

Total Depravity - John Reisinger

The Doctrine of Total Depravity John Reisinger

There are basically only two religions in the whole world. The one begins with the free will of man and the other one begins with the sovereignty of God. The first one keeps telling you what "You must do," for God, and the second one declares what "God has done for you" that you could not do for yourself. The religion of "free will" pictures salvation as a possibility for all men if they are willing to cooperate with God by believing. The religion of free grace presents salvation as a certainty for all of the elect of God because God gives faith as a gift. Does your preacher keep emphasizing "do" or does he talk about "done"?

The many varieties of the religion based on man's free will differ only on what man must do in order to find acceptance with God. One says he must go to Mecca and kiss the sacred rock; another says he must bathe in the Ganges river; another says he must be baptized by immersion; and others says he must produce faith with his free will. The theological term for this view is Auto-soteriology, which means "self-salvation," or salvation depending, in some sense, on man's cooperation with God. The religion of free grace is called Theo-soteriology, which means "salvation depending wholly on God's grace and power." The Biblical gospel is "God saves sinners"—period. That means God (all by Himself with no help at all from the sinner) saves (actually and truly and not merely "tries to save") sinners (helpless, hopeless, guilty, hell-deserving people who can do absolutely nothing). The gospel it is not "God gives every man a chance to be saved if the sinner will only cooperate by furnishing the necessary faith." In Theo-soteriology, all of the glory belongs to God alone because His sovereign grace and power alone is what makes the difference. In Auto-soteriology, the glory is shared by God and the sinner because it was "the sinner's willingness" that made the real difference between himself and other lost people that enabled God to effect salvation.

Genesis 11:1-9⁺ shows these two basic ideas in the words "let us" as these words are uttered by man and the same words are uttered by God. "Let us (man) build a tower to reach up to God" (Auto-soteriology) is the religion based on man's will. It begins with man and his effort. "Let us (Triune God) go down" (Theo-soteriology) is the religion of sovereign grace that comes to a depraved sinner and enables the dead sinner to repent and believe.

When a knowledgeable believer says, "The Lord saved me," he does not mean the Lord Jesus Christ saved him. He means, "the Lord God the Father saved me in electing grace; the Lord God the Son saved me by His atoning death; and the Lord God the Holy Spirit saved me by opening my heart and giving me faith." Each member of the blessed Trinity has a specific, and essential, part to play in every sinner's salvation.

One of the clear proofs of how man-centered our theology has become in the last 100 years is the near total absence of either hymns or sermons depicting the sovereign electing grace of the Father or the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit. Remember that we have been saved by a Triune God. Should we not gladly acknowledge and worship the Father for His electing grace even as we praise the Son for His vicarious death? Are we not duty bound to acknowledge and worship the Holy Spirit for raising us out of spiritual death and giving us the gift of faith and life? There is an absence of good hymns depicting the work of the Father and the work of the Holy Spirit because of the failure to grasp the Biblical doctrine of Total Depravity.

Introduction: What does the phrase "Total Depravity" mean?

I remember a college professor who constantly depicted the Puritans as kill-joys. He blamed their problem on their belief in total depravity. The professor's caricature was, "A puritan is a man who cannot sleep at night because he is afraid that somewhere in the world someone may be having fun." The Puritans really got bad press in that man's class.

The carnal mind hates the doctrine of total depravity. Nothing cuts across the grain of the modern religious, psychological, and philosophical view of man and his basic nature as much as the truth that man is a depraved sinner. The unchallenged absolute in academic circles today is that "Man is basically good." Biblical depravity says the exact opposite. The Bible clearly sees that environment plays a great part in shaping an individual. However, it traces the root cause of all man's problems to a wicked and selfish heart. The sun and rain cannot bring a single plant out the ground that is not already there in seed form, nor can a bad environment produce any fruit that is not potentially already in our hearts. Everyone of us is capable, apart from grace, of being as wicked as any person who ever lived. If you balk at that statement you have probably never become a Christian!

Once the fact of total depravity is accepted, then sovereign grace is man's only hope. As long as this fact is rejected and man's fictitious goodness is exalted, men will merely find more ways to justify their rebellion to God and His revealed truth.

Here is Webster's Dictionary definition: "DEPRAVED: characterized by corruption; perverted; evil . . .". The word "TOTAL" means what it says and needs no comment. The word "depraved" is not in your concordance nor is the word "Trinity." However, both of these truths are stamped on nearly every page of the Bible.

Here is the doctrine of total depravity in a nutshell:

"Man is bad, but he is not that bad, but he really is bad." That means,

- (1) Man is a sinner.
- (2) But he is not nearly as sinful in actual practice as he could be.
- (3) However, he is really is a totally depraved sinner in the sight of God.

It takes both a negative and a positive wire to produce electricity. Often times it is essential to clearly spell out what we do not believe, before it is possible to understand what we actually do believe. We will begin our study with things that we do not believe even though we are often very wrongly accused of these things.

First: Negative. Let me show what we do NOT mean by "total depravity."

1. Total depravity does not mean that man is without a conscience or any sense of right and wrong.

People often have a strong impulse to do "right," and they often feel remorse for doing "wrong." However, this only proves that man still has some remnants of his original creation. He still has a conscience and, depending on environment and training, it can be very strong. Conscience often drives people into a mental institution, and, in some cases, even to suicide. The following texts clearly show that man has a conscience.

John 8:9[±]. And they which heard it, being convicted by their own conscience, went out one by one . . . "

Romans 2:14,15[±]. For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: Which show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another.

C. S. Lewis spoke of the universal "ought" in ever man. Every person will accuse others (and themselves in their conscience) of not doing what they "ought" to have done. This universal admission by every creature of a "right and wrong" will be one of the righteous grounds upon God will judge all men as guilty. Man's constant moral judgement of other people is absolute proof that man is a moral being created in the moral image of God. Man is not an animal without any consciousness of his creator. Man is a rational and moral creature who makes volitional choices based on both his rationality and moral consciousness.

