

“Some Practical Points about Human Depravity” (人的败坏)
Canons of Dort: Third-Fourth Head, articles 4-7; Bible reference: Romans 7
By Pastor Rand Lankheet, at New Horizon URC, Second sermon, on April 8, 2018

Introduction: Can you remember that Latin word, from the sermon of last week?

It is the word, “pravus.” “Pravus” means “twisted” or “bent.” “Pravus” is the root of the English word, de-pravity (堕落 , 败坏). De-pravity refers to human sinfulness, particularly, that we have been twisted, bent, by sin. We no longer follow the law of God in a straight way.

Instead, we are spiritually twisted (扭曲的). We are no longer in alignment with (与...相一致) God’s law.

Today, I am going to apply this biblical teaching in FOUR WAYS.

1. The first is this: We cannot prove to unbelievers that the Bible is true.

Because human depravity has darkened(玷污了) peoples’ minds:

We cannot prove to unbelievers that Jesus has died on the cross to pay for human sin.

We cannot prove that they need to put faith in Jesus to be saved.

We cannot prove any of these, or other teachings from the Bible to unbelievers.

By nature, all the thoughts of our minds are closed to the truth about God.

The Arminian(阿民念主义的) group would disagree. In their theology, unbelievers are said to have some ability to know God. The Arminians would speak about God giving unbelievers the “light of nature.” They said unbelievers have some natural light, natural illumination(光照,启示), to be able to learn something about the true God.

Based on that theology(神学), many Christians will try to use convincing proofs to bring unbelievers to see the truth about God. For example, in an evangelistic(传道德) conversation, Christians will talk about the complexity(复杂性) of creation. They will say to an unbeliever, something like this:

“Just think how complex is the universe. For example, the Earth is exactly 93 million miles away from the sun. If earth were 10 million miles less, 83 million miles away from the sun, it would be too hot for us to survive. If the Earth were 10 million miles further, 103 miles away from the sun, it would be too cold. Can’t you see how the Creator God put the Earth at the right distance away from the sun?”

With arguments like this, those from an Arminian perspective hope to bring people to God. These kinds of arguments convince some unbelievers, they think.

But, what does the Bible say? The Bible says in Romans chapter 1 that unbelievers are

So unbelievers will not be convinced by any of our so-called “proofs” or “arguments.”

But those holding to the Arminian viewpoint

say that the “light of nature” is sufficient to convince some unbelievers.

-Look what the delegates of Dort said about those glimmerings(微光) of nature within unbelievers.

[Read III-IV, Article 4.

Yes, there is some light of nature. The delegates at Dort called them “glimmerings.”

But these glimmerings are not sufficient to bring unbelievers to faith in Christ.

Romans 1:18 says that unbelievers always “suppress” the truth about God.

So here’s the practical point: none of us can ever convince someone else to become a Christian.

We can never logically convince someone that they need Jesus to pay for their sins.

Practically, that gives us some relief, doesn't it? You see, if I thought that it was up to me to convince unbelievers of the truth about what, what pressure I would feel! What pressure to come up with the best arguments. And what responsibility I would feel if someone isn't be convinced. I could end up thinking that is my fault...that I am not convincing enough.

But the point is: **No one can convince(说服) someone to become a Christian.**

It is only God who can change peoples' minds, change their hearts, and bring them to faith in Jesus./That's a first point. And it is a helpful point. Ultimately, it is not our fault if people will not come to faith in Jesus.

2. And here's a second point: **Even the Law of God is powerless to change people.**

None of God's commandments has any power to bring people to faith.

Now, I used to be confused about this point. Either my seminary(神学院) professors did not teach me clearly, or else, I wasn't listening. I had to learn this later in my ministry.

We cannot go in depth to explain each verse in Romans chapter 7. But one point the apostle makes in Romans 7 that the law of God is powerless to convert(改变) people. The Law of God is powerless to bring people to faith in Jesus.

[Read Romans 7:7-9. Born as a Jew, and studying to become a Jewish rabbi(犹太的拉比,教师), Paul understood God's law very well. Paul was trained to apply the law of God to himself and to others.

But did that law produce spiritual life in him? No!

The only thing the law produced in him was evil desire.

Illustration: It's sort of like when parents have rules in the house, rules for their young children.

Parents might tell their children: "Now be sure not to ever throw a ball inside the house. You going to break something in the house if you throw a ball." And what often happens, when a rule like that is emphasized(被强调)? You guessed it...many children are even more tempted(被试探) to throw a ball. You see, a rule often brings added temptation to break the rule.

So it is with God's rules, His commandments. Now, Paul explains, strictly speaking, it was not the Law of God, in itself, that produced evil desire. But it was the law in connection with his inner sin, that produced the sinful desire. [Read Romans 7:10-12.

The law of God is good and perfect.

But when the good law, impacts sinful people, it sets off(引起) a bad reaction.

Vs. 11: Ultimately, says Paul, the law "killed him." It destroyed him.

