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Challenges to Total Depravity (Part 1)



God's Sovereignty and Man's Salvation - Steve Gregg

In this lecture, Steve Gregg challenges the Calvinist view of total depravity by examining various biblical passages. He argues that while there is evidence of people's sinful nature, the idea that no one seeks God or has the ability to repent is not a categorical statement about all of mankind. Gregg also delves into the use of the word "dead" in Scripture and suggests that it doesn't necessarily mean a complete inability to change or choose righteousness. Ultimately, he asserts that the choice to repent and accept salvation is available to all.

Transcript

We're turning to lecture four, Challenges to Total Depravity. We've just gone through the defense of the five points, including total depravity and the other four. We will now be going more slowly, looking at those five points again.

And in each case, we're going to look at the scriptures that we already saw that support these views. In each of the following lectures, Roman numeral one is reexamining the positive case. That means we're going to revisit all those scriptures that we looked at when we were defending these points.

And then Roman numeral two is going to be, in each lecture, the contrary witness of Scripture. So, we have two tasks before us. One is to make reasonable sense of the Calvinistic proof text in a non-Calvinistic way.

And the other is to present those texts which seem to eliminate the possibility of Calvinist view being true, because they affirm the contrary. Obviously, you know that's going to be challenging, because we saw that a lot of the proof texts for the Calvinist views are pretty, they look strong. I mean, I won't deny it.

I wouldn't say Calvinists are stupid and they're not paying attention. They are paying attention. They're paying attention to those verses which, taken by themselves especially, give the impression that these points are true.

Now, remember I said yesterday that my thought is that a person would not become a

Calvinist just from reading the Scripture. But you might say, well, if they just read those scriptures, they would. True.

But just reading those scriptures isn't reading the whole counsel of God. And there are many things throughout Scripture. In fact, I consider the whole thought process of Scripture implies that there are things that God did not determine, that God did not ordain, that God does not approve of, that He holds man fully responsible for, and indicates that man could have done better.

And didn't. And that man is responsible to believe and to repent and to do good. Now, the verses we saw in our last lecture sound like that doesn't work.

Those things suggest that that isn't possible. Or do they? The point here is that all verses of Scripture, whether they seem to support Arminianism or support Calvinism, have to be harmonized with all the Scripture. The problem with most theological controversialists is that they find the Scriptures which taken by themselves certainly sound like they're saying what the person wants them to say.

But if you take the whole of Scripture, you find that these same verses make good enough sense in a different way. And that some Scriptures almost make it necessary to reject the Calvinist interpretation of these, because some Scriptures affirm the opposite. And so, once again, I'm not satisfied just saying, OK, I showed you the Calvinist verses, let me now show you the Arminian verses.

That's not responsible. We have to look at those Calvinist verses again, because they are there. They mean something.

And it's not ours to just manipulate them because we'd rather believe something else. We have to make those Scriptures make responsible sense and try to find out what God actually wanted them to be understood to say. Not use our own ingenuity to manipulate them, to kind of obscure the fact that they in fact are teaching Calvinism, but we don't want to admit it, so we find it a clever way to eliminate that possibility so we can move on to say what we want to say.

We shouldn't be here with any agenda at all, except to find out what God has said. It's not my agenda to prove Arminianism, because if Calvinism is true, I'd just soon believe that. I mean, I don't like it, but I don't like everything about Arminianism either.

I mean, some things are hard. The hard thing is that not everyone is saved. That's what I don't like.

I'd like everyone to be saved. And Calvinism and Arminianism give different reasons why some people are not saved. And, you know, whatever the right reason is, the one I want to adopt.

So I'm going to look at these Scriptures not with a determination that I have to somehow destroy this evidence to maintain an anti-Calvinist position. I want to see what it's saying and what it's not saying. And so let me read again some Calvinist statements, because I want to remind you what their position is on this, on total depravity.

John Piper and his pastoral staff wrote a book called *Tulip, What We Believe About the Five Points of Calvinism*. He said, we do not think that faith precedes and causes new birth. Faith is the evidence that God has begotten us anew.

So we're not born again because we believed. We believe because we're born again. R.C. Sproul, once again in *Chosen by God*, said, the Reformed view of predestination teaches that before a person can choose Christ, he must be born again.

One does not first believe and then become reborn. A cardinal point of Reformed theology is the maxim, regeneration precedes faith. Charles Hodge, in his systematic theology, said, no more soul destroying doctrine could well be devised than the doctrine that the sinner can regenerate themselves and repent and believe just when they please.

Now, I'm not really sure why that particular doctrine would be the most soul destroying doctrine that can be imagined. Suppose somebody said that the sinner can regenerate themselves by repenting and believing when they please. By the way, that's not what Arminians necessarily say and not what I would say.

But I don't know why that would be so soul destroying. In other words, if we understood a doctrine that God was ready to regenerate us all and he's just the ball is in our court, we have the power and the obligation to repent and believe whenever we choose and can do so. Well, I don't really know how that would change much of anything about our Christian life or whatever.

Calvinists believe we have to do that, too. They just believe we'll do it because God makes us. They even believe that it seems to us that we're making the decision.

And it certainly does. When you become a Christian, it seems to you you're making a choice. And Calvinists admit this.

They say it does seem like it to you. But behind the scenes in the secret workings of God, there's a sovereign working that made you come to a place where you did that. OK, who could deny that? I mean, it depends on what scripture says.

But as far as from my experience, I couldn't tell whether that's true or not. It wouldn't change anything in my life. But what's more, an Arminian, although he believes in free will and believes in the obligation of the sinner to repent and believe, doesn't necessarily say a sinner can do that whenever they want.

Well, maybe they would say whenever they want, but it's not necessarily the case that a sinner can want to at all times. People can harden their hearts, for example. There may be a time earlier in life when a person could have repented, but they've made such a mental habit of resistance and rebellion.

Their hearts become so hard that they're no longer able to do that. There is a scripture that says, call on the Lord while he is near. Seek the Lord while he may be found.

It sounds like it is possible to seek the Lord. And it's not because of some secret decree, but because of the timing. Seek him while he can be found.

There will be a time when he can't be. Now, if you're elect, there would never be a time when he can't be. And if you're not elect, there wouldn't be a time when he can be.

It seems to say that people can seek God, but not at any time they want to necessarily. There's times when their heart is soft. There's times when they're being convicted by the Holy Spirit.

There's times when that conviction passes and they would not be in the same readiness to repent. There's people I know who say, I'm going to repent on my deathbed. But they can't.

They thought they'd be able to, but their heart changed over the year. Interesting studies have been done of people who actually did receive a diagnosis from their doctor that they had only weeks to live. And they called for the priest or they called for the minister and they wanted to make their confession, get right with God.

And of course, they thought they were going to die. So they were very serious and sincere wanting to get right with God at that point. And there's a certain percentage of these people who actually recovered unexpectedly.

You know how many of them served God after that? Zero. And yet they were repenting as sincerely as they knew how. They were desperate.

They were dying. They wanted to repent, but they obviously didn't really repent. They couldn't apparently.

They tried, but couldn't. In other words, there does come a time when you've put it off too long and your heart has been so much made in the habit of resisting and resisting and resisting and resisting that calluses form over it. You can't feel anymore.

Anyone who's learned how to play the guitar knows what that's like with your fingers. Start playing the guitar as a beginner. It hurts your fingers after a few minutes.

How can anyone ever do this? You keep it up and within a few days, you don't feel a thing. You have calluses there. Your skin's so hard.

It doesn't hurt at all. You become desensitized. In other words, it's not that you're not doing the same kind of damage to yourself.

It's just you're not aware of it because you're desensitized. And the heart apparently can become calloused like that. In the Proverbs, it says, he that hardens his neck, which means doesn't bow, stiffens his neck instead of bowing his neck to God.

He that hardens his neck, being often reprov'd, will suddenly be destroyed and that without remedy. A person who establishes a habit and a pattern of total willful resistance against God can easily come to a place where they don't have that same softness of heart, that same ability. So the Arminian doesn't argue that all people at all times, whenever they wish, they can just set their clock by, I'm going to repent at this particular date in this particular time.

That's not the way it is. Repentance is a response to God's conviction. It's a response to God's wooing.

It's a response to God's working. And if you respond negatively, that opportunity may not come back again anytime soon or ever. Some people may only have one moment in their life where that's, that's really happening to them.

Others may have several opportunities in their lifetime, but no one would be wise to suggest that it's always the case that at any moment, a person can just repent. That's not what Arminianism teaches. And so just to make that clear now in saying that a person has to be regenerated before they can repent, we have to ask, why does the Bible then talk as if that's not true all the time? Jesus in the prodigal son parable was crafting a story to closely parallel the sinner's return to God.