Suppose the day that you were born God hung an invisible tape recorder around your neck. Every time you said either "you should have done such and such," or "you should not have done such and such," the invisible recorder went blip, blip, blip and recorded what you said. In the day of judgement, imagine God getting out the tape, with your own words of moral judgments on it, and saying, "I want to be fair in judging you. Therefore I will judge you on the exact standards that you boldly professed to believe. I will use your own words. I will not use either the Ten Commandments, or the words of Christ in the Sermon on the Mount, I will use what you yourself fervently acknowledged (by judging others) was right and wrong." Could anything be more fair? Would we not all be proven guilty before God? Do you realize that very thing is going to happen!

Man indeed has a consciousness of right and wrong. We need only read Ann Landers or visit a mental institution to see that people often have a very deep consciousness of morality that sometimes screams at them. However, this does not mean that these people are convicted of sin in God's sight. A "guilty conscience" is not the same as "conviction of sin." People have great remorse for the results of sin who are not in the least concerned that they have offended God.

2. Total Depravity does not mean that every sinner is devoid of all of the qualities that are both pleasing to men and useful to society, when those qualities are judged only by a human standard.

Mother Teresa and Albert Switzer were great humanitarians. The world is a better place for many people because of them and their ministry. They rightly earned and deserve our praise for their humanitarian labors. However, they were still guilty sinners in the sight of a holy God. All the "good" they did will not earn them grace in God's sight. They too are included in the "you" who must be "born again." Were these two people "much better persons" than an Adolf Hitler or a Charles Manson? Of course they were, if you judge only on the basis of a human standard. Is it possible that a Manson or a Hitler can be saved by grace and go to Heaven—and a Mother Teresa and a Switzer be lost and go to Hell because of self-righteousness? The answer is yes, both situations are possible, if you judge by God's revealed standards.

A parent's love and willingness to suffer even death for their child's well-being is certainly a "good" thing that deserves to be admired and applauded. However, such actions do not prove the parent has grace in his or her heart, nor does it prove they are not totally depraved in God's sight. All it proves is that man still has vestiges of the image of God from his original creation. A patriot's sacrifice for his country is another illustration of the same principle.

A bombed and ruined religious temple may have fragments of beautiful columns or parts of painted walls that are perfectly in tact. However, it is not a fit place for worship. It is "totally" ruined for the purpose for which it was built, even though a few isolated parts are not totally destroyed. Man has remnants of his creation in Eden, but he is "totally" ruined by sin as far as ability or desire to love and worship God.

Suppose a doctor in the Navy lead a crew into mutiny and took control of a Navy ship. He then uses the ship in piracy. The Navy finds him and demands that he either surrender or they will destroy the ship. Upon his refusal, the Navy brings in the necessary fire power and begins to fight. During the battle many men on the rebel ship are wounded. The doctor works without rest or food and risks his life over and over again in order to give his men the necessary medical treatment to keep them alive. When the Navy finally captures the ship they will hang both the captain and his men because of their mutiny. The heroic "good" which the captain did in risking his life for his men will help neither him or them at the trial. The judges who sentences the man to die may "admire his courage" but he is still a traitor against the government and will therefore be put to death. None of his "good" will count for anything. The same principle applies to the all of the "good" that sinful men do.

It is this principle that is being taught in Proverbs 21:4. "A high look, and a proud heart, and the plowing of the wicked, is sin." It is not the actual plowing of the man that is sinful, but the sinful attitude of the man's heart.

(1) His plowing is an exhibition of his faith in the seasons. If he did not believe that spring and summer were sure to follow, he would not plow and plant. His very act of plowing is an expression of faith in God's providence and will condemn the man's unbelieving heart for refusing to worship the very God he constantly acknowledged.

(2) The man will curse God if there is too little or too much rain, but he will not praise God for a good harvest. His very cursing shows that he knows God is for real and that He is in control of the weather. The man's pride and self-sufficiency will not allow him to give God the credit for the good weather. The whole situation shows that his very plowing will someday be the evidence that condemns him in his sin of unbelief.

3. We are not saying that every sinner is prone to every form of sin.

The Pharisee's prove this point. Jesus acknowledges that some of the things the Pharisees did were right and "good." However, they also selectively omitted some other things. They will be condemned for the very good things they did because it proves they had an understanding of what God wanted. Their deliberate omissions proves the depravity of the hearts.

Matthew 23:23+ "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for you pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought you to have done, and not to leave the other undone."

One form of sin will often exclude another form of sin.

(1) The "miser" will be delivered from the sin of "wastefulness."

(2) The "work-a-holic" will be delivered from sloth and laziness.

(3) The "Pride of position" will often exclude immorality but only for fear of being caught. Shakespeare said it well: "I see it has pleased Devil drunkenness, to give place to Devil wrath."

This truth explains the "apparent" change in some men when elevated to a position of authority. Their nice personality is replaced with a tyrannical attitude. Actually the man did not really change at all. His true self came to the surface for the first time. The man was always like that in his heart, but he never had the authority or opportunity to demonstrate it.

4. We are not saying that every sinner is as intense as he can be in his sin. Remember our original definition, "Man is bad, but he is not that bad, but he really is bad."

No one person has ever expressed all of the sin of which they were capable. The following texts demonstrate this fact:

Genesis 15:16+. In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here, for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure.

2 Timothy 3:13+. But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived.

Every year we are convinced that society and the world simply cannot possibly get any worse. However, it does get worse and will continue to do so until our Lord returns. The old saying is true: "You aren't seen nothing yet!" I would not want to live in the same city, county, or state where God permitted one individual to express all of the rebellion of which he was capable. We ought to constantly thank God for His restraining grace.

We now put the positive wire into place and show what we actually do believe about total depravity.

Second: Positive. What we DO mean by Total Depravity, or, What the Bible DOES teach on the subject.

Total depravity means that man is totally dead in sin and not just sick and dying. The sinner is not an emergency room case who desperately need attention before it too late—the sinner is a graveyard case. They are dead, not dying. They are not incurably sick and on the verge of death—they are already dead! Ephesians 2:1⁺ is clear: "And you has he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins . . ."

1. Total depravity means that every sinner, including you and me, is destitute or without that love to God which constitutes the fundamental and all-inclusive demand of God's law. The one great thing that all men owe to God is the one thing that they adamantly refuse to give Him.

Matthew 22:35-38⁺. Then one of them, which was a lawyer, asked him a question, tempting him, and saying, Master, which is the great commandment in the law? Jesus said unto him, You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment.

