

The Doctrine of Total Depravity

Romans 3:9-20

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All Under Sin and Guilty Before God

- By nature my heart, speech, and actions are corrupted by sin.
- The very core of my being is set against God.
- I do not understand God, seek God, or serve God.
- This inward corruption manifests itself in the destruction of my words and deeds.
- I am “under sin” – under its control

Defining Our Terms

- “Total Depravity” – the “T” in TULIP (total depravity, unconditional election, limited atonement, irresistible grace, perseverance of the saints)
- Does not mean that a person is as wicked as he can possibly be
- “Depraved” – corrupt, perverse, sinful
- “Total” – the whole of man’s being
- Every part of man is corrupt – body and soul; mind and will
- “Total Inability” – we can do nothing pertaining to our salvation

Can an Unbeliever Do Good?

- Romans 2:14-15
- Sometimes the Gentiles “by nature do the things in the law.”
- Genesis 1:27 – created in God’s image before the fall
- Romans 1:18-21 – the knowledge of God through Creation
- The law written in their hearts
- Their conscience, a built-in sense of right and wrong
- People have admirable qualities and virtuous acts
- Kindness, generosity, self-sacrifice, creativity, humor...
- Reformers: “civil virtue” – deeds that conform outwardly to the law of God

Then why does Paul write “There is none who does good, no, not one”?

- Idolatry – “...although they knew God, they did not glorify *Him* as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened...they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man—and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things.” (Romans 1:18-25)
- “There is no fear of God before their eyes.” (Rom. 3:18 & Ps. 36:1)
- R.C. Sproul – “We who have been created in God’s image and who were made to worship and revere our Creator, have lost the capacity for holy reverence before him.”

Idolatry

- Exodus 20:3 – “You shall have no other gods before Me.”
- Deuteronomy 6:5 – “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.”
- R. C. Sproul – “The supreme motive required of everything we do is the love of God. A deed that outwardly conforms to God’s law but proceeds from a heart alienated from God is not deemed by God a good deed.”
- Motive for good deeds – not a heart-felt love for God, but a desire to protect our own interests, avoid the penalty of the law, satisfy cultural obligations, avoid conflict, make ourselves feel good, get applause, gain an advantage

Our Confession on Total Depravity

- 6:2 (The Fall of Mankind, and Sin and Its Punishment)
By this sin our first parents fell from their original righteousness and communion with God. We fell in them, and through this, death came upon all. All became dead in sin and completely defiled in all the capabilities and parts of soul and body.
- 9:3 (Free Will)
Humanity, by falling into a state of sin, has completely lost all ability to choose any spiritual good that accompanies salvation. Thus, people in their natural state are absolutely opposed to spiritual good and dead in sin, so that they cannot convert themselves by their own strength or prepare themselves for conversion.

What can I do?

- I Corinthians 1:21 – “For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe.”
- Rejoice that God uses the preaching of the Word to save sinners. Seek the Lord. Pray for forgiveness. Bow to Christ.
- Believers: give glory to God for his grace in giving us the desire and the ability to glorify God!