The sinner has gone from his father's house. He's fallen on bad times. He comes to his senses.

He says, things are better in my father's house. I'm going to return to my father. I'm going to go back there.

I'm going to say, father, I've sinned against heaven and in your sight. I'm no longer worthy to be called your son. Just make me one of your servants.

Now, all this happens while he's in a far country, not in communication with his father. Now, if Jesus wanted to convey the idea, he could have said his father sent out troops to, you know, arrest him and bring him home again. You know, his father's power was too great for the son.

The son wanted to rebel, but the father made him come home. Instead, he depicts the son as coming to his senses. He starts to assess his situation.

You know, my father's house is better than this. I need to, I've done the wrong thing. I need to repent.

I need to come home. And when his father sees that he's on his way, he runs out to meet him and embraces him and restores him. That story is a very important story, not just because it's a favorite sentimental story for Christians.

It's Christ's way of describing why the tax collectors and sinners were coming to God. They were like prodigal children who had rebelled, but they got smart and came home. Now, get smart is a term that the Calvinists would not like at all, because they actually will ridicule the Armenian because they'll say, well, what's the difference between you and a person who doesn't get saved? Let's say you're both, you and two sinners are sitting in an evangelistic meeting.

One goes forward and receives Christ. The other doesn't. What's the difference between those two? And they say, if you're an Armenian, you have to say the one who went forward is smarter or better than the other person.

There's something in them that's better than the whatever's in that other person. The sinner who repents has to take credit for being a better, wiser, something better person than the person who didn't. The Calvinist says, no, God elected him and not the other guy.

Therefore, the one who gets saved can't take any credit. All the glory goes to God. But if you're an Armenian, you have to take some credit to yourself somehow, because I made a decision others didn't make.

I made a better decision. I was wiser. I was somewhat better.

I was somewhat less hardened or whatever. Well, that's a strong, I mean, that's a common statement of Armenians. I mean, of Calvinists about Armenians.

But nonetheless, the prodigal son is depicted as someone who who came to his senses, got smart and said, you know, this is the pits. I want to go home and did. And the story is, although it could have included the element, it gives no impression that the father was in any way drawing his son back, except by the son's memory of how good his father was.

Certainly, Jesus said, no one can come to me unless the father draws him. But is that an irresistible drawing or is that that a person feels drawn to God because the grace of the goodness of God leads you to repentance, that you actually begin to say, you know, God is a loving God. God, you start feeling bad about having done wrong to someone who's so good.

And and that brings you to repentance. Anyway, the point I'm making is there's a lot in

the Bible, not just that story, but much that suggests that. People make the decision themselves, actually, Jesus in telling the parable of the sower, he said that the good ground that were that produced fruit, unlike the other bad ground, it was those who hear the word with a good and honest heart.

What? Are there people of good and honest hearts? I know there's total depravity. Jesus said, no, these are those who hear the word and with a good and honest heart, they receive it. Now, if there are people who get saved because they have a good and honest heart.

And other people don't get saved who hear the same word because they don't have a good and honest heart. Sounds like there is something in the person that makes a difference between getting saved or not. At least Jesus seemed to want to give that impression, it looks like.

We have to consider that when you look at all these proof texts for Calvinism. Almost all of them come from the Gospel of John or a few chapters in Romans or a place or two in Ephesians. There's a few exceptions besides those, but there are certain clusters in the Bible that are fruitful for Calvinist proof texts.

And we have to realize that something is being said in these places, but it may not be what the Calvinists think it is, especially if you find that the rest of the Bible makes no hint of these Calvinist ideas and speaks always as if some people are actually better, wiser, more humble, have more of a good and honest heart than some other people do. But that can't be true if total depravity is the case, because total depravity paints everyone with the same brush. There are no unbelievers who are good, even a little bit.

No, not one. There's none that seeks after God. So what do we do? Well, let's look at Genesis 6.5. By the way, you'll notice Genesis 6.5 is where it says, The wickedness of man was great in the earth, and every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.

Jeremiah 13.23 says, Can an Ethiopian change his skin? A leopard his spots, then may you do good who are accustomed to evil. Jeremiah 17.9, The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. Who can know it? Now, when you debate a Calvinist, they often resort to the same tactics as all of their mentors do, I guess, because I've had, I think every Calvinist I've ever debated did this.

They say, How can a person who's dead in trespasses and sins, whose thoughts and imaginations of his heart are only evil continually, who is a slave of sin, who is like a leopard who cannot change his spots and do good, whose heart is evil and deceitful above all things. How can such a person turn to God? And my answer is probably someone like that can't. They probably have to change from being that way before they will turn to God.

But what makes you think all unbelievers are that way? These verses are not descriptions of all fallen humanity. Every one of these verses is talking about someone in particular who is about to be specifically judged for being as bad as they are. In Genesis 6, 5, this is describing how bad the world became so that God could no longer tolerate it and had to send the flood.

This is describing the conditions that God had to remedy by sending the flood. Now, God has only sent one flood. He has had other times where he's judged nations and people and so forth.

But let's face it, he doesn't do it all the time. He does it when he can no longer endure the degree of corruption that man has come to or fallen to. This does not say that all people at all times in history have only evil thoughts continually.

This is a description of the society that God had to wipe out before the flood. Now, here's something we have to notice. Many theologians, because they are theologians and trying to be systematic, they're looking to make general statements about biblical anthropology, biblical thoughts, what's man like, and other subjects.

And so they want a seamless one-size-fits-all description of people in different categories, in this case of people who aren't saved. And so they'll find verses like this. Look at this.

Every thought and imagination of the heart was only evil continually. Let's put that in our bag of Christian anthropology, unsaved people. But it's not a statement about unsaved people in general.

Most of these statements were not intended to be anthropological, theological, categorical statements about mankind. They are actual descriptions of certain people. I first got onto this many, many years ago.

When I was in my early 20s, I was witnessing at a New Age kind of a gathering in a park, talking to this New Age guy and talking about his need for Christ. He said, well, I just think we need to follow our heart. And I said, but the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked.

Who can know it? I was ready for that, because follow your heart was kind of a cliché of the non-Christians of those days. And I already knew that's the verse I'm going to use. If they say you should follow your heart, I say, no, the heart is desperately wicked above all things.

Jeremiah 17.9. And the guy said to me, yeah, but who is that spoken to? I thought, wait a minute, I never asked myself that question. I guess that is a responsible way to study the Bible is find out who is being talked about when there's some kind of description. And I didn't, this guy, you know, it's like, I don't even know if he, I don't know if he even knew

who it was spoken to.

I don't know if he'd ever read the Bible. And maybe God just spoke to him through me, like speaking through a donkey. But I was using a proof text the way a Calvinist would use it.

Although I wasn't a Calvinist, I was, you know, Armenians make the same mistakes sometimes too. Just taking a statement that's about somebody in particular and just generalizing all people are this way at all times. And when he said, who is that about? I thought, whoa, I never gave that much thought, but I did realize Jeremiah was talking, describing his nation Judah just prior to the Babylonian exile.

Jeremiah's message was that God's going to wipe out Judah because he'd had enough of their increasing rebelliousness. And they'd reached a horrible place where their thoughts were only evil, continue like the people before the flood, their heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked who can know it. He's describing, he's not speaking anthropologically, he's speaking prophetically.

This is a prophetic denunciation of his generation. Now I'm not saying there's no one else besides his generation that that could be true of. It could be true of people in hundreds or thousands of situations, this could be true of them, but it's not a statement about all people.

That's not its intention. It's a rebuke to a certain generation of people who were so wicked, so anti-God that God's going to wipe them out at the hands of the Babylonians. Now, frankly, I think you could say the same thing about many people we meet today, that their hearts are desperately wicked and deceitful and that every thought of their imagination is evil continually.

I'm sure what is said about the people in this case was not at all unique. There's other cases like it, but it's a mistake to take what is said about this case and say everyone who's not a Christian, that's them right there. That's abusing the scripture.

It's not exegesis. It's using a pigeonhole approach. I want to prove this, this is the pigeonhole, total depravity.

I'll find every verse I can shove into that pigeonhole and that becomes my proof case. You see it'll go, also look at Jeremiah 13, 23, the Ethiopian thing. Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots? Then you may also do good, he's still talking to his generation, but notice, you may also do good who are accustomed to do evil.

In other words, the reason you're not going to be able to do good is because you've accustomed yourself to doing evil. He didn't say because you've been relegated to a total depraved state from birth. No, you have come to place by your accustomed behavior.

You've become accustomed to doing evil. It's a habit. It's a bad habit you're not going to be able to break.

