

TOTAL DEPRAVITY

All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.

— Romans 3:12

The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?

— Jeremiah 17:9

Grace is not grace, if sin is not sin. If we have a small view of sin, we will have a small view of grace. It simply won't amaze us. So it was in Jesus' day. In the home of a Pharisee, while a sinful woman fell at his feet in tears, kissing them and anointing them with oil, the Pharisee did nothing. The difference? She was aware of her many sins, and the forgiveness Jesus provided was everything to her. The Pharisee, however, did not sense any great sin in his life, and "he who is forgiven little, loves little" (Luke 7:47). How profound is sin? How bad is our condition? How pervasive, how debilitating, how destructive is it in our hearts? Should we fall at Jesus' feet in awe of His love, or is it enough that we allow Him room in our lives?

"Total depravity" describes the profundity of sin. It is not just that we all sin. That is true. It is not just that sin pervades all our motives and all our actions. That is also true. Our hearts are like contaminated wells: sin is spread through every part. Rather, total depravity means that we are totally incapable of turning to God, unless He first intervenes.

The term "total depravity" is easily misunderstood. It sounds like it means that people are totally evil, that there is no good in people in any sense, and that people are as evil as they can be. "Total depravity" is not intended to communicate that all people are completely evil, nothing but evil, and as evil as they can be. Because of God's common grace, we can admire some good in all people.

Because "total depravity" is so easily misunderstood, some prefer the term radical depravity. Here, the meaning of "radical" is taken from its Latin root, *radix*, which means root. We are not as evil as we can be, but we are sinful at root. Sin is a root problem. It is catastrophic and total debilitating in terms of our ability to turn from sin to God.

In what sense are we unable to turn from sin? It is not that there is anything keeping us from turning from sin. Our will is totally free in the sense that it is unconstrained. Nothing forces us to do anything against our will. The problem is that simply that we love sin too much to let it go. We can't. We are like children totally enthralled and enamored by toys: caught up in the moment, we cannot turn from sin.

Overcome by the knowledge of his own sinfulness and inability, Paul cried out, "Who will save me from this body of death?" He answered, "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!" God sent His Son to seek and to save the lost. He finds lost sheep and carries them home. We owe Christ everything and can only fall at His feet amazed by His love!