

# KOINONIA KONNECTION

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## **ON THE USES OF TOTAL DEPRAVITY**

*Of all those sacred doctrines which have suffered in the last century from Protestantism's theological reconstruction, none have been the target of so much fire as that of total depravity. This finds its root in the fact that no doctrine strikes so deep at certain central assumptions of today's self-congratulating, self-assured Christianity; a Christianity which has come to view emphasis upon human sin as anathema...a puritanical remnant of a less informed, and ultimately less mature faith. Man, say these, must be viewed more positively. Rather than pressing home such dour concepts like sin and guilt, preaching and divine instruction ought to emphasize those more pleasant aspects of God and religion which provide for less offence, less remorse, and more personal satisfaction, comfort, and delight in the activities of faith.*

*Yet, there are certain matters which advocates of such an approach to Christ's religion neglect. First, as much as they may try to avoid the issue, those who neglect the doctrine of total depravity are not casting aside a supposedly "less informed" and "less mature" view of Christianity, they are throwing away as so much rubbish the clear assertions of the Word of God. Though I will not take the time to argue the case here, there can be no doubt that the Scripture places great, even overpowering emphasis upon sin as a central concern to fallen human experience (Psa. li.5; Isa. lix.2; Rom. vii.14ff), and thus a central concern to saving religion. Second, and more to the purpose of our essay, while a proper meditation upon the terrible realities of human depravity does indeed in-*

*spire in saints a sobriety in mind, it unfailingly serves as a springboard to great joy, increase of holiness, and use unto God. Allow me to mention three uses of our doctrine which serve to these ends...*

### **AN IMPETUS TO HUMILITY**

*Pride stands as the root of much in the dark realm of human sin. Divisions in the Church, broken marriages, tense parent-child relationships, bitterness, failed pastorates...these and so many other evils often find their basis in the arrogance of the human heart. Pride and piety are opposites. One cancels out the other. Thus, it is little wonder that the language of Scripture, which has as its end the creation of a holy people, is so strong on the matter: "He that exalteth his gate seeketh destruction." (Prov. vii.19)*

*For this reason, Jehovah's ubiquitous focus on sin in the Bible becomes an unspeakable grace. Its revelation of the holy Law and parallel, frightfully honest depiction of the profound darkness and perversity of the human spirit serves to bring men low in their own estimation, to inspire in them a painful acquaintance with that force for blackest evil that is called Adam. And having, by the Spirit's grace, this fearful knowledge implanted in his soul, man truly becomes a candidate for holiness. His once stony heart, unqualified to serve as a proper medium in the hands of the Great Sculptor, grows soft, compliant. The skill of the Divine Artist smoothes away the rough edges, moulds out the flaws, creating from that once useless and stubborn lump a work honourable enough to be displayed even in the bright halls of Heaven.*

*And as those who are Christ's well know, the humbling work of this doctrine does not end with conversion to Christ. Indeed, its terrible and overwhelming truth continues to melt our hearts throughout our life in Christ. In fact, the weight of it presses with increasing heaviness on our minds the more mature in Christ we become...for as we grow older, our tenderness and sensitivity to sin grows up with us. Sin's awful power over us is felt more acutely, and so are we more and more moved to seek the help of the One who is able to subdue our terrible nature...*

#### **A TUTOR TO THE CROSS**

*Having humbled us and made us aware of our fearful spiritual state, the truth of total depravity has served its greatest aim: to steer us toward Christ and His healing power. It is said of Him in the Scripture that He is able to "subdue all things to Himself." What a precious message is this Word to a soul bowed down by the weight of the knowledge of sin! Prior to hearing this message of hope we, like Christian in Bunyan's enlightening novel, were bent low by the burden of our depravity. Little higher than the dust were we able to look, such was the inexpressible sorrow which hampered our joy. Yet, our kind Master did not leave us in that condition, but had His Word of Grace to accompany His Word of Doom. As loudly as did the trumpet of guilt resound in our hearts, it could by no means drown out the comforting voice of One who had the strength to take up the Book of Life and open its seals. This One did preach to our soul saying, "I am the Bread of Life." And then, in His great mercy, He did invite us to feast upon that Bread and be healed...and O, how we did feast! And yes, how we were truly healed! Our burden, that awful affliction having written upon it "Condemned," was cast off by the word of His power, and we witnessed it roll away into the Tomb, to be shut in forever!*

*But how, let us ask, would we have come to flee to Christ if we had not been aware of our need?*