You can't break that habit any more than a person could change the color of their skin because you have accustomed yourself. You have made a habit of bad behavior and you're not, how are you going to change that? You can't. But again, this is talking to a specific group and again, I was talking to James White, debating James White on my radio program and I was trying to get him to admit something.

He wouldn't admit it, but he was saying that total depravity of man was proven by Romans chapter one. You guys know probably Romans chapter one talks about how bad things become when people knew God and didn't want to retain the knowledge of God and they changed the glory of the incorruptible God to the image of four-footed beasts and so forth and they were given over to their evil thoughts and they loved wickedness and so forth. It does describe great depravity, but I said, could you show me which verse in this tells us that this is describing all people? He said, well, it says right in verse 18, the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in their unrighteousness.

Who? And it goes on to describe them. I said, but that's talking about men who suppress the truth in their unrighteousness, isn't it? It says that God is angry at those who suppress the truth in their unrighteousness and they have done these things that are described. Have all people done that? Well, his argument was, well, are you saying they don't? Are you saying that sinners don't all suppress the truth of God in their unrighteousness? Well, that'd be another question to answer from other data.

Maybe all people do, maybe all people don't. We'd have to decide that from some other point, but this passage doesn't say that all people do. This passage only says that God is angry at the people who do that.

That might be everybody. That might be a large percentage. It might be a small percentage.

There's no evidence given of how many people there are in this bag, but some of them are homosexual. He said, because they give up the natural use of the woman to lust after other men. I didn't do that when I was not born again yet.

And lots of unbelievers don't lust after same sex and so forth. This isn't describing everybody. This is describing a certain category of people who have habitually rejected the truth.

They've suppressed the truth in their unrighteousness, and it's gone from bad to worse in their life and their society. Now, I'd be open to the possibility that this is everyone who's not saved, but first of all, I don't observe it to be so. I know some unsaved people

who don't seem to fit that description, and the Bible doesn't require that I see it so.

And I accuse the Calvinists of making uncharitable judgments about people they've never met. That doesn't seem very Christian. They assume that every unbeliever, most of whom they've never met, is hateful toward God continually.

One of the favorite lines that James White uses frequently in his books and in his speaking is that every unregenerate person is going to stand from the parapet of hell eternally shouting out his eternal hatred to God. Wait a minute. I know a lot of unbelievers that aren't shouting out their eternal hatred to God now.

Why would they do so later? How do you know they're going to do this? Where does it say that? Well, it's necessary to say it because that's total depravity. But how do we know that total depravity is true? Well, because we read it into these passages. But should we? Is Jeremiah? Is Genesis? Is Paul? Talk about everybody.

Is Jesus? Look at Ephesians 4, 17 through 19. This I say therefore in testifying the Lord that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles. Now, the rest of the Gentiles were pagans.

Okay. There were no good Gentiles except Christians in those days because there were only Jews, Christians, and pagans. And these Christians, these are the ones who had formerly been the pagans and now they were Christians.

He says, don't walk any longer as the rest of the Gentiles walk in the futility of their mind. Why? They have their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that's in them, because of the blindness of their heart, who being past feeling have given themselves over to lewdness to work all uncleanness with That certainly sounds totally depraved, but is he describing everyone? He's describing the pagan Gentiles and he's not describing the condition in which they were born. They have given themselves over.

Presumably sometime after they were born, they did this. They've given themselves over to lewdness. They are past feeling.

They used to have feeling, but they've gotten past that point. He's not describing the birth condition of sinners. He's describing the Gentile pagan society who through their paganism and their hedonism and their lack of knowledge of God, their ignorance and the darkness they're in, they've given themselves over to a way of life that is very depraved, no question about it.

But all I'm saying is I can't make Paul in this statement necessarily refer to every person who's ever lived who's not a believer. And we're going to find the scripture. There are unbelievers that God thought were pretty decent folks, like Cornelius.

I mean, these are not statements about everyone who's unregenerate. These are statements about specific groups of people that fit these descriptions. And in many cases, it's not even talking about the way they were born.

It's not about the way that they've been conditioned. How can you do good? Who have become accustomed to doing evil? Jeremiah said, these people have given themselves over to lewdness. They are gone past the point of moral sensitivity.

Sure, there are people who are that depraved. He's talking about what these readers in the pagan world used to do and what their neighbors are still doing. But what about a world where Christianity has been influential, which wasn't Paul's case in the Gentile world.

He was bringing it to the Gentile world. What about a world like ours, where a lot of people are raised with Christian standards, even if they weren't in Christian homes? The whole society is shot through with Christian standards, even though, of course, the society is doing their best to try to shed them all. Let's face it, there's a lot of people who aren't Christians who still think they should be good parents.

They still think they should not curse God. They fear God somewhat, but they don't follow him. There are people who aren't all bad.

They're not good enough to be saved because no one can be saved by their own goodness, even if they've got some in them. You see, here's the point. I once heard, I think it was Clark Pinnock or someone wrote, he says, we're always keen to emphasize original sin, but we often forget to emphasize original righteousness.

Because man was made in the image of God. There's a reason why even pagan philosophers philosophize about what is virtue and what is good. There's something in man, in most men anyway, that wants to be good.

They find, like Paul said, I find another law in my members that brings me into bondage to sin, but in my heart, I want to do what's right. Now, I think Paul's probably describing himself as a Christian, but I believe there are non-Christians like that. They want to find the truth.

They want to find what's good. They don't know about God. They don't know about Jesus.

But I mean, certainly Socrates and Seneca and some of these old pagan philosophers, you read them, they were looking for virtue. They were looking to define who God is and things. They weren't only evil continually.

Some sinners are, some sinners aren't. It's not a description of all unregenerate people that Paul or Jesus or the prophets are giving here. That's misusing their language.

It's generalizing what is not a general statement, not as general as they're making it. Jesus said in John 8, 44, you of your father, the devil and the desires of your father you want to do. And so, of course, if you're of your father, the devil, how could you want to repent since you will do what your father wants you to do? But Jesus said they were murderers.

The devil was a murderer from the beginning and you want to murder me. Did everybody want to murder Jesus? No, but there were some who did. There were some there who really were children of the devil.

Now, I was raised thinking everyone's either a child of God or a child of the devil. Just like I was thinking from Romans 9 that everybody either was God showed mercy to or he hardened and there's no middle ground. If you weren't a Christian, he's hardened your heart.

Paul doesn't say that. Paul talks about those that God shows mercy to. He talks about those that God has hardened.

He doesn't say that everyone who's not a Christian has been hardened by God. It may be that they are, but he doesn't say so. That's reading into it something that isn't said.

That's exegesis. Exegesis is trying to read out what is said and not trying to insert our own ideas that Paul or someone else didn't intend to say. Jesus was talking to who? The people who wanted to kill him.

And he said, your father, Satan, was a murderer from the beginning. You're just like him. Now, I don't believe that everybody is a child of God at all in the sense that Christians are.

As many as received him, he gave the power to become the children of God. We are children of God in a unique sense. We've been born again.

We're regenerated. We have the spirit of God, the life of God. We're different because we're Christians.

We're children of God in a unique sense. But the Bible also uses the term children of God to speak of all humanity in a different sense, a broader sense. Man was made in God's image.

Paul said, we are all his offspring. He's talking to the Athenian philosophers. We're all God's offspring.

Malachi, speaking to the rebellious in Israel, he says, are we not all his children? Is not God our father? Has he not created all of us? There's a sense in which God is called the father of all people because he's the creator of all people. There's a different sense in

which some of us are children of God by regeneration. And there's a sense in which some people are children of the devil.

The Bible does not say that everyone who's not a Christian is a child of the devil. The ones who are the children of the devil, according to 1 John 3 and Jesus' statement here, are those who are hateful and murderous. But you know, if you think hard enough, you probably have a neighbor or two who's not a Christian.

They don't seem hateful or murderous, and they're probably not. On what grounds can we say they are children of the devil? We can argue that they're not born again and not children of God, but is everyone either a child of God or children of the devil? Are there just a bunch of people in between who are just children of Adam? And the ones who love God are the children of God. The ones who love Satan in his ways are the children of the devil.

And we don't know, but there might be a broad category in between. I'm not reading it in, but I'm refusing to exclude it because the passage doesn't exclude that possibility. You see, someone might say, well, if you're saying there's a group of people that aren't children of God or children of the devil, you're isageating the passage.

No, I'm not insisting on it. I'm just saying that is a conceivable possibility that is not ruled out. And therefore, we can't insist from these passages that everybody who's not a Christian is a murderer.

The Bible doesn't tell us that. Jesus says that those people were children of the devil. They were murderous.

