

Calvary Church: Coordinated Curriculum 2007-2008

Romans: The Transforming Power of the Righteousness of God

Key Concept: Total Depravity

Definition: unmeritoriousness of man in the sight of God

Through the Fall humanity lost the ability to exercise moral freedom, that is the rational power to determine the right course in the direction of the highest good, in harmony with the original purpose of God in providing moral character to His creature.

Total depravity indicates man's utter inability to do anything for his salvation. God must initiate the process if a person is to be saved.¹

"Total depravity does not mean that everyone is as thoroughly depraved in his actions as he could possibly be, nor that everyone will indulge in every form of sin, nor that a person cannot appreciate and even do acts of goodness; but it does mean that the corruption of sin extends to all men and to all parts of all men so that there is nothing within the natural man that can give him merit in God's sight."²

The phrase *total depravity* is commonly used to make explicit the implications of original sin. It signifies a corruption of our moral and spiritual nature that is total not in degree (for no one is as bad as he or she might be) but in extent. It declares that no part of us is untouched by sin, and therefore no action of ours is as good as it should be, and consequently nothing in us or about us ever appears meritorious in God's eyes. We cannot earn God's favor, no matter what we do; unless grace saves us, we are lost.

Total depravity entails total inability, that is, the state of not having it in oneself to respond to God and his Word in a sincere and wholehearted way (John 6:44; Rom. 8:7-8). Paul calls this unresponsiveness of the fallen heart a state of death (Eph. 2:1, 5; Col. 2:13), and the Westminster Confession says: "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" (IX. 3).³

Explanation of the Doctrine

Depravity refers to the lack of original righteousness

It speaks of the presence of an inherited sinful old self or old capacity

It teaches that humanity is completely unable to please God (Rom. 1:28 *adokimos* not standing the test)

Depravity refers to the fact that we are under actual guilt

Negatively: It does not mean—*Man is as bad as he could be*

Depravity does not mean that:

People have exhibited their depravity as thoroughly as they could (though it sure seems that some do, sometimes)

People indulge in every form of sin

Common grace—the general blessing on mankind (Matthew 5:45), including the withholding of punishment (Psalm 145:8-9) and the exercise of influence to restrain sin and maintain order.

People are not always as evil as they could be—not all will indulge in **all** sin. Such things as the restraint of the maximum expression of sin (2 Thess. 2:6-10) lead to this conclusion, as does the indication of degrees of punishment in eternity (Luke 12:47-48; Matt. 10:15; 11:21-24).

¹ Paul Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1989), p. 481

² Paul Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1989), p. 311.

³ J. I. Packer, *Concise Theology: A Guide to Historic Christian Beliefs* (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House, 1995, c1993). Logos

So, not all people will indulge in every form of sin all the time

People never performs actions that are good in the sight of God

People have no consciousness of what God would like (they do have a conscience)

People often show an idea of God and His will (Romans 1 and 3) even if they don't understand it that way

People do not necessarily lack a sense of good (or right and wrong, even though often warped) (Rom. 2:14)

Positively: It means—*Man is as bad off as he could be*

Corruption extends to every part of man's nature, including all the faculties of his being

There is nothing in man that can commend him to a righteous God for salvation

People may please one another but cannot gain favor with God.

Inherent corruption extends to whole nature, every part of every person (Rom. 3:10-18).

There is no good in us to recommend us to God—we cannot please God (Rom 8:8).

We are separated from God by sin and do not seek God (Rom. 3:10-18)

Total depravity does not cause or reinforce self-deprecation. It does not lead to “I'm just a worm” or “I'm nothing.” Regeneration and the fact that we were fashioned by God in the womb (Ps. 139:13ff.), and are the benefactors of the grace of God. We are still created in the image of God. That image has been defaced but not erased.

It should be added that total depravity is no excuse for sin in the life of the believer. The believer has been released from “slavery to sin” (Rom. 6:17-20), freed to become a servant of righteousness (Rom. 6:18).

Total depravity and the bondage of the will do not mean that the unbeliever can make no choice only that the choice will always be to choose rebellion and sinful actions rather than choosing submission to God and righteousness. Even when choosing what appears to be the “right thing,” the sinner motivated by personal self-advancement, does not please God.

Total depravity means that people need the grace of God, not that proclamation of the gospel is futile because of the spiritual condition of the lost.

Additional quotes

“Total depravity is the entire absence of holiness, not the intensity of sin. A totally depraved man is not as bad as he can be, but he has not holiness, that is, nothing to commend himself to God.”⁴

“The doctrine of depravity has to do, not with man's estimation of man, but God's estimation of man....But the Scriptures do not measure men by man; they measure men by God who has created them. The creature is measured by the Creator and found to be wanting.”⁵

J. O. Philpot stated:

As no heart can sufficiently conceive, so no tongue can adequately express, the state of wretchedness and ruin into which sin has cast guilty, miserable man. In separating him from God, it severed him from the only source of all happiness and holiness. It has ruined him body and soul: the one it has filled with sickness and disease; in the other it has defaced and destroyed the image of God in which it was created. It has made him love sin and hate God.⁶

All fall short of the Glory of God

⁴ Dr. Harold W. Hoehner's outline (DTS, Spring 1991, Exegesis of Romans 206, unpublished class notes)

⁵ J. D. Penticost, *Things which become sound doctrine*, p.9-10.

⁶ Quotes in Aurthor W. Pink, *The Total Depravity of Man*, Providence Baptist Ministries © Baptist Trumpeter Publications
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