

Examining Calvinism Part 2

Total Depravity/Total Inability?

John 1:12-13; Eph. 2:1-5

What is Total Depravity/Total Inability according to Reformed Theology/ Calvinism?

In examining Total Depravity, I am using the ESV (English Standard Version) because that is the version that they for the most part use.

Introduction

Before we get into what Calvinists mean by Total Depravity there is some groundwork that should be laid. Last week Bob gave us the historical account of the foundational roots of what today is called the 5-points of Reformed theology that started as far back as the pagan gnostic Manicheans.

Something I think we can all agree on.

It goes like this. God created the heavens and the earth and all that is in them. That included a perfect paradise garden, and, in that garden, He placed the man to care for the garden whom He formed after His own image out of the dust of the ground and breathed into him the breath of life and he became a living creature without sin and to live forever. God caused two special trees to spring up out of the ground, the tree of life and the tree of knowledge of **good and evil**. He commanded the man saying, "You may eat of all the trees of the garden, except the tree of knowledge of good and evil, for in the day that you eat of it, you will surely die.

Adam was alone, so God met his need by fashioning a woman out of one of the man's ribs. When God brought her to him, the man exclaimed this is bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh so she shall be called woman the mother of all human beings.

God commanded them to procreate and fill the earth and gave them the responsibility to manage the garden of God. God did all of this knowing that they would eat of the Tree of Knowledge of good and evil and die and become sinners with a sin nature that they could not change. Because of that sin nature they would be separated from God forever unless God Himself would provide a way to redeem them from their sin.

Unavoidable Division

We are instructed to keep the bond of peace as much as is possible. (Eph. 4:1-3) It is sad to see the division in the church, but there are times it is unavoidable.

In 1 Cor. 3 Paul had to deal with jealousy and strife in the church of Corinth because they were divided over the teachings of Paul and Apollos. From Acts 18:24-28 we learn that Apollos was a gifted, dynamic, and fervent speaker in spreading the truth that Christ was indeed the Messiah that had risen from the grave to pay for sin but lacked insight as far as the Scripture were concerned, yet those gifts were gaining him notoriety among many believers, particularly in Corinth.

Paul on the other hand lacked the same charisma, was blunt, had an uncomely physical defect, was writing from prison, yet he was unassuming and had great wisdom and insight into the Scriptures because God had revealed to him the mystery of God's grace and that the Gentile were fellow heirs with the Jews. (Eph. 3:1-13)

We all need to heed Paul's warning of following a man or a belief system based on whether he or the belief system is appealing to us. I know for myself some my greatest life lessons have come through sources that were not appealing to me and even downright demeaning.

These are things that should not cause division within the church, but in the case at hand it is unavoidable, but we need to do so without anger and a mean spirit.

Again, we urge you search out the Scripture like the Bereans to see if what we say is true. Scripture does not contradict itself. Those portions that seem to create a paradox is only because we are lacking understanding or have misunderstood one or even both sides.

Case in point

I was accused of being a Calvinist as well as being an Armenian on the basis of whether I believed that it is possible or not possible to lose your salvation once you are saved.

Side note: Many of us that are not Calvinist believe that once a person trusts in the work of Jesus Christ as payment of their sin he is declared righteous by God, therefore God will be faithful in giving them eternal life based on His promise.

Over 50 years ago one of Bertha's older sisters who together with her husband were missionaries in the backwoods of southern Ohio, accused me of being a Calvinist because I made a statement regarding the security of the believer. When I told her I was not a Calvinist she replied, then you must be an Arminian, no I am not Arminian. She replied, "well you have to be one or the other." No, I am a Christian, a follower of Christ and His apostle's teachings as revealed in the New Testament. Even though Calvin and Arminius may have been godly men, but men they were like me, susceptible to error. I cannot align myself with either Calvin or Arminius because Calvin emphasized the sovereignty of God to the point that unless God gives you faith to believe you cannot have faith to believe. On the other hand, Arminius emphasized the responsibility lay solely upon man. In a moment I will show why that matters. Calvin taught that in order to be sure of eternal life you had to persevere in faith unto death, and Arminius taught that you could lose your salvation by sinning. Both of these teachings involved works and are contrary to the Word of God.