And 1 John chapter 3 says Cain was a child of the devil. He murdered his brother. As near as I can tell, everyone in the Bible that's called a child of the devil is a murderer.

And not everybody's a murderer if they're not a Christian. Some people would be as adverse to murdering someone as I am, even though they're not a Christian. You know, sometimes you say the Jews killed Jesus.

Well, some of them did, but a lot of Jews liked him. They weren't necessarily his disciples, but a lot of people were beholden to him. He healed them, raised their sons from the dead, did things like that.

I'm sure they were favorably disposed toward Jesus. We don't read that all the people that in the multitudes he spoke to came in mass and said crucify him. Certainly some Jews did that.

We don't know what their motivations were, but there must have been a lot of unsaved Jews who had either apathy or just generic positive good feelings about Jesus. And at least it's not unrealistic to suggest it, and there's nothing in the Bible that would argue it.

You can't take these verses that say really bad things about certain really bad people and say, here we have a picture of everyone before they're saved.

It's just not charitable. It's not realistic, and it's not required by the passages. It's an extrapolation that is not made by the authors.

Okay, so some of these passages that are used for total depravity are really just prophetic denunciations of certain groups. Now, there's another category. Some of them are generic statements about the weakness and corruption of fallen human nature.

Okay? Armenians don't have trouble with that. We believe men are sinners. Men are born sinners.

In our human nature, we are slaves of sin. That means we can't, on our own power, stop sinning. But the Calvinist often says a slave of sin can't release himself.

A slave can't release himself, and so we can't make a decision to follow Christ. But they're assuming that a slave of sin means slave of sin means you can't want to be free. Many slaves want to be free.

Many sins would be glad to accept emancipation if it was offered to them. Many slaves did. Many slaves were emancipated in this country.

In fact, they all were. Some of them actually liked their masters and didn't mind staying with them, but most of them were glad probably for their freedom, I would assume. So to say the man's a slave of sin simply means he's got no choice but to follow sin unless he gets emancipated.

And lo and behold, there's an emancipator. There's one named Jesus. He's a savior.

He's an emancipator. He said, if you continue my words, you'll be my disciples indeed, and you'll know the truth, and truth will make you free. Well, how do I get free then if I continue in his words? What? I have to do that first, and then I'll be made free? That's right.

Freedom is offered to me. I cannot stop sinning in my own power. I have to be set free from that bondage, but I can choose that liberation that is offered to me.

To say a person is a slave of sin does not tell you anything about their inability to respond to an offer of liberation, and yet Calvinist talk is that it does. Slave of sin means nothing in your head can ever be anything but sin. Well, you know, Paul says in Romans 6, now we were slaves of sin, but now we're slaves of righteousness.

Does that mean nothing in my head can be anything other than righteous, because I'm a slave of righteousness? No, I'm a slave of righteousness, but I still sometimes do wrong. Well, maybe a slave of sin can sometimes make a right decision too. Being a slave of sin

doesn't mean that's all you ever do any more than being a slave of righteousness means that's all you ever do.

Being a slave means that's who you're serving. That's who your master is, and it doesn't mean that you can't change loyalties or that you can't inconsistently with your general pattern of slavery. It doesn't mean that a slave cannot disobey his master ever.

A slave of sin might disobey sin by saying, I want out of here, I'm going to repent. And a slave of righteousness might disobey its master by doing a sin. Some Christians do that once in a while.

Maybe some of them are even here. Slaves of righteousness who don't always do the right thing. There's no guarantee that a slave is always going to sin just because he's a slave.

He's trapped in a lifestyle of sin, just like a Christian is truly trapped in a lifestyle of righteousness. As long as you're a Christian, it spoils you for sinning. You can still commit a sin, but you can't like it.

It's not the way you're constituted. And a greedy man can occasionally make a generous gift, but he'd probably do it grudgingly. It's not what he likes.

You can act against your nature sometimes, but it goes against your grain. But if you've come to realize I'm a slave of sin, then accepting an offering of freedom may not always be against your grain. You might say, hey, I'd like that.

I'm sick of this sin. I think that's where the prodigal son came to. So this is the pits.

I was better when I wasn't in this condition. I think I want out. He couldn't get himself out, but his father could.

He knew he could go to his father and he'd be out of that condition. But his father didn't come and drag him out. He had to come to himself and make that decision.

And so the Bible does affirm that sinners cannot on their own escape the consequences and the power of sin in their lives. That's not a Calvinist doctrine. That's just a biblical doctrine that all Christians pretty much accept.

John 6, 44 and 65, these are verses the Calvinists raised in our last lecture. No one can come to me, Jesus said, unless the father who sent me draws him. Now, okay, I've always believed that, though I've never been a Calvinist.

I really believe that no one can come to Christ unless God makes the first move. And he has, by the way. He made the first move by sending Jesus to the earth to die and rise again.

He made another move by having the gospel preached to me. He made another move after that by having me convicted by the Holy Spirit of my sin. God has made all the first moves, but I make some of the moves.

I make a response. This is not giving me credit for my own salvation any more than grabbing a life preserver when I'm drowning in the sea. I'm going to congratulate myself for my brilliance and my power of saving myself.

You know, sometimes they say that. The Calvinist says, you know, it's wrong to consider the gospel message as throwing a life preserver from the shore to a drowning man and to say he has the choice to choose it because the Bible says man is dead in trespasses and sins. You're not going to save him that way.

A dead man can't grab a life preserver. You're going to get scuba gear on and go down and, you know, fish him out of the bottom of the ocean and resuscitate him because he's dead. Well, sure, the Bible does say man's dead in trespasses and sins.

It's not the only metaphor that's used. Jesus also spoke of him as sick. It's not those who are well that need a physician, those who are sick.

I have not come to call the righteous, but the sinners to repentance. Men are dead in one sense. We'll talk about what sense when we get to Ephesians 2. They're also in another metaphor sick.

In another sense, they're slaves. There's a lot of metaphors for the lost condition, and it's not safe to just seize upon one and contradict all the others because you like that one. They're dead.

Truly, people are sick. Certainly, people are doomed. Certainly, people are drowning in the sea of sin.

If someone throws you a life preserver and you accept it and you find yourself safe on the shore again, do you think you're going to start around holding your suspenders and then, I saved myself because I reached out and grabbed that life preserver? Or are you going to be thinking nothing about what you did but about the person who was there and threw the life preserver? You see, the Calvinist thinks that if you have the power to accept the offer, you're going to take the credit for the rest of your life of saving yourself, of regenerating yourself, of being the one who is the virtuous one. I don't think that really happens. It's a scenario that Calvinists always paint, but I've never met a person who thought that way.

When a person really repents humbly, all they can think about is how good God is for having saved me. Yeah, I do believe that I made a choice to receive it. I don't understand why that guy didn't.

I'm not saying I'm a better person than him. Maybe I am in some way. I don't know.

I'm not speculating about that. I'm not boasting about it. All I know is that God sent me salvation and gave me the right to become a child of God.

As many as believed in his name, and I believed. Now, that's not a boast, although Calvinists can't seem to understand that that isn't a boast. But the illustrations they give don't make any sense.

I can't imagine a man who's rescued because he was thrown a life preserver and he grabbed it congratulating himself, even for one minute. Like, what else would I do? I'm drowning. I just did what any sensible person would do.

I don't know why that person who didn't grab the life preserver did something so counterintuitive. I'm not going to speculate about that. I don't know what's wrong with that person, but I'm just normal.

I'm not exceptional. I just did what any smart person who's not crazy would do. That's not boasting.

But they think it's boasting because they say, you're not smart. You're not good. You can't make good decisions.

That's giving yourself too much credit. Why? I was made in the image of God. You think God's image is junk? You know, God gave us powers he didn't give the animals.

That's part of being in his image. Are you saying that the devil did more for the damage of man than God did for the good by creating him in his image? Is there no original righteousness left even in the sinner? There is. We find it in scripture, as we shall see.

There is original sin. It keeps men in bondage. They can't live a holy life as long as they're in bondage to sin.

But that's not the same thing as saying they can't cry out for help. It's not the same thing as saying they can't seize upon a salvation that is offered to them by Christ. It's not the same thing.

But Calvin's talking as if there's no division between those two concepts. A person who says, yes, I'll accept my liberation to them is the same person who saved himself from slavery. They don't know the difference.

Or if they do, they conceal the fact that they know because it makes for good argumentation to make, you know, Arminianism sound like it's giving credit to man that it's not. Jesus said in John 15, 5, I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me and I in him bears much fruit for without me you can do nothing.

In the context, what's this saying? You can't bear fruit without me. I'm the vine. If you're not attached to me like a branch, you're not gonna produce any fruit.

