

Steve Whitacre

## SESSION 2: Total Depravity<sup>1</sup>

### I. WHAT HAPPENED TO SIN?

“Whatever became of sin?” – Karl Menninger

“Here we are dealing with the nature and extent of sin, and the point is that we are all radically sinful, so much so that we cannot take even the smallest steps toward God unless he first intervenes.”<sup>2</sup>

“What total depravity is meant to convey is the idea that sin has affected the whole person down to the very core or root of his or her being.”<sup>3</sup>

### II. THE FALL OF THE RACE IN ADAM

Genesis 2:15-17; God’s penalty for sin is death.

*“The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, ‘You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.’”* (Genesis 2:15–17, ESV)

Genesis 3:1-13; The result of the fall is death.

- A. Immediate spiritual death
- B. Ultimate physical death
- C. Continuing effects in humanity

“Man was originally created in the image of God and was furnished in his mind with a true and salutary knowledge of his Creator and things spiritual, in his will and heart with righteousness, and in all his emotions with purity; indeed, the whole man was holy. However, rebelling against God at the devil’s instigation and by his own free will, he deprived himself of these outstanding gifts. Rather, in their place he brought upon himself blindness, terrible darkness, futility, and distortion of judgment in his

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<sup>1</sup> This outline is adapted from portions of chapter 3 of *The Doctrines of Grace*, by James Montgomery Boice and Philip Graham Ryken. For further study, see Wayne Grudem’s *Systematic Theology*, chapter 24.

<sup>2</sup> Boice and Ryken, *The Doctrines of Grace*, 70.

<sup>3</sup> Boice and Ryken, *The Doctrines of Grace*, 71.

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mind; perversity, defiance, and hardness in his heart and will; and finally impurity in all his emotions.”<sup>4</sup>

“The Bible presents sin by way of major concepts, principally lawlessness and faithlessness, expressed in an array of images: sin is the missing of a target, a wandering from the path, a straying from the fold. Sin is a hard heart and a stiff neck. Sin is blindness and deafness. It is both the overstepping of a line and the failure to reach it—both transgression and shortcoming. Sin is a beast crouching at the door. In sin, people attack or evade or neglect their divine calling. These and other images suggest deviance: even when it is familiar, sin is never normal. Sin is disruption of creation harmony and then resistance to divine restoration of that harmony. Above all, sin disrupts and resists the vital human relation to God, and it does all this disrupting and resisting in a number of intertwined ways. Sinful life, as Geoffrey Bromiley observes, is a partly depressing, partly ludicrous caricature of genuine human life.”<sup>5</sup>

Sin involves guilt, corruption, and inability.

### III. EPHESIANS 2:1-3

- A. The sinner is “dead in... transgressions and sins”
- B. The sinner actually practices evil
- C. The sinner is enslaved
- D. The sinner is by nature an object of God’s wrath

### IV. ROMANS 3:9-20

- A. The moral nature: None are righteous
- B. The sinful mind: None understands
- C. The captive will: None seeks God
- D. From Adam to us: Romans 5.

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<sup>4</sup> *Canons of Dort*, III.1, in *Ecumenical Creeds and Reformed Confessions*, 133.

<sup>5</sup> Cornelius Plantinga, *Not The Way It's Supposed To Be*, 5.

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## V. THE BONDAGE OF THE WILL

### A. Augustine & Pelagius

“Augustine saw that the Bible always speaks of sin as more than mere isolated and individual acts. It speaks of an inherited depravity as a result of which it simply is not possible for the individual to stop sinning.”<sup>6</sup>

1. Before the fall: *posse peccare*
2. After the fall: *non posse non peccare*
3. After conversion: *posse non peccare*
4. After glorification: *non posse peccare*

### B. Luther & Erasmus

“Luther did not deny the psychological fact that men and women do make choices. This is so obvious that no one can deny it. What Luther insisted, however, was that in the specific area of an individual’s choice of God or failure to choose God, the will is impotent.”<sup>7</sup>

### C. Edwards’s Freedom of the Will

1. Will. The will always chooses what the mind thinks is best.
2. Motives. The sinful mind does not view serving God as desirable and thus does not choose to serve God.

“As the bird with a broken wing is ‘free’ to fly but not able, so the natural man is free to come to God but not able. How can he repent of his sin when he loves it? How can he come to God when he hates him?”<sup>8</sup>

3. Moral & natural ability

“The sinner will not come to Christ because he does not want to. Deep in his heart he hates Christ and what he stands for. It is not because he cannot come naturally or physically.”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Boice and Ryken, *The Doctrines of Grace*, 81.

<sup>7</sup> Boice and Ryken, *The Doctrines of Grace*, 83.

<sup>8</sup> Loraine Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*, 61.

<sup>9</sup> Boice and Ryken, *The Doctrines of Grace*, 86.

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## VI. THEOLOGY FOR REAL LIFE

- A. Radical depravity reveals the seriousness of sin.
- B. Radical depravity explains so much of human behavior.
- C. Radical depravity makes the gospel sweet.
- D. Radical depravity makes evangelism urgent.
- E. What effect does this have on your soul?

*“The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, ‘The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children’s children, to the third and the fourth generation.’” (Exodus 34:6–7, ESV)*

*“but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” (Romans 5:8, ESV)*

“Far from keeping us away from Christ, the true knowledge of radical depravity actually helps us abandon ourselves to his grace.”<sup>10</sup>

### RECOMMENDED READING:

- James Montgomery Boice and Philip Ryken, *The Doctrines of Grace*
- Joel R. Beeke, *Living for God’s Glory*
- Stephen J. Nichols, *The Reformation: How a Monk and a Mallet Changed the World*

On sin:

- Kris Lundgaard, *The Enemy Within*
- Jerry Bridges, *Respectable Sins*
- John Owen, *Temptation and Sin* (Works, Vol. 6) —OR—  
Kelly Kapic and Justin Taylor, *Overcoming Sin and Temptation*

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<sup>10</sup> Boice and Ryken, *The Doctrines of Grace*, 89.