Those teachings are the result of the lack of consistent literal, grammatical, and historical hermeneutics, which I believe to be the main cause of error today. What do I mean by that? We need to use the same method of interpretation of Scripture throughout the entire Bible. That is the literal intention that the author intended using his grammatic, and historical background within the context of the subject. That does not mean that I do not believe there are types, allegories, metaphors, and parabolic illustrations in Scripture. For there are many.

Example: When I was a young boy, my dad tells me, "if you don't straighten up, I'm going to burn your britches." In the literal interpretation of his meaning, I understand that I better behave or I'm in for a spanking, not

that he will literally set my pants on fire, they just going to feel like they are on fire.

It has been well said many times, "If the literal makes sense, seek no other sense, lest you end up with nonsense."

As we proceed, we need to realize that both sides claim God's Word for the base their teaching.

One adherent of Calvinism stated, "TULIP is like a glove, cut off one finger and the glove is no good." I would agree with him. He went on to state, "those who call themselves Calvinist who change the meaning of TULIP or take away one or more of the points are not Calvinists at all."

To reaffirm what Bob said last week, we are only examining the original meaning of the acronym TULIP as stated by them, otherwise we will only add more confusion to the confusion.

I must say at this juncture it is not our intent to enter into the old useless dialog of the centuries or into heated debate with those who are adamantly opposed to our teaching of free grace because that only adds to the strife just as it did in Corinth.

Our goal is to inform believers of how they wrongly interpret Scripture.

Perhaps you are wondering why all the fuss. If you have not yet run into the neo-Calvinism of today, you are likely to very soon.

From my point of view in the early years of our ministry I would only occasionally come in contact with a church or pastor that was 5-point. The main issues of those days were the Charismatic and Liberal Churches. After we went to Brazil (1973) I cannot remember any that I came in contact with, so for those years it was a non-issue to me. It only has been in the last 30 years that I have seen it become a real issue. More recently however, I have noticed an uptick in the number direct derogatory remarks made by those of the Calvinist persuasion toward those of us who teach Free Grace on social media. Some have gone so far in saying that what we teach is damnable heresy.

These renewed efforts are due largely to a number of high profile and well-known celebrity preachers that have become very dogmatic not only in their teaching and writing in support of their world view but also have been very

vocal toward those of us that reject their teaching. All of this has caused them to gain a significant foot hold in the Evangelical Community.

It is this dogma that is directed toward their unhinged desire to propagate their world view that makes it necessary to respond to their claims with the truth as established by God's Word and the apostles in the early church, and to give the other side a voice because we see real danger in their teaching. We are not interested in a tick-for-tack argument.

What is at stake? The Sovereignty of God vs. human responsibility.

Beginning with Augustine and throughout church history since his time, there has been debate between which of these two aspects is correct, the Sovereignty of God or human responsibility? The answer to that question is, they both are correct because the Word clearly teaches both.

What may seem impossible to rectify for man is not the least bit difficult for God. To accept one and deny the other or to place emphasis on one or the other is error. Both are clearly taught in the Word of God. **And we must believe both because they both reveal two aspects of God.**

Again, God's Word does not contradict itself. The problem is with our understanding the true meaning of each subject. I do not see a paradox but the power and wisdom of God that has no limit.

In order for God to accomplish His Eternal Purpose (Eph. 3:11), which of the following lines up with all the Word of God?

1. For God to create man (Adam) without sin and giving him the choice to obey His command to not eat, knowing that he would choose to disobey thus, making him sin against his Creator. That resulted in a sin nature for him (likewise all that would be born from him) that separated him from God with no way to undo what he had done. So, only God could rectify the situation. So, He chose some out of the mass of humanity that He would redeem but, they have no choice in resisting God's grace because they are dead in their sins, so they have no ability to make a choice to believe. This results in no human responsibility for their redemption because they are born dead in their sin, and their only hope of redemption is for God to choose or not to choose to regenerate them so they can then believe.

2. Or, to create him without sin giving him the choice to obey or not, knowing that he will choose to disobey and be separated from fellowship with God because he is now a sinner with a sin nature, and that all born from him will inherit that same sin nature that results in man being unable to redeem himself. Then provide a way for all that is born from Adam to be redeemed.