All men, without a single exception, are guilty of this sin. They simply do not "love God" and put Him first in any sense. They are commanded to do this 24 hours every day, but lost sinners have never consciously ever done one single thing in their whole life for the express purpose of glorifying God. They live to please themselves and have no thought of their indebtedness to God. I once pressed this fact on a high school teacher and he claimed that his three children were produced out of obedience to God's command to "be fruitful and multiply." When I asked if that was the only motive involved, he grinned and said, "Well, maybe not entirely."

This is what Jesus meant in John 5:42⁺, "But I know you, that you have not the love of God in you." That is, we lack the one thing essential in order to please God. We are not at all motivated by either duty or love to God. We are motivated entirely by sin and self.

2. Total Depravity means that every sinner is guilty of elevating some lower affection or desire above regard for God, His Law, and the Gospel. This is the opposite of #1 above. Sinners not only do not love the true God and put Him first, but they do love some other God and put that false God first.

2 Timothy 3:4⁺ . . . lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God.

It is not that "pleasures" are wrong in themselves. It is when pleasure becomes the cause for living and is a higher goal than knowing God Himself. God can justly complain that this attitude controls the hearts of all lost men.

Malachi 1:6⁺. A son honors his father, and a servant his master. If I am a father [in the sense of creation, JGR], where is the honor due me?

Sinners do not give God the love and worship that He deserves because they are filled with love for something else. They feel no "obligation" to God and therefore they cannot help but be "unthankful." Romans one is a perfect picture of sinful man's ungrateful proud heart.

3. That "something else" that men love is an idol called "self" or "me." Every sinner is determined, in his whole inward being and outward life, by a preference of self instead of God. The sinner treats himself as if he were the only true God.

2 Timothy 3:2⁺. People will be lovers of themselves . . .

John 3:19⁺. Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil.

It is bad enough to dethrone God the Creator, but to enthrone the creature, to enthrone self as God, is the height of sin. (See Romans 1:21-23⁺)

Sin, in the garden of Eden, created a monster called "happiness" that literally consumes people. To "be happy" is to have everything and everyone act the way that I want them to act. To be "unhappy" is to wish that I could make everything that disagrees with me to "un-happen," or cease to exist. It is to earnestly desire to have everything and everybody line up in the way that I want them to so I can get everything I desire.

4. Total Depravity means that every sinner is possessed with a nature, inherited from Adam's fall, that is completely hostile toward God. We were all born with a "positive" aversion to God and His authority. By nature, every sinner wants "his own way." Romans 8:7⁺ makes this fact very clear. "The sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so."

The obvious question is, "Why does man not feel this awful hostility that, according to the Scripture, is in his heart?" The answer is simple.

Romans 7:8-11⁺. But sin, taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me all manner of concupiscence. For without the law sin was dead. For I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died. And the commandment, which was ordained to life, I found to be unto death. For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it slew me.

This hostility, or enmity, is against God's authority, and as long as a man is not forced to think about God's authority, that man will not feel the hostility that is in his heart. However, when God's law, or authority, is pressed on the man's conscience, then the enmity that is buried in his nature will surface. As long as the sinner sincerely believes that he is "free to do as he chooses, and as long as he has a false view of God, especially God's sovereignty and his duty to God, he will never feel either guilty or angry toward God. However, when God's true character as Sovereign Law-Giver and Judge is pressed on the sinner, then the sparks begin to fly. This rarely happens today simply because our generation has been lulled to sleep by a totally false view of a "God of love."

Let me illustrate this fact. A truly virtuous woman may smile in mild amusement at a "wolf whistle" as she enters the grocery store. However, if the man would follow her into the store and literally force her into a corner, she would lash out in rage and indignation. Her true nature would manifest itself. You would see what she is really like. So it is with the lost man. It is not until his conscience is pressed with God's true claims that his true nature of hostility comes to the surface. That is when the "nice man" tells you, in anger, to "leave me alone to do as I please."

Preaching the "love of God" makes no one angry. Preaching man's duty to God as His Creator and judge will make the sinner gnash his teeth. We must remember that all men think they love God. However, the God they love is a God of their own imagination and not the God of the Bible.

Let me illustrate what I mean. The ancient Greeks "sincerely loved" and "fervently worshiped" God. On any given day you could find several "worship services" in process. We know that these religious feasts were nothing less than drunken orgies, but they were done in the name of Baccus, one of the Greek Gods. If we would have rebuked the "worshippers" for their drunken immoral behavior because in their heart of hearts they knew better, they would not have thanked us. They would have been furious. They knew that the one true living God hated such behavior. However, they did not care and did everything they could to forget that fact. They would hate us for reminding them of what they knew in their conscience. They would have raised their wine goblets and shouted, "Away with your God, Baccus is God! Baccus is God!"

We come down a little farther in history and meet a pirate named Eric the Red as he is about to go on a "business" trip. Of course his business was to capture ships, steal what was worth stealing, and kill everyone of his helpless victims. If we said, "But Eric, have you fear or love for God?" the poor man would be horrified. He would say, "Why of course I love God. Look at his image on the front of my ship. I pray to him before I go to sea and I sacrifice to him when I return." If we reminded this man that in his conscience he knew that the one true God Who made the heavens and earth hated such behavior, Eric would be furious. He would put his sword under our chin and walk us off the gang-plank backward while he shouted, "Thor is God! Thor is God!"

Let us move down to the twentieth century liberal preacher who lives down the street from you. He is a hard working "do gooder" sentimentalist. He "loves God" but when asked what God is like, the man admits he does not have a clue. When we begin to talk about the God who revealed Himself at the cross in the atoning blood of Christ, we notice the man's neck is getting red. He finally grits his teeth and blurts out in anger, "I hate your religion of blood and the God who requires it." You see, he "sincerely loves God," but it is a God of his own imagination and not the God of the Bible. He hates the true and living God revealed in the Scriptures.

The same reaction will come from the "Super Church" leaders who insist on being "positive thinkers." When we mention Romans nine and its awesome picture of God's sovereignty, we are hated and ridiculed. Put it into your memory system: Men sincerely love a God of their own imagination, and He is always a God that they can control. Our duty is to confront men with the God of the Bible. He is the Creator, the Law-giver, the Judge, and the only Redeemer. We must begin with Genesis 1:1⁺ and not John 3:16⁺.