Fair enough. I don't know one Arminian who would dispute that. It's not saying you can't accept Christ.

It's not saying you can't repent or believe. It's saying you can't bear fruit. This is talking about a different phase of a person's life than their conversion.

This is talking about their Christian life and fruit bearing in their life. Fair enough. Christians, I think anyone who knows anything about the Bible knows that we don't produce the fruit.

God does. How does that support total depravity? I don't think it does. All it says is that in ourselves we are sinners and can't live the kind of life that we need to live.

We need God for that. Romans 7, 18, Paul says, for I know that in me that is in my flesh nothing good dwells. For to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I find not.

Now think about that statement. In me nothing good dwells. That sounds like total depravity.

There's nothing in me good. There's no goodness in me. But then he says, I have the power to will to do good, but I don't find the power to perform it.

Wait a minute. Isn't the will to do good something good? He says, I have nothing good in me, but I have the will to do good. Well, that's what Calvinists say you can't do.

If you're not a Christian, if you're not elect, you can't even will to do good. And yet the one who says there's nothing good in me says, I can will to do good. I just can't perform it.

Obviously, when he says there's nothing good in me, he means he doesn't have the power to live the good life in his own power. In my flesh, I can't really be a good person, but I can want to be. Hey brother, great seeing you.

So if I can want to be, then maybe I can respond to God when he offers to make me that way. In other words, this is not the same thing as total depravity. Romans 8, 7, and 8, because the carnal mind is enmity against God, for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be.

So then those who are in the flesh cannot please God. Now this is a pretty good verse for total depravity, I think. I mean, certainly it can be sensible to see this in a Calvinistic way, I believe.

He says the carnal mind, that's the fleshly mind, cannot be subject to the law of God. That's about inability. And it says that those who are in the flesh, that's those who are not born again, cannot please God.

Now, okay, fair enough. If the rest of the Bible supported total depravity, this would fit well into that, but it doesn't. What this can as easily mean, and to my mind in the context does mean, is that God has called all people to live a holy and righteous life pleasing to God.

You can't do that unless you're a Christian. Those who are in the flesh can't please God, meaning can't live a life that's consistently pleasing to God. Doesn't mean you can't do one thing ever that would please God, like believe in Jesus or something like that.

Paul is talking about patterns of life here. In Romans 8, he's talking about walking in the Spirit, living the Christian life. And he's saying those who are in the flesh, meaning those who don't have the Holy Spirit, they can't do this.

They can't live the Christian life. They can't live a life pleasing God. That doesn't mean they can't want to, or they can't occasionally do one good thing.

It just means consistent Christian living, which is what's required, is not possible without being born again. Arminians agree about that. You know, in 1 John, there's three different places where John says those who are born of God cannot sin.

Well, how absolutely do we take that? Can you sin? I can. And I am born of God. If the promises of God are true, I'm born of God.

But I can sin. Well, why did John say three times those who are born of God cannot sin? Clearly, he means they can't live a life of sin while they're born of God because their conscience in God, the Holy Spirit, will not allow them to live that way anymore. They did before they were born of God.

They lived in sin. A person who's born of God can't do that anymore. They can't practice sin.

Just as a Christian can't sin, so a person in the flesh can't please God. Neither statement is absolute. Both statements are saying you're either going to live a life pleasing to God or you're going to live in sin.

If you're born again, you can't live in sin. If you're not born again, you can't live a life pleasing to God. It's just that's what Paul is getting at.

He's describing the Christian life and he's saying this Christian life that we're called live that's pleasing to God. It's not possible without the Holy Spirit. Those who are in the flesh can't do that.

He's not saying and James White in argumentation often uses this. He says, believing God is pleasing God. Therefore, the man in flesh can't believe God because he can't please God.

That's not what Paul is talking about. He's talking about pleasing God as a lifestyle. He has just said in Romans 7, I can will to please God.

I just can't perform it. And that's what he's talking about. I could believe I could become a Christian, but short of that, living a life pleasing to God is not going to be within my reach because of sin and my members.

Now let's look at Romans 3, 9 through 12. I love coming to this first because so much is made of it that is inappropriate by the Calvinist. I'd like to actually turn to Romans 3, not just look at the print out there because there's context here.

This is another case where the Calvinist takes statements that are made about specific people and generalizes to mean everybody who's not saved. Now, they do this because of what they think Paul's flow of thought is. Here's what the Calvinist and frankly many Arminians too, think Paul's flow of thought is in Romans.

All Calvinists believe this and some Arminians believe this. And my contention is they're wrong about this particular point. They believe that Paul in Romans is simply building a case for the gospel to a generic audience.

They believe that Romans is not so much an occasional document like most epistles. You know, most epistles are written for an occasion. The church in Corinth had problems.

The church in Galatia had problems. The church in Philippi had problems. The church in Colossae had problems.

So a letter was written to address those problems. The letters that Paul wrote are what we call occasional. That doesn't mean it happens once in a while.

It means they were addressing a certain occasion. There's some occasion in the readers that called forth the specific letters. But most commentators think that Romans, not so much.

Not so much an occasional document. Not really addressing anything in the church of Rome. More that Paul just wants to write a treatise about the gospel that will one size fits all.

All people will benefit from this. It's like a gospel tract. Now, I was taught that too.

On that view, Paul builds his case, first of all, by talking about how sick people are before he presents the remedy. He wants to convince his audience that they're all sinners. And so he spends three chapters indicting the human race of universal sinfulness.

And to do this, they say, he uses chapter one to show how sinful the Gentiles are. Chapter two to show how sinful the Jews are. And chapter three to summarize Jews and Gentiles are all sinful.

And of course, this is the chapter that actually has the verse later on, all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. So, this is a great proof for universal sinfulness. And therefore, most Christians, whether they're Calvinists or not, believe that Paul's strategy here is not to address anything going on in the Church of Rome, but simply to give all Christians, including us in the 21st century, a good gospel tract.

That's why we have the Romans Road Method of evangelism. This verse in Romans tells how sinful that people are. This verse in Romans, Romans 6, 23, the wages of sin is death.

This verse in Romans chapter 10 says, if you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, or you confess Jesus Lord and believe in your heart, God raised from the dead, you'll be saved. Like Paul's writing a gospel tract. And if you just dip into it at certain points, you can find the proof text for a gospel presentation.

If you read the whole book, all the better. You get the message fleshed out more, but it's just a gospel presentation. I disagree.

I believe there's evidence throughout the book of Romans that Paul is writing to the Romans for the same kinds of reasons he wrote to the Galatians or the Corinthians or anyone else. There was something in the church that needed to be addressed. That problem, once you begin to suspect it, you can see it everywhere.

The problem was the Jewish Christians and the Gentile Christians didn't like each other very much. And there was division in the church of Rome between the Jews and the Gentiles. So Paul has to tell the Gentiles in chapter 11, don't boast against those branches that were cut off.

Don't think you're so good just because you're a Gentile, because they were cut off in your graft. You could be cut off too. And he has to say to the whole church, some of you keep one day holy.

The rest of you don't. Don't judge each other about that. Some of you restrict your diet.

Others don't. Don't judge each other about that. Why? The Jews, of course, in the congregation, typically, as Jews who become Christians, they often do, wanted to keep a kosher diet.

They wanted to keep Sabbath. They just feel that's how they were raised. They'd prefer to do it.

Paul said, don't judge each other. I see Paul continually in Romans telling the Jews and the Gentiles to get along and stop fighting. Now, the first four chapters of Romans is addressed primarily to the Jews, not addressing the question of the universal sinfulness of man, though Paul would not deny the universal sinfulness of man, nor would I. I believe all men are sinners too.

That's not the issue. The issue is what is Paul talking about? Is he saying that or is he making a different point? He's addressing the Jewish mentality that Jews are better than Gentiles because they have the law, not because they keep it better. In fact, Paul points out they don't keep it better.

They just think they're better because they have it, because God chose the Jews to make a covenant and give them the law. He didn't choose the Gentiles. The Gentiles are a lesser breed without the law.

They're the uncircumcised, unclean, and sure, we might have to accept them into the church, but they're certainly second tier Christians because we are Jews. We're the chosen people. It's better to be a Jew than a Gentile.

This was not saying that Jews behave better than Gentiles, although perhaps many of them did because Gentiles were total pagans. Probably Jews didn't fornicate as much as the Gentiles did. They certainly didn't worship idols like the Gentiles did.

The Jews often were, in fact, better than the Gentiles, but that was not what the Jewish people were thinking about. They were thinking about we're better because God chose us, and the mark of our chosenness is that we have been circumcised and we have had the privilege of the law given to us. So Paul has to say to them, but you're not better.

