

Salvation 101

Lesson 1

Depravity

PART I EXPLANATION

Introduction: The most essential component to a proper understanding of salvation is a correct view of the condition of fallen man, which is commonly called depravity. “Total depravity” is a term used to describe the inability of man to save himself apart from the grace of God. It implies that there is nothing inside of any individual that would cause them to seek after God. Your understanding of depravity will determine your view of the respective roles that God and man play in the salvation experience and is the foundation to a proper view of salvation.

The ultimate question to be answered is: who takes the initiative in the salvation experience? Who is the active agent and who is passive agent? For example, did Christ die on the cross to make salvation available and is now passively standing by to discover who will exercise their will to repent and believe the gospel? Or, is God the active agent pursuing man by convicting and regenerating them, leading to their simultaneous conversion? The Bible tells us that Christ came to “*seek and to save that which was lost.*” A proper understanding of depravity reveals that God must be the active agent because “*there is none that seeketh after God.*”

A great example to illustrate the concept of the active agent is the conversion of the apostle Paul. When he was on the Damascus road in Acts 9, he was not pursuing Christ. He was headed to Damascus to persecute and kill anyone who professed the name of Christ. Paul himself describes his conversion as being “*apprehended of Christ Jesus.*”

The reason that God must be the active agent is that man, as a result of The Fall, is spiritually ‘*dead in trespasses and sins*’. (Eph. 2:1) What exactly does this mean? It means that man is dead to spiritual things. The Bible tells us that the “*natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, they are foolishness unto him*”. Unregenerate man has no capacity to comprehend spiritual truth. The Bible illustrates this concept by referring to unsaved people as being blind and deaf. It is not just that they cannot hear or see *very well*, it is that they have no capacity to perceive.

This condition of being dead to spiritual things is referred to as total depravity or total inability. It is not just that man is hesitant to repent and believe the gospel; they are totally depraved and unable to do so apart from the grace of God. Opponents of total depravity often deny its teaching based on an improper definition of the concept. Therefore, it is necessary to clearly define and understand what is meant by the term. Total depravity does not mean that all individuals do equally wicked things or that unsaved persons cannot do good things. It is that even their good works are filthy and unacceptable to God because they are acts of self righteousness. It is the failure to see themselves as wicked and as equally condemned as others.

The principle of total inability is that no individual is more spiritually dead than another. There is no person that is more or less saveable; all are in need of grace. A proper understanding of this reveals that the greatest sinners on earth are no more out of the reach of God’s amazing grace than any other sinner. Total depravity is describing the nature of man as being without the ability or capacity to seek after God, apart from the influence of the Holy Spirit. Understanding the nature of depravity is essential to a proper appreciation for and understanding of the grace of God in salvation. Each Christian should establish a well thought out definition of the term.

Definitions: For English use the Webster’s 1828 Dictionary and copy all appropriate definitions for each word. For the Greek and Hebrew use a Strong’s Concordance and copy the definition. The Strong’s number is in parenthesis.

English: Depravity -

Sin (original) -

Greek: (266) **hamartia** *ham-ar-tee'-ah* -

Hebrew: (2403) **chata** *khat-taw-aw'* -

(817) **asham** *aw-shawm'* -

(5753) **avon** *aw-vaw'* -

(7686) **shagah** *shaw-gaw'* -

(6586) **pasha** *paw-shah'* -

Quotation:

Louis Berkhof on Total Depravity:

What it does not mean

1. That every man is as thoroughly depraved as he can possibly become.
2. That the sinner is without an innate knowledge of the will of God or a conscience that discriminates between good and evil.
3. That sinful man does not often admire virtuous character and actions in others, or is incapable of disinterested affections and actions in his relations with his fellow men.
4. That every unregenerate man will indulge in every form of sin (e.g. sometimes one form of sin excludes another.).

What it does mean

1. That the inherent corruption extends to every part of man's nature, to all the faculties and powers, both of body and soul.
2. That there is no spiritual good, i.e., good in relation to God, in the sinner at all, but only perversion, which deserves God's wrath.

“Total inability is the term used to describe the effect of the pollution of sin on man's spiritual powers. Reformed theologians admit that unregenerate man is able to perform natural and civil good. However, by nature no man can do anything either to change the bias of his will toward self and sin, or to meet the requirements of God's holy law and merit His favor.” Alan Cairns

“The plain truth is that a right knowledge of sin lies at the root of all saving Christianity. Without it such doctrines as justification, conversion, sanctification, are ‘words and names’ which convey no meaning to the mind. The first thing, therefore, that God does when He makes anyone a new creature in Christ, is to send light into his heart and show him that he is a guilty sinner. ..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

4. Summarize the quote from William Gurnall in your own words.

5. What best describes the spiritual condition of man prior to salvation?

6. According to the 1828 Webster's definition of sin, what is the difference between Original and Actual sin?

7. Explain why depravity necessitates God being the active agent in the salvation of man.

8. How does the Apostle Paul's conversion illustrate man being the passive agent in the salvation experience?

9. What type of good does depraved man have the ability to do?

10. What type of good does depraved man not have the ability to do?

Key Scriptures: (*Look up these verses and fill in the blanks*)

Genesis 6:4-8 Six chapters into the Bible, God describes the wickedness of man as being

_____. He saw that _____ imagination of the _____ of his _____ was _____ evil _____.

Psalm 14:1-3 When God looked down from heaven to see how many were seeking after Him, how many did He find?

Mark 4:9-13 Christ purposely explained the mysteries of His kingdom in such a way (by parables) that even though they were seeing, they would not _____ and that even though they were hearing they would not _____ lest they should be _____ and their sins be _____.

Christ placed special emphasis upon this parable of the sower and declared that if they didn't understand the principle in this parable that they would be unable to _____.

John 6:44 Jesus taught in this verse the truth that no man _____ come to Him for salvation

_____ the Father _____ him.

Romans 3:9-20 Amongst all men, whether they are a Jew or a Gentile, there is _____ that _____ after God, there is none that doeth good, _____, _____. The greatest sign of man's depravity is that they have no _____ of _____. The purpose of God giving the law (10 Commandments) is to reveal their sinful condition, that their mouth may be _____ without excuse and all the world become _____ before God. No man will be declared righteous in his _____ by keeping the law, because the law was given to give a _____ of _____.

Romans 7:8 Without the law exposing sin, it was _____.

Romans 7:13 The law makes sin appear _____.

Ephesians 2:1-3 Prior to being saved, the natural man is _____ in his sins without ability to help himself and is by _____ a child of wrath.

I John 3:8-10 The person that lives in habitual sin reveals that he has the nature of the _____ . By our ordinary lifestyle we reveal whether we are the children of (have the same nature as) _____ or children of the _____ .

Key Chapter(s) (*Read daily and summarize in your own words the meaning of the chapter*):

Romans 1

PART III EXPECTATION

Memory verse: Ephesians 2:1

Personal Definition: (*Write a definition in your own words*)

Total Depravity -

Personal Confession: (*Study the confessions and summarize them in your own words*)

The Fall of Man-

Free will -

Meditation question: *(be prepared for discussion)*

What happened to the free will of man in the fall?

Extra Credit: Relate your conversion experience and how God was active in saving you.