Let me illustrate this point. Suppose a man named Harry bitterly hated a next door neighbor. The very sight of his neighbor made Harry furious. The neighbor finally moved to California. Several years later, someone visiting Harry said, "You really hated that guy who used to live next door." Harry would probably say, "Well, I did not like him too much, but I would not say I actually hated him. That is a strong word." No amount of arguing would convince Harry of how deeply he had hated that neighbor. You see, Harry has not seen the man for a long time. There was nothing confronting him that aroused his strong feelings.

Five years later someone knocks on Harry's door and says, "I am collecting money to buy flowers for the widow of that man who used to live next door to you." It seems the former neighbor had died a tragic death. All of a sudden the person at the door says, "Oh, I'm sorry, I forgot how deeply you hated the man. You would not be interested in helping. You are probably glad he is dead." Harry would protest that he was being misrepresented. "I admit we had our differences, but as I look back, I am sure part of it was my fault. He really was not all that bad. Here is five dollars for the flowers." It would be impossible to convince Harry that he had truly hated his former neighbor. The hatred had long settled in the bottom of his heart.

Five more years pass by and a moving van pulls up next door to Harry's house and the man he hated starts to move back into the same house. There had been a mix up and the man had not died, it was his brother. How long would that man have to live there before all of Harry's buried hatred would once more be felt and expressed? The old saying, "Out of sight, out of mind" is true. Man's hatred of God is like the dirty mud puddles on the road right after a heavy rain. Those same puddles become clear as crystal after several days. The mud is still there but it has all settled to the bottom and is not visible. However, if you started stirring the puddle with a stick, the mud would soon come to the surface.

Man's sinful heart is the same way. As long as Harry is not directly confronted with his enemy, he can never be convinced of the depth of his hatred. As long as men are not being directly confronted with a true picture of God, they do not feel the natural enmity towards God that is in their hearts. However, the moment we begin to tell them what God is really like, their rebellion against God's authority and their love of self will come to the surface. The God of the Bible is a forgotten God in our society. The weak and wishey-washey God that is preached in most churches, even Evangelical churches, would never stir up any valid feelings of any kind. This is why men can hate God while being deeply religious. Because men today love a God of their own imagination, there is neither deep faith or visible antagonism in the churches today.

Regardless of what we think or what any individual believes, we must accept what the Word of God says—all men by nature hate God! We need only preach God's revealed will to sinners, and press on them their absolute duty to do that will, and we see that Romans 8:7⁺ is a fact. The one indelible mark of every lost man is Romans 8:7⁺, "Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be."

Likewise, the one indelible mark of a true believer is the exact opposite: "For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous." 1 John 5:3⁺.

Before we were converted we hated God's authority over us simply because we wanted to "do our own thing." We hated anyone who tried to tell us the awful consequences of our rebellion. We hated God's commandments because they condemned us and we hated those who reminded us of those commandments. We felt God was unreasonable and too strict. When the Holy Spirit gave us a new nature, we then loved the very same law that we previously hated. Our problem then was not with the strictness of God's law but our total inability to keep it because we now wanted to keep it with all of our being.

5. By Total Depravity, we mean that every part of man's being and nature has been effected by sin. This is what the word "total" means. Total depravity means that sin has effected every part of man's being and this includes his will. The primary difference between Calvinism (the religion of free grace) and Arminianism (the religion of free will) is whether he is partially depraved, meaning everything excepting his will—or whether he is totally depraved, meaning everything including his will.

Romans 6:17⁺ is a key text: But God be thanked, that you were the servants of sin, but you have

[1] obeyed [the will]

[2] from the heart [emotions]

[3] that form of doctrine [mind] which was delivered you.

This text shows the order of biblical conversion to be as follows:

(1) The mind must be illuminated by the truth. God does not save us in a vacuum. We must hear, understand, and believe the gospel facts about our sin and Christ's death.

(2) The heart must be penetrated by the truth. It is not enough to believe intellectually, we must literally feel the power of truth in our inward man (See 1 Thes 1:4,5⁺).

(3) The will must be liberated with the truth (Acts 16:14⁺). Lydia's heart must indeed be opened and she must hear and believe the gospel in order to be saved. However, Lydia cannot understand or even desire the truth of God with her nature of sin. The Holy Spirit must "open her heart" (This is regeneration) before she is able to understand and believe. When the Holy Spirit gives Lydia a new heart, she will gladly be ready to believe. You will notice how all three of these things are mentioned in Romans 6:17⁺.

The mind, or understanding, receives the "form of doctrine," or facts of the gospel. Our natural minds are described as being totally incapable of understanding truth (1 Cor 2:14⁺; Eph 4:18⁺). When ever a sinner understands and gladly receives the gospel it is not because of their so-called free will, it is, like in Lydia's case, because God sovereignly opened that heart in regeneration.

The heart, or affections, by nature is not able to feel the power of truth (Jer 17:9). Whenever the gospel effects a real change in us it is because the Holy Spirit has powerfully and savingly applied the truth to the core of our being. When a girl says, "He gets me," that can mean different things. If she sighs and almost faints when she says, "He gets me," that means one thing. If she grits her teeth

and shakes her fist when she says, "He gets me," that means something entirely different. In both cases the girl is saying, "Just seeing him or hearing his name evokes an uncontrollable feeling inside of me." In one case it is anger and in the other it is love. In both cases it is automatic because the girl's emotions are controlled by the attitude of her heart. It is the same with a child of God. He cannot hear the name of Christ without feeling deeply a heartfelt gratitude for so great salvation. The gospel really gets to a Christian and literally gets the Christian.

The will, or the power of choice does not, indeed it cannot, operate either independently of, or contrary to, man's sinful mind and wicked heart. Our will is not an independent faculty or "little man inside the man that is unaffected by sin." The will is chained to our sinful nature and it is impossible for the will to operate independently of that sinful nature. The Scriptures are clear that man can no more change his sinful nature by an act will, anymore than an Ethiopian can "change the color of his skin" (Jer 13:23). To say, "a sinner can change if he sincerely wants to" is the same as saying, "an Ethiopian, who loves being black and hates any idea of being white, can change the color of his skin if he sincerely wants to." In both cases the problem does not lie in the power of the will but in the "want to," or power that controls the will and that power is the sinner's totally depraved nature. The sinner always wants to please himself. We will come back to this point later.