Knowing that leaving man to himself without drawing him he will forever be lost, unless He draws him back by His endless mercy, grace and love and providing the way back through faith in Christ and giving him the choice to reject or accept mercy grace and love?

When I stop to gaze at the stars without number and begin to learn of the complexity of creation that God simply spoke into being I am amazed beyond words of the power and wisdom of God. "His power has no limit, His grace has no measure, for out of the abundance of His mercy He giveth and giveth again."

Therefore, as sovereign Lord of all (even of those who reject Him) it was no problem for Him to give man a free will to choose to reject or receive His gift of Grace and still be able to retain His sovereignty and make all things work according to His eternal purpose that he realized in Christ Jesus our LORD without violating man's free will. (Eph. 3:11)

Who then can question God's wisdom for God had the problem of His sovereignty and human responsibility solved before He laid the foundation of the world when He chose us **in Christ** to be conformed to **His** Image?

The only way to be conformed to the image of Christ is for us to be in Christ and that is what God in His wisdom knew and that is why He chose to send His blessed Son to become a sinless man to die for us. That is grace, as dead I was buried with Him, through faith I was raised with Him to new life because God put me in Christ through faith. (Col. 2:12) (Eph. 1:3; Rom.8:29)

Remember God said, "Let us make **man** (mankind) in our image, after our likeness. And let **them** have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." So, God created man in his own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. ([Gen 1:26-27 ESV](#))

What does it mean to be created in the image of God?

First, notice the plural, in the context we can see that this does not just apply to Adam, but to all of Adam and Eves descendants.

Second, it does not mean that our body is in the image of God, nor do we have the sovereign attributes of God, but we do share in the communicable attributes, such as free will, we are God's image bearers, therefore the objects of His blessing; verse 28, and **God blessed them.**

Third, this is what separates us from the animal kingdom, both animals and humans have a conscience of life, try to kill an ant that is crawling along minding its own business and it will go frantic trying to get away.

Fourth, being created in the image of God we are able to have a personal relationship with God our creator as well as our spouse, family, and friends so that we may reflect the goodness of God.

Fifth, being created in God's image indicate personality, moral, and spiritual qualities that God and man share, such as self-consciousness, God-consciousness, **freedom**, responsibility, speech, moral discernment, etc.

What is Total Depravity/Total Inability according to Reformed Theology/ Calvinism?

But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. (Joh 1:12-13 ESV)

Just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. Eph 1:4 ESV

And you were dead in the trespasses and sins (Eph 2:1 ESV)

even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ--by grace you have been saved-- (Eph 2:5 ESV)

1. Total Inability leads to Unconditional Election that teaches that God unconditionally chose some for salvation and some for damnation before He laid the foundations of the earth. There are some Calvinists that say God only chose some for salvation but not for damnation. This is known as single predestination. However, R. C. Sproul a defender of double predestination, wrote: *"The question then is not if predestination is double, but how it is double. Some advocates of predestination argue for single predestination. They maintain that, though some are predestined to election, no*

one is predestined to damnation or reprobation.... This view is based more on sentiment than on logic or exegesis. It is manifestly obvious that if some people are elect and some are not elect, then predestination has two sides to it. It must be double in some sense." At least he is consistent

What Reformed Calvinistic Theology does is over emphasize both total inability and God's sovereignty leaving out man's responsibility by saying that God has to choose to regenerate him before he can believe, therefore it is in error.

Total Inability quotes:

Canons of Dordt, III & IV, Article 3 "Therefore, all people are conceived in sin and are born children of wrath, unfit for any saving good, inclined to evil, dead in their sins, and slaves to sin; without the grace of the regenerating Holy Spirit they are neither willing nor able to return to God, to reform their distorted nature, or even to dispose themselves to such reform."

"Calvinist have created a new doctrine, Omni-Causality (that God causes all things including sin)" Andy Woods.

A.W. Pink in his book Sovereignty of God, p. 201. "That God decreed sin should enter this world through the disobedience of our first parents was a secret hid in His own breast."

In Edwin Palmer's book, The Five Points of Calvinism, he states: "God is in back of everything. He decides and causes all things to happen that do happen...even sin. ... God ordained sin and unbelief."

R.C. Sproul Jr. (R.C. Sproul's son) said, "that God desired that man would fall into sin... [God] created sin."

