

The Natural Man's Struggle with Reformed Theology: Man as Sinner vs. Man as Evolving

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Natural Man and Reformed Theology. Tonight, man as sinner versus man as evolving. If this gives you a headache, you don't have to come next week, okay? I will give you a pass. You don't have to do this. But if this does not give you a headache, maybe we can think it through and maybe we can even try to do a better job of being a Christian in the world today. Because that's what I want you to do.

Quick review. Two parallels here: man as a Christian and man as a natural man. The Christian man believes in the Sovereignty of God, the natural man tends to believe in the sovereignty of man. The Christian believes in the authority of Scripture as an external source of truth, the natural man believes that he has rights and no one should tell him what he should or should not do, especially if the majority votes that it is okay. Hence, if the majority votes through its court systems or legislature that abortion is okay, what is all the commotion about? We voted. Heaven is what the Christian believes in. That there is an eternity out there. The natural man says that whether there is an eternity or not, all we really have is now. And so I want what "now" has to offer me. The Christian also says that not only is there Heaven out there, there is hell out there. And the natural man says, nah, not really. Everybody is responsible, I am not. Group responsibility—remember, if everyone is responsible, no one is responsible—that's this mush over here of this modern man's thinking versus this crispness of Christian (i.e. "Reformed" thinking)

Tonight, we are shifting gears a little bit because what we said so far in this series, most Christian groups—might dispute a little bit—but pretty much agree. It's acceptable to the majority of Christians. But tonight we are shifting gears. I told you, I think, once upon a time, that one of our historians of the church in the United States says that at the time of the American Revolution, approximately 75% of the population of the colonies was in one shape, form, or fashion, of the general reformed persuasion. 75% Presbyterian! No, not just exactly—but Reformed! Today, remember that sort of gave you a visual graph — we have 8-9% atheists, we've got 5-6% something else. We've got about 85% of our population identifying with the Christian faith. But over here on the extreme right (your right) is that little slice of Reformed Theology. I don't have good numbers on it; if anyone out there knows it, I want you to give it to me, I want to research

it, but my guesstimate is, that of that 85%, like 1%, maybe 2% is Reformed in their thinking. Do you realize how weird you really are? If you are a part of this 1-2%, then you are a part of a minority of this group of Christian thinking people. Now we are shifting gears. We are going from this 85% over here to this 1-2%. That's the 1-2%, I say the modern man and most of them claim some allegiance to some form of Christianity. This is where they have the greatest struggle.

My number one point of the struggle is the concept of human beings — mankind, human beings, men and women, boys and girls — oh gracious, did that not sound like John Reed Miller? Men and women, boys and girls — I remember him saying that — that's a side trip, I won't go there. I just remember hearing him preach, “men and women, boys and girls”...well, anyway. Man as sinner, human beings as sinners. Now, let's just define what we are talking about here. I'm going to do it fairly quickly, so take your nap if you want to, but I am going to do it fairly quickly.

Confession of Faith Chapter 6:

Our first parents, being seduced by the subtlety and temptation of Satan sinned, in eating the forbidden fruit. This their sin, God was *pleased* in accordance with His wise and holy counsel, to permit, having purposed to order it according to His own glory.

Key phrase: “to permit.” All you have to remember on that one is that God chose to permit. Paragraph two:

By this sin, they fell from their original righteousness and communion with sin and so became dead in sin and so became wholly defiled in all the parts and faculties of soul and body.

Key phrase: “wholly defiled.” Paragraph three:

They being the root of all mankind, the guilt of the sin was imputed and the same death in sin and corrupted nature conveyed to all their posterity, the sin being from them by ordinary generation.

Key word: “imputed.” This is the essence of our theology of human beings. Four...

From this original corruption whereby we are utterly indisposed, disabled, and made opposite to all good and holy incline to all evil, do precede all actual transgressions.

Phrase: “utterly indisposed to good.” Boy, I am telling you. To most people, that is going to be like a real clanging symbol that they don't like to hear in their ear. Number five...

