

T is for Total Depravity, Part 1

Eph. 2:1-3

NKJ Ephesians 2:1 And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins,
 2 in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience,
 3 among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.

Romans 3:9-20

9 What then? Are we better than they? Not at all. For we have previously charged both Jews and Greeks that they are all under sin.
 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."
 19 Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.
 20 Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin.

A few years ago, Pastor Ian Hamilton shared the following anecdote at the Banner of Truth Conference. He is a Scotsman who pastors a congregation of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of England and Wales in Cambridge, he said that soon after he and his wife moved down to England from Scotland he and his wife began looking for a Christian school for their children, and having found that in the entire area there was only one that came close to being "evangelical" he and his wife decided that *beggars can't be choosers* and enrolled their kids. Not long after they had enrolled them, there was a discussion of salvation going on in one of the classes and the teacher had asked his eight year old daughter about what she believed. In answering the little girl apparently had said in part "Well Miss, I'm a Calvinist..." to which the teacher answered "What's a Calvinist?" and the little girl answered "A Calvinist is someone who believes that God Saves Sinners."

That is an excellent answer – and to tell the truth you could hear more than a little of her daddy's joy that she had answered that way. But that really does get down to the core of the difference amongst Christians regarding salvation. That is the difference between Calvinists and Arminians, between the Reformed and the Non-Reformed. Namely is salvation, Monergistic, or Synergistic? Monergism is the belief that man's conversion is wholly by the grace of God while synergism posits that man is saved by cooperating with God to effect his salvation.

J.I. Packer, in probably the best thing he has ever written in his long career, his introduction to John Owen's magnificent "The Death of Death in the Death of Christ" summarized the difference between monergism and synergism this way:

"Now, here are two coherent interpretations of the biblical gospel, which stand in evident opposition to each other. The difference between them is not primarily one of emphasis, but of content. One proclaims a God who saves; the other speaks of a God who enables man to save himself. One view presents the three great acts of the Holy Trinity for the recovering of lost mankind—election by the Father, redemption by the Son, calling by the Spirit—as directed towards the same persons, and as securing their salvation infallibly. The other view gives each act a different reference (the objects of redemption being all mankind, of calling, all who hear the gospel, and of election, those hearers who respond), and denies that any man's salvation is secured by any of them. The two theologies thus conceive the plan of salvation in quite different terms.

One makes salvation depend on the work of God, the other on a work of man; one regards faith as part of God's gift of salvation, the other as man's own contribution to salvation; one gives all the glory of saving believers to God, the other divides the praise between God, who, so to speak, built the machinery of salvation, and man, who by believing operated it. Plainly, these differences are important, and the permanent value of the "five points", as a summary of Calvinism, is that they make clear the areas in which, and the extent to which, these two conceptions are at variance."

The "five points" that Packer speaks of, are not so much a summary of Calvinism, for there is so much more to Reformed theology than simply the five points, but they are a good summary of Reformed Soteriology. That is what Calvinists believe about salvation. You probably have heard of them before as TULIP – each letter in that word standing for a critical doctrine –

T for Total Depravity or Total inability

U for Unconditional Election

L for Limited Atonement

I for Irresistible Grace

P for Perseverance of the Saints

The funny thing of course is that while you will find these doctrines scattered about in his works, Calvin did not create the five points of Calvinism. Like most definitions of orthodoxy, such as the Nicene Creed, they were developed as a response to a new heresy being promulgated in the church. Specifically, the first time they were put together in this way was at the Synod of Dordrecht in Holland which met from 1618-1619 to examine and respond to the teachings of the followers of a Dutch theologian by the name of Jacob Harmin, or Jacobus Arminius as he is better known (in the 17th century for some reason every Continental theologian "latinized" his name – I guess I would sound cooler as Webbius rather than simply Pastor Webb). These followers called *Arminians* had been teaching that the Reformed church had essentially gone too far away from the Semi-Pelagian doctrines of Roman Catholicism and so they issued a *remonstrance or protest* asking that the confessions and teaching of the Dutch Reformed Churches be changed from the Monergistic Calvinism of the Belgic Confession and Heidelberg Catechism to the conform to the synergism of the leader Arminius.

They issued their own 5 point manifesto: 1) Free Will or Human ability 2) Conditional Election 3) Universal Redemption 4) The resistability of Grace & 5) That the Redeemed can fall into Apostasy and loose their salvation.

