

TOTAL DEPRAVITY

Total depravity means that **everything** that a person does is sin. Even the 'good' things a person does are sinful because they are not done to the glory of God.

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"

Psalms 53:3 "They have all fallen away; together they have become corrupt; there is none who does good, not even one."

Romans 1:21 "For although they knew God, they did not honour him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened."

Total depravity also refers to the fact that a person's faculties are so darkened by sin that a person will **always reject God without exception every time**. The Bible describes such a person as spiritually deaf and blind to the things of God with no capacity to respond to God as they are spiritually dead.

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 flesh and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind."

So total depravity means we are utterly sinful, unable to please God in any way, and having no delight or joy in the holiness and glory of God. It also means an unwillingness and inability to say yes to God on our own. Our sinful nature is such that by nature we will always reject God every time.

This means that I don't just need saving from my sins but I also need saving from my condition which always rejects God.

IRRESISTABLE GRACE

Irresistible Grace is the grace that God gives to his elect. As the gospel is preached a general call is made to all people to repent and believe. However because of total depravity that call will always be met with rejection unless God does a work through his Spirit to overcome a person's obstacles. This work of overcoming a person's natural inclination to always say 'no' is called irresistible grace.

In addition to the outward general call of the gospel the Spirit works an effectual inward call. It is called effectual because it always works. ***The effectual call of the Spirit creates faith by causing a person to be regenerated*** ('born from above', 'made a new creation'). The Spirit causes blind eyes and deaf ears that could not see and hear the gospel to respond. He gives a new heart to a person enabling them to say 'yes' to God for the first time.

A person to whom God gives this grace is unable to resist the gospel at the moment of conversion because of the Spirit's work. It is not that God makes a person a Christian against their will but rather the person's will has been released from bondage to sin and made alive so that they can actually will to say 'yes'. But they could never have willed to say 'yes' without the regenerating, healing of eyes and ears and being alive by the Spirit. It is this work of the Spirit that makes God's grace irresistibly glorious, attractive and desirable.

So in giving my testimony I may well describe the circumstances in which the Spirit worked to bring me to faith but at the end of the day I say that I choose God not because of my emotions, intellect or circumstances but rather because of the Spirit's enabling me to respond.

Regeneration then brings about faith. We often think that faith brings about regeneration. Regeneration is the work of the Spirit, working in whoever he pleases, enabling a person to respond in faith.

Quotes

First God calls people to Himself, enabling them to hear and understand the gospel.

Then He graciously gives those He calls the free gifts of repentance and faith.

God produces both creation and new creation by his Word and Spirit. ... he calls all things into being out of nothing ... by the word of his almighty power he again raises up the fallen world.

source: Bavinck, 'The Call of God' vol. 4 p.33.

UNCONDITIONAL ELECTION

God does not give the effectual call of the Spirit, that is, regeneration and irresistible grace, to all people but to his elect only.

If God did give the effectual call of the Spirit, regeneration and irresistible grace to all people then all people would be saved. Clearly this isn't the case.

Election is God choosing ***some*** people to be the recipients of irresistible grace and salvation. This choice is based on God's free will before the creation of the world.

Those God fore-knew he predestined, justified, glorified. Foreknowledge can mean two things. It can mean 'knowing things before they happen' or 'knowing in the sense of an intimate personal relationship' (as in Adam knew Eve). When it says

"those God foreknew he also predestined", it is the people that are the objects of God's foreknowing not their future choices. This verse is saying that those people whom God fore-loved before the creation of the world, he predestined, justified, glorified. A similar verse is when God says to Israel "You only have I know of all the families of the earth". Clearly God knows about other nations! What is meant is that only Israel has God known in an intimate relationship.

When we say that election is *unconditional* we mean that God was free to choose whomever he wanted, free of all external constraints. God choose us not because of any condition in us that determined his choice.

Why am I one of God's elect? Because he loved me before the creation of the world and choose me to receive the gift of irresistible grace. Why did he love me? Not because of any pre-existing characteristic in me or any future action on my part. He loved me because he choose to love me but I do not know any more than that. At this point I just bow in thanksgiving.

Irresistible grace is given to those who are unconditionally elected.

John 10:26-27 ... but you do not believe because you are not part of my flock. My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.

i.e. the reason people do or do not believe Jesus' words is whether or not they belong to Jesus.

Acts 13:48 And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed.

Before Paul spends 18 months preaching at Corinth, Jesus speaks to Paul saying, in Act 18:10 "I have many in this city who are my people." Presumably this will be discovered as Paul preaches.

LIMITED ATONEMENT

Everybody has some sense of a limited atonement. It is just a matter of how one thinks the atonement is limited.

For Arminians the work of the cross is *not limited regarding people* as the cross is available for all people. However it *is limited in terms of effectiveness*, that is, the cross purchases everyone an offer of salvation but doesn't actually save anyone of itself. It only actually saves when a person generates faith.

For Calvinists the work of the cross *is limited*, in terms of salvation, to the elect only. But the cross is *unlimited in its effectiveness*. For Calvinists, the work of the cross actually purchases for the elect both salvation and saving faith (irresistible grace). In other words, the cross is completely effective in achieving what it was designed to do – save the elect. For Arminians the cross is only effective depending on human responses and although designed for the salvation of all men it doesn't actually achieve all it was designed for.

PERSEVERANCE

Perseverance doesn't mean we must persevere to death in order to be saved (although this is true).

Perseverance rather refers to the fact that God will not allow any of his elect to be lost and he will enable his saints to persevere in his strength.