This corruption of nature during this life doth remain in those that are regenerated and although it be through Christ pardoned and mortified, yet both itself and all the motions thereof are truly and properly sin.

Phrase: “we have a corrupt nature” even as Christians. We have sin in us. There is not a person who has lived the last five minutes without sin. I don't know what it was, but it was. Alright, number six...

Every sin, both original and actual, being a transgression of the righteous law of God and contrary there unto, doth in its own nature bring guilt upon the sin whereby he is bound over to the wrath of God and the curse of the law and so made subject to death with all miseries, spiritual, temporal, and eternal.

One word: “death.” So what do we believe about sin? God permitted. We are wholly defiled. It is imputed to us. We are utterly indisposed to good. We have a corruption of our nature and the natural consequence of all is death. That's reformed theology, y'all. We believe that. And to be a minister, you have to subscribe to it. To be a teaching elder or officer, you have to subscribe to these standards of our church. Now, I am not going to read all of these scriptures that I could read to back it up. But, I am going to read one.

Ephesians 2:

As for you, you are dead in your transgressions and sins in which you used to live when you followed in the ways of this world. And of the ruler of the Kingdom of the air, the Spirit who is now at work in those who are now disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the craving of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts, like the rest, we were by nature, objects of wrath. But because of His great love for us, God who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in our transgressions. It is by grace you have been saved.

That's the core of Christianity right there. By grace, we have been saved. We're sinners. But by grace, we have been saved. I have pages of verses backing it up but I am not going to take the time to read them right now. Reformed theology then believes in Total Depravity. Now, I sometimes like to get the simplest definition that I can possibly get because that's the one that is easiest for me to get my head around. Baker's dictionary of theology, “total depravity,” or “depravity, total” is the way that it is listed. What total depravity is not: (I love the way they lay it out here!) Total Depravity does not mean that every man has exhibited his depravity as thoroughly as he could. We are not as bad as we could be! We are not all as awful as we could be. Total depravity does not mean that sinners do not have conscience or native induction concerning God. Yea, we are sinners and we are totally depraved, but we can still recognize that there is a God. Satan knows that there is a god. Total depravity does not mean that sinners

will indulge in every form of sin. There are some things that I wouldn't do, I don't care what you tell me—whether I was a Christian or not. All sin is not appealing to all people. Total depravity does not mean that depraved man does not perform actions that are good in the sight of men. Yes, we have benevolence from pagans. Yes, we have non-Christians who do public works and goods. Of course we do. All total depravity does not mean that people don't attempt to do good to fellow man. That doesn't mean that it is good, by the way. The heart determines what we do and the heart is deceitful above all things and who could know it. But, it looks good to us.

Okay, total depravity. Now, I'm talking about this right wing over here; this little sliver of people over here who believe this kind of stuff. The bulk of people in the general cauldron of Christianity in this country would generally fall under the heading of being Arminian. Now, I know that this congregation is fairly well educated, so you know about Arminius and his name and the Latin version of his name, and you know that he was reared in a very Reformed home, but he got to the point where he questioned the sovereign grace of God in salvation, and hence, they came up, the Arminians, with five-points. And the five points of Calvinism are a reaction to those five points. These are the five points: God elects or reprobates on the basis of foreseen faith or unbelief. God has a big DVD player and He can skip forward to the end of the movie and see how the good guy is going to be open to the Gospel and says, "I will elect Him." And He skips forward and says, "nah, I don't elect her." It's based on God's ability to look into the future and see the heart of man. It is not based upon the will of God. Salvation is based upon the will of the individual and God validating their willingness to accept Him. Now, we could pause here and I could go off on a side trip on this one, right now. Most Christianity in the United States today believes something of that. They don't believe that a loving God would send anyone to hell and He only sends those to hell who reject His reaching out to Him. But He loves everybody. As a matter of fact, point number two of the Arminian statement is that Christ died for all men and for every man although only believers are saved. Well, this is where we get to splitting theological hairs. Did Christ die for those who reject Him or did He die for the elect? Our theology teaches that Christ died for the elect. His death was sufficient for all mankind but efficient for the elect. Three, man is so depraved that divine grace is necessary under faith for any good deeds. Well, yea, I agree with that. We do need grace. Number four, this grace, may be resisted. Now you can probably, if you are familiar with the five-points of Calvinism, can get your TULIP phrases coming right out of it. This one is the "I" — Irresistible Grace. Number five, whether all who are truly regenerate will certainly persevere in the faith, is a point which needs further investigation—was the original point! I like that one! If you don't know, you say, well, we will figure that out in the future. This was a reaction to this sliver of Reformed faith over here. It also was a reaction to putting salvation wholly in God's hand. I want salvation to be in my hand, so therefore, I need to think it through so that I have something. After all, in some sense, it is my holding on to God. That is what most of those 85% say. Total Depravity, man as corrupted by sin to the point of