And Romans 3 begins asking a question. What advantage then has the Jew, meaning over the Gentile? Now you'd expect him to say none at all, but he says the much in every way. The Jews have great advantages over the Gentiles.

Chiefly, he says that to them was committed the oracles of God. That is the scriptures. The Jews have been given a great privilege.

The Gentiles have not been given. The Jews have for centuries known the law of God. The Gentiles have been ignorant.

Do we have, is there a privilege in being Jewish? There certainly is a great advantage. But then in verse nine, he says, well, then are we any better than they? He says, nope. Who's we and who's they? The Jews.

Are we Jews better than the Gentiles? Answer is no. We haven't turned out any better than they. The Old Testament prophets will attest to this, and he quotes them.

Now the quotations he gives, I think there's like six quotations there from different passages. It might be five, but they're all from the Psalms except for ones from Isaiah. And these are the quotes that are used for total depravity.

Here they are. Now this is just like a string of phrases from Old Testament passages about sinners. And it says, as it is written, there is none righteous, no, not one.

There is none who understands. There is none who seeks after God. They've all turned aside.

They've all together become unprofitable. There is none who does good. No, not one.

Now this is, as I said, just a string of denunciations of sinners from the Psalms and from Isaiah. One thing that you have to understand to know what Paul's doing with these, he's not writing up a theology of total depravity of all men. He's trying to answer the question, are we Jews any better than those Gentiles? That's how he introduces this set of quotes.

Did we have an advantage they didn't have? Yes, we did. We had a great advantage they didn't have. Did we turn out better? No, afraid not.

We didn't live up to our privileges. We didn't exploit our advantages. We had a chance they didn't have to know and serve God, but we didn't do it.

And let me quote you some scriptures about that. All those scriptures are about Jews. David is not talking about the Gentiles.

Isaiah is not talking about the Gentiles. They're talking about their own people in their own generation. Now, the reason for quoting it is not to make an extrapolation that all men are sinful individually, although that may be true.

It's a different point The point he's making is this. You think you're better than Gentiles because you have the law, but you don't keep the law. He's made that point in chapter two.

He says it's not the hearers of the law who are just, it's the doers of the law. He says you'll find some Gentiles who do the law by nature, meaning the Christians who have it written in their hearts. They're Gentiles and they're keeping the law better than you are as a Jew.

Obviously, having the law doesn't make you a better person. That's Paul's argument. Being a Jew, being in that class of people who collectively had the privilege of knowing God's law, does not make them the superior people that they think they are.

There are Gentiles who never had the law, but are now Christians, have the law written in their hearts, and they do the law by nature. And you Jews, many of them don't. It's not

those who know the law.

It's those who do it that are different. And so he says, did we have advantages others didn't have? Yes, we did. Are we better? No, we're not.

Let me prove it to you. Let me tell you what David and Isaiah said about the Jews of their time. They sound as bad as any Gentiles.

We're not better than the Gentiles. This is the testimony of our own prophets against our own people. You see, the person who fails to see Paul's line of argument and just sees he's making a sterile presentation of a theological outline of the gospel, and doesn't realize he's addressing real issues in his readers who need to be corrected, isn't going to see this.

They can't make anything of this. Oh, look, all people are sinners. No one does good.

No one seeks God. There we go. Total depravity of the human race.

Well, that's not the point he's making. The point he's making is these horrible statements about the sinfulness of individuals are statements about our fellow Jews, not Gentiles. People who had the law like we do, but didn't keep it, obviously.

You might say, but still it says no one seeks God. Well, let's just look at that. First of all, look at the passage he's quoted.

Among the things that is said, it says they have all turned aside. They have all together become unprofitable. It doesn't talk about the way they were born.

It talks about the way they have become. They weren't born going aside, but they've turned that way. They weren't born unprofitable.

They became unprofitable. This is an acquired state due to sinful choices. It is not a reference to the birth condition of every man.

It's talking about a group of people who went the right way briefly and didn't keep going the right way. And they went wrong and they became very corrupt. Just like in Ephesians 4, when he's talking with the Gentiles, they say they've gotten past feeling and they've thrown themselves into lewdness.

He's not talking about the way they're born. He's talking about the decisions they've made in life. And they have no doubt done so because they are sinners by nature.

Please don't think I'm denying that we're sinners by nature. We are. What I'm saying is these are not proof texts about that.

These are texts about a different subject. About, in this case, how bad people have

become and specifically how bad fellow Jews have become and specifically how that proves they're not better than Gentiles. That's the point Paul's arguing.

Now let's look at the most important of the scriptures he quotes there in Psalm 14. In Psalm 14, it begins, the fool has said in his heart, there's no God. This is not a description of every man.

Not all unbelievers say there's no God, but there are some who do and they're fools. He says they are corrupt. They have done abominable works.

There is none who does good. Of what category? The fools who say there's no God. This is not a generic statement of all unregenerate people.

There's a lot of unregenerate people who know there's a God and even try to serve God through various inadequate ways. He's not describing every man on earth. He's actually describing the Jewish atheists.

He says the Lord looks down from heaven upon the children of men to see if there are any who understand, who seek God. They have all turned aside. They have together become corrupt.

They became that way. They have turned aside. This is not their original state.

It's the state they have chosen for themselves. They have all turned aside. They have become corrupt.

There is none who does good. No, not one. Now, when Paul's quoting the Septuagint, one of these verses in the Septuagint says, there's none who seeks after God.

He's quoting from this passage in the Septuagint. That's where we get in Romans 3, there's none that seeks after God. That's the important line for the Calvinists.

If there's none that seeks after God, then none can repent or believe unless God regenerates them, and then they can. But does David believe that there's none that seek after God? Wasn't he a seeker after God? Wasn't he aware of others, a few, who sought after God? After all, look at this. Verse 4, have all the workers of iniquity no knowledge who eat up my people as they eat bread? That sounds kind of like a hyperbole.

I don't know of anyone who eats people like they eat bread. This is poetic. This is a hyperbole.

He says, they're there in great fear. He says in verse 5, for God is with the generation of the righteous. Oh, there's a generation of the righteous too.

I thought there's none who do good. I thought there's none who seek after God. The very passage where David says these things, he says, but there is a generation of the

righteous over here.

Now, see what the Calvinist says? Well, of course, there's the elect and there's the reprobate. David's describing the unregenerate as the ones who don't seek God and the regenerate who are the generation of the righteous. Oh, really? Where does he say that? Where does he say that these ones are regenerated and these ones are not regenerated? Those are categories the Calvinist has made up and imposed on the passage.

What David really says is, nobody does good anymore. Oh, there's a few over here, but in general, no one does good. He's using a hyperbole.

It's like when we say churches, no churches have Sunday night services anymore. When I was a kid, all churches had Sunday night services. They don't have those anymore.

Well, I'll bet there are some that do, but it's kind of a generic hyperbole. Nobody believes that homosexuality is wrong anymore. Well, I do, but a lot of people don't seem to, and people use that kind of hyperbole.

It's an expression of exasperation. It's not a cool, logical, technical statement of fact. The Psalms are poems.

They are expressions of great emotion, great frustration, great anguish. Sometimes they sometimes say things that aren't really very responsible or not very exact because they are expressions of, in this case, great frustration. David said, where's all the good people? There aren't any anymore.

Nobody's seeking after God. No one's doing good. Of course, the generation of the righteous accepted, but in general, our society has gone down the tubes.

We've gone to hell in a handbasket. He's using typical frustrated hyperbole without any intention of contributing to a systematic theology on the state of the world. He's making a social comment about the Jews of his society.

These people, they're not serving God anymore. None of them. They're saying there's no God.

They're fools. Now, that's not true of every man. It wasn't true of him, and by the way, we have no biblical evidence that anyone in the Old Testament was regenerate at all.

Regeneration or being born again, the New Testament says, is a phenomenon brought about by the resurrection of Christ. In 1 Peter 1, it says that we are born again through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Jesus' resurrection brought about the opportunity for believers to be reborn.

In the Old Testament, they could be justified by faith like Abraham was and David was,

but there's no evidence that they passed from death into life in the sense that the new covenant allows. The new covenant does something different inside that the old covenant couldn't do. He wrote his laws in their hearts and put his spirit within.

These are the promises of the new covenant. In the old covenant, people could obey God, could believe God. They could be justified.

They could die in good terms with God, but the phenomenon of having the Holy Spirit given to you and changing you, taking out your heart of stone and giving you a heart of flesh, that's a new covenant thing. That's regeneration, and therefore, there's no reason to even say that David or the generation of the righteous in his day were regenerated any more than the wicked who weren't seeking God were regenerated. They were just people making their choices.