It left him without any hope of salvation(拯救).

Those of Arminian theology were teaching that unbelievers can be moved to take the first steps toward God, by emphasizing God's law. That the law would give unbelievers a certain power, or motivation(动机), to change themselves. [Read III-IV, article 5.

Let me apply this to ourselves. Often in our worship services, we Reformed Christians read God's law, or a portion of His law. But this is what can happen, if we are not careful. We can give the impression that the Law, apart from Christ, somehow can give us strength. Or that the commandments of God give us more motivation, to live for Jesus. No!

Paul knew the Law of God better than any of us. And Paul says that law "killed" him.

The commandments of God destroyed him.

He concludes this section with the words in [vs. 24. Read.

So in our worship services, when we hear the Law of God, we must never depend on that law to give us power. Or to find some extra motivation in the commandments of God. No!

Only Jesus is our hope. Only God's grace to us in Jesus is our motivation.

Look at how Paul explains this in the words that follow. [Read Romans 8:2-4.

The delegates of Dort affirmed this teaching. [Read article 6.
So when you are witnessing to unbelievers, don't give them more law. Don't give them more of
God's demands. Don't tell them they have to become more obedient before God.
That's the way of death. That's the way of despair.
Rather, point them to Jesus. To God's grace to us, in Jesus alone. /

3. A third application, about this teaching on human depravity, natural human sinfulness.

It is this: **we should never be surprised by the daily news. About the bad things that people do.**

Of course, the news often is shocking. We react in horror at all the bad things that people do to
other people. But, on a certain level, we should never be surprised by the wickedness of human
beings.

From the Arminian perspective(观点), unbelievers are filled with God's light, with the light of
nature.

And, they believe people's decision-making power still has the ability to take certain steps towards
God. From the Arminian perspective, people are generally regarded as good, quite good. Even quite
good towards God.

That viewpoint leads to all kinds of surprise, and shock...when people do such bad things.

Illustration: I was reminded of this recently, while I was reading stories about Nikolas Cruz.

Cruz is the young man in Florida, who recently shot to death 17 students and staff in that
high school. Many women, young and old, have been writing love letters to him. Some are
saying they want to marry him. A mass murderer! A public defender, representing Cruz
says he's never seen anything like it, in his 40 years on the job. He says, [quote] "everyday,
boys and girls are starting to view him [Cruz] in an elevated(被抬高的) way." It's horrible,
horrific, how Cruz coldly shot to death 15-year-old, 16-year-old, 17-year-old students. But it
is equally horrific how so many people are attracted to him. / It illustrates something of the
nature of human depravity. How twisted and bent people really are. HYPERLINK "http://
www.sun-sentinel.com/local/broward/parkland/florida-school-shooting/fl-reg-nikolas-cruz-prison-
love-letters-20180327-story.html" \h <http://www.sun-sentinel.com/local/broward/parkland/florida-school-shooting/fl-reg-nikolas-cruz-prison-love-letters-20180327-story.html>

The Bible itself includes graphic(生动的,形象的) examples of murder, even mass murder. It
describes horrible wars, with tens of thousands of people killed. The Bible gives some examples
of rape and incest(乱伦). It refers to people being tortured to death. Hebrews 11, for example,
refers to Christians being thrown by their persecutors(逼迫者) to wild animals. Being torn apart,
horribly killed, by wild animals.

When we know the depth of human sin and wickedness, we should not be terrible surprised.

Oh, the horror is still horrible. But on some level, we should know that this is what human depravity
leads to. It gives us a more honest expectation about our society and culture today.

4. And one more thing, one more application arising from this biblical teaching of human
depravity. For this, turn to article 7, of Third and Fourth Head of Doctrine. [Read article 7. Because
we know the awfulness of sin, and the sin in ourselves,

we should give thanks and praise to our God, all the more.

Remember, God didn't have to save us. God didn't have to save you, or me. God would have
been perfectly just, perfectly righteous, to punish us for our sin. But in his love, in his mercy, God
freely decided to save us. To change our sin-deadened hearts. And to give us the ability to trust in
Jesus as our Saviour.

Look, you are no more deserving(配得的) of salvation in Jesus, than anyone else in this world.

I am no more deserving of salvation than anyone else. None of us are.

We all are equally depraved, equally twisted, bent, away from God.

There is nothing in any of us, of any saving value.

Nothing that would move God to have mercy on us.

But God has simply decided to save you. Based on his plan, according to his good pleasure.

That means we should especially give God thanks. We especially should be praising Him, for choosing us in Christ. And having the gospel preached to us, and sending His Spirit, to give light to our darkened minds. And causing us to put our faith in Jesus.

[Read Romans 7:24-25a. Paul gives thanks to God.

In Romans 11:36 we read this, about our merciful God:

“For of Him, and through Him, and to Him, are all things, **TO WHOM BE GLORY FOREVER.**”

God must receive all glory and all praise, from us, forever and ever. AMEN.