The Synod called together the best Reformed theologians from throughout Europe and the British Isles and the examined the remonstrances of the Arminians in the light of the final arbiter of all theological questions – *scripture, and then issued a point by point* reply called the canons of Dordt. Dordt rejected the synergism of the Arminians as fundamentally unbiblical –

For Instance regarding the first point of Arminianism, free will or human ability, the Synod affirmed the doctrine of total depravity and rejected the error of the Arminians in part by saying:

The true doctrine having been explained, the Synod rejects the errors of those:

Who teach: That the unregenerate man is not really nor utterly dead in sin, nor destitute of all powers unto spiritual good, but that he can yet hunger and thirst after righteousness and life, and offer the sacrifice of a contrite and broken spirit, which is pleasing to God.

For these things are contrary to the express testimony of Scripture: Ye were dead through your trespasses and sins (Eph. 2:1, 5). And: Every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually (Gen. 6:5; 8:21). Moreover, to hunger and thirst after deliverance from misery and after life, and to offer unto God the sacrifice of a broken spirit, is peculiar to the regenerate and those that are called blessed (Psa. 51:17; Matt. 5:6).

[The Canons of Dort, Third and Fourth Heads of Doctrine - The Corruption of Man, His Conversion to God, & the Manner Thereof - Rejection of Errors]

In fact Dordt rightly pointed out that these Remonstrances were nothing new, and that they were simply resuming once again the 4th century argument between Augustine and Pelagius.

Augustine following the apostle Paul had written strongly of the Sovereignty of God and the fallenness of man and man's utter dependence on God for salvation. Pelagius a Welsh Monk, had denied that original sin had affected all men, that they were not dead in sin, and that his will was essentially intact and unfallen and not hopelessly inclined to evil, and that all men everywhere had the ability to freely choose between Christ and the Devil, righteousness and sin. He also believed that man was essentially saved by his good works.

The Church eventually affirmed Augustine and pronounced Pelagianism a heresy, but over a period of time, Pelagian ideas crept back into the church until the theology of the Roman Catholic Church could not be described as fully Pelagian, but it was certainly semi-Pelagian, and thoroughly synergistic. Instead of God saving Sinners, Sinners co-operate in their salvation.

The Reformation of the 16th century had once again reaffirmed the monergistic soteriology of Augustine, but as Augustine himself had confessed, ultimately they were just getting back to the teaching of Paul and the Bible, and that and not history is going to be our critical concern – *what does the Bible teach?*

Does God Save Sinners or Do Men Cooperate with God to Save Themselves?

Let us start then with the first point of Calvinism, **Total Depravity**, we won't be able to cover all of it today, but we can at least make a start and then finish up last week.

What does Total Depravity mean? Well it means that the fall of Adam and the Curse of Original Sin brought man into a condition of Spiritual Death as the Westminster Confession of Faith Summarized it:

Man, by his fall into a state of sin, hath wholly lost all ability of will to any spiritual good accompanying salvation:[4] so as, a natural man, being altogether averse from that good,[5] and dead in sin,[6] is not able, by his own strength, to convert himself, or to prepare himself thereunto.[7] [WCF 9.3]

Now, interestingly enough, if we can prove that the Bible teaches that all men after the fall are *dead in sin*, and not just *sick* or *injured* in sin, that should be the end of the argument of whether God saves you or you cooperate in your salvation. After all, what can dead men do at all for themselves? A drowning man can indeed reach out and grab a line thrown to him, but a drowned man will need you to do everything to remove him from the water.

When Jesus arrived at the tomb of Lazarus and commanded them to roll away the stone, Martha did not say, "ah good, I hope Lazarus is going to do all he can to answer the call of the Lord – She said **"Lord, by this time there is a stench, for he has been dead four days." Only the power of the Lord could bring life to a man that dead, and so it is with spiritual conversion.** If we are spiritually dead and stinking in our sins, what can we contribute to our conversion?

Are men by nature spiritually *dead* then or just sick? Did God need to regenerate you before you could answer his call to faith? Did you come to faith and then you were regenerated? Or does regeneration precede faith? What did Paul teach?

Romans 5:12 " 12 Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned --

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 3 among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.
 4 But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us,
 5 even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved),
 6 and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,

Col. 2:13 And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses,

Clearly at one time you were all **dead** in your sins, not sick, and that spiritual death implies an obstinate and total opposition to God and his salvation. Next week we will look at how that means that far from being able to cooperate in your redemption, you were opposed to it. We will look more at what it means to be spiritually dead totally or radically depraved.

But in the meantime let us praise God for His mercy to us even while we were in that condition for as Paul puts it: Titus 3:" 3 For we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another. 4 But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, 5 not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit,"

