

"TOTAL DEPRAVITY"

(Romans 3:9-20)

(Charles Ryrie)

Fallen humanity's relation to a holy God. Because of the fall, original fellowship with God was broken and our entire nature polluted. No one can do anything, even good, that can gain soteriological [saving] merit in God's sight. Therefore, total depravity is unmeritoriousness before God because of original sin's corruption.

The concept does not mean (1) that depraved people cannot or do not perform actions that are good in either human or divine sight. But no such action can gain favor for salvation. Neither does it mean (2) that fallen humanity has no conscience judging between good and evil. But conscience has been affected by the fall so that it cannot be a reliable guide. Nor does it mean (3) that people indulge in every form of sin or in any sin to the greatest extent possible.

Positively, *total* depravity means that corruption has extended to all aspects of human nature; *total depravity* means that because of such corruption we can do nothing to merit saving favor with God.

The Bible teaches this concept in many places. The mind is affected (Rom. 1:28; Eph, 4:18), the conscience is unclean (Heb. 9:14), the heart is deceitful (Jer. 17:9), and by nature humanity is subject to wrath (Eph. 2:3). God sent the flood as judgment on human depravity (Gen. 6:5). Depravity is in the inner being, root of evil actions (Mark 7:20-23). With a string of OT quotations Paul also shows that it is deep-seated, universal, and total (Rom. 3:9—18).

Augustine stressed that all were seminally present in Adam and therefore sinned in him. Calvinists trace depravity to inherent corruption inherited from Adam as covenant representative. Arminian theology often strictly denies *total* depravity, with the cross's prevenient grace mitigating the guilt of original sin and the loss of the will's freedom; in that case Adam's sin now gives humanity a tendency toward sin but not a sinful nature that prevents seeking God.