inability to choose God by his own power is the key beginning point of Tulip. But also, as a distinguishing mark of Reformed Theology. Now, it's not a popular concept in the world today. You find an awful lot of Christians who struggle with the harshness of Reformed Theology. At the same time, we have a rebirth of Reformed Theology among some of the "non-traditionally" formed groups of the country. I've told you before that there is a real birth of Reformed theology in the Baptist church—they started out being Reformed, but there has been a rebirth of Baptists in their Reformed thinking. Now, that's what we believe.

Now man as evolving. A whole different deal. Man as evolving doesn't want to use the word sin. It's offensive as a matter of fact, so we use another word as opposed to sin. And we will get to more of that in just a minute. But that other word tends to be, "morality." So we want a common morality and morality tends to be what we as people agree to and vote on and have a consensus to. Now, if we believe that man is evolving, we have to in some way understand that his religion is evolving to. Hence, we try to harmonize so our 84% do try to harmonize evolution and the development of religion. Now, I'm not going to go into all of that. I don't claim to be an expert at evolution—that's not my message. Please hear me. But there are certain things that evolutionary theory does talk about. There are only sort of five key views, one of which is getting more and more popular. One of which is starting off, they use the word descent. I think a more proper term would be "ascent" — they see us as moving up. But let's use their term, "descent." In religion, there is descent with modification as a mere process of change. We just, you know, change over time. So that morality changes over time. By the way, morality has changed over time. I bet you there are some women in here with britches on. My grandmother would not be caught dead with britches on. I just want to tell y'all that, okay? Of course, my wife wears britches to church, but my grandmother wouldn't. And she would have said it was immoral for women to wear britches to church. But anyway, you get my message. Okay? There is a change of morality—it evolves. That kind of thing.

Secondarily, using dissent with modification is a creative process. Simple, spontaneous, life becoming more complex from a single cell to a two cell to a fifty-cell to an organism to a functioning organism with differing abilities, senses, etc. We're evolving into a more complex creature. We also evolve into a more complex creature in terms of our understanding of God and faith, etc. Dissent with modification with a creative process at work and the most common creative process proposed by the evolutionists, Christian or non-Christian, and I believe there can be Christians who believe in this—it is not the unpardonable sin. A particular form, one of the most popular forms is the survival of the fittest. So only the fit survive. And so, the dog with the tail that can swat the flies away survives and the one without a tail doesn't. You know? Survival of the fittest. I have said this before and I will probably say it again before we finish this series. We are in a real conflict in the world today and we won't even realize philosophically what we are doing. The people who espouse evolution the strongest are the ones who are fighting the hardest against it because the ones who espouse evolution tend

to be more socialistic in their thinking, but they are the ones who do not want the survival of the fittest—they want survival of all. I made that point before but I need to make it again because here it comes — it is coming up again. Survival of the fittest. If that were the case, then we would believe that there would be a tiered level to society. Those who had not developed as highly would be lower on the totem pole and what we believe today is that there should be no totem pole. Interesting.