Some were choosing to obey God, and most were not. Now, if you look at these passages that Paul quotes in Romans 3, every one of them is a prophetic exasperation about how wicked Israel had become, and Paul quotes it to make that point. Now, it's true the language is sometimes a little exaggerated, sometimes doesn't admit exceptions when there actually were some.

There were a remnant who sought God at all times, but mostly they didn't, and so these words were justified. This kind of hyperbole was justified, and Paul's not quoting that in order to use the hyperbole as a sober statement of technical fact. He's saying, don't you see? You think you're Jews better than Gentiles just because you're Jews.

What about these people? They were Jews. They clearly were just as bad as any Gentiles. Therefore, how does he close that statement? He says, therefore, there is no difference, but all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.

Now, in that case, all means Jews and Gentiles. Now, we could also argue that every last person has sinned and come short of the glory of God, and I think we could have scriptural support for that in various places, but when Paul said, he begins by saying, are we better than they? No. Here's all these scriptures that prove Jews can be just as bad as any Gentile.

Therefore, there's no difference, for all have sinned. See, that famous verse, all have sinned, starts with there is no difference between Jew and Gentile. There's no distinction.

All have sinned. So, Paul is not here making a case for total depravity of all people. He's making a case that the Jewish people in Rome who thought themselves better than the Gentiles just because they happened to be circumcised and have the law and the privileges, had never lived up to their privileges and were not really any better than the Gentiles and needed to repent just as much as the Gentiles did.

They had to humble themselves and say, I'm really not better than these Gentiles. That's

the point Paul's making. Now, a person could say, I don't think that's the point Paul's making, and I'd be glad to debate that with them if they had the time, but we don't have the time to do that.

I'm convinced that if you read Romans through that way of looking at it, you'd see that it is true. Now, what about the dead and sin? This is a very important text. Ephesians 2, and by the way, Colossians 2.12 makes the same, uses the phrase dead and trespasses also.

Before we were Christians, we were dead, or at least the Ephesians were. We were too, no doubt, but he doesn't, of course he's talking to them. He says, And you he made alive who were dead in trespasses and sins, 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, 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 the children of wrath, just like others.

Now, that's interesting, because if we say, well, children of wrath and children of the devil, this means the non-elect and God's sheep and God's children, that's the elect. Boy, we're God's sheep and God's children, but we used to be God's, we used to be the children of wrath and children of the enemy. So, I mean, you mean I can be elect now, but I was not elect earlier? How did this work out that I was a child of wrath? Child of wrath doesn't mean I was an angry man.

It means a child destined wrath, destined to experience wrath, just like the son of perdition. The word perdition means destruction in the Greek. Calling Judas the son of perdition or the man of Lawless the son of perdition, that just means he's destined to perdition.

It's a Hebraism. A son of this means this is his destiny. We were children of wrath.

We were destined for wrath. Really? How could that be if we were already, before we were born, destined for heaven? No, before we were children of wrath, now we're children of God. But that's another issue.

The question is, what does it mean dead? Because the Calvinists make great points about being dead. Remember, I think it was Doug Wilson said, we weren't sick, we weren't infected, we weren't wounded, we were dead. And that's a very emphatic and important point to them.

Now, by the way, it does say a couple of times in Colossians and in Ephesians that we were dead in trespasses. But I would also remind you that there are other places that says that we are now dead to sin. That doesn't mean we can't sin, by the way.

We sometimes do, but we're dead to sin. Well, then what does dead mean? Well, that is

the question, isn't it? What does it mean we were dead? Now, dead people don't make decisions to accept Christ, but they also don't brush their teeth in the morning. But lots of people who are described as dead in trespasses do brush their teeth, and they go off to work, and they get married, and they raise kids, and sometimes they stay faithful to their wives, and sometimes they raise their kids to be responsible citizens.

And in other words, people who are spiritually dead can do a lot of things. Some things they even choose good over bad. A man who's not saved is not guaranteed to cheat on his wife, though he'll have opportunity.

He may choose to be faithful to his wife. How could he do that if he's dead in trespasses and sins? Well, apparently dead doesn't mean you can't do that kind of thing. Apparently, whatever dead in trespasses and sins means, it doesn't mean that you can't make any decisions.

It doesn't even mean you can't make any moral decisions. It must have some other meaning. The question then is, what meaning does it have? I want you to look over a page or two, because we're just to jump ahead to this to answer that question.

In these notes, you'll find, if you go far enough, in the middle of, on my notes, it's the middle of page Roman numeral four, which says, how can one who is dead in trespasses and sins believe or repent? This is the question that Calvinists consider rhetorical. In other words, they think there's no answer. They think it's a statement that proves their point by asking the question, if you're dead, how can you repent? Case closed.

Not necessarily. You ask the question. Let's see if we can answer it.

How about that? Is it possible that a person dead in trespasses and sins might indeed repent and believe? If so, how? Well, I'm glad they asked, because that gets us into an interesting study in the way the word dead is used in scripture, more than one way. Certainly, it means physical death sometimes, but Paul doesn't mean that. He doesn't mean we're physically dead.

Before we're Christians, so he means it in some other sense, some metaphorical sense. Well, we know that the Bible uses dead in metaphorical senses, but what do they mean in those metaphors? Compare Hebrews 11, 12 with Romans 4, 19. They're both talking about Abraham at age 99 and his capacity or incapacity to father a child at that age.

And Hebrews 11, 12 says, therefore, from one man, Abraham, and him as good as dead, were born as many as the stars of the sky. But Romans 4, 19 talks about the same subject. It says that Abraham did not consider his body already dead since he was about 100 years old and the deadness of Sarah's womb.

Now notice, in Romans, it says Abraham's body was dead. Hebrews says, well, it was as good as dead for having kids. It might as well have been dead.

It couldn't produce children any more than a dead man could. So his body was as good as that of a dead man for this particular function. But in saying it's as good as dead, in Romans, Paul says it was dead.

It's a figure of speech. Many times people are as good as dead because they can't do a certain thing any more than a dead person could, like maybe live a life pleasing to God. A dead person can't do that.

Physically dead, they can't live any kind of life. An unregenerate person can't live a life pleasing to God any more than a dead person can. They're as good as dead for producing that kind of fruit.

Just like Abraham's body was as good as dead for producing offspring, an unbeliever is as good as dead for producing a life of righteousness and holiness pleasing to God. I mean, that's at least a possible meaning. But there's more.

Because not uncommonly, the Bible uses the word dead to mean something like destined to die or doomed to die. We even use it that way. If you're sitting on a railroad track in a locked car and you can't get the doors open, can't get the seatbelt off and the train's coming and it's bearing down on you, you can see you're not getting out of the car, the person in the back seat might say, we're dead.

And they'd be right in the sense that they mean it. You're going to die real quick. You're doomed.

There's no way out of this. Death is your unavoidable destiny. You might as well say, we're dead.

And we do say that. People do talk that way. In Genesis 20, in verse 3, when Abimelech had taken Sarah into his harem thinking she was Abraham's sister, God came to Abimelech in a dream by night and said to him, indeed, you're a dead man.

Because the woman whom you've taken, she's a man's wife. You're a dead man? Do dead men have dreams? Apparently, if they're dead in the sense that it's being used, how was he dead? Certainly, God is saying you are committing adultery without knowing or you're about to. You're going to die for that.

Unless, of course, you repent is the implication. And he did repent and he didn't die. The point is you're doomed.

You're facing death. You're on death row. You're facing death right now because of what you're doing.

You're a dead man. Used exactly the same way we use the term in some situations. In Exodus 12, 33, Young's literal translation, when the servants of Pharaoh had suffered a

number of the plagues and were trying to persuade the Pharaoh to give in to Moses and not bring any more plagues on the city.

It says in Exodus 12, 33, and this doesn't work in the New King James because they mistranslated in this case. Young's literal translation says, as it does in the Greek, the Egyptians are urgent on the people hastening to send them away out of the land for they said, we are all dead. That's what the Egyptians said to Pharaoh.

Let these people go because we're dead. What's he mean? Plague after plague. This is going to kill us.

If you don't let the people go, we're going to die. To say we're dead simply means we're imminently facing a death sentence here. In 2 Samuel 9, 8, I think it was Mephibosheth, Jonathan's son or grandson, offhand I'm not going to try to remember the details of that.

He came to David and said, what is your servant that you should look upon such a dead dog as I? And a similar statement was made by rebels against David who said in 2 Samuel 19, 28, for all my father's house were but dead men before my Lord, the King. What this means is that they usually, when one dynasty replaced another, all the members of the first dynasty were wiped out. David replaced Saul's dynasty.