*The answer is quite plain: we would not have done so. We would yet be in our sins, mindless of our condition and ignorant of the power and grace of the One able to deliver. In the mercy of God, however, we had sent to us the message of our depravity. Our knowledge of personal sin, once practically nonexistent, was expanded and deepened almost to a point we could not bear. Its black powers were made clear to us...as was the dreadful destiny reserved for those enslaved to it. Only then were we prepared to sprint to Christ. Only then did the Cross, and its profound hope, become meaningful to us. Only then, when the hammer of total depravity struck us full force, could we become students unto salvation. Only then, being thrust down into the maw of death, could we arise heirs of life!*

#### **A FUEL TO GODLY PATIENCE**

*I have said that our doctrine continues to find its use long after our conversion. Allow me to give a single example: It empowers our patience in tense human relationships. Generally when addressing matters related to peacemaking, Church unity, and similar issues, emphasis falls upon doctrines other than this one (e.g. corporate union with Christ, the eternal love of the Trinity, etc.). Yet, it may be of use in the churches to stress the doctrine of total depravity in the event of congregational or personal divisions.*

*In this kind of a situation, the lessons of our doctrine will serve a two-fold purpose. First, they will inspire in the divided parties an increased consciousness of their own sin...the incredible power which remaining sin yet wields even over the people of God. "How," each party will be inspired to ask, "can I dare to be embittered against my brother when I myself am so profoundly evil? How dare I judge him when I so much deserve judgment?" To our mind comes those countless moments in which we ourselves have spoken cruel words, acted unjustly, been possessed of a*  
*-continued on back cover*

# **FAMILIES IN FOCUS**

## **LITTLE INNOCENTS?**



*Last thing at night, when our children were small, I often secretly watched them as they slept: there they lay, breathing rhythmically, almost imperceptibly, relaxed, at ease, enjoying “the sleep of innocence.” But man - perhaps especially a father - looks on the outward appearance. What of the heart on which God gazes?*

*Wearing biblical lenses we come to see a more sinister reality: our children may be unknowing and naive, but innocent they have never been. Like ourselves they are guilty and depraved. Already, as Robert Murray McCheyne once wrote, the seed of every known sin is planted in their hearts.*

*The truth is not merely that if things work out badly our children may drift spiritually and morally; rather, the drive to do so is already embedded in their hearts. All that is required for the tragic harvest is that they allow themselves to give expression to their heart’s desires. For in the sense in which Reformed theology has used the term, our children are already totally depraved; that is, as Louis Berkhof expressed it: “. . . inherent corruption extends to every part of . . . nature, to all the faculties and powers of both soul and body; and that there is no spiritual good . . . in the sinner at all, but only perversion” (Systematic Theology, p. 247).*

*The total depravity of our children is a faith-doctrine, a biblical insight. Our natural instinct is to think of newborn children as moral and spiritual tabulae rasae, clean sheets on which to write a successful life. Admittedly the page may soon be a little blotted (the occasional temper tantrum!), but the background is still basically white, surely?*

*Not so, according to the Scriptures: the wicked*

*go astray from the womb and speak lies from birth, insists the psalmist. Even if we see these words as describing only some (“the wicked” are a specific category in the Psalms), we would be foolish to minimize what David is saying: the fruit is already in the root. We commit sin because our basic nature is twisted.*

*This is as true of a David as it is of “the wicked.” That was the revelation which stunned him when Nathan exposed him after his adultery with Bathsheba and the murder of Uriah.*

*This is not a self-justifying excuse; it is a confession of sin. David’s sin was not an aberration in an otherwise satisfactory life, but a revelation of congenital heart-disease.*

*How can this be? Paul explains it in terms of the unity of the human race in Adam. Sin entered the world through him, and death followed. All sinned in Adam the representative head of the whole of humanity.*

*The proof of this is seen in the way death spread to all and reigned over them. Paul adds: “even over those who had not sinned according to the likeness of the transgression of Adam” (Rom. 5:14), i.e., those who had not been recipients of the special verbal revelation of God’s will.*

*Paul may not be thinking here exclusively of infants; but no class of persons more clearly illustrates this terrible consequence of the fall than do infants who die before they are even capable of understanding God’s command.*

*Why does this happen? Death does not come, ultimately, from “natural causes,” but because*

*our representative Adam has catastrophically brought us down in his fall. This is what our forefathers wisely taught their children: "In Adam's fall we sinned all."*

*By his disobedience we have all been constituted sinners. As a result of our natural relationship with him we have come to share in his depravity from the very beginning of our existence. We are flawed from conception. None of us has a "normal" birth.*

