

# THE DOCTRINES OF GRACE 2

## TOTAL DEPRAVITY

**The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.**

**(Gen 6:5)**

### INTRODUCTION

This doctrine has been given various names: *human depravity*, *radical depravity*, *pervasive depravity*, *total inability*; but the phrase *Total Depravity* best sums up the Biblical perspective. Man is not just unable to reach for salvation, is not just pervaded by a sinful tendency, man is corrupt and under the wrath of God due to the original sin of Adam, as well as his own specific sins. Hard as this is to swallow, it is a clear teaching of the Bible (Rm 5:12-19). In all the doctrines of grace, we must not be dominated by our feelings but by the word of God if we are to know the truth.

### WHAT TOTAL DEPRAVITY IS NOT

It is not conduct but state; not behaviour but condition.

It is not that all men are as bad as they can be.

It is not our estimation of others, but God's estimation of us.

It is not that man is unable to recognize God's will or the need to do good.

### WHAT IT IS

(See Ps 14, the only Psalm repeated- Ps 53)

- Depravity refers to sinfulness and wickedness. In God's eyes our situation is one of complete corruption, ruin (God's standard = Rm 14:23; 1 Cor 10:31). We are dead (Eph 2:1).
- Total refers to completeness. Man is depraved in every part of his life: thoughts (Gen 6:5), will (Eph 2:3, 4:22), emotions (heart) (Jer 17:9) as well as deeds. If the will is ruined, then man is unable to choose salvation or believe without God's help. It also means that the depravity is total, ie every part of the nature is affected. We are not partly depraved, that would only require a partial atonement. There is no good in man as far as God is concerned:

**We have all become like one who is unclean,  
and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment (filthy rags AV).  
(Isa 64:6)**

### DEFINITION

The doctrine of Total Depravity states that every area of man's life is affected by the Fall; he is spiritually dead, cut off from God and tainted by sin in every part of his life. Man fell totally. He is self-centred, lacking in genuine love to God and to man, and unable to fulfill God's law. It is exactly the opposite of evolution (man is getting better and better). It is illustrated in children who from an early age do not have to be taught to be bad but have to be taught to be good.

## KEY SCRIPTURES

Eph 2:1-10; Gen 6:5, Isa 64:6; Jer 17:9; Rm 7:18,23, 8:7; Eph 4:18; Titus 1:15; Jn 5:42; 2 Tim 3:2-4; Heb 3:12, Ps 14.

## WHY IS MAN TOTALLY DEPRAVED?

### MAN IS COMMITTED UNDER SIN (Gal 3:22)

#### 1 Personal Sin (Our conducts, acts)

#### All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Rm 3:23)

#### Words for sin:

- Transgression (parabasis): overstepping bounds, breaking law (Gal 3:19)
- Trespass (paraptoma): a false step, a blunder, deviation from truth (Mt 6:14)
- Law-breaking (paranomia): (2 Pt 2:16)
- Iniquity (poneria): wickedness, perversity (Mt 7:23)
- Error (plane): disregard of the right, go astray (Rm 1:27)
- Error (agnoema): a sin of ignorance (Heb 9:7)
- Sin (Harmartia): falling short of the mark as an arrow, failure (Rm 4:7-8)
- Evil (kakos): actual wrong, opposition to God's righteousness, base (Mt 21:41)
- Evil (poneros): evil that causes labour, pain, sorrow; bad, worthless (Mt 7:11)
- Ungodliness (asebeia): no fear of God, no likeness to God (Rm 1:18)
- Disobedience (harmartema): unwillingness to be led in truth, rebellion (Mk 3:29)
- Disobedience (apeitheia): unpersuadable, obstinacy, rejection of truth (Eph 2:2)
- Disobedience (parakoe): refusal to hear (Rm 5:19)
- Unbelief (apistia): refusing to have faith (Mt 13:58)
- Lawlessness (anomia): contempt of law, authority (1 Jn 3:4)
- Unrighteousness (adikia): lit. not rightness (Lk 16:8)
- Wrong-doing (adikema): wrong, injury, misdeed, concrete act of unrighteousness (Acts 18:14)

(Many other words could be added to this list, man's behaviour is also: loveless, rejection of God, illegal, sensual, anarchy, etc.)

#### This is God's view of the sinner!

#### 2 The Fall

##### a) Sinful Nature (The source of sinful acts)

In the garden of Eden, Adam was warned that disobedience would result in immediate spiritual death (Gen 2:16-17). At that time Adam was in some respects like Jesus. He was the federal head of a (potentially spiritual) race, he was sinless, he had communion with God, he was Lord of creation (under God), he would not die (death results from sin).

But Adam disobeyed God by eating the forbidden fruit (not apple) and lost all the above benefits. He not only died towards God (ie spiritual death), but all men died with him. He

became the head of a race of people alien to God, a different race than that which God had created, a race with sin in the core of it's being, the very antithesis of all that God is. Adam's nature changed from being innocent and clean to rebellious and sinful. As our father we are the fruit of his loins. As our representative federal head, he was on probation for us all. Therefore, we all fell with him, we cannot rise higher than the source of our life (Ps 51:5; Rm 5:12,15,19; 1Kg 8:46; Rm 3:10; Ps 14:2-3; Col 2:13; Ps 58:3). To recover fellowship with God man now needs a new source of life to restore the nature as well as a means of forgiveness for sins committed.