Let me repeat that the word "total" in "total depravity" does not mean man is as wicked as he can be. It means sin has affected every part of our being in such a way that our autobiography reads, "I know that in me, that is, in no single part of me, dwells no good thing" (Romans 7:18⁺). It means that the sinner's heart, which is the seat of his thinking, feeling, and choosing, is "deceitful and incurable wicked" (Jer 17:9). The word total in "total depravity" means the same thing as putting a drop of deadly poison into a glass of water. The entire glass is totally, meaning every single particle of the water, is poisoned and unfit to drink. If you pour that glass of water into a gallon jug you will dilute the intensity of the poison but you will still totally poison the entire gallon of water. Pour the gallon into a barrel of water and you have totally destroyed the entire barrel of water. Remember our definition: "Man is bad, but he is not that bad, but he really is bad."

The primary objection to everything I have said goes like this: "If the sinner does not have the innate power or ability to repent and believe, then God cannot hold him responsible." In other words, man's ability is always the measure of his responsibility. If God holds the sinner responsible to repent and believe when He knows the sinner is unable to do so, then God becomes unjust and grossly unfair. This objection totally misunderstands both sin and responsibility. It also denies the reality and effects of the fall. We will spend quite a bit of time on this point in a future article, but for now let me show how absurd the argument is: Is a sinner able to perfectly obey the Ten Commandments? All will answer, "Absolutely not." Does God hold sinner's responsible for perfectly obeying the Ten Commandments and punishing them for breaking those commandments? The answer will be, with a bit of hesitation and without the "absolutely," will be the exact opposite, or, "Yes." So then God can, and does, hold men responsible for doing something they are totally unable to do! The objection is exploded.

What we will see is that the reason sinners can neither obey the commandments or repent and believe the gospel is the power of their sinful will to totally control the sinner's whole being. The only question is this: "Who is totally responsible for man's sinful nature?" Did man acquire his sinful nature by an act of his free will, or did God force him to sin against his will? If man is totally responsible for his sin, then he is also totally responsible for the effects of that sin, and the awful effect is the sinner's total depravity and total inability to change that sinful nature. As I said, we will come back to this point.

I can say without hesitation that the sinner is "totally free to do exactly as he pleases." However, that kind of freedom is the sinner's greatest problem. An unregenerate sinner, because he is totally controlled by a sinful nature, will always, every single time, freely, or deliberately, choose to please himself. We always do, or choose to do, things which are consistent with what we ARE. If we are sinners by nature and choice then every choice will be effected by our sinful nature. Adam is the only man that ever had a true "free" will that was free from sin. Adam is also the only person who ever became a sinner by sinning, or by an act of will. You and I sin because we are born sinners, we did not become a sinner the first time we consciously disobeyed. Our first act of sin did not produce our sinful nature. The sinful nature inherited from Adam produced the sinful act.

6. Man has a nature that will not permit him to choose God or righteousness. Man's INABILITY grows out of his DEPRAVITY.

A lost man can choose between two evils according to which benefits him the most. He may choose a "good," as judged by the world's standard, instead of a "bad," but in every case he is motivated by his own interests. The sinner cannot choose between God's glory and his own selfish ends. Romans 8:7⁺ stands as a Biblical truth and a historical fact.

In our next study we will let the Bible give man, the sinner, a complete "spiritual examination." We will pretend the Word of God gives us a Physician's, a Coroner's, and an Autopsy report. We will use Scripture to look at every part of man's being. We are not concerned with either how man looks at himself or the world looks at him. We will not consult philosophy, psychology, medicine, sociology, or popular sentiment. What does the Word of God itself say about the condition of man? Here is what we will find in the Word of God:

1. The Physician's Report. "The patient is totally unable to respond to any spiritual stimulus in any of his faculties. He is blind, deaf, dumb, no pulse, can't breathe, mind totally gone, totally impotent, etc."
2. The Coroner's Report. "The patient is spiritual DEAD. There is not a single evidence of life"
3. The Autopsy Report.

The Doctrine of Total Depravity, Part II

This is the second article on the doctrine of total depravity. In the first article we covered what we believe, and what we do not believe when we speak of total depravity. Perhaps it would be good to repeat the outline.

REVIEW

What does the phrase "total depravity" mean?

I. Negative. Let us note what we do NOT mean by "total depravity."

A. We do not mean that man is without a conscience or any sense of right or wrong.

B. Total depravity does not mean that every sinner is devoid of all the qualities that are both pleasing to men and useful to society when those qualities are judged only by a human standard.

C. We are not saying that every sinner is prone to every form of sin.

D. We do not mean that every sinner is as intense as he can be in his sin.

II. Positive. What we DO mean by "total depravity." What DOES the Bible itself teach?

A. Every sinner, including you and me, is destitute of, or without, that love to God which constitutes the fundamental and all-inclusive demand of God's law.

B. Total depravity means that every sinner is guilty of elevating some lower affection or desire above regard for God, His Law and the Gospel.

C. That "something else" that all men love is an idol called "self" or "me."

D. Every sinner is possessed with a nature, inherited from Adam's fall, that is completely hostile toward God.

E. By total depravity, we mean that every part of man's being and nature has been affected by sin.

F. Man has a nature that will not permit him to choose God or righteousness.

A Complete "Spiritual" Examination

We will now continue our study where we left off above. We will begin by giving man, the depraved sinner, a complete and thorough "spiritual examination." We will use the Bible to test man spiritually the same as medicine and science test a man physically. We will look at all of man's faculties exactly as they are each described in the Bible. We are not concerned with how man looks at himself. We will not consult philosophy, psychology, medicine, sociology or popular sentiment. What does the Word of God say about the spiritual condition of man? We will use the following procedure:

(1) The Physician's Report. After Doctor Bible carefully examines each part of man, the conclusion will be irrefutable. "The patient is totally unable to respond to any spiritual stimulus in any of his faculties. He is blind, deaf, dumb, no pulse, can't breathe, mind totally gone, etc. Not one spiritual organ is functioning."