*Nor is it long before this manifests itself in a thousand ways: are all tantrums expressions of physical discomfort? Are we not shocked to see the willfulness of children? Or do we fail to ascribe to God every evidence we see of a gracious character forming? Do we know our hearts so little that we think it is thanks to ourselves?*

*In a world drifting on a sea of parental moral and spiritual confusion, the doctrine of the total depravity of our children is actually an important practical anchor. Parents who understand its significance recognize the divine wisdom in teaching the commandments of God, given as they are largely in negative form. God wrote them for sinners. They also recognize the importance of teaching God's law in the context of God's grace in Christ and through the Spirit. With Augustine we know that God will give what He commands.*

*God has not given us angels, but sinners to train to be saints. Since the situation is further complicated by the fact that parents are also sinners, we constantly need to rely on the teaching and directives of Scripture. While that is a subject all on its own, here are some simple guidelines.*

*Recognize that your children are miniature versions of yourself. Learn to think in terms of Adam and Christ, sin and grace. That itself will help you realize why God has given you the command not to exasperate your children.*

*In bringing up your children, do not commit child-idolatry (in which the one commandment is "never say no") or self-idolatry ("he/she will reflect my glory"). Rather, by God's promised grace, parent a sinner into sainthood.*

*Take seriously the promise of God's Word that He will be your God and the God of your children. But if you believe in infant baptism, do not make the mistake of presuming that covenant children do not need to repent and believe the Gospel. For in baptism we recognize the need of the washing of regeneration and place our children under a lifelong covenant responsibility to repent of sin and to believe in Christ.*

*In times when there is grievous sin, never forget that there is more grace in Christ than there is sin in your heart and your child's heart combined. In Christ there is a way back from the far country of a life style even for children who have given full expression to heart depravity. So Monica discovered after years of praying for her son, Augustine.*

*After all, "And such were some of you" (1 Cor. 6:11) and did you not find grace in Christ?*

*-Sinclair Ferguson*

*Psalm 51:5 "Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, And in sin my mother conceived me." The point David is making is that as he developed within the context of the womb environment, he gained organs capable of fulfilling the sinful intentions of his heart. As his arms and legs were formed, and as his fingers were formed on the ends of his hands, he was shaped in iniquity: fully prepared to come forth from the womb to obey the lust of the flesh and to express his sinful nature. This is an astounding statement. It means we are sinners not because we sin but we sin because we are by nature sinners.*

*-Bruce A. Ray in "Withhold not Correction"*

# YOUTH'S CORNER

## NEW TESTAMENT BIBLE BOOKS

Fit the names of the New Testament books, omitting numbers, into the puzzle below.

Matthew

Mark

Luke

John

Acts

Romans

1&2 Corinthians

Galatians

Ephesians

Philippians

Colossians

1&2 Thessalonians

1&2 Timothy

Titus

Philemon

Hebrews

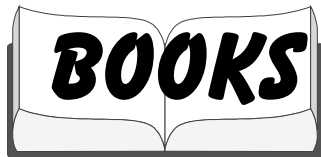
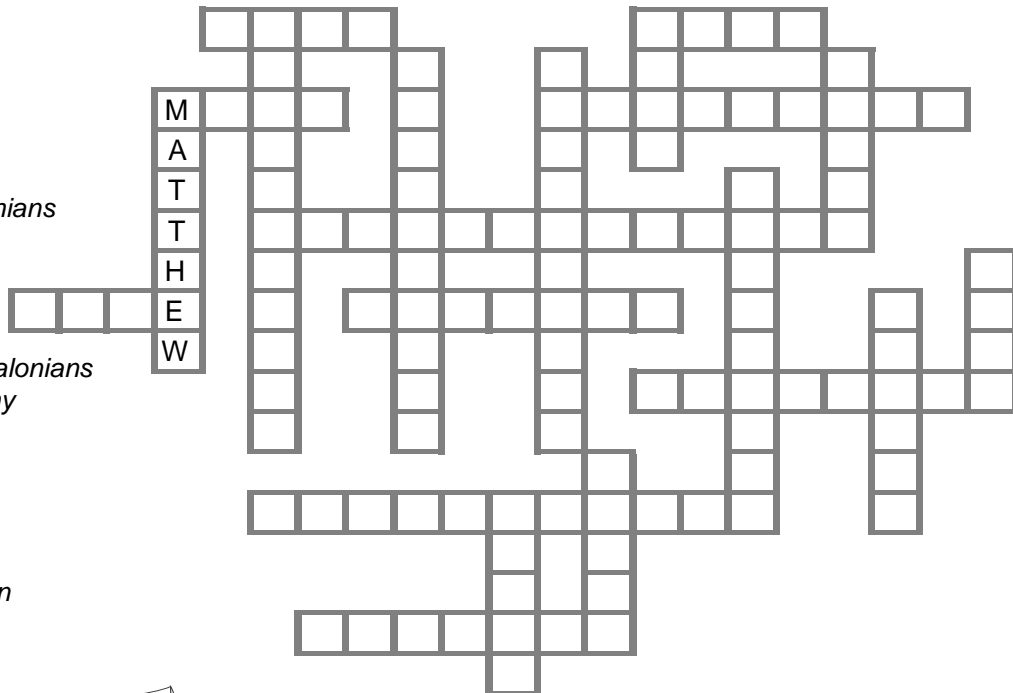
James

