

## Reformed Doctrine of Predestination, Lesson #11

*As will be shown, the Bible contains an abundance of material for the development of each of these doctrines. Furthermore, these are not isolated and independent doctrines but are so inter-related that they form a simple, harmonious, self-consistent system; and the way in which they fit together as component parts of a well-ordered whole has won the admiration of thinking men of all creeds. Prove any one of them true and all the others will follow as logical and necessary parts of the system. Prove any one of them false and the whole system must be abandoned. They are found to dovetail perfectly one into the other.*

### Doctrine of Total Depravity, or Total Inability

#### I. What is Total Depravity?

**WCF 9.3** *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.*

*Paul, Augustine, and Calvin have as their starting point the fact that all mankind sinned in Adam and that all men are "without excuse," (Rom. 2:1). Time and again Paul tells us that we are dead in trespasses and sins, estranged from God, and helpless. In writing to the Ephesian Christians he reminded them that before they received the Gospel they were "separate from Christ, alienated from the common wealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of the promise, having no hope and without God in the world," (2:12). There we notice the five-fold emphasis as he piles phrase on top of phrase to stress this truth.*

What doctrine of total depravity does NOT mean:

- 1) Does not mean that all men are equally bad, nor that any man is as bad as he could be
- 2) Does not mean that any one is entirely destitute of virtue

What doctrine of total depravity DOES mean:

That since the fall, man rests under the curse of sin, that he is actuated by wrong principles, and that he is wholly unable to love God or to do anything meriting salvation. His corruption is extensive but not necessarily intensive.

**WCF 6.4** *From this original corruption, whereby we are utterly indisposed, disabled, and made opposite to all good, and wholly inclined to all evil, do proceed all actual transgressions.*

#### II. Total Depravity and Man's Free Will

##### A. Defining free will

1. Most common definition: the ability to make choices without any prior prejudice, inclination, or disposition. The will must act from a posture of neutrality with absolutely no bias.  
Problem: Our choices are not utterly spontaneous. Neutral-will theory is irrational.
2. Second definition of free-will - the ability to choose what we want. To have free will is to be able to choose according to our desires.

According to Edwards: The will always chooses according to its strongest inclination at the moment. So every choice is free AND every choice is determined. Determined here doesn't mean some external force coerces the will, but rather it refers to one's internal motivation or desire. Our choices are determined by our desires, therefore every decision is made for a reason.

##### B. What does this have to do with total depravity?

Our problem lies with the nature of our desires.

*Man is a free agent but he cannot originate the love of God in his heart. His will is free in the sense that it is not controlled by any force outside of himself. As the bird with a broken wing is "free" to fly but not able, so the natural man is free to come to God but not able. How can he repent of his sin when he loves it? How can he come to God when he hates Him? This is the inability of the will under which man labors. Jesus said, "And this is the judgment, that light is come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the light; for their works were evil," John 3 :19; and again, "Ye will not come to me, that ye may have life," John 5:40. Man's ruin lies mainly in his own perverse will. He cannot come because he will not.*

*The inability under which he labors is not an inability to exercise volitions, but an inability to be willing to exercise holy volitions.*

*Man's fallen nature gives rise to a most obdurate blindness, stupidity, and opposition concerning the things of God. His will is under the control of a darkened understanding, which puts sweet for bitter, and bitter for sweet, good for evil, and evil for good. So far as his relations with God are concerned, he wills only that which is evil, although he wills it freely. Spontaneity and enslavement actually exist together.*

**Rom 8:7** Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be.

**John 6:44** No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day.

**1 Cor 2:14** But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.

*We read that "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit, for they are foolishness to him; neither can he know them, for they are spiritually discerned," 1 Corinthians 2:14. We are at a loss to understand how any one can take a plain common sense view of this passage of Scripture and yet contend for the doctrine of human ability. Man in his natural state cannot even see the kingdom of God, much less can he get into it. An uncultured person may see a beautiful work of art as an object of vision, but he has no appreciation of its excellence. He may see the figures of a complex mathematical equation, but they have no meaning for him...So it is when the Gospel of the cross is presented to the unregenerate man. He may have an intellectual knowledge of the facts and doctrines of the Bible, but he lacks all spiritual discernment of their excellence, and finds no delight in them. The same Christ is to one man without form or comeliness that he should desire Him; to another He is the Prince of life and the Savior of the world, God manifest in the flesh, whom it is impossible not to adore, love and obey.*

*Fallen man then lacks the power of spiritual discernment. His reason or understanding is blinded, and the taste and feelings are perverted. And since this state of mind is innate, as a condition of man's nature, it is beyond the power of the will to change it. Rather it controls both the affections and volitions. The effect of regeneration is clearly taught in the divine commission which Paul received at his conversion when he was told that he was to be sent to the Gentiles "to open their eyes, that they might turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan unto God," Acts 26:18.*

Fallen man does not naturally possess spiritual discernment. It must be awakened within him through the Holy Spirit.

C. Depraved man is dead in his trespasses and sins

**Eph 2:1** And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins

Just as a man who's dead physically cannot perform any physical actions, a man who's dead spiritually cannot perform any spiritual actions. Regeneration MUST therefore precede faith in the *ordo salutis*.

### III. Total Depravity is Fallen Man's Default Nature

How and when do we become spiritually dead? Is it when we commit our first sin? Is it at a certain age?

We are born spiritually dead; born with a sin nature.

**WSC 26. Q.** *How is original sin conveyed from our first parents unto their posterity? A. Original sin is conveyed from our first parents unto their posterity by natural generation, so as all that proceed from them in that way are conceived and born in sin.*

**Psalms 51:5** Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, And in sin my mother conceived me.

**Psalms 58:3** The wicked are estranged from the womb; They go astray as soon as they are born, speaking lies.

**Job 15:14-16** What is man, that he could be pure? And he who is born of a woman, that he could be righteous?

15 If God puts no trust in His saints, And the heavens are not pure in His sight, 16 How much less man, who is abominable and filthy, Who drinks iniquity like water!

**Gen 8:21** ...the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth...

Acts of sin are therefore but the expression of the natural heart. You're not a sinner because you sin; you sin because you're a sinner!