

**Biblical Soteriology:  
An Overview and Defense of the  
Reformed Doctrines of Salvation**

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**Total Depravity, Part 3**

**ANALYSIS OF THE ARGUMENT SUPPORTING  
THE DOCTRINE OF TOTAL DEPRAVITY (part 3)**

**III. RESULTS OF DEPRAVITY**

- A. Spiritual Death — Mankind is born without spiritual life, being spiritually dead until such time as God decides to give him spiritual life. God’s gift of spiritual life regenerates man’s spirit and necessarily results in salvation. If man never receives spiritual life from God, he remains spiritually dead all the days of his life.**

“Jesus answered, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again’” (John 3:5-7).

Every person has a body, but this body is of flesh. Children born of fleshly human parents, all of whose flesh is corrupted by sin, are themselves fleshly children indwelt by sin. Only those who are born of the Spirit of God have spiritual life. This spiritual life does not come when one is born, otherwise one would not need to be born again. Before one believes, he lacks spiritual life and is in a state of spiritual death. Man comes into the world spiritually stillborn.

“Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life.” (John 5:24-25).

Believers have passed out of death and into life. Jesus did not speak here of physical death (as he did in the verses immediately following

this one), but of a someone who was physically alive but counted as dead (compare John 6:53). Given the context of John's gospel, which states that "it is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing" (John 6:63; compare John 3:5-7), it seems reasonable to conclude that Jesus spoke of spiritual life and death here. If one is spiritually dead, he is dead even though his body lives. The spirit of him who believes the gospel has been regenerated and has literally passed from spiritual death to life. He who does not believe remains spiritually dead and goes into judgment.

"And if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, yet the spirit is alive because of righteousness" (Rom. 8:10).

Though a believer's body is indwelt by sin and is therefore dead, even though it walks and talks, the spirit of a believer is alive because of righteousness. This being the case, it follows that no one's spirit is alive apart from righteousness. Since the righteousness in question is that of Christ, and comes only if Christ is in a person, all whom Christ does not indwell are spiritually dead, and all whom Christ does indwell are spiritually alive.

"And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this 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 desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest. But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places, in Christ Jesus, in order that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast" (Eph. 2:1-9).

In his unsaved state, man is dead in trespasses and sins. His body is not physically dead, so this death would seem to be spiritual. Paul wrote elsewhere that man's body remains dead in sin even after regeneration of his spirit (Rom. 8:10), affirming that the new life which God gives believers immediately upon their coming to faith in Christ is spiritual rather than physical in nature. This becomes clearer in this passage

because being made alive together with Christ equates to salvation, which was already accomplished in the believers to whom he wrote. Because they were made alive when they came to faith, prior to their salvation they were spiritually dead.

“For this reason it says, ‘Awake, sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you’” (Eph. 5:14).

This verse falls in the context of Paul’s exhortation to Christians to live righteous lives. He quotes a line which teaches that with new life in Christ comes Christ’s light which reveals sin and righteousness (compare John 3:17-21). This shining probably also harks back to the famous passage of Numbers 6:24-26 where Moses told Aaron to bless Israel with these words:

“‘The LORD bless you, and keep you; The LORD make His face shine on you, And be gracious to you; The LORD lift up His countenance on you, And give you peace.’”

In any event, the blessings and righteousness of Christ shine on believers after they “arise from the dead.” In the context of Ephesians (see Eph. 2:1-9), arising from the dead would seem most naturally to be coming to faith and to spiritual life. This indicates prior spiritual death in the unbelieving state.

“And when you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, having cancelled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us and which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross” (Col. 2:13-14).

This making alive refers primarily to the spiritual life a believer receives in Christ when he is forgiven of all his transgressions, when he is converted. Furthermore, a state of death exists prior to this new life, a death in which all who are not yet forgiven (unbelievers) continue to exist.

“By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious; any one who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother . . . We know that we have passed out of death into life,

because we love the brethren. He who does not love abides in death” (1 John 3:10,14).

Those who are children of God have passed out of death into life. Since it is not the case that everyone who is converted experiences a physical resurrection at the moment of faith, this new life would seem to be spiritual. This new life is evident, not in outward appearance, but in good works which result from a living spirit that loves God, particularly in the good work of loving the brethren. As Paul wrote, love is a fruit of the Spirit, not of the flesh (Gal. 5:22). Only those who have a living spirit can produce spiritual fruit, such as love. Those who do not produce the spiritual fruit of love are spiritually dead, they have not passed out of spiritual death into spiritual life.

