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What Is The Importance Of This Doctrine?

There are two remarks which we must make by way of conclusion.

In the first place, the importance of this doctrine is theological.

This means two things.

First of all, the truth of total depravity is not an isolated doctrine. It is closely connected to and interwoven with the other four points of Calvinism. And because this is true, this doctrine is closely connected with the whole truth of Scripture. It is with good reason that our beautiful Heidelberg Catechism begins its entire discussion of the truth with the significant statement of total depravity:

Are we then so corrupt that we are wholly incapable of doing any good, and inclined to all wickedness?

Indeed we are; except we are regenerated by the Spirit of God.

It is on this foundation that the Catechism erects the whole structure of the truth. The truth of total depravity is part of the whole truth of Scripture. If this truth is denied, softened, vitiated in any respect, it becomes impossible to preserve any of the truth of God's Word. Historically this has proved true. And this lies in the nature of the case. And so this is true also of the five points of Calvinism. A denial of total depravity leads to a denial of sovereign grace. This in turn leads to a denial of limited atonement and unconditional election. And the preservation of the saints necessarily falls by the wayside. This cannot be demonstrated in detail in this chapter. This shall be amply made clear in the chapters to follow. But it ought to be clear that if man is not totally depraved, then grace cannot possibly be sovereign. To the extent that he is not totally depraved, he is capable of doing good. And to that extent he is capable of participating in the work of salvation. And to that extent grace is not sovereign at all. The two truths stand or fall together. And so it is with the whole of the truth.

Secondly, all this means (and this is most serious) that the truth of total depravity is the only truth which preserves intact the glory of God. To the extent that good is ascribed to man, glory is taken away from the only adorable God. To the extent that man is said to be other than the awful sentence of Scripture. God is no more the glorious sovereign and holy God of heaven and earth.

And this brings us to the last point. This truth is also important as far as the life of the child of God is concerned.

The doctrine of total depravity is not cold and abstract dogma. It is the living confession of the people of God. But even that confession is not something which they make of themselves. It is the fruit of grace. For characteristic of the sinner is that he exalts himself in pride, haughtiness and arrogance. In his frightening conceit he refuses to admit his total depravity and boasts of his own goodness before the face of the Most High. But when the shining light of God's holiness and the sovereign power of grace penetrates into the heart of God's elect child, and he sees himself standing exposed before the face of Him Who searches the hearts, then he hears thundering in his ears the awful sentence of Scripture. He sees himself as worthless, corrupt, depraved, incapable of doing any good. And the words of the saints of all ages ring in his own heart: "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me." "God be merciful to me, a sinner." "Oh, wretched man that I am. Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"

This is the living confession of the child of God. And when that confession grips his soul and he sees himself as he truly is, as God's Word describes him, then, with tear-filled eyes, he can also see the cross. Only then. For in the consciousness of sin he can see the wonder, the power of the cross; the mercy and grace revealed there; the infinite splendor and love of God manifested in that blood-spattered tree. And seeing this, he sees the wonder of sovereign grace; and from his heart arises a doxology of praise and glory to God - the God of his salvation.