Simply stated by John Piper in his book, What Calvinists Believe about the Five Points of Calvinism, "Total Depravity is People are spiritually dead and therefore unable to respond to God's offer of salvation unless He first regenerates them."

Hanko, Hoeksema & Van Baren, The Five Points of Calvinism "When Calvin and the fathers of Dordt insisted that depravity was total, they... intended that the expression 'total depravity' be a description of what Scripture calls 'death.' The sinner is dead; spiritually dead.... He is not sick.... He is dead."

Pink, in his book *The Sovereignty of God* “And because the unregenerate are spiritually dead...then it follows that faith from them is impossible, for a dead man cannot believe anything.”

Jonathan Barlow, “*The Five Points of Calvinism*,” “Without the power of the Holy Spirit, the natural man is blind and deaf to the message of the gospel.... This is why Total Depravity has also been called ‘Total Inability.’ The man without a knowledge of God will never come to this knowledge without God’s making him alive through Christ....”

Hanko, Hoeksema & Van Baren, *The Five Points of Calvinism. Bondage of the will* — “ Since unregenerate man is dead, his mind is so filled with the darkness of the lie that there is no room for the truth in it. The same is true of man’s will. The bondage of the will describes man’s state precisely. His will is bound — bound by sin.... The sinner does not, but also cannot will the good. This is his nature. He is dead. Can a dead man think? Can a dead man?”

As we saw in the creation of man, God gave man (mankind) a free will, but He also gave them responsibilities of management, to meet each other’s needs, to multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it by ruling over it, and lastly to honor God by obeying His voice.

For God to take away man’s free will to choose between both good and evil would be to violate His unchanging character by admitting that He lacked the power to work good in spite of man’s evil doing, making Him less than sovereign.

The only answer is that man still retains the freedom to accept or reject His gift of Grace. He cannot deny Himself; for *God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good.* (Gen. 1:31)

In reality death according to God does not mean to cease exist.

Physical death is a temporary separation of body and spirit. The body decays and is no longer aware but the spirit is still fully aware, and the body will one day be reunited either for judgement or to spend eternity joined to Christ. (Ma. 25:46)

Spiritual death for Adam and Eve was instant separation from God as we see when they tried to hide from God. They were depraved sinners with a sin nature that tried to cover their nakedness with leaves, yet they talked

with God and God with them, and gave them the verdict that they now lived on a cursed earth, and in Grace, he dressed them in animal skins that He made for them. They were dead in their sin, yet they were fully aware of what they had done.

Cain and Able were also dead in their sins, yet they had the choice whether to sacrifice the way God told them to or not. Abel's choice justified him before God but cost him his life. Cain's choice led him to murder and eventually led him out from the presence of the Lord.

It is true to God's Word that we believers were dead in our sins (unbelievers still are) without any way to pay for our sins because to pay for the penalty of sin requires the death (separation from God) by one that has not been separated from God by sin but that would be separated from God because of sin.

We do not take sin lightly. Some commit all sorts of atrocities and unthinkable crimes. Some commit less offensive sin like trying to make themselves look good at. Some are arrogant. Some lead decent lives helping others, and some even give or have given their lives to save others. Some are very disciplined, and faithful to their religious belief. Some even attend church and pray to God. But God says the heart is deceitful and desperately wicked. All our righteous acts are like filthy rags. [Isa 64:6](#)
 We agree that man left to himself does not seek God, but man has not been left to himself. That is why our Lord said, "if I be lifted up, I will draw **all** men unto me." (Jon. 12:32)

Jesus said, "if I go away, I will send the Holy Spirit to convict the world of sin, righteousness and judgment." (Jon. 16:8)

And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commands **all** men **everywhere** to repent. (Act 17:30) All means all.

No one can ever say that God did not draw them to Himself.

Death: Calvinism vs Bible		
	CALVINISM	BIBLE
Spiritual Death:	Corpse, cadaver	Separated
Consciousness:	Cessation, lifeless	Aware
Results:	Inability	Can hear and believe

Spiritual Response:	Regeneration first	God's Word, Spirit's conviction, Gospel's Power.
Regeneration:	Before faith	Result of faith
My revision of Congdon Ministries International graft, 2014		