**B. No Ability or Desire to Repent and Follow God — Fallen man has no ability to repent or to follow God, and not desire to do so. He lacks all ability to do anything meritorious for salvation, and all ability to do anything truly good (pleasing to God) because of his depravity and lack of faith. He also lacks any and all ability to understand and believe the gospel. Such ability must be granted to him by God, and is not something given to mankind at large.**

**1. No ability to do anything truly good — This is the result of slavery to sin, lack of faith, and lack of favor in God’s eyes. Though fallen man can do outwardly good acts (compare Matt. 7:11), he cannot do truly good works which please God.**

“‘Either make the tree good, and its fruit good; or make the tree bad, and its fruit bad; for the tree is known by its fruit. You brood of vipers, how can you, being evil, speak what is good? For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart. The good man out of his good treasure brings forth what is good; and the evil man out of his evil treasure brings forth what is evil’” (Matt. 12:33-35).

People produce fruit according to their natures, either good or bad. Those who are evil cannot produce good fruit. Since fallen man has a sinful nature, he produces sins, not good works. It is noteworthy here that it is not the production of good fruit which makes a tree good, but rather the goodness of the tree which makes its fruit good.

“For there is no good tree which produces bad fruit; nor, on the other hand, a bad tree which produces good fruit. For each tree is known by its own fruit. For men do not gather figs from thorns, nor do they pick grapes from a briar bush. The good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth what is good; and the evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth what is evil; for his mouth speaks from that which fills his heart” (Luke 6:43-45).

This passage again uses good trees and bad trees to represent humanity. Since fallen man’s heart is totally corrupted by sin, he is a bad tree and cannot produce good fruit. That is, he cannot do good in God’s sight.

“Jesus answered them, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, every one who commits sin is the slave of sin. And the slave does not remain in the house forever; the son does remain forever. If therefore the Son shall make you free, you shall be free indeed. I know that you are Abraham’s offspring; yet you seek to kill Me, because My word has no place in you’” (John 8:34-37).

If one sins, something of which all mankind is guilty, he is a slave to sin. One can only be freed from this slavery by the Son, therefore fallen man is a slave to sin by default, and is released from this slavery only when Jesus saves him. While the word “slave” does not in and of itself indicate the inability to do that to which one is not a slave, Jesus’ application of this principle to his opponents demonstrates the truth of this inability. Specifically, the fact that they seek to kill him because his word is not in them indicates that only the presence of his word would prevent this sinful attempt. Only the presence of Christ’s word in a person enables that person to do that which is good. Therefore, those in whom Christ’s word does not abide are not able to do good.

“Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me, and I in him, he bears much fruit; for apart from Me you can do nothing” (John 15:4-5).

If one is not already in Christ, one can do nothing. No fruit can be borne by a person who is not already in Christ because all who are not in Christ lack the ability to bear fruit. In this metaphor, fruit is good works (compare John 15:8,10).

“For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh . . . For the mind set on the flesh is death . . . because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so; and those who are in the flesh cannot please God” (Rom. 8:5-8).

Those who are not saved cannot obey God’s commands, they cannot do anything in obedience to God, and they cannot please God. Even if they outwardly obey God, they inwardly disobey because their minds are hostile toward God. Therefore, they are considered transgressors of the command.

“Whatever is not from faith is sin” (Rom. 14:23).

Paul made this statement in an argument regarding eating meat sacrificed to idols, and its primary referent is to the particular sin of eating meat sacrificed to idols when one does not have strong enough faith to do so. The broader underlying point, however, is that outward actions alone are not sufficient for goodness. That is, since one may eat and not sin, while another who eats does sin, something besides eating makes the actions sinful or good. Explicitly, this something is faith. Thus, even actions which outwardly appear good (such as decisions to follow Christ) are sinful if they are not from faith. An unsaved person does not have faith, and therefore can do nothing that is not sinful.

“And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him” (Heb. 11:6).

Unless one is a believer, one does not have faith, and one cannot please God. No matter how outwardly righteous one’s actions may be, those actions are sinful unless they come from faithful believers.

**2. No ability to understand, believe or trust the gospel — This ability must be granted to a person by God, and God does not give it to everyone.**

“No one knows the Son, except the Father; nor does anyone know the Father, except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him” (Matt. 11:27).