The emphasis is more on God's preserving them so they are not lost rather than focussing in their efforts to remain faithful.

Once genuinely saved, always saved because of God's effort.

John 6:37 All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away.

John 6:38 For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me.

John 6:39 And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day.

Quote:

When God initiates his plan of salvation in a person, he will complete it. If he regenerates the heart of a sinner so that he can see the things of God, he will draw him irresistibly to his son, Jesus Christ, who purchased his salvation on the cross, and through the work of the Holy Spirit will escort him through this life to the glory of the Father's presence. And he will be as secure in that process as if he were living in the loving hand of God himself.

Source: J.D. Wetterling

The doctrine of perseverance means that a person is seen to genuinely be a Christian if they are faithful to the end of their lives but the reason a person is faithful to the end is not simply the product of their own effort but rather the result of the work of God in keeping them faithful.

QUESTIONS

What is sin?

Sin is everything that isn't done for the glory of God and giving him thanks.

An unregenerate person cannot do anything of themselves for God's glory.

Are Christians totally depraved?

No. Christians have a new nature in Christ. Total depravity refers to what we were before Christ not to what we are now in Christ.

Does a person have a 'free will'?

I wish we could ditch the idea of sinful people having a free will. Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden had a free will. They had the genuine choice to obey or disobey God not being compelled by a sinful nature. They had genuine free will.

With the exception of Adam and Eve before they sinned, every person born into this world has had a sinful nature. A person with a sinful nature does not have a free will. The Bible is clear that such a person's will is an enslaved in bondage to sin and rebellion. In fact the Bible describes such a will not as free but rather as spiritually dead, that is, unresponsive.

So rather than the Bible teaching that a sinful person has a free will it in fact teaches the exact opposite an enslaved will (Jesus being the exception – he had a genuinely free will as evident in the Garden of Gethsemane).

Once a person is regenerated they, for the first time, have a free will to say 'yes' to the cross. In their subsequent lives they have a genuine free will to say 'yes' or 'no' to God on a daily basis in how they live.

Some people speak as if 'free will' is some kind of principle that God *must* respect. However God is not confined by a principle of 'human free will'. Rather God is free to act in accordance with what will display his glory. It is the free will of God to act for his glory that determines how God acts not a principle of 'human free will'.

I think the reason we have this idea of 'free will' in the unregenerate is because we fail to appreciate our enslaved will and we have a tendency to give too much credence to man's autonomy and importance.

Quotes

"There has been no such thing as freedom since Adam fell. Adam was free. Not a single child of Adam has ever been free... Man's will has been bound ever since the fall of Adam. By nature man is not free to choose God."

- Martyn Lloyd-Jones, Romans, Assurance

"A man is opposed to Christ, he hates his gospel, does not understand it and will not receive it— the Holy Spirit comes, puts light into his darkened understanding, takes the chain from his bondaged will, gives liberty to his conscience, gives life to his dead soul, ... and the man becomes a new creature in Christ Jesus."

- C.H. Spurgeon

Does God ever over-ride a person's free will in the matter of salvation?

The short answer is 'no' because no one has a free will.

In the case of the non-elect God allows them to act **consistently with** their desire to exercise **their enslaved will** in rejecting God.

In the case of the elect, it is **not that God over-rides their will so much as it is that he frees their will** and makes his grace irresistibly attractive so that **they choose to exercise their newly freed will** in saying 'yes'.

How are people accountable for rejecting God if they are unable to choose God?

Total depravity and an enslaved will means that the non-elect will always choose to reject God. People are not accountable for natural or physical disabilities for which they are not responsible. People are responsible for moral disabilities that are expressions of their own volition. Moral disability is due to the inclination of one's nature.

Illustration: Joshua's moral inability to eat onion due to his aversion to it. He is able to eat it physically but his inability comes from his inclination such that he has a moral inability.

If God wills for all men to be saved then why aren't they?

Arminians would say that the reason God does not fulfil his will in this regard is **because he purposes to grant people self-determining free will takes priority** (no such thing really).

Calvinists would say that the reason God does not fulfil his will in this regard is **because his purposes to display his glory in wrath and mercy take priority**.

Does God have two wills?

Yes. There is God's moral will and will of decree. God's moral will is things like 'do not kill'. But sometimes God will allow his moral will to be violated in order to fulfil his will of decree.

e.g. It was not God's moral will for men to reject and crucify his son but it was his will of decree that it should happen this way to fulfil his purpose.

e.g. God's moral will is that men should not be saved, he desires that they turn from sin and repent. God does not desire the death of the ungodly. But God's will of decree (what will actually happen) is that some will be saved and some condemned for the display of his glory.

Is God right and just to choose some people and not treat all people the same?

On one hand God would be right and just to send every person to hell. That he should choose to save some is very gracious. However there is no principle external to God that says he must treat all people the same.

God's righteousness is not his adherence to principles or moral codes. ***God's righteousness is his unwavering commitment to display his glory.***

So God is right to choose Jacob but reject Esau before they are born and do anything good or bad because ***he is acting for the display of his glory*** in both saving Jacob and judging Esau and that is what it means for God to act righteously.

Does Calvinism mean that you do not do evangelism?

Calvinists believe that God has ordained not just the ends (who gets saved) but also the means (our preaching the gospel).

Evangelism is about gathering the sheep into the flock as they hear Jesus' voice.

Calvinism encourages the evangelist because he knows that God will sovereignly achieve his purpose of gathering his elect from every nation and people group. This plan cannot be frustrated by human 'free will'.