

TOTAL DEPRAVITY (CORRUPTION)

WHAT TOTAL DEPRAVITY IS NOT:

1. Total Depravity is not Absolute Depravity. A person is not as terrible as he/she could be.
2. Total Depravity is not a complete absence of relative good.

There are three elements that make an act “truly good.” (cf. Heidelberg Cat. Q&A 91)

- i. It arises out of true faith.
- ii. It conforms to God’s law.
- iii. It is done for God’s glory.

A “relatively” good work may have the correct outward form (conforms outwardly to God’s law), but may not be done from true faith or to the glory of God. Therefore, non-Christians are able to perform relatively good deeds, even though they themselves are totally depraved. Even a blaspheming pagan can help a beggar.

WHAT IS TOTAL DEPRAVITY?

1. **It is only and always sinning.** Even though a non-Christian can do relative good, it is not “truly” good. In fact, because it doesn’t arise out of true faith and because it isn’t done for God’s glory, it is nothing else than sin. Unredeemed sinners are never able to do any good that is fundamentally pleasing to God. Consider the following Scripture passages: Genesis 6:5, Jeremiah 17:9, Psalm 51:5, Romans 3:10-18.

2. **Totally depraved persons are unable to do, understand, and even desire what is good.**

- a. **They cannot do good.** (John 15:4-5, Romans 8:7-8).
- b. **They cannot understand good.** John 1:10-11, “He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.” The trouble was not in the presentation of the truth. The truth was there. The trouble was that people were blinded to the truth. They were incapable of understanding it. Consider also John 8:43 and Matt. 13:14. This explains why some theologians and Bible students can spend most of their lives studying the Bible and yet reject Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. The cause of their rejection is not in the clear testimony of God’s Word. Rather, it is in their blindness, darkness, and inability to understand the truth.
- c. **They cannot desire what is good.** In fact, sinners hate good and hate its source, namely, God. This truth is taught in Scripture in such places as John 3:19-20.

See also Isaiah 64:6, Ezekiel 11:19, John 3:3, Ephesians 2:1, Col. 2:13.

There are some lessons that we can draw from this Biblical teaching of Total Depravity.

1. Total Depravity explains the troubles in our world.
2. We are thoroughly bad and we are in terrible circumstances unless God helps us.
3. If a person has a desire to ask God to help him or her, it is only because God is at work in their lives.