Number four, dissent with modification with the addition that there is a spontaneity here—there is a spontaneous something here that calls life. And then the fifth view, commonly called theistic evolution. And this is where you believe in the evolutionary process but you believe that there is a spontaneous something that happens because God steps in and does something to the evolutionary process. Theistic evolution tends to be very popular in the church today. Now, forgive me, I don't mean to make light of it but I am going to give you my little four-stepper here.

Some believed that something came from something by means of something. Others believed something came from nothing by something. Still others believed that humans came from something by something. And then others believe that humans came from something by God. There is a something in all of them, though. The question that cannot be answered by the evolutionist is, “where did it start?” I understand there can be change, but I don't understand where it started. If you take God out of the equation, where did it come from? The something is the big catch-all, the big problem. Well, I always have to stir psychology into all of this mess, don't I?

Well, the psychologists have a research model here. Again, we are looking at morality. And we're trying to explain human behavior that violates social norms. Of course, Brister would call it sin. But we are trying to explain human behavior that violates the social norm. That violates morality, even. How do we explain it?

Here's a quote, “Some individuals are more likely than others to engage in wrongdoing. For instance, those who cheat on exams tend to be low in the ability to delay gratification, low in interpersonal trust, and low in self-esteem. Such people also tend to be high in sociopathic tendencies, high innate need for approval, and high in chronic self-destructive tendencies. Now that may sound like a bunch of garbage to you, but do you realize what I just said? We have laid out about six areas that if society will address those areas, we can make people more moral. We can educate them out of —well, what the Christian will call, “sin.” So if we have a program in the schools to teach children to delay gratification, they won't get into trouble as much. And if we have a program that helps their self-esteem, they won't be as likely to cheat and steal. And furthermore if they do cheat and steal, it is our fault for not having a program to teach them not to cheat and steal, by giving them good self-esteem. Is that not what we are doing mainly in society today? Oh, how do we get morality then?

Again, evolving. Again, the Christian calls it sin but this evolving morality—will we need to train people so that they will be more aware of, sympathetic to, and involved with the process of change and see the greater good? Forgive me, I may be saying something I shouldn't say, but maybe that's how we expect a country dedicated to our destruction and to the destruction of others, to sit down and REASON with us because surely they are going to understand that the greater good comes from NOT doing this. I'm sorry, but that reminds me of trying to educate a Kamikaze pilot diving on a ship in WWII. I don't think it would work. But anyway, side note. In terms of religious thinking, a lot of what I'm telling you right now comes from this book right here — I always like to “show and tell,” well, this is show and tell. I had a client at one point in my career who was a text book salesman for a book company and he would send me free copies of these textbooks—they give them out to the professors in all the schools, you see. And he would slip me some every now and again. This is when that he gave me—a college textbook on the study of adolescents. If you have a kid in a college right now, if they take a course on adolescents, it may not be this textbook, but it would be one very similar to it. The reason I say that is because in that textbook, it is understood — I want to give you this model that is developed by two people, Meadow and Kao. They came up with a system of how we are to understand the development of religion/morality in our young people. And if you have a child in college, they will have studied something like this at some point in time. This theory says that we all start off over here, in what they call an extrinsic orientation to religion. That is to say, my religious thinking is determined overwhelmingly by what goes on around me. So, if my parents teach me the catechism, I will learn the catechism words. So I instill that. You all have heard the phrase—“give us the child until he is six years old and we will have him for life” because we will inculcate certain things in them. This extrinsic—we surround them with religious stuff. But in our moral/religious development, there is a next stage that comes and that's where observance begins to take over. Observance is when I begin to do the ritual of the church. I get where I go to Sunday morning, SS, and church so much, that if we go on vacation, I feel guilty if we don't go. So now my religion is not just what I have had extrinsically around me. It is also involves, “I am used to doing these things and if I am not doing them, I don't feel right.” So that sort of keeps me shaken up. Extrinsic observance. So the theory goes that religion becomes more intrinsic. It becomes part of the way I think and feel inside. It becomes the way in which I breath, the way I think, the way it is a part of my personality. But this text book doesn't stop right there. It goes on through a fourth stage. It makes a circle and brings it back up to here. They say that the highest form of moral/religious development is when the individual develops what they call, “autonomy.”

