, a statement of the ground of their obligation. The idea, however, they have, and must have, or they could not affirm obligation.

9. Why is sin so natural to mankind? Not because their nature is itself sinful, but because the appetites and passions tend so strongly to self-indulgence. These are temptations to sin, but sin itself consists not in these appetites and propensities, but in the voluntary committal of the will to their indulgence. This committal of the will is selfishness, and when the will is once given up to sin, it is very natural to sin. The will once committed to self-indulgence as its end, selfish actions are in a sense spontaneous.

10. The constitution of a moral being as a whole, when all the powers are developed, does not tend to sin, but strongly in an opposite direction; as is manifest from the fact that when reason is thoroughly developed by the Holy Spirit, it is more than a match for the sensibility, and turns the heart to God. The difficulty is, that the sensibility gets the start

of reason, and engages the attention in devising means of self-gratification, and thus retards, and in a great measure prevents, the development of the ideas of the reason which were designed to control the will. It is this morbid development that the Holy Spirit is given to rectify, by so forcing truth upon the attention, as to secure the development of the reason. By doing this, He brings the will under the influence of truth. Our senses reveal to us the objects correlated to our animal nature and propensities. The Holy Spirit reveals God and the spiritual world, and all that class of objects that are correlated to our higher nature, so as to give reason the control of the will. This is regeneration and sanctification, as we shall see in its proper place.

**(Editor's note: This article constitutes the third of three lectures on Moral Depravity from Finney's Systematic Theology, the 1878 edition. It was included in that volume as Lecture 24)*