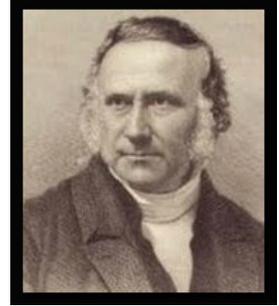


Total Depravity



About to call upon a young woman, to whom I had sometimes spoken on the subject of religion, but who uniformly appeared very indifferent; I began to consider what I should say to her. I recollected, that, although she had always been polite to me, yet she evidently did not like me; and therefore I deemed it my duty, if possible, not to allow her dislike to me, to influence her mind against religion. I recollected also, that I had heard of her inclination towards another denomination, whose religious sentiments were very different from my own; and I thought therefore, that I must take care not to awaken prejudices, but aim to reach her conscience and her heart. The most of her relatives and friends were members of my church, she had been religiously educated, was a very regular attendant upon divine worship; and I knew, therefore, that she must have considerable intellectual knowledge, on the subject of religion. But she was a gay young woman, loved amusements and thoughtless society; and I supposed she would be very reluctant to yield any personal attention to her salvation, lest it should interfere with her pleasures. And beyond all this, I had heard, that she possessed a great share of independence, and the more her friends had urged her to attend to her salvation, the more she seemed resolved to neglect it.

I rang the bell, inquired for her, and she soon met me in the parlor. I immediately told her for what purpose I had called; and asked whether she was willing to talk with me on the subject of her religion. She replied:

“I am willing to talk with you; but I don’t think as you do, about religion.”

“I do not ask you to think as I do. I may be wrong; but the word of God is right. I have not come here to intrude my opinions upon you, but to induce you to act agreeably to your own.”

“Yes,” she replied, (with a very significant toss of the head,) “you all say so. But if anybody ventures to differ from you, then they are ‘heretics,’ and ‘reprobates.’”

“I beg pardon, Miss S. I really do not think you can say that of me.”
“Well I mean mother, and the rest of them; and I suppose you are just like them. If I do differ from you, I think I might be let alone, and left to my own way.”

“Most certainly,” said I, “if your own way is right.”

“Well,” says she, “I am a Unitarian.”

“I am very glad to hear it; I did not know as you were anything.”

“I mean,” said she, “that I think more like the Unitarians, than like you.”

“I doubt it,” said I; “but, no matter. Never mind what I think. I am no rule for you. I do not ask you to think as I do. Let all that go. You may call me fool, or bigot, or—”

“You are no fool; but I think you are a bigot,” says she.

“Very well,” said I; “I am happy to find you so frank. And you—” “Oh,” said she, blushing, “I did not mean to say that; indeed I did not. That is too impudent.”

“Not a bit,” said I. “It is just right.”

“Well,” said she, “it is true that I think so; but it was not polite to say it.”

“I thank you for saying it. But no matter what I am. I wish to ask you about yourself first; and then you may say anything to me that you please to say. Do you believe the Bible?”

“Yes; to be sure I do!” (Tartly.)

“Are you aiming to live according to it? For example, are you daily praying to God to pardon and save you?”

“No!” said she; (with an impudent accent)

“Does not the Bible command you to pray! ‘to seek the Lord while he may be found, and call upon him while he is near?’”

“Yes, I know that; but I don’t believe in total depravity.”

“No matter. I do not ask you to believe in it. But I suppose you believe you are a sinner?”

“Why, yes.” (Impatiently.)

“And need God’s forgiveness?”

“Yes.”

“Are you seeking for it?”

“No.”

“Ought you not to be seeking for it?”

“Yes; I suppose so.”

“Well, then, will you begin, without any more delay? and act as you know you ought, in order to be saved?”

“You and I don’t agree,” says she.

“No matter for that. But we agree in one thing: I think exactly as you do, that you ought to seek the Lord. But you don’t agree with yourself. Your course disagrees with your conscience. You are not against me, but against your own reason and good sense—against your known duty, while you lead a prayerless life. I am surprised that a girl of your good mind will do so. You are just yielding to the desires of a wicked and deceitful heart. I do not ask you to think as I think, or feel as I feel; I only ask you to act according to the Bible and your own good sense. Is there anything unreasonable, or unkind, any bigotry in asking this?”

“Oh, no, sir. But I am sorry I called you a bigot.”

“I am glad of it. I respect you for it. You spoke as you felt.—But let that pass. I just want you to attend to religion in your own way, and according to God’s word. I did not come here to abuse you, or domineer over you, but to reason with you. And now, suffer me to ask you, if you think it right and safe to neglect salvation, as you are doing? I know you will answer me frankly.”

“No; I do not think it is.”

“Have you long thought so?”

