

THIRD AND FOURTH HEADS OF DOCTRINE.

THE CORRUPTION OF MAN, HIS CONVERSION TO GOD, AND THE MANNER THEREOF

THIRD AND FOURTH HEAD: ARTICLE 1. Man was originally formed after the image of God. His understanding was adorned with a true and saving knowledge of his Creator, and of spiritual things; his heart and will were upright, all his affections pure, and the whole man was holy. But, revolting from God by the instigation of the devil and **by his own free will**, he forfeited these excellent gifts; and in the place thereof became involved in blindness of mind, horrible darkness, vanity, and perverseness of judgment; became wicked, rebellious, and obdurate in heart and will, and impure in his affections.

THIRD AND FOURTH HEAD: ARTICLE 2. Man after the fall begat children in his own likeness. A corrupt stock produced a corrupt offspring. Hence all the posterity of Adam, Christ only excepted, have derived corruption from their original parent...by the propagation of a vicious nature, in consequence of the just judgment of God.

THIRD AND FOURTH HEAD: ARTICLE 3. Therefore all men are conceived in sin, and are by nature children of wrath, incapable of saving good, prone to evil, dead in sin, and in bondage thereto; and without the regenerating grace of the Holy Spirit, they are neither able nor willing to return to God, to reform the depravity of their nature, or to dispose themselves to reformation

I.e., Adam (and Eve), prior to the Fall, had free will; that is, prior to the Fall, neither Adam nor Eve had any inherent predisposition toward good or evil, obedience or disobedience toward God. However, in the Fall, man (Adam and his progeny) “forfeited these excellent gifts,” including his freedom to obey God, and as a result is “blind, vain, perverse in judgment, wicked, rebellious, impure, corrupt, by nature a child of wrath, incapable of saving good, prone to evil, dead in sin, in bondage to sin, and neither able nor willing to return to God, to reform their own depravity, or to dispose themselves to reformation.”

EVANGELISTIC NOTE: This is what men are according to the Bible. (This is what we were before God regenerated us.) Therefore, let us not be under any misconceptions regarding our evangelistic endeavors: we are not going to “talk anyone into following Christ,” and no fleshly trappings (list them here) are going to make it any easier for the spiritually dead man or woman we’re talking to stand up and walk out of their tomb. The Gospel of Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit are our only hope in this regard.

THIRD AND FOURTH HEAD: ARTICLE 4. There remain, however, in man since the fall, the glimmerings of natural light, whereby he retains some knowledge of God, or natural things, and of the difference between good and evil, and shows some regard for virtue and for good outward behavior. But so far is this light of nature from being sufficient to bring him to a saving knowledge of God and to true conversion that he is incapable of using it aright even in things natural and civil. Nay further, this light, such as it is, man in various ways renders wholly polluted, and hinders in unrighteousness, by doing which he becomes inexcusable before God.

I.e., although we affirm that men are *totally depraved* in their nature, that is, men after the Fall are unwilling and unable in themselves to please God, we deny that men are *utterly depraved* (men are as bad as they conceivably can be.) We acknowledge that there remain echoes of the *imago Dei* in every human.

EVANGELISTIC NOTE: The 3 great *transcendentals* of the Christian faith are TRUTH, GOODNESS, and BEAUTY, and God – in His mercy – has allowed remnants of these to remain even in Fallen men and women, primarily as manifest in the conscience. We must learn to speak to men's consciences – not being diverted or allowing men to be diverted by intellectual smokescreens – because it is through the conscience whereby comes *conviction*.

THIRD AND FOURTH HEAD: ARTICLE 5. In the same light are we to consider the law of the decalogue, delivered by God to His peculiar people, the Jews, by the hands of Moses. For though it reveals the greatness of sin, and more and more convinces man thereof, yet, as it neither points out a remedy nor imparts strength to extricate him from his misery, but, being weak through the flesh, leaves the transgressor under the curse, man cannot by this law obtain saving grace.

I.e., as we seek to birth and foster conviction in the consciences of men, the primary path is laid out for us in the Moral Law as codified primarily in the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:1-17). The Moral Law – rather, men's continued violation of it – provides the foundation for conviction of sin and the realization of man's need for reconciliation with God through Jesus Christ.

THIRD AND FOURTH HEAD: ARTICLE 6. What, therefore, neither the light of nature nor the law could do, that God performs by the operation of the Holy Spirit through the word or ministry of reconciliation; which is the glad tidings concerning the Messiah, by means whereof it has pleased God to save such as believe, as well under the Old as under the New Testament.

I.e., the Law itself does not save; it only condemns. Upon observance of conviction of sin, we can provide the Gospel which saves (according to God's regenerating mercy).