#### Result

- We are evil from this evil root (Job 14:4)
- We have a corrupt nature (Eph 4:22; Rm 7:25, 8:2)
- The law of sin and death works in the flesh (Rm 3:10-18, 7:2, 8:2; Gal 5:19-21)
- We have an evil heart (Prov 4:23; Jer 17:9; Matt 15:19-20; Lk 6:45; Heb 3:12; Eccles 9:3; Mk 7:21-23)

### **3 We are placed in a state of sin (Gal 3:22)**

Man is not only guilty, not only has a corrupt flesh life, but God has placed him in the state of sin (Rm 3:9) as a result of the fall (Rm 11:32).

#### Effects of sin

- Destroys life (Rm 6:23, Ezek 18:4, note that sinners killed Jesus, the Prince of life)
- Makes blind (Eph 4:17-18; 2 Cor 4:4)
- Makes deaf (Mk 4:11+)
- Makes unclean (Rm 1:28+)
- Enslaves (Rm 7:18,24)
- Makes hopeless (Eph 2:12)
- Makes lonely by making selfish
- Makes one uninstrutable (1 Cor 2:14; Eph 4:17-19)

#### Sin is

Essentially pride (the root of which is Satan), shown in:

- Unbelief - started in Eden, man believed The Lie (Rm 1:25), refused to believe God. NB no sin is small, all have great consequences : 'No grain of sand is small in the mechanism of a watch'. Jeremy Taylor. Heb 12
- Disobedience - doubt is the forerunner, first the thought then the deed, rebellion, refusal of God's rule, lawlessness, self determination self-sufficiency. (NB 2 Tim 3:2: 'lovers of self' comes first.)

### **MAN IS SPIRITUALLY DEAD**

Eph 2:1, Ezek 18:4

Physical death is the result of spiritual death (Rm 6:23)

Rm 5:12

### **MAN IS UNDER CONDEMNATION**

- Man is guilty (Jn 3:18,36; Rm 1:18; 1 Thess 5:9; 2 Thess 1:9)

- Man is under wrath because:  
He is fallen in Adam  
He commits sins

### **MAN IS UNDER THE POWER OF SATAN AND IN BONDAGE**

1 Jn 3:10,5:19; Jn 8:44; 2 Cor 4:4; Eph 2:1-3,12; Col 1:13; 2 Tim 2:25+

### **MAN IS LOST**

Job 14:4; Jer 13:23; Mt 7:16-18; Jn 6:44,65; Eph 2:12; Lk 15 (parables of lost sheep, coin, son)

Man is outside the covenant, needs a deliverer, has no hope, is without God  
God gave man up (Rm 1:24,26,28).

### **CONCLUSION**

It can be clearly seen that man is spiritually unable to do good because every part of his nature is polluted. The Fall damaged man so that the root of his life is sinful, hence the fruits of his best efforts are sins in comparison to God's perfections.

**What is man that he can be clean? Or he that is born of a woman, that he can be righteous? Behold, God puts no trust in his holy ones, and the heavens are not clean in his sight; how much less one who is abominable and corrupt, a man who drinks iniquity like water! Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? There is not one.**

(Job 15:14-16, 14:4)

(Note: the question of the freedom or bondage of the will is closely allied to this doctrine and a paper on this subject is available upon request.)

### **QUOTES**

Every man born of Adam is by nature the child of wrath and God's enemy: this is true of all without exception; high and low; rich and poor; noble and simple... and furthermore, by being an enemy of God, he is therefore born subject to hell, to damnation, and to all other curses...In every man are all sins; more plainly, that in every man by nature are the seeds of all sins: and that not in the worst but in the best natured men... Not the practice of all sins, but the seeds; for all men practice not all sin: but the seeds are in their nature. The practice is restrained (by education, laws, etc as well as the grace of God).

William Perkins, Works, Vol 111, p416

(Total Depravity) is the opposite to what is required by Divine Law. The sum of Divine Law is love. The essence of depravity then must be the lack of love toward God and our neighbour... Love for ourselves seems to be the root of depravity.

Andrew Fuller

Man, by his fall into a state of sin, hath wholly lost all ability of will to any spiritual good accompanying salvation; so as a natural man, being altogether averse from

that good, and dead in sin, is not able, by his own strength, to convert himself, or to prepare himself thereunto ... The guilt of this sin (Adam's) was imputed, and the same death in sin and corrupted nature conveyed to all their posterity ... from this original corruption, whereby we are utterly indisposed, disabled, and made opposite to all good and wholly inclined to evil.

Westminster Confession of Faith, IX,3; VI,4

## **PRACTICAL**

Discuss the opposite of the above headings as a guide to the atonement.

Note that the basis of depravity = selfishness, discipleship = 'deny yourself'.

Note: total depravity shows us why we are distant from God and need to be brought near (Eph 2:13), and why we need to be made into a new creation (2 Cor 5:17)

## **SOURCES**

Louis Berkhof, Systematic Theology

G C Berkouwer, Works

Andrew Fuller, Works

Dwight Pentecost, Sound Doctrine

William Perkins, Works

Seaton, Five points of Calvinism

Vine, Expository Dictionary

Scripture quotations are from The New King James Version

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