



# Systematic Theology

A study of the major doctrines of Scripture

TOPIC 5 – THE DOCTRINE OF SIN  
LESSON 93 – TOTAL DEPRAVITY

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BIBLICAL DOCTRINE – JOHN MACARTHUR, PGS. 451-482  
SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY – WAYNE GRUDEM, PGS. 490-514

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# Total Inability

- ▶ The Bible teaches what is called total depravity to describe the corruption and pollution of sin passed down from Adam.
- ▶ Total depravity emphasizes the devastating impact of sin on the person and covers three related concepts: 1) the pollution and corruption of all aspects of a person, 2) the complete inability of a person to please God, and 3) universality – all are conceived and born as sinners making a person unable and even unwilling to glorify God.
- ▶ This does not mean that a lost person will always act as sinfully as possible, but that sin pervades every part of who and what they are.
- ▶ John Calvin stated, “We are so entirely controlled by the power of sin, that the whole heart, the whole mind, and all our actions are under its influence.”

# Total Inability

- ▶ Every part of our being is affected by sin – our intellect, emotions, desires, hearts, goals, and motives. Even our physical bodies.
- ▶ Paul says, “I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh” (Rom. 7:18).
- ▶ In Titus 1:15 he writes, “to the corrupt and unbelieving nothing is pure; there very minds and consciences are corrupted.”
- ▶ Jeremiah tells us that “the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately corrupt” (Jer. 17:19).
- ▶ These passages are not a denial of the truth that unbelievers can do good in human society in some senses. It is denying that they can do and spiritual good before God or be on good terms with Him. (Eph. 4:18)
- ▶ In our natural, fallen state, we are completely incapable (totally unable) of doing any spiritual good before God.

# Total Inability

- ▶ Not only do we as sinners lack any spiritual good in ourselves, but we also lack the ability to do anything that will in itself please God and the ability to come to God (or even want to come to Him) in our own strength.
- ▶ Romans 3:10 As it is written: “There is none righteous, no, not one; 11 There is none who understands; There is none who seeks after God. 12 They have all turned aside; They have together become unprofitable; There is none who does good, no, not one.” 13 “Their throat is an open tomb; With their tongues they have practiced deceit”; “The poison of asps is under their lips”; 14 “Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness.” 15 “Their feet are swift to shed blood; 16 Destruction and misery are in their ways; 17 And the way of peace they have not known.” 18 “There is no fear of God before their eyes.”
- ▶ Paul says that those who are in the flesh cannot please God (Romans 8:8).

# Total Inability

- ▶ Moreover in terms of bearing fruit and doing what pleases God, Jesus reminds us that “apart from Me you can do nothing” (John 15:5).
- ▶ Unbelievers are not and cannot be pleasing to God on the simple basis that they do not have faith in Christ and “without faith it is impossible to please God” (Heb. 11:6).
- ▶ Romans 8:7 Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. 8 So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God.
- ▶ Everyone who commits sin (all who are born sinners) is a slave of sin (John 8:34), dead in sin (Eph. 2:1-2), and if they were to attempt to offer God a righteous gift or act, “all our righteousnesses are filthy rags” before God (Isa. 64:6).

# Total Inability

- ▶ “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” (1 Cor. 2:14)
- ▶ Even if we had righteousness that was pleasing to God, we still are unable to come to Him on our own. John 6:44 No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him...
- ▶ Therefore, man’s natural, spiritual state is not one of relative neutrality, in which he is able to accept or reject God and the Gospel. He is an active hater of God (Rom. 8:7) who cannot accept spiritual truth or understand it (1 Cor, 2:14).
- ▶ The total depravity of man demonstrates the absolute sovereignty of God in salvation because man can do nothing to save himself and does not even want to be saved or believe he needs to be saved if left on his own.
- ▶ God must accomplish all as a gift of sovereign grace.

# Total Inability

- ▶ In the Westminster Confession the doctrine of Total Inability is stated as follows: — “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 good, and dead in sin, is not able, by his own strength, to convert himself, or to prepare himself thereunto.”
- ▶ Charles Spurgeon preached: If the heart be so evil, then it is impossible for us to enter heaven as we are. We cannot suppose that those holy gates shall enclose those whose imaginations and thoughts are evil, and only evil continually. No, if that is the place into which nothing shall enter that defiles, then no man being what he was in his first birth can ever stand there. Then, it is quite clear that if I am to enter heaven no outward reform will ever do, for if I wash my face, that does not change my heart, and if I give up all my outward sins, and become outwardly what I ought to be, yet still, if it is true that my heart is the villainous thing which Scripture says it is, then my outward reformation cannot touch that, and I am still shut out of heaven. If inside that cup and platter there is all this filthiness, I may cleanse the outside, but I have not touched that which will shut me out of heaven.

# Total Inability

- ▶ I go, then, a little farther and I observe that I must have a new nature—not new practice only, but a new nature—not new thoughts or new words, but a new nature so as to become a totally new man. And when I draw the inference, I have Scripture to back me at once, for what does Jesus say to Nicodemus? “You must be born again.” But what is to be born again? To my first birth, I owe all I am by nature. I must get a second birth to which I am to owe all I am as I enter heaven. My first birth makes me a creature, my second birth makes me a new creature, and I become what I never was before.” I must remember that what is wanted in me is not to bring out and develop what is good in me, for, according to God’s Word in the sixth of Genesis, there is nothing good, it is only evil. Grace does not enter to educate the germs of holiness within me, for there is no germ of good in man at all, he is “evil continually,” and every imagination is “only evil.”
- ▶ I must then die to sin. My old nature must be slain, it cannot be mended. It is too bad, too rotten to be patched up—that must die. By the death of Jesus, it must be destroyed. It must be buried with Christ, and I must rise in resurrection life to conformity with my Lord Jesus.



# Total Inability

- ▶ Well then, advancing one step further—it is clear if I must be this before I can enter heaven, that I cannot give myself a new nature. A crab tree cannot transform itself into an apple tree. If I am a wolf, I cannot make myself a sheep. Water can rise to its own proper level, but it cannot go beyond it without pressure. I must have, then, something wrought in me more than I can work in myself, and this indeed is good Scriptural doctrine. “That which is born of the flesh”—what is it? When the flesh has done its very best, what is it?—“That which is born of the flesh is flesh”—it is filthy to begin with and filth comes of it—only “that which is born of the Spirit is spirit: marvel not that I said unto you, you must be born again.”
- ▶ My soul must come under the hand of the Spirit, just as a piece of clay is on the potter’s wheel and is made to revolve and is touched by the fingers of the potter and molded into what he wishes it to be, so must I lie passively in the hands of the Spirit of God, and He must work in me to will and to do of His own good pleasure. And then, I shall begin to work out my own salvation with fear and trembling, but never, never till then. I must have more than nature can give me, more than my mother gave me, more than my father gave me, more than flesh and blood can produce under the most favorable circumstances. I must have the Spirit of God from heaven.
- ▶ CH Spurgeon – Human Depravity and Divine Mercy - <http://www.spurgeongems.org/sermon/chs615.pdf>