(2) The Coroner's Report. The coroner administers every known test and cannot find any evidence of life. "There is absolutely no question, the man is spiritually dead."

(3) The Autopsy Report. The dead sinner is opened up and each part of his being is examined. The autopsy report establishes that the man died because of the cancer of sin. "Every part of his being was infected and ruined by sin. Not one part was left untouched and uncontaminated. He was totally depraved by sin."

I. The Physician's Report

Doctor Bible is going to examine seven individual faculties of the sinner. In each case the result will show total inability. Here are seven things that God says a sinner cannot do. It is essential that we see that the Holy Spirit uses the word "cannot" in all seven instances. To say, "Well, the sinner really can do these things if he only wants to," is to not only misunderstand the Bible, it is to flat out contradict it! As we shall see later, man's "will not," or his refusal to repent and believe the gospel, is the direct effect of the "cannot" of total depravity. More about this in a moment.

First, the man is totally BLIND.

A lost man CANNOT see! "I tell you the truth, no one CAN SEE the kingdom of God unless he is born again" (John 3:3). The "see" means to realize, or to experience, or to appreciate. Christ is saying that man does not have the spiritual ability to even desire the kingdom of God until he is first "born again."

We must understand the relationship between "sight" and "seeing." Once we see that, we will understand the relationship between the new birth and faith. Do you get sight by seeing—or do you see because you have sight? Which is the cause and which is the effect? For instance, does it help a blind man to see if we shine a 1,000 watt bulb in his eyes instead of a 100 watt bulb. I am sure you will say that is a stupid question. We all know that the problem is not the amount of light, the problem is in the man's eyes. He needs sight before he can see. Of course we must have light to see, but people who are blind need more than light. They need the gift of sight.

The sinner's problem is the same. He needs far more than light simply because he is spiritually blind. He is not near sighted. He does not have defective vision that can be corrected by an act of his will. He needs the gift of sight. Jesus said that sinners cannot even see the kingdom of God unless he is first born again or regenerated. We agree that man needs the light of the gospel. It is true that no one can see spiritual reality without the light of the gospel. However, the sinner is blind until God gives him the spiritual ability to "see" in regeneration. The problem is with his spiritual eyes. Every regenerate believer can say a hearty "amen" to these words of Christ: "But blessed are your eyes because they see . . ." (Matthew 13:16+).

Second, the man is MENTALLY DERANGED.

He CANNOT UNDERSTAND a single thing that is spiritual. "But the natural man receives not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither CAN he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Corinthians 2:14+). Again we must notice the cause and effect. The word "because" in this text is very important. The natural, or unregenerate man, cannot understand spiritual things because those things are spiritually discerned and the lost man does not have the Spirit until he is "born of the Spirit."

When we trusted Christ because we found Him to be most desirable, it was not our old blind mind that gave us that knowledge. That understanding came from the new nature given to us in regeneration. If we carefully compare 1 Corinthians 1:18-29+ with 2 Corinthians 4:4-6+, we will see that God's shining in the darkness at the first creation is the same as His shining into our dark and dead hearts to give us the knowledge of salvation. Can the old heart and depraved, incurable affections ever give us spiritual knowledge and desires? The will cannot choose something that the mind cannot truly understand and the affections truly desire.

Third, the man is stone DEAF.

He CANNOT HEAR any spiritual truth. This is verdict of Christ Himself. "Why do you not understand my speech? Even because you cannot hear my word" (John 8:43+). Again we have the same cause and effect relationship. Jesus is more emphatic this time and adds the word "even." Why did the Jews not understand our Lord's words? He said it was because you cannot. Just as the ability to see is the gift God, so is the ability to hear. All men are not given that ability. See Matthew 13:9-18+.

I am sure we have all seen a dog responding to a special dog whistle. No human ear can hear the sound because our ears do not have the ability to hear that kind of pitch. A dog hears easily. So the sinner does not have ears to hear the gospel. He considers it nonsense (1 Corinthians 1:18+), but the Christian hears, understands and gladly believes by the grace and power of God.

I remember preaching at a picnic attended by deaf people. The interpreter and I were the only ones who could hear. The park was near the Toronto airport and a large jet plane came in to land while I was preaching. The noise was so loud that the interpreter could not hear my voice so I stopped speaking and waited for the plane to land. I was facing the airport and the congregation; because their backs were toward the airport, did not see the plane. Because they were stone deaf, they did not hear the roar. They kept watching the interpreter's hand and then looking at my lips. They began to look at each other with a look of bewilderment. I pointed up to the sky and as they turned around, they looked up and saw the plane. Having seen the plane they smiled and nodded their heads in understanding.

My friend, that is the same way it is with an unregenerate sinner. The wrath of God against sin is clearly revealed from Heaven and roars with its terrible threats. The gospel bells of promise and joy ring loudly and with clarity. Yet the sinner is totally deaf to both the law and the gospel until God, in regeneration, opens his ears.

Fourth, the man is completely POWERLESS.

He CANNOT even want to receive spiritual help. A comparison of two verses of Scripture will establish this awful fact. The first verse shows us why a lost sinner cannot receive truth and grace.

Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him; for he dwells with you, and shall be in you. (John 14:17⁺)

Notice the following in this text:

(1) The world cannot receive the Spirit because they cannot see Him or know Him. They are without spiritual sight and cannot perceive, or know, any spiritual reality.

(2) Every Christian has seen (spiritually) and knows (experientially) the ministry of the blessed Holy Spirit. Remember that sight and knowledge were given in regeneration.

The second verse of Scripture is Jude 19. This is the best verse I know of that gives us the essence of man's total depravity and inability.

"These are those who separate themselves, sensual, having not the Spirit." (Jude 19)

Notice the following in this verse:

(1) The lost man is totally sensual. That does not mean in a sexual sense. It means the sum total of the man's knowledge and experience is that which comes to him through his physical senses.

(2) He does not have the Spirit. The life of God, which is the Holy Spirit of God, left man when he sinned in the garden of Eden. Man's whole experience is now totally controlled by his fleshly nature and its senses. However, you do not know God through your eyes, ears, mouth, fingers, etc. God is a Spirit and those who worship Him must worship Him in Spirit. Since the unsaved person is "sensual" and does not have either the Spirit or a spiritual nature—he cannot see or experience God until he is first "born of the Spirit." He can only receive that which he is capable of "seeing" (John 14:17⁺).