“Yes; to tell you the truth, I have, a good while.”

“Indeed! and how came you still to neglect?”

“I don’t know! But they keep talking to me, a kind of scolding I call it; and they talk in such a way, that I am provoked, and my mind turns against religion. If they would talk to me as you do, and reason with me, and not be dinging at me, and treating me as if I were a fool, I should not feel so.”

Said I, “They may be unwise perhaps, but they mean well; and you ought to remember, that religion is not to be blamed for their folly.—And now, my dear girl, let me ask you seriously;—will you attend to this matter of your salvation as well as you can, according to the word of God and with prayer, and endeavor to be saved? Will you do it, without any farther delay? If you are not disposed to do so; if you think it best, and right, and reasonable to neglect it; if you do not wish me to say anything more to you about it; then, say so, and I will urge you no more: I shall be sorry, but I will be still. I am not going to annoy you, or treat you impolitely.—What do you say? shall I leave you and say no more?”

“I don’t wish you to leave me.”

“Well, do you wish, to seek the Lord?”

“I wish to be saved,” said she. “But I never can believe in total depravity. The doctrine disgusts me. It sounds so much like can’t. I never will believe it. I abhor it. And I won’t believe it.”

“Perhaps not,” said I. “I do not ask you to believe it. But I ask you to repent of sin now—to improve your day of grace, and get ready for death and heaven. I ask you to love the world supremely no longer—to deny yourself and follow Christ, as you know you ought to do. When you sincerely try to do these things; you will begin to find out something about your heart, that you do not know now.”

“But I don’t like doctrines! I want a practical religion!”

“That practical religion is the very thing I am urging upon you; the practice of prayer—the practice of repentance—the practice of self-denial—the practice of loving and serving God in faith. I care no more about doctrines than you do, for their own sake. I only want truth, which shall guide you rightly and safely, and want you to follow it.”

“Well,” said she, “if I attempt to be religious, I shall be a Unitarian.”

“Be a Unitarian then, if the Bible and the Holy Spirit will make you one. Do not be afraid to be a Unitarian. But get at the truth, and follow it, according to your own sober judgment. Study your Bible, for your own heart. Get right. Pray God to direct you. And never rest, till you feel, that God is your friend and you are his. I beseech you to this; because I love you and wish you to be right and happy. And now, my dear girl, tell me, will you try to do it?”

“Yes, sir, I will.”

“I thank you for that promise. And I do trust God will bless you.” In a few days she sent for me. I found her very sad. She told me she was in trouble. She had not found it so easy a thing to be a Christian as she expected. Her heart rebelled and recoiled; and she did not know what was the matter. Her mind would wander. The world would intrude. Instead

of “getting nearer to religion, she was getting farther off, every day.” She wanted to know, if other people felt so, when they tried to be Christians. I said but little to her, except to direct her in God’s promises, to those that seek him with all their heart. She desired me to pray with her, which I did.—As I rose to depart; she affectionately entreated me not to neglect her.

About ten days after this, she sent for me again. I obeyed her summons. She told me with tears in her eyes, that she never dreamed she was so wicked. She said the more she tried to love God and give up sin; the more her own heart opposed her. Her sins not only appeared greater; but it seemed to her, that sinning was as natural to her as breathing.

“What shall I do?” said she; “I have no peace, day or night! My resolutions are weak as water.”

I repeated texts of scripture to her. ‘In me is thy help. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts,’ (his thoughts are wrong,) ‘and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. Strive to enter in at the strait gate.’

I saw her several times. She said her troubles increased upon her, temptations came up every day; and it seemed to her, “there never was so wicked a heart, as she had to contend with.” Among other things, she said, some Christian people would keep talking to her, and she did not wish to hear them. I advised her to avoid them as much as possible. And without letting her know it, I privately requested her officious exhorters to say nothing to her. But I found it hard work to keep them still. And when she complained to me again of their officious inquiries about her feelings; I requested her to leave the room, whenever anyone of them should venture on such an inquiry again.

She continued her prayerful attempts after the knowledge of salvation; and in a few weeks she found peace and joy in believing in Christ. She told me she knew her entire depravity; “but,” said she, “I never should have believed it, if I had not found it out by my own experience. It was just as you told me. When I really tried to be a Christian, such as is described in the Bible; I found my heart was all sin and enmity to God. And I am sure, I never should have turned to Christ, if God had not shown me mercy. It was all grace.

“Now I believe in total depravity. But I learnt it alone. You did not convince me of it.”

“I never tried,” said I.

I know you didn’t; and it was well for me that you let it alone. If you had tried to prove it, or gone into a dispute about Unitarianism; I believe I should not have been led to my Saviour.”

She afterwards made a public profession of religion, which she still lives to honor.