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# Tower of Strength

“The name of the Lord is a strong tower  
The righteous runs into it and is safe.”

—Proverbs 18:10

## Is Depravity Total?

The “T” of the five points of Calvinism is “Total Depravity.” It teaches that mankind is so utterly and hopelessly depraved that he cannot will himself to be saved. He is so wicked that he cannot even desire salvation without God’s miraculous and personal intervention, which will only be given to those already predestined for salvation.

Calvinism teaches that mankind entered this condition at the sin of Adam and Eve:

Our first parents ... sinned in eating the forbidden fruit... By this sin, they fell from their original righteousness and communion with God, and so became dead in sin and wholly defiled in all the faculties and parts of soul and body. They being the root of all mankind, the guilt of this sin was imputed, and the same death in sin and corrupted nature conveyed to all their posterity, descending from them by ordinary generation (*Westminster Confession of Faith*, VI.1–3)

Or, as more modern Calvinists explain it:

[Adam] plunged himself and the entire race into spiritual ruin and lost for himself and his

descendants the ability to make right choices in the spiritual realm (David Steele, *The Five Points of Calvinism*, p. 25).

Calvinists does not teach that all people are all bad all the time. They admit that unsaved people do righteous things now and then—rescue kittens from trees, give pocket change to the poor, etc. But when it comes to salvation, mankind can neither be saved nor want salvation.

Man, by his fall into a state of sin, hath wholly lost all ability of will to any spiritual good accompanying salvation; so as a natural man, being altogether averse from that good, and dead in sin, is not able, by his own strength, to convert himself, or to prepare himself thereunto (*Westminster Confession of Faith*, IX.3).

In other words, if an unsaved person heard the gospel, it would not interest him unto salvation. He can't be converted, nor can he "prepare himself" for God to convert Him. Only when God's irresistible grace comes (which will only come upon the lucky elect) will a person desire salvation and respond to the gospel.

In my view, "T" is the one of the five points of Calvinism that contains the largest grain of truth. The Bible most certainly does teach that mankind is depraved. Among other passages, Eph. 2:1–3 says,

You were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of the world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desire of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.

But Calvinism runs off the rails when describing how an individual person got into this condition, and his unwillingness to get out.

The Bible nowhere defines sin as a genetic defect or an infectious contagion that is passed down from person to person by virtue of birth. Sin is defined as a decision, a violation of God's revealed will (which is

usually a conscious violation, but not always). “Everyone who practices sin practices lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness” (1 John 3:4). “To one who knows the right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin” (James 4:17). As a human being in a physical body, I am constantly surrounded by temptations to ignore the will of God and indulge the fleshly nature. And our enemy Satan is very crafty in putting those temptations before us—sexual immorality, lying, stealing, etc.

When I give in to that temptation, I share in the sin of Adam and become separated from God. But here’s the key point—I become a sinner when I commit sin, not when I am born. I became a sinner when I committed a sin, not when Adam committed his. Romans 5:12 says,

Just as through one man [Adam] sin entered the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned...

Jesus used children as an example of what a righteous person is like (Matthew 18:1–6, 19:14–16). And, Ezekiel 18 provides a lengthy discourse about God’s dealings with mankind, that He does not pin the sins of the father or grandfather upon the next generation (nor does He, for that matter, credit the deeds of the father or grandfather upon the next generation). Let me quote excerpts of it:

Behold, all souls are Mine. The soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is Mine. The soul who sins will die.

If a man is righteous and practices justice and righteousness ... he will surely live.

Then he may have a violent son who sheds blood and who does any of these things to a brother (though he himself did not do any of these things)... Will he live? He will not live!... His blood will be upon his own head.

Now behold, he has a son who has observed all his father’s sins which he committed, and observing does not do likewise. He does not defile his neighbor’s wife or oppress anyone... He will not die for his father’s iniquity, he will surely live.

The guilt of sin is *not* imputed from one generation to the next through ordinary generation, as Calvinism teaches. I will *not* stand before God in judgment because of what Adam did, I will stand before God in judgment because of what I did.

So, I am most certainly a depraved person. In fact, one could even speak poetically, as David did, that I'm depraved all the time, from womb to tomb (Psalm 51:5, 58:3). But I got that way through sinful habits and choices, not through birth.

As for the second way in which the Calvinist doctrine of "total depravity" runs off the rails, no where does the Bible suggest that mankind's depravity is such that it prevents him from desiring God. Remember that the five points of TULIP hold together as a package. "Total depravity" goes hand in hand with "unconditional election" and "irresistible grace." It purports to explain why mankind cannot choose God without God first stepping in and overpowering that person.

But, the evangelists of the Bible do not seem to say, "hang out, and wait for God to force you to be saved." Instead, they appeal to the conscience of sinful man to repent and run to God without delay. They say, "Get right with God, right now!" and urge depraved people to act. Peter said, "Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ," (Acts 2:38). He said, "repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come" (Acts 3:19). In Iconium, Paul "spoke in such a manner that a large number of people believed" (Acts 14:1). In Thessalonica, Paul "reasoned with them from the Scriptures ... and some of them were persuaded" (Acts 17:2-4). It seems to me that God has a higher estimation of the conscience and mind of man than Calvinists do!

Yes, while an unsaved person I am depraved, and through the gospel I learn that I need a Savior, and that I can turn to Him for salvation. What depravity man has does not prevent him from being accountable to God, nor his conscience from yearning for God. —*John Guzzetta*

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**Quote of the Week:**

"We learn best by doing."

—*old saying*