

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.

Opponents of total depravity often deny its teaching based on an improper definition of the concept. Therefore, it is necessary to clearly define what is and what is not meant by the term. Simply put, total depravity means that inherited pollution pervades the entire human character. Louis Berkhof has attempted to remove the confusion by pointing out what total depravity does not mean:

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.

Your perspective of this doctrine will determine your view of the respective roles that God and man play in the salvation experience. The ultimate question to be answered is: who takes the initiative in the regeneration/conversion 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 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."

The reason that God must be the active agent is that man is spiritually 'dead in 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. 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 without the grace of God. That is why the greatest sinners are no more out of the reach of God's amazing grace than any other sinner. Though that does not mean that all individuals do equally wicked things or that unsaved persons cannot do good things. 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.

A great example to illustrate this point is the conversion of the apostle Paul. When he was on the Damascus road in Acts 9, was he pursuing or being pursued by Christ? He was not pursuing Christ, he was headed to Damascus to persecute and kill anyone who professed the name of Christ. In Philippians three, when Paul relates his conversion, he makes this statement, "that I may apprehend that for which also I have been apprehended of Christ Jesus". (Apprehend (Webster's) = to take or seize or take hold of)

A clear understanding of the nature of the depravity of man is essential to a proper appreciation for and understanding of the grace of God in salvation. Each Christian should establish a well thought out description of what total depravity is and what it is not.

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 -

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:

“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 he is content with false or imperfect remedies. I believe that one of the chief wants of the church in the nineteenth century has been, and is, clearer, fuller teaching about sin.” JC Ryle

“Let original sin make us walk with continual jealousy and watchfulness over our hearts. The sin of our nature is like a sleeping lion, the least thing that awakens it makes it rage. The sin of our nature, though it seems quiet, and lies as fire hid under the embers, yet if it be a little stirred and blown up by a temptation, how quickly may it flame forth into scandalous evils? Therefore we had need always to walk watchfully... A wandering heart needs a watchful eye.” Thomas Watson

“Is the Christian’s strength in the Lord, and not in himself? Surely then, the person outside of Christ must be a poor, impotent creature, helpless to do anything to effect his own salvation. If a living tree cannot grow without sap from the taproot, how can a rotten stump, which has no root, revive itself of its own accord? In other words, if a Christian imbued with God’s grace must continually rely on His strength, then surely the one outside of God’s grace, dead in trespasses and sin, can never produce such strength in himself. To be unregenerate is to be impotent.” William Gurnall

Confessions (Look up and read these articles)

New Hampshire Baptist Confession of Faith 1833

Article III The Fall Of Man

Article VI Salvation Free

London Confession of Faith of 1689

Chapter 6 Of the Fall of Man, Of Sin, and of the Punishment Thereof - paragraphs 1-5

Chapter 9 Of Free Will - paragraphs 1-5

Spurgeon’s Catechism

Q - Did our first parents continue in the state wherein they were created?

A - Our first parents being left to the freedom of their own will, fell from the state wherein they were created, by sinning against God (Ecc. 7:29) by eating the forbidden fruit (Gen. 3:6-8)

Q - What is sin?

A - Sin is any want of conformity to, or transgression of the law of God (I John 3:4)

Q - Did all mankind fall in Adam’s first transgression?

A -The covenant being made with Adam, not only for himself but for his posterity, all mankind descending from him by ordinary generation, sinned in him, and fell with him in his first transgression I Cor 15:22 Rom 5:12

Q - Into what estate did the fall bring mankind?

A - The fall brought mankind into a state of sin and misery Rom. 5:18

Q - Wherein consists the sinfulness of that state wherein man fell?

A - The sinfulness of that state whereunto man fell, consists in the guilt of Adam’s first sin Rom. 5:19 the want of original righteousness Rom. 3:10 and the corruption of his whole nature, which is commonly called original sin Eph. 2:1 Ps. 51:5 together with all actual transgressions which proceed from it Mt. 15:19

Q - What is the misery of that state whereunto man fell?

A - All mankind, by their fall, lost communion with God (Gen. 3:8,24), are under His wrath and curse (Eph. 2:3 Gal. 3:10), and so made liable to all the miseries in this life, to death itself, and to the pains of hell for ever (Rom. 6:23 Mt. 25:41).

Q - Did God leave all mankind to perish in the state of sin and misery?

A - God having, out of His good pleasure from all eternity, elected some to everlasting life (2 Thes. 2:13) did enter into a covenant of grace to deliver them out of the state of sin and misery, and to bring them into a state of salvation by a Redeemer (Rom 5:21).

Q - Are all transgression of the law equally heinous?

A - Some sins in themselves, and by reason of various aggravations are more heinous in the sight of God than others (John 19:11, I John 5:15)

Q - What does every sin deserve?

A - Every sin deserves God's wrath and curse, both in this life and that which is to come Eph. 5:6 Ps. 11:6

PART II EXPLORATION

Key Questions (Answer in writing)

1. What does depravity mean?
2. What does depravity not mean?
3. According to Romans 3:19-20, what has God given to reveal to man his depravity?
 - 4.
5. Summarize chapter 9 of the London confession in your own words.
 - 6.
7. What best describes the spiritual condition of man prior to salvation?
 - 8.
9. According to the 1828 Webster's definition of sin, what is the difference between Original and Actual sin?
 - 10.
11. Explain why depravity necessitates God being the active agent in the salvation of man.
 - 12.
13. How does the apostle Paul's conversion illustrate man being the passive agent in the salvation experience?
 - 14.
15. What type of good does depraved man have the ability to do?
 - 16.
17. What type of good does depraved man not have the ability to do?

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

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 that no man _____ come to Him for salvation _____ the Father _____ him.

Romans 3:9-20 Amongst all men, whether Jew or 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 _____ or without excuse and all the world become _____ before God, unable to maintain their innocence. No man will be declared righteous in his _____ by keeping the law, because the entire purpose of the law was to give a

_____ of _____ .

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

Romans 7:13 The law serves to make 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.