Let me illustrate this truth. Right this very moment there is probably an airplane flying right through the room where you are sitting. There may also be a large ship, a herd of buffalo, and a line of pretty chorus girls dancing. If you look around, you will see none of those things. If you turn on a TV set and turn the channel changer, you will draw all of those things out of the air and "see" them. All of those TV waves are present even though unseen. God did not build a TV receiver into our heads. In the same way, there is a spiritual world and a real Savior that is just as real as the air we breathe. The unregenerate man does not see, hear or feel a single evidence of that spiritual reality. The sum total of his potential experience is what he can taste, touch, feel and smell and God is not known or experienced through the physical senses.

Fifth, the man is a spiritual MUTE. He is unable to speak.

He CANNOT even "call on the Lord" until renewed by grace. See 1 Corinthians 12:3⁺, Romans 10:9,10⁺, and Matthew 16:13-17⁺.

Sixth, the man is unable to move a spiritual muscle.

He CANNOT even "come to Christ" until He is given spiritual life. The following two verses of Scripture should never be separated. The first one shows the total inability of the sinner apart from the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit. The second shows the certainty of repentance and faith in every single instance where the Holy Spirit does effectually call.

No man can come to me, unless the Father who has sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore who has heard, and has learned of the Father, comes unto me. (John 6:44,45⁺)

Verse 44 states what no man can do unless God does something first. No man can, is able to, come to Christ unless the Father deliberately draws that individual by the power of the Spirit. That is human inability.

Verse 45 states what every man is certain to do when the Father does draw him. Everyone, without exception, who "hears" and is "taught by the Father" (the same thing as "draw" in verse 44) "comes (always) to me." Do you see the clear contrast. No man can—unless; but everyone will—when. Verse 44 is teaching inability and verse 45 is teaching irresistible grace.

Seventh, the man is incapable of any kind of positive spiritual response.

He CAN ONLY act out his nature of spiritual death. As we noted in the previous article, the indelible mark of the lost man is his

hatred of God's authority, and the mark of a believer is a delight in God's truth. A lost man can no more give a spiritual response to spiritual truth than a physically dead man could respond to a ham sandwich.

We cannot leave this section until we at least mention another aspect of truth. Even though the above seven things are clear as crystal in Scripture, the following things are also true:

- (1) Every sinner is invited, commanded and encouraged by God to do all of the above things which he cannot do.
- (2) Every sinner is held totally responsible for not doing all of the above things.
- (3) Every saved man has done all of these seven things and done them all most willingly! Cf. John 15:5+ and Philippians 4:13+. The first verse shows inability and the second verse shows the power of grace.
- (4) God has never commanded a sinner to do anything that the sinner is capable of doing! No, I did not say it wrong or backward. I said exactly what John 15:5+ says, "without Me you can do NOTHING." The "nothing" in that verse really means nothing. The flesh can produce nothing that profits. Whenever a person does any of the above seven things, he does it only because he has been born of God and given spiritual life or ability.

II. The Coroner's Report.

After the coroner has made every known test, he gives the following report. "The man is without a single evidence of spiritual life. He is DEAD!" (Ephesians 2:1-5+).

There is an old saying, "Where there is life there is hope." When it is discovered that someone is desperately sick, we rush them to the hospital in the hopes of keeping them alive. When they are dead, all hope is gone, and we take them to the graveyard. A lost sinner is not "sick near unto death," he is really spiritually dead. He is not a hospital case who might respond to the right treatment. He is dead to righteousness, and alive to sin. He loves his death in sin, and hates both the doctor and the medicine. The sinner would rather perish than admit he is a sinner. He is a graveyard case that needs a life giving miracle.

I sometimes try to picture the scene in John 11+. I see the stone rolled away from the grave of Lazarus and three men are there:

The first one is looking into the dark tomb and passionately pleading with the dead Lazarus inside: "Lazarus, if you will only give God a chance, He will give you life. If you just take the first step, then the Holy Spirit will make you come alive. God honestly wants to make you live, but its all up to you. Lazarus, this is a great deal that God is offering, but your 'free will' must decide to take advantage of it. You must get up and take that first step in faith." That may be just a bit of a caricature, but not much. That is exactly the way some free-will preachers talk.

I am reminded of a story told by C. H. Spurgeon about the Catholic saint whose head had been cut off. The man is supposed to have picked up his head, put it under his arm and walked 10,000 miles back to Rome. Spurgeon said, "I would have no trouble believing that to be true, if the man could take that first step!" If man's will can enable him to get up out of the tomb of death, then he surely does not need any help to keep on going.

The second man I see at the tomb of Lazarus is what we call a Hyper-Calvinist. He is sitting down and calmly writing a treatise of the futility of preaching to dead sinners. This pathetic creature never preaches or witnesses the gospel and he discourages and condemns those who do. Since Lazarus is "dead" this man concludes that it is a waste of time to address the dead sinner in any way.

The third man is a preacher of the biblical gospel. While the second man sneers and the first man gasps for breath, the third man cries out, "Sinner, believe! Lazarus, come out!" And Lazarus walks out of the tomb. If we interviewed the third man, the questions might go as follows:

"Were you fully aware that Lazarus was totally dead in that tomb?"

"Of course I was. Is not that what Scripture says?"

"Did you think that Lazarus had the ability to hear and respond to your message?"

"Not for a moment. How can a dead man respond to my voice?"

"Why did you command him to believe when you knew he was unable to comply because he was dead?"

The man would smile and say, "Friend, my confidence was neither in my ability to preach and invite, nor was it in the supposed (wrongly) power of Lazarus' 'free will.' My whole confidence was in the power of the Words that I spoke. I spoke the Words of Christ believing that Christ Himself has the power to wake the dead and give them faith."

My friend, the gospel is the power of God that can "wake the dead" when it is attended by the power of the Holy Spirit. See John 5:21-25⁺.

