

Total Depravity

Is it Biblical?

- “Depravity is simply Moral Corruption”
- “the word deprave is from the Latin Depravare, which is made up of the intensive de, signifying “completely” and proves, meaning “crooked”. Thus, “completely crooked” or “totally depraved””

-Laurence Vance

What is meant by
“Total Depravity”

“II. By this sin they fell from their original righteousness and communion with God, and so became dead in sin, and wholly defiled in all the parts and faculties of soul and body.

III. They being the root of all mankind, the guilt of this sin was imputed; and the same death in sin, and corrupted nature, conveyed to all their posterity descending from them by ordinary generation.

IV. From this original corruption, whereby we are utterly indisposed, disabled, and made opposite of all good, and wholly inclined to all evil, do proceed all actual transgressions”

–Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter VI

“In Reformed theology total depravity refers to the idea that our whole humanity is fallen. That is, there is no part of me that has not been affected in some way by the Fall. Sin affects my will, my heart, my mind, and my body.”

–R.C. Sproul, *Chosen by God*

“The concept of total depravity is often confused with the idea of utter depravity...Utter depravity would mean that we are all as sinful as we possibly could be. We know that is not the case. No matter how much each of us has sinned, we are able to think of worse sins that we could have committed. Even Adolf Hitler refrained from murdering his mother.”

–R.C. Sproul, *Chosen by God*

“Total depravity (also called total inability, total corruption) is the biblical doctrine closely linked with the doctrine of original sin as formalized by Augustine and advocated in many Protestant confessions of faith and catechisms, especially in Calvinism. The doctrine understands the Bible to teach that, as a consequence of the Fall of man, every person born into the world is morally corrupt, enslaved to sin and is, apart from the grace of God, utterly unable to choose to follow God or choose to turn to Christ in faith for salvation.”

–Theopedia

“III. 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 good, and dead in sin, is not able by his own strength, to convert himself, or to prepare himself thereunto.”

IV. When God converts a sinner, and translates him into the state of grace, he frees him from his natural bondage under sin; and, by his grace alone, enables him freely to will and to do that which is spiritually good; yet so, as that by reason of this remaining corruption, he doth not perfectly, nor only, will that which is good, but doth also will that which is evil.”

–Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter X

“When a Calvinist says Total Depravity, what he really means is Total Inability, which has nothing to do with Total Depravity at all, but is rather the supposed results of it.”

–**Laurence Vance, *The Other Side of Calvinism***

“Human beings are incapable of believing because they are dead in trespasses and sins as a results of the sin that Adam introduced into the world.” This view is often called the “total depravity” of man—although we noted that this phrase too does not appear in Scripture. Just as dead creatures cannot respond to any stimulus, the argument runs, so men and women are constitutionally unable to respond to God. In order to respond they must receive new life (they must be “born again”). Only then can they respond with the faith that God gives them. Without any action on their part (they are dead and therefore cannot act) God regenerates those he decides to regenerate by his Spirit; they are then, and only then, able to believe in Christ.”

–John Lennox, *Determined to Believe*

“A man is not regenerated because he has first believed in Christ, but he believes in Christ because he has been regenerated.”

–Arthur W. Pink

“Unless regeneration takes place first, there is no possibility of faith.”

“We do not believe in order to be born again; we are born again that we may believe.”

–R.C. Sproul

“New birth is a miraculous creation of God that enables a formerly “dead” person to receive Christ and so be saved. We do not bring about the new birth by our faith. God brings about our faith by the new birth.”

—John Piper

2 Illustrations given by R.C. Sproul in his book Chosen by God, on pages 87-89 drive home the Calvinistic view that conflates physical death with spiritual death.

So according to Calvinism, Total Depravity also known as Total Inability results in mankind not being able to believe the gospel because they are spiritually dead and unable to respond to the gospel call unless God first regenerates them. So, one of the major mantras of the Calvinist system is: Regeneration (being made spiritually alive) precedes faith

“It turns out that Calvinism only believes man’s depravity is total with respect to believing the gospel. This doctrine would be more accurately called singular depravity. That is, man is apparently capable of doing just about any and every good thing in his deadness except believe the gospel.”

–David Winston Busch, *Sonship Snares*

What saith the scriptures

- Gen.6:5—“And God 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. 6:11-12—“The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence. And God looked upon the earth, and, behold it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth.”