Knowing the Father and the Son is reserved for those who possess eternal life (John 17:3). Even in the context of Matthew’s gospel it is clear that those who know the Father and Son are the saved. Since no one can come to this knowledge on his own, fallen man lacks the ability to believe and trust the gospel. Further, this lack of ability is the general rule, the exception to which is Christ’s decision to reveal the Father. In the context of this passage, he specifically declines to give this knowledge to Chorazin and Bethsaida (Matt. 11:21), therefore he does not give it to everyone.

“To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been granted” (Matt. 13:11).

The mysteries of the kingdom of heaven include the mystery of salvation. One must know the gospel’s content in order to believe and trust it, and this knowledge must be granted by God. God does not grant this knowledge to everyone, therefore not everyone can know the gospel and not everyone can believe the gospel. Those who do know and believe the gospel do so only because God grants this to them.

“But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born not of blood nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God” (John 1:12-13).

Those who receive Christ are one and the same group as those who have the right to become children of God, those who have been born of God, and those who believe in his name. Thus, only those who have been born of God have been given the right to become his children. Also, everyone who is born of God actually believes, is saved, and does become his child. Until one

is given that right, one cannot receive Christ, otherwise one would be able to receive Christ before one had the right to do so. Thus, it follows that one cannot receive Christ until God gives one that right.

Because everyone to whom God gives this right is saved, and not everyone is saved, God does not give everyone the right to become his child. Further, if God granted the right to become his children upon the condition that people first chose to receive him, then he would grant this right on the basis of the will of man. However, John specifically excludes man's will as the determining factor, explaining that it is birth from God, not man's will, that determines whether or not a person will be saved. God gives this right to people irrespective of their wills.

“For everyone who does evil hates the light, and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who practices the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God” (John 3:20-21).

One can only practice the truth if his deeds have been wrought in God. Therefore, if one does anything right, God gets the credit, not man. Thus, God must get the credit for man doing the specifically right thing of believing the gospel. Belief in the gospel is wrought in God, not in the will or mind of man.

“No one can come to Me, unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day” (John 6:44).

No one has the ability to come to Christ. The only way one can come to Christ is if the Father draws him to Christ. This word “draw” does not mean to “offer” or “woo,” but “pull” or “drag.” It was the word used when one seized another by the arm and dragged him into the court of law, and the word used when one pulled water out of a well. In no case does it imply that the thing which is drawn comes voluntarily. This is not to say that it necessarily is drawn against its will as it actively resists, only that the will of the person/thing drawn is not relevant to the definition of “draw” as it would be in the case of wooing or inviting.



“It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life. But there are some of you who do not believe.’ For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who it was that would betray Him. And He was saying, “For this reason I have said to you, that no one can come to Me, unless it has been granted him from the Father” (John 6:63-65).

“Granted him from the Father” is a restatement of the “drawing” of John 6:44, and as such is a further elucidation of John 6:44. Jesus was motivated to tell the disciples that no one could come to Him unless it had been given to that person by the Father specifically because there were some who did not come. These did not come because they were unable to come, and they were unable to come because God had not given them this privilege.

“Jesus said to them, ‘If God were your Father, you would love Me; for I proceeded forth and have come from God, for I have not even come on My own initiative, but He sent Me. Why do you not understand what I am saying? It is because you cannot hear My word. You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature; for he is a liar, and the father of lies. But because I speak the truth, you do not believe Me. Which one of you convicts Me of sin? If I speak the truth, why do you not believe Me? He who is of God hears the words of God; for this reason you do not hear them, because you are not of God” (John 8:42-47).

One cannot hear Christ, specifically His word, unless that person is of God. One is not of God before one is saved. Those, like the Pharisees in this passage, who do not believe, do not believe because they “cannot hear” the word of Christ, and they “do not hear” because they “are not of God.” Therefore, no one who is not saved can hear the word of God, and no one who is not saved can believe the word of God. Only God can overcome the barrier of man’s inability by graciously granting saving belief in the gospel to those who cannot believe on their own. The fact that the Pharisees could not hear or believe demonstrates that God does not grant this ability to everyone.

“For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh . . . For the mind set on the flesh is death . . . because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so; and those who are in the flesh cannot please God” (Rom. 8:5-8).