III. The Autopsy Report.

The corpse is now sent to the morgue for an autopsy. After cutting open the sinner and examining every part, the report shows the cause of death. "The man was destroyed by SIN. Sin penetrated every part of the sinner's being and left him in a state of total inability." The report listed the following:

(1) The Mind—"It was vain . . . dark . . . blind . . . deliberately ignorant." See Ephesians 2:3⁺; Ephesians 4:17-19⁺; 2 Corinthians 4:4-6⁺ for a detailed description of the symptoms.

(2) The Heart—"It was saturated with a love of sin that could not be cut out. Sin had so entangled itself around the heart that it was incurable and inoperable." See John 3:19⁺; Jeremiah 17:9 for the symptoms.

(3) The Will—"The will was literally chained to sin and the love of sin in an indestructible union. The two had grown together so that they were not even distinguishable." See John 5:40⁺ and 2 Timothy 2:24-26⁺ for expert testimony and illustrations.

If the autopsy report had a check-off list, the words "totally destroyed by sin" would appear after each of the items on the list. (See Check-Off List below.)

IV. The Final Verdict. The sinner is totally depraved in sin and totally unable to do anything to help his recovery from sin and its effect.

We may think or reason in any manner we choose, but we dare not come up with conclusions that emphatically state that a sinner can, "if he only wants to," do things that the Bible specifically declares the sinner CANNOT DO! The foregoing biblical facts are God's diagnosis of man's spiritual problem and man's true state. All the sentiment and sophistry in the world cannot change the Word of God and its final verdict.

V. The Big Problem. Moral responsibility versus moral ability; or free will versus free moral agency.

Let us list several biblical facts that appear to be contradictory:

A: An unrenewed sinner may come to Christ for salvation, but an unrenewed sinner cannot come to Christ in true repentance and true faith until he is first born of the Spirit. [See our tract, God's Part and Man's Part in Salvation.] We are not "fussing over words" when we insist that "may not" and "cannot" are two entirely different things. One means permission and the other means ability. A lawyer friend tried to teach his son correct grammar. When the boy asked, "Can I go out and play?", his father would reply, "You may go out and play if you are big and strong enough to be able to do so." That is more than proper grammar. That is solid theology.

B: Adam is the only man that every had a truly "free will" in that he is the only man, apart from Christ, that ever had the spiritual ability, or power, to love and obey God. Adam used his free will to disobey God and forever lost the ability (free will) to love and obey God. See the following chart for a clear comparison of the difference in Adam's will at different periods.

C: If you can see three clear biblical facts, then you will clearly understand the doctrine of total depravity and man's responsibility.

(1) Every sinner is "free" (is at liberty as a free moral agent) to obey God's commandments. Yes, he is commanded by God to do so, and is condemned by God for not obeying them. He is both guilty and responsible, even though unable to do his duty.

(2) No sinner is "free" (has the moral ability) to obey God's commandments. The sinner can only live to please himself. He cannot choose God over sin and self.

(3) The sinner, not God, is responsible for his spiritual inability to love and obey God's commandments. Man was not created a sinner. He became a sinner by an act of pure free will. He cannot "undo" the effects of his sinful nature by an act of will. Adam did not fall and stub his toe, he jumped off a cliff and cannot "will" his way back up the cliff.

(4) Man is only as free as his own sinful nature permits. Man can not rise above his nature, or change his nature, by an act of will. See Matthew 12:33-35⁺. A man may choose between the pieces of treasure in the chest (his heart), but he cannot by an act of will turn pieces of glass into diamonds, nor can he create a new treasure chest. The sinner can choose between sins, but he cannot choose between self and God.

6. Man Is Free To Do As He Pleases.

In no sense whatever is man ever forced to do anything against his will whether it is committing sin or believing in Christ. Every man

is free to choose and act as "he pleases" within the limits of his ability and nature. See Proverbs 21:4; Acts 2:24-26[±]; Matthew 27:15-26[±].

"What else can freedom or liberty be than to do as we please? However, we must carefully note that liberty is not identical with ability. Confusion of these two distinct things accounts for much false thinking on the subject of free will. Many people really mean ABILITY when they say LIBERTY. They speak of man being free to do good or evil when they really mean to say that men are able to do good or evil. In this they seriously err. For the Bible clearly and consistently teaches:

(1) that man is free to do good or evil, that he is at liberty to do either, but

(2) it also clearly and consistently teaches that man is able only to do evil because of his fallen condition."

G.I. Williamson—Westminster Confession for Study Classes.

Man's "freedom" is like the freedom of water to run down hill. No one has to "force" it to run down hill. It does that naturally. However, it takes a power totally outside of the water itself to make it run up hill.

Man's freedom is like the bondage (freedom) of a mother's love. Give a mother a butcher knife and tell her to stab her child. She says, "I cannot." We say, "Of course you can. You have everything physically that is necessary. You do not mean cannot, but you mean you will not. You have the physical strength and ability. You just do not want to." She would reply, "In this case, 'cannot' and 'will not' mean exactly the same thing. I cannot want to kill my child because I love her." In other words, the woman is in bondage to her mother's nature. Before she could ever kill her child, her nature would have to change. She would have to become totally insane and act contrary to her nature.

The sinner is in the same situation. He is controlled by his nature of sin. He cannot act contrary to that nature. The most revolting and impossible thing a sinner could imagine would be to renounce his self righteousness and bow to the sovereign authority of Christ. His nature must be changed before he can even consider such a thing.

AUTOPSY REPORT

CHECK-OFF LIST

Body: "totally destroyed by sin" Philippians 3:21[±]

Head: "totally destroyed by sin" Isaiah 1:5[±]

Throat: "totally destroyed by sin" Romans 3:13[±]

Tongue: "totally destroyed by sin" James 3:6[±]

Mouth: "totally destroyed by sin" Romans 3:14[±]

Lips: "totally destroyed by sin" Romans 3:13[±]

Feet: "totally destroyed by sin" Romans 3:15[±]

Ears: "totally destroyed by sin" Mark 8:18[±]

Eyes: "totally destroyed by sin" Isaiah 53:2[±]

Hands: "totally destroyed by sin" James 4:8[±]

Heart: "totally destroyed by sin" Jeremiah 17:9

Thoughts: "totally destroyed by sin" Psalm 56:5

Bones: "totally destroyed by sin" Job 2:11