

BIBLICAL TRUTH ABOUT MAN, SIN, AND SALVATION

Lesson 13: Total Depravity

This is the last of six lessons on the biblical doctrine of sin (hamartiology, from Greek *hamartia*, sin). Our previous lessons have covered these topics: 1) Sin's Origin; 2) Sin's Definition; 3) Original Sin; 4) Sin's Curse; and 5) Sin's Judgment. This final lesson deals with the internal consequences of sin and how it affects the entire human condition and outlook. In short, man does not need to become better; he needs to be made new.

Lesson 13 – Central Truth Q and A

Question: Can man please God and save himself?

Answer: Man has no ability to please God and save himself.

Lesson 13 – Memory Verses

Romans 3:10-11 *As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God.*

Jeremiah 17:9 *The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?*

Lesson 13 – Outline

In Romans 1-3, the apostle Paul proves that all people are guilty before a righteous God and entirely without hope of salvation. Using several Old Testament Scriptures, he shows that no one is righteous in God's sight. Total depravity is the teaching that all people are corrupt in their sins. A better name for this subject might be "radical depravity" rather than total depravity because man is not as bad or sinful as he possibly could be, but every part of man's being and everything he does is tainted by sin. Radical depravity comes from the heart or inner being of man and it shows up in his sinful desires, thoughts, and actions. Total depravity does not mean that he is as bad as he could be, but it means that he is as "bad off" as he could be.

1. No One is Righteous

God is perfectly righteous (just, perfect, true, right, good, and holy) and He requires that anyone who comes into His presence must conform to His standard of perfect righteousness. After Adam's sin and fall in the Garden of Eden, a sin nature has been passed on to every person (Rom. 5:12). Man lacks perfect righteousness and cannot attain it on his own. In Romans 3:10 and 12 Paul refers to Psalm 14 and 53 which declare that no one is righteous and no one does good. This is the doctrine of total (radical) depravity. Every person has a natural sinful nature from the moment of his conception (Ps. 51:5), and therefore enters life as a "child of wrath," a person deserving God's wrath (Eph. 2:1-3). Every person has a deceitful and wicked heart (Jer. 17:9). Nothing good dwells in his flesh or his unredeemed human nature (Rom. 7:18). Christ taught that a person's actions reveal his heart, just as good fruit shows that the tree is good, and bad fruit reveals that the tree is bad (Mt. 7:17-20). Even the "good" things people do are not actually good or righteous in God's sight, but they are like "filthy rags" to Him (Isa. 64:6).

2. No One Understands

Total (radical) depravity is revealed by a person's corrupt mind and defiled conscience. All people lack spiritual understanding (Rom. 3:11). Due to their depraved (sinful) minds and hearts, they are unable to understand their need for Christ. Unbelievers are people who have not received the Holy Spirit and therefore they cannot receive the things of the Spirit of God (1 Cor. 2:14). Unbelievers cannot escape the futility (emptiness) of their own minds and their understanding has been darkened because they are alienated from the life of God (Eph. 4:17-18). People who reject Christ and the gospel remain ignorant of spiritual truth. Their sinful nature blinds them to the truth of God's Word and renders them unable to believe in the person and work of Christ (Jn. 12:37-40). Their spiritual blindness and moral corruption is rooted in their failure to fear God (Rom. 3:18). Their spiritual deadness is compounded by Satan who blinds their minds, keeping them from understanding the truth of the gospel (2 Cor. 4:3-4).

3. No One Seeks God

Many people claim to be seeking God and many churches attempt to be "seeker-sensitive" by attracting unsaved people by worldly means, but Scripture states that no person truly seeks God (Rom. 3:11). That's why Christ came to earth "to seek and save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10) and why the Father must draw sinners to Christ (Jn. 6:44). Scripture teaches that men generally suppress the truth that God reveals about Himself (Rom. 1:18-20). Scripture also teaches that man has commonly rejected the truth of the gospel. When exposed to the truth, unbelievers love darkness rather than light and suppress the truth because of their unrighteousness (Jn. 3:19-21). In Romans 1:25, Paul describes how the unbelieving world rejects the one true God and replaces Him with false gods (idols) of many forms. All false worship is basically a rejection and replacement of the one true God with the worship of man-made gods. The Jews, even as they sought to worship the true God, were perverted in their thinking to worship God according to their own standard of righteousness and system of moral achievement. Paul exposed the error of their thinking by stating that the law never could give anyone a right standing with God (Rom. 3:19-20). Man is separated from God by his sinful nature and desires, is unable to change his nature or his standing with God, and is powerless to save himself (Rom. 5:6). Therefore, God in His marvelous grace intervened and sent Christ to rescue sinners, to give them a new heart, and to provide imputed righteousness through Christ as a free gift.

God's Remedy for Total Depravity

From man's perspective total depravity seems to be a hopeless condition, but God's gracious plan of redemption through Christ is more than sufficient to reclaim and restore sinners:

Profound in depth, human depravity is comprehensive in its reach and effects. No part of our being, no time in our earthly pilgrimage, no facet of life and work in the world, no relationship with God or man, and nothing we think, feel, say, or do is left uncorrupted or unimpaired by our depravity.... God's remedy for the depravity of His people is a threefold salvation in Christ. First, in regeneration (new birth), new life is implanted in the believer. Second, by the process of sanctification, this new life is nourished, increased, and made fruitful. Third, it is brought to final perfection or glorification at death, when the believer's soul is made perfect, and at the last day, when his resurrection body is changed and made like the glorious body of the risen Christ.¹

¹ "Total Depravity," *KJV Study Bible*, Joel Beeke, Gen. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage, 2021), 1060.