Obedience to God’s command to repent and receive Christ equates to an ability to understand and believe the gospel. Surely such repentance and belief would please God, especially if one argues that God rewards that such repentance and belief with eternal life. Since those who are unsaved cannot please God or obey him, and since repentance and belief would naturally be both pleasing and obedient, the unsaved cannot repent or believe. Thus, God must intervene if anyone is to be saved.

“Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things freely given to us by God . . . But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised” (1 Cor. 2:12,14).

The Spirit of God is given to those who have already freely received things from God in order that they might understand the things which they have received. A natural, or unsaved, man does not have the Spirit and does not accept the things of the Spirit. Also, he cannot understand spiritual things. Therefore, a natural man cannot “accept” the gospel, which is a spiritual thing (John 6:63).

“This I say therefore, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind, being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart” (Eph. 4:17-18).

The Christians used to walk “just as the Gentiles also walk,” which proves that all men begin in the same condition of “walking” with “darkened understanding, excluded from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them.” That the darkened understanding of the Gentiles excludes them from the

life of God indicates that unregenerate man lacks the understanding necessary to be included in the life of God. Unregenerate man could not possibly understand and believe the gospel on his own, because this would imply that his understanding was enlightened enough to bring about the belief that would result in his being included in the life of God.

“And the Lord’s bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will” (2 Tim. 2:25-26).

One must be led by repentance to the knowledge of the truth, and this repentance must be granted by God. Therefore, man cannot know the truth on his own, but God first must enable man to know the truth. From his human perspective, Paul left God’s granting of this repentance as a possibility for each person, not a certainty (“if perhaps”), indicating that God does not grant this repentance to everyone.

**3. No desire to repent and/or to follow God — This must be granted to a person by God. This desire is only given to those who are children of God, and who are no longer slaves to sin.**

“No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will hold to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon” (Matthew 6:24; cf. Luke 16:13).

While “mammon” is not precisely identical to “sin,” the general principle established by this verse applies to that which Paul called “slavery to sin:”

“But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed, and having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness” (Rom. 6:17-18).

This principle teaches that man cannot serve both sin and God, and that fallen man already serves sin. Therefore, unregenerate man cannot serve God. Further, unregenerate man, in slavery to sin, loves sin and hates God. Since a hatred for God would naturally preclude a desire to repent and/or to follow God, unregenerate man cannot desire any such thing.

“Jesus said to them, ‘If God were your Father, you would love Me; for I proceeded forth and have come from God, for I have not even come on My own initiative, but He sent Me. Why do you not understand what I am saying? It is because you cannot hear My word. You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father’” (John 8:42-44).

Those whose father is not God are children of the devil. Unregenerate man is a child of the devil and is therefore unable to understand God’s word, or even to hear it. Further, the desires of unregenerate man are the desires of the devil, not the desires of God. Therefore, unregenerate man cannot desire to comply with the desires or commands of God, including the command to repent and be saved.

“For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life” (Rom. 5:10).

At the time that Christians are reconciled to God, they are enemies to God. They are not neutral, and they are not inclined toward godliness. One does not desire to please or follow an enemy, but desires to harm and rebel against that enemy. Through Christ, God overcame His hatred for His people, but His people do not overcome their hatred for God until after Christ works in them. Therefore, man cannot desire to obey God until after he is saved by Christ.

“For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh . . . For the mind set on the flesh is death . . . because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God.” (Rom. 8:5-7).

Those who are not yet saved are “according to the flesh.” Being in the flesh, their minds are hostile toward God. If they could

desire to obey God, they could not rightly be called hostile to God. Therefore, those who are not yet saved cannot desire to repent or follow God.

“This I say therefore, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind, being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart; and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality, for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness” (Eph. 4:17-18).

Those who are not saved have hearts which are hardened against God and which are entirely given over to sin. A heart which is hardened and callous against God is not a heart which desires to repent or to obey God.

“You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God” (Jas. 4:4).

Of course, this verse was written primarily to Christians, but it asserts a principle, by way of warning, that illustrates the condition of fallen man. Christians have been saved and should not act as if they were still God’s enemies. This verse does not reveal a possibility that a Christian can lose his salvation and become an enemy of God, but it strongly exhorts Christians to live righteously. However, for those who are not saved, it is true that they are God’s enemies and are friends with the world. Since they are God’s enemies and hostile toward God, they do not desire reconciliation with Him, or desire to follow or obey Him.