1&2 Peter

1&2&3 John

Jude

Revelation



## BOOKS IN REVIEW

*The Resurrection: The Unopened Gift*  
by Gerard Chrispin  
Publisher - Day One Ministries

The author is the Director of Prison Ministries and Director of American Ministries for Day One Ministries who promote the observance

of the Lord's Day in the United Kingdom and elsewhere. He wrote this book because though he believes many in the church accept the overwhelming evidence of Christ's resurrection they fail to understand the wonder and rich blessing it is to the believer. Christian's live as paupers although God's untold riches are within grasp. It remains like an unopened gift to them. The book is divided into two parts. The first part works through the evidence of the bodily resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. The second part deals with God's purpose for His children through Christ's resurrection. He also responds to many objections raised by unbelievers. It closes with chapter on the Lord's Day-a day to remember the resurrection. The book also includes an appendix on further study on the Lord's day as well as a second appendix entitled Ten Commandments-or Only Nine?

The book is appropriate either as an introduction to Christianity for the seeking heart, or as a helpful handbook for believers. It can be purchased through Cornerstone Bible Institute-Canada or Sola Scriptura Ministries.

-Cope Jonkman



# **MISSION SPOTLIGHT**

## **BUILDING THE CHURCH**

*"I will build my church". The remarkable words of the Lamb of God. The Church is Christ's Church, and it is Christ who will build it. He will draw the people to Himself. Yes, He will use His Church to build His Church, but He will always remain the architect and the builder. He will not be ignored. The Church of Christ is being built out of the rubble of man's sin, and when it is finished, it will be a Temple of God the like of which the world has never seen, where God's holiness will be taken so seriously reflected as it is in all of His attributes, and especially in the attribute of grace.*

### **A CHURCH WORTH EXTENDING**

*The Church that God uses to build His church has never been perfect, and it is far from perfect now. There are spiritual problems. There are financial problems. But the church has always had problems. The days of the Apostles were not any different. The world to be evangelized was corrupt. There was a massive immorality problem outside of Jerusalem. Deeply ingrained religious beliefs had to be confronted and challenged in order to be faithful to Him.*

### **LEARNING FROM THE NEW TESTAMENT**

*Although the work of the New Testament church was beset with problems such as the size of the mission field, the lack of manpower and so on, we do not get the impression that Paul was overly distressed by such matters, though these things had to be dealt with.*

*What did cause acute distress for Paul was quite different. It was not the size of the mission field, nor the imperfection of the labourers. It was not the dominant pluralism nor the devilish persecution. What distressed Paul the most and what really brought the most alarmed tone into his letters was when the churches began tinkering with the gospel.*

*Why was this? It was because he was so sure that the gospel was the truth and that any additions to it, to satisfy whatever group, would lead to a substitute gospel that would leave countless thousands to perish without Christ. It was that which distressed Paul which should distress us as well. This is a danger for any church who seeks to evangelize in a pluralist age, and our own church is not immune from such a danger.*

*None of the teachings concerning God in Christ in the Old Testament or in the New Testament is to be considered an elective course which people can tack on to their spiritual life as a luxury top up. No. God's people need it all. Give them teaching on God in Christ. The more they hear of Christ, the more they will be willing to serve Christ and to speak of Christ. We need teaching on the deep things of God lest we give the impression, not only to the world, but to our own people, that our God is pathetically trivial and insignificant in His glory.*

*What we must not do, however, is ever give the world the impression, or the church, for that matter, that we need finance in order to evangelize. The world, after all, was turned upside down by the apostles when they had precious little by way of established finance. What we do have, however, is the gospel. I would like to make a few points concerning this matter.*

### **WE HAVE THE GOSPEL**

*We have the truth concerning God in Christ in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. It is the inspired word of God. It is authoritative truth. Christ did not give to the Church a part gospel. He did not give us an unfinished Bible. He gave us a whole gospel.*