- Gen. 8:21 — “The imagination of man’s heart is evil from his youth.”
- Ecc. 7:20 — “For there is not a just man upon the earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not.”
- Ps. 39:5 — “Every man at his best state is altogether vanity.”
- Ps. 51:5 — “Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me.”
- Ps. 58:3 — “The wicked are estranged from the womb: they go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies.”
- Jer. 17:9 — “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?”

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- Mark 7:20-23—“And he said, That which cometh out of the man, that defileth the man. For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: All these evil things come from within, and defile the man.

- Romans 3:9-12—“What then? are we better than they? No, in no wise: for we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin: As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one.”

- Romans 5:8—“But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”
- Romans 5:10—“For if, when we were enemies...”
- Romans 5:12—“Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.”

The other side of the coin

- Gen. 20:5-6—an unregenerate man is said, by God, to have done something in the integrity of his heart
- Matt. 7:11—Jesus said that unregenerate evil men know how to give good gifts unto their children.
- Acts 10:1-4, 22, 31, 34-35—an unregenerate man doing works that God looks favorably at. He still needs to get saved, so God sends Peter to Cornelius. Cornelius believes the message and then they received the Holy Ghost.
- Romans 2:14—The gentiles “do by nature the things contained in the law”

Major Proof Text for Total Inability: Ephesians 2:1-3

“And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: Among who also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.

- How is “dead” used in scripture
 - Death means “Separation”
 - physical death—soul and spirit are separated from my body
 - Lk. 15:11-32 —v.24 “For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry.” The prodigal son was separated from relationship with his father.
 - Romans 6:2—believers are “dead to sin” Our Holy Spirit baptism separates us from the power of sin. (Romans 6:6)
 - Col. 2:20—“Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world...” We are separated from the “rudiments of the world”
 - 1 Timothy 5:6—“But she that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth.” Separated from God’s kind of functional life. Eternal life is a quality of life that we can lay hold on now or not.
 - Rev. 3:1 —“...I know thy works, that thou has a name that thou livest, and art dead.”

Are we able to believe the gospel being spiritually dead? In other words, does faith precede regeneration (new life)

- John 5:24-25,40
- John 6:63
- John 20:31
- Gal.3:2; Eph. 1:13

Why don't men believe the gospel?

- 1 Cor.1:18—“For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God.
- 2 Cor. 4:3-4—“But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.
- Luke 8:11-12—“Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. Those by the way side are they that hear; then cometh the devil, and taketh away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved.”

“This first point of Calvinism is attempting, among other things, to philosophically address why some men believe the gospel and others don’t. This is as useless as asking why some men are murderers and thieves, while others have respect for the law. Men are culpable for their beliefs and actions. This extends to their acceptance or rejection of the gospel when confronted with the righteousness of God and its implications.

The reasons for a man’s response to the gospel are as varied and complex as all other human behavior. The difference is that God declares that belief of the gospel, unlike other actions, is not a work (Rom.4:5). Faith, in accordance with the terms of the gospel, is how we receive the gift. If faith is itself the gift, then there is nothing to receive.”

–David Winston Busch, *Sonship Snares*

Common Proof Texts for Total Inability

- Ezekiel 36:26-27—The context is needed. start in v.22 and read through the rest of the chapter. Eze.11:17-20; Eze.18:23, 30-32
- 1 Cor.2:14—The context is needed. start in 2:1 and go thru 3:3
- John 1:13—The context is needed. start in v.12
- John 6:44-45—>John 12:32—context involves the Father's sheep that were present within the nation when the Son came, were being given to the Son and responding to the Son. God would eventually draw all men to himself but not until after the cross work was finished.
- Matt. 7:16—“Ye shall know them by their fruits....” Context starts in v.15 and is dealing with false prophets. You would know them by what they said—the fruit of their lips. Reference the article written on our website at crbible.org

Do we have the ability to respond to God?

- It is assumed throughout the bible. (“come unto me”)
- Romans 4:4-5—“Now to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.”
- Romans 10:14—“How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?”
- 2 Thes. 2:8-12

Conclusion: 2 different views

- Calvinist viewpoint: Total Depravity also known as Total Inability results in mankind not being able to believe the gospel because they are spiritually dead and unable to respond to the gospel call unless God first regenerates them. So, one of the major mantras of the Calvinist system is: Regeneration precedes faith.
- My viewpoint: With the exception of Jesus Christ, every person sins, they are sinners, they are spiritually dead, they are servants of sin, but still retain the ability to respond to God positively. That is why God holds us responsible for rejecting the gospel because we are response—able, able to respond. Faith precedes regeneration.