

Here We Stand: Total Depravity

INTRODUCTION

- A brief review of the 5 Sola's
- Our objective over our remaining evenings together is to begin unpacking what is called in Reformed Theology, "The doctrines of grace". We are going to devote one evening per each point to analyze what Scripture teaches concerning the nature of sin and the nature of God's saving grace.

2 very important qualifiers to this study

- #1 The division we are about to address within the Reformed church is not a division concerning the essentials of the Christian faith!
- #2, although these doctrines are not essential to be a Christian, we believe they are essential to ascribe all the glory to God in salvation and that they grant the Christian the truest grounds for comfort and assurance.

Arminianism's First Point

- *"Man is never so completely corrupted by sin that he cannot savingly believe the gospel when it is put before him."*
- In other words, they believe that man possesses the "ability" to respond to the gospel in and of himself. Man is able to comply with the gospel command to "repent and believe" *apart* from God's *regenerating* grace.
- And here's the implication... salvation or damnation, ultimately will be dependent on the sinner's choice.
- The Synod of Dort's teaching could be summarized under this counter point... "Total Depravity". This has also been referred to as Radical Corruption.

Erasmus and Luther

- In 1524 Desiderius Erasmus, a Renaissance humanist and Catholic priest, was considered in his time as the foremost opponent to challenge Martin Luther and his teachings on the nature of saving grace. So he attacked Luther on the issue of the "free will of man".

“You and you alone have seen the hinge on which all turns! This decides whether Christianity will be a religion of pure grace or of a polluted grace. Would it be part God and part man? Would God supply the grace and man supply the faith, so that man now becomes his co-savior. And that man saves himself as much as God saves him! NO!” Luther goes on to say “God supplies not only the forgiveness of sins through grace but God also supplies the gift of saving faith and the gift of repentance! Man contributes nothing! God supplies everything! God is exclusively the Savior of lost sinners!”

Martin Luther *“Bondage of the will”*

- Arminius was not novel in his beliefs. He, and his followers were essentially re-articulating Rome’s position on the ability of the human will.

Total Depravity Defined

- When discussing this first and vital issue the question we are dealing with is this... *“Is man merely wounded by sin or dead in sin?”*
- It is imperative that we rightly define sin biblically because the doctrine of salvation is necessarily built upon the doctrine of sin.

“The plain truth is that a right knowledge of sin lies at the root of all saving Christianity. Dim or indistinct views of sin are the origin of most of the errors, heresies and false doctrines of the present day. If a man does not realize the dangerous nature of his soul’s disease, you cannot wonder if he is content with false or imperfect remedies.”

JC Ryle *“Holiness”*

What “Total Depravity” is **not!**

- Total Depravity does not mean that man is as sinful as he could be! In other words, we are not saying that man is “Utterly Depraved”.
- God in common grace restrains sinners in many ways from acting out the full potential of their sinful natures. The Lord restrains fallen men by their consciences, by parental authority, by civil authorities and by His own goodness in common grace to keep people from becoming little devils.
- Total depravity does not mean that sinful man cannot do anything “good”.

What “Total Depravity” is

- Total depravity means that sin has affected man extensively (that is to say, every part of man in all his human faculties has been affected by sin).

- Arminian's believe in "Partial Depravity". They believe that sin has affected every part of man's faculties (except his will). They believe that sin has merely wounded him! They believe that with the assistance of some grace by God, that sinful man has the "ability" to respond to the gospel offer with repentance and faith.
- The Reformers on the other hand, believe that sin has extended to every part of man's faculties (including his will)! Sin has so affected man that it leaves him "spiritually dead"! And because he is spiritually dead, he hates God and will not exercise his will to come to God, b/c He cannot come to God.
- Ephesians 2:1-3, *"And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience--among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind."*
- Romans 5:18-19, *"As one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous."*
- When Adam sinned two things occurred. V.18 told us that his "guilt" was imputed to us. Imputed; meaning reckoned/counted; external. His trespass led to condemnation for all! That's legal terminology. We are all guilty! But v.19 tells us that his pollution/his fallen corrupt nature was also imparted to us by natural generation. Imparted; meaning, internal corruption.
- The consistent teaching of the Bible concerning man's state in sin... Genesis 6:5, *"The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually."* Jeremiah 17:9, *"The heart is deceitful above all things, and it is exceedingly corrupt: who can know it?"* Jesus words in John 8:34, *"Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin."* Titus 3:3, *"For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another."* And then listen to Paul as he weaves multiple portions of the Psalms to describe man in his fallen state, *"None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one." "Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive." "The venom of asps is under their lips." "Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness." "Their feet are swift to shed blood; in their paths are ruin and misery, and the way of peace they have not known." "There is no fear of God before their eyes."*

- A good deed as defined by God is a deed done motivated out of love to God, it is done from the right rule which is the word of God and it is done to the right end which is the glory of God.
- Total Inability is one facet of Total Depravity. Man's will is bound to his sinful nature. Man will only will that which is consistent with his sin nature. Man's will is not free; it is bound to sin as a slave.
- John 6:44, Jesus says, *"No man can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him."* Jesus doesn't say no man "may" come; may is a word of permission. Jesus say's no man "can" come; can is a word of ability!
- Nothing less than a miracle must occur if sinful man is to exercise saving faith. And that miracle is what's called in Scripture the new birth, or regeneration. And what we will see in subsequent lessons is that the new birth *precedes* faith and sovereign election precedes the new birth.
- Once we affirm the Reformed position of "Total Depravity" ... there's no way off this train. Our view of man will determine our view of the gospel.

Resources

"A Journey in Grace", Richard P. Belcher

"Amazing Grace: History and Theology of Calvinism" DVD

"Whatever happened to the doctrines of grace", James M. Boice

"What's so great about the doctrines of grace?", Richard D. Phillips

"When grace comes home", Terry L. Johnson

"Five Points of Calvinism: A Study Guide", Edwin Palmer

For deeper reading and reflection...

"Redemption: Accomplished and Applied", John Murray

"The bondage of the will", Martin Luther