Autonomy — the tendency, where I begin to think for myself. The more important religion is the particular family of the individual, the more likely it is that religion will become a significant factor in the young person's moral development. Moving on, autonomous religiosity or religiousness is a step beyond intrinsic faith and

represents the most mature stage of personal religious development. Individuals who have reached this level of religious development, exhibit a more advanced religious orientation characterized by greater independence of thought and practice and concern for others than those in earlier stages whereas most higher religious groups advocate intrinsic religion, they seldom promote a thoroughly autonomous faith because such independence of thought and behavior is generally against the vested interest of organized religion. Now, what am I saying? What they are saying in the textbook, talking about religious development, and teaching our children in college, by the way, what they are saying is that the more independent your thinking is, the higher development you have in terms of your religiosity. Not only that, the more you think about other people, the more highly developed your religious thinking is. Now what does that do to the concept of divine absolute truth? What does that do to the concept of biblical standards? What does that do to the concept of a confessional church whereby you adhere to the confession of faith and the catechisms? It says that that is not the highest development of morality and religiosity. You need to move on from there and we wonder today why people aren't going to worship and to church. We wonder why only these right wings weirdoes over here have attendance on Sunday morning? With a church that is filled up? I know the Pentecostals are filling them up too. I 'm not talking about that. But what I am saying is, we have a whole generation being told that you are the authority figure to make the decision about religion and it is up to you about what you wish to believe. And we wonder why they stop going to church. We don't fight the fight because we don't know if there is a fight. There is no such thing as absolute truth in that system. Now, there are other things I could say, but common sense seems to support a developmental moving away from sin. I happen to believe that common sense happens to support, not a moving away from sin, but a sophistication of sin. So that my sin becomes more sophisticated, so it is not that I go out and go to a house of no repute. I now have my computer where I can get virtually access to visually and auditorially, anything that I wish to watch. Sin becomes more sophisticated—we don't move away from it, we just get more sophisticated. It still does not explain the rawness of sin. Reaction...I'm through.

Reformed Theology holds to the sinfulness of humans and their inability to choose the good. Liberal theology has advocated the position of Reformed Theology and apparently favors theistic evolution and its developmental model of morality. Arminian theology works to see man—wants to see man and is capable of grabbing hold of God but understands that he may lose his grip. The Reformed doctrine of total depravity is a bitter pill for the humanist to swallow, a difficult pill for the Arminians to swallow, but a real comfort to the one who puts all hope in God's unmerited grace. So I end up by reading this: As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sin in which you used to live when you followed the ways of the world and of the ruler of the Kingdom of the air, the Spirit who is now at work in those who are now disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the craving of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts, like the rest, we were by nature, objects of wrath—but, because of his

great love for us, God who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ, even when we were dead in transgressions. It is by grace you have been saved and God raised us up with Christ and seated us with Him in the Heavenly realms with Christ Jesus in order that the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in His kindness to us in Christ Jesus, for it is by grace you have been saved through faith—it is not from yourselves. It is the gift of God, not of works, so that no one can boast.

That's Reformed Theology and that's Christianity. Let's pray:

Heavenly Father, we pray that you will enable us to have that sense of awareness of your good pleasure, that awareness that we wish to serve you and love you, but Lord, may we always realize that we struggle with and live with the sin within us as we go through the process of sanctification. And until we reach that process of glorification, we will have that struggle. Encourage us, but may we be encouraged by your Sovereignty, by your love, and by your care, by the fact that you did it all. In Christ's name we pray, Amen.

Please stand...

And now may the grace to the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God the Father and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, Amen.

Singing of Doxology.

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