*And it is the truth. People need to be reminded of that. For nothing will give them apostolic confidence before a pluralistic world more than the knowledge of the Truth as the Truth.*

*We dare not change the gospel to suit the 21st century. We dare not give it up in the face of a society that is increasingly suspicious of evangelism. We dare not pare it down in order to make it more appealing to people. We must be aware of a defining line between making the gospel relevant by answering their questions, and making it a gospel that suits their particular likes or dislikes. Yes, we must go to unchurched Harry - but we don't change the gospel on the road to meet him.*

*We must share the Gospel as it stands. As a church we must encourage one another to share that truth - to be evangelists.*

*It must be part of the church's teaching ministry to bring Christians to that point where they cannot but respond to the opportunity before them. But how can we be equipped to share the gospel? There are four things that we must be reminded of, four crucial things.*

#### **THE DIVINE EYE OF GOD ABOVE**

*The first, concerns our personal relationship with God. It must be taught that this is the most important matter of all - not our reputation within the church or our image before the world. What God thinks of us is what really matters. That is primary. It is the indispensable foundation on which any evangelism must be built. We must take time to tell believers this, for if we do not, then they are not going to learn it from the world. It is what God thinks that really matters.*

#### **A DELICATE CONCERN FOR ONE ANOTHER**

*The second thing that believers must have is a priestly concern and compassion for one another. By compassion we mean that we must be known as people who take sin seriously, and yet who never give the impression that the*

*situation in someone's life is hopeless. For if we do not have hope for one another inside the church how can we expect to speak of hope meaningfully to the outside world. We must have the compassion that the High Priest has where he deals seriously but gently with people like himself. We must never give the impression that sin does not matter; nor, on the other hand, must we allow anyone to think that their situation is hopeless. That blend of seriousness and gentleness is utterly essential as we reach out into the world.*

#### **A DIFFERENT LIFESTYLE FROM WORLD**

*The third thing is that we must encourage one another to be different from the world, to be godly. We must not be different for the sake of it. We must be encouraged to live godly lives in an ungodly world, to be ready to suffer if need be. It may often be the case that we are only given the opportunity to speak because we are so different from the world in its values and aspirations to the point that we are light in the darkness and like salt in the earth. No one will ask us about our hope if we give up. No one will ask us about our hope if it is only the same as their own. But if our hope - our certainties and expectations with God in Christ at the center - are different from their own, then we can expect to engage in responsive evangelism.*

#### **DOCTRINAL TEACHING FROM THE CHURCH**

*We must apply deep doctrinal teaching. This fourth area relates precisely to ones need of confidence to give others a reason for the hope that makes them different and for the hope that keeps them going. The Church must give, as much as she can of the knowledge of God - of God's character and of God's will - in its weekly ministries. What we are taught on the Lords Day may well be what will give us courage to walk worthy of God in the week to come.*

*-condensed and revised from original article written by Rev John A. Macleod*

**ON THE USES OF TOTAL DEPRAVITY**  
**CONTINUED FROM INSIDE FRONT COVER**

mean spirit, or committed offences hurtful to others...often, admittedly, far worse in nature or more frequent than those committed against us. Such thoughts soften us, ready us to be abundant in that forgiveness which we ourselves have so bounteously received from Christ for our own sins.

Second, an awareness of the power and presence of total depravity in the human experience prepares us for the great evils that other men may commit against us. If we are weak on this doctrine, the offences and evil words of others take on a hurting power which would otherwise not be present had their capacity for evil not been so unexpected. Shock merely adds to salt to the wound. On the other hand, if we are well acquainted with the depth and power of sin in men, then their wicked acts are, in a very real fashion, completely to be

expected. We are not taken aback when men transgress against us. We may yet be disappointed...but never flabbergasted. This inspires, rather than reciprocal evils and bitter words, a kind of pity in us when we see sin's filthy hand take hold on another. More quick will we be to take on the vocation of physician rather than assassin.

**TO CLOSE**

And so, while this doctrine has certainly been misused by many Sessions and Pastors, we find that, with a proper understanding and application thereof, it comes to serve the interests of grace and piety with exemplary worth. True, some may apply it wrongly, using it as a means to crush assurance, negate the graces of God, and darken the light of His promises in the hearts of church-folk. Yet, when employed with wisdom, it becomes a doctrine filled with light, hope, and profound use for God's people.

-Pastor Ed Ludt

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## **GRACE COVENANT CHURCH**

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