Typical in those days would be for David to wipe out every relative of Saul so that none of them could rise up and try to assert the royal position against him in the future. Mephibosheth was a descendant of Saul. He was Jonathan's son and Saul's grandson.

He therefore was, when David came to power, he was dead. It's like he could just wait for David to send the soldiers and lop off his head because he's a member of the reigning family that's now been ousted. And he had nothing to expect but that he'd be executed.

That's what kings would do. And David didn't. David gave him a place of honor at his table.

I was a dead dog. In Romans 8, 10, Paul says, and if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the spirit is life because of righteousness. Now I'm a Christian and the spirit is life, but is my body dead? Well, it's going to die because of sin.

It's still doomed to die. My body is going to die. Dead in many cases, Old and New Testament, means, as it were, doomed to die.

Could Paul say we were dead in trespasses and sins and have that meaning? Simply mean that because of our trespasses and sins, we had the death sentence upon us. But he came and changed that. He brought us back to life.

It's like when Paul said in Romans 7 about his youth, he says, I was alive once, but the law came and slew me. It didn't kill him literally, but it condemned him to death. To be

condemned to death is not an unusual meaning of the word dead in the Bible, as we've seen many examples.

But also it can mean dead in the sense of alienated, not dead in the sense of incapacitated or literally unconscious or something like that, unable to make decisions like the Calvinists want it to be, dead in the sense that there's alienation. And that's the verse I was talking about a moment ago, Romans 7, 9 through 11. Paul says, I was alive once without the law.

I had a good relationship with God when I was a kid. But when the commandment came, that's when I became aware of my sin, sin revived and I died. And the commandment, which was to bring life, I found to bring death.

So Paul, before he was a it brought death. What did learning about the commandments before that he was alive. He wasn't born in this state of death.

He became dead. It slew him. What did learning that he had been breaking God's law and that God therefore was had a case against him.

He was facing the death sentence. He was alienated from God when he was a kid. He wasn't alienated from God.

He didn't know any better. He didn't have the law. He just, you know, there was no conscience issues between him and God.

When the law came, that changed that. It killed him in a sense. Luke 15, 24, the prodigal son comes home and his father says, my son was dead.

And he's alive again. He was lost and he's found. Now consider this.

The father is using the term dead in a fairly typical way. Like Jews would say to some of their children now, if they become Christians, you're dead to me. It doesn't mean you've really, really died.

It doesn't even mean I'm saying you're in a position you can't make decisions, good or bad. It means we're cut off. As far as our relationship is concerned, it's as good as dead.

It's like, you're not alive anymore to me. And that the prodigal was dead to his father, but he's now back. And, and you know, what condition was in when he decided to come home? He did it when he was dead.

He was dead and alienated from his father. And in that condition, he said, I'm going home. I'm going to repent.

I mean, the Bible itself in its metaphorical uses of dead does not suggest anywhere that a person who's dead in sin cannot choose to do the right thing. In fact, it says that they

can if the prodigal son is any kind of an example. And so I just want to make that clear because back in the earlier pages of our notes, we're going to have to, of course, take a break here and come back to this subject.

But in Ephesians and Colossians says, we were dead in sin. The Calvin makes a great deal about this. This proves you couldn't repent.

You're dead. You're not sick. You can't grab the life preserver.

You're at the bottom of the ocean filled with water in your lungs. You're dead. Well, what makes you say that? Just finding the word dead in a sentence doesn't tell us all that.

It obviously means to tell us something, but there's a variety of possible things that might be trying to say. And one of them cannot be that a person who's dead cannot repent since the prodigal son was specifically said to be dead at the time that he did repent. So this doesn't work for this verse, this, this conclusion, the Calvinist trial.

Now we're almost done with the cross-examination of the, of the positive case here. There is a scripture that's irrelevant to the discussion that they do bring up and they bring it up frequently. First Corinthians 2.14, the natural man does not receive the things of the spirit of God because they're foolishness to him, nor can he know them because they are spiritually discerned.

The Calvinist argument here is that all people who are not born again, of course, are natural men. They're not born again. I'm not going to argue against that.

They can't receive the things of the spirit of God. Isn't the gospel a thing of the spirit of God? Isn't the gospel something that the spirit of God, you know, a message from the spirit of God, then they can't receive that. They have to be born again, the Calvinist says.

But again, we need to look at Paul's context. What is he saying? Again, he's talking to a specific audience and he's talking about very specific things about them. He begins the chapter saying, when I came to you, uh, I didn't come with enticing words of men's wisdom.

I came with a demonstration of the power of the gospel. I determined to know nothing among you, but Jesus Christ and him crucified. In other words, when I was with you, I kept it simple.

Why? Because if you look at the third chapter, the opening verse say, when I was with you, I couldn't treat you as spiritual men, but as carnal, even as babes in Christ. You know, he says, I fed you with milk and not with solid food because you were not able to endure it. What he's saying is when I came to you, I recognized your spiritual immaturity and carnality.

Therefore, I didn't give you solid food. So to speak, I gave you milk. What was that? I determined to know nothing among you, but Jesus and him crucified.

That's the basic gospel. I gave you nothing else. You weren't able to receive anything else.

You're babes and carnal. But in verse six of that chapter, he says, however, among the mature, we do things differently. Of course he's saying you aren't them.

You're the babes, you're carnal. But when I'm with mature people, I speak the wisdom of God in a mystery. And he goes on talking about these things as the deep things of God.

For what man knows the things of a man, but the spirit of man, and who knows the deep things of God, but the spirit of God. And he says, these are things that eye has not seen and ear has not heard and not entered into the heart of man, but God has revealed them to us by his spirit. He's saying, these are the meat.

This is not the milk. There are deep things of God wisdom that I do share with mature people. He says in verse six to the mature, I give them this kind of a diet to you.

Not so much. You're not mature. You're babes, you're carnal.

I stuck with the only thing you could understand, Jesus Christ named crucified. I couldn't give you anything more. I'd like to have, if you were mature, I would have given you what I give mature people.

I couldn't give you that. In that context, he says, these are the things that are revealed by the spirit of God. For the natural man does not receive the things of the spirit of God.

He's not talking about the gospel. He's talking about the deep things of God that he gives to mature Christians. If you're not a spiritual person, you can't receive these spiritual things.

Now, can you the gospel? Apparently, the Corinthians did and they weren't spiritual. He didn't even try to give them the deep things of God. He didn't try to give them those things of the spirit of God that he's referring to here because he knew they couldn't handle it because they were babes.

But he did give them Jesus Christ and crucified. He did preach the gospel because he figured they could handle that. In other words, he's not saying people who are unregenerate can't receive the gospel.

He's saying people who are natural and carnal, they are not qualified to hear the things that he'd like to tell to spiritual mature people. However, they can receive some things, just not those things of the spirit that have to be revealed by the spirit. The carnal can understand Jesus was crucified, and he does not deny that they were able to do that.

So when he says the natural cannot receive the things of the spirit of God, he's not arguing that they can't receive the gospel. He's got an entirely different category of things in mind. We talked about the things of the spirit of God.

These are the things that eye has not seen or ears not heard, can't even enter the heart of man, has to be revealed through the spirit of God. These are the deep things of God that I teach to the mature, but I didn't teach to you. That's what he's saying.

Again, he's not making a generic statement on all people can't receive the gospel. That's not even in his mind here. He knew the Corinthians could receive the gospel because they did, but he knew they couldn't receive these things of the spirit because they were thinking like mere natural men, not spiritually.

So that's an irrelevancy to the whole subject of total depravity. Now, just a couple more verses, then we'll take our break. R.C. Sproul said, as we saw earlier, the reform view is that before a person can choose Christ, he must first be born again.

And they give a couple of scriptures. One is Acts 16, 14 about Lydia. Paul came to Philippi.

There was no synagogue there. There weren't enough Jews for a synagogue. So the Jews met down by the river on the Sabbath.

Paul went down there and found mostly women. They're Jewish women. One of them was named Lydia.

She had come from Thyatira on business apparently, or she'd moved there because of her business of selling purple. Lydia heard Paul and it says the Lord opened her heart to heed the things which Paul spoke. This suggests that before she believed the gospel, God opened her heart so that she would heed and believe it.

I'll accept this. She believed because God opened her heart. But there's something more in this passage that is kind of being ignored.

She was a worshiper of God. It says she worshiped God. This is before she was a Christian.

She was one of the faithful remnant of Israel. She was not totally depraved. She was a worshiper of God.

By definition, the totally depraved don't seek God. They don't worship God. They don't want God.

That wasn't her. She was not totally depraved. She was unregenerate because you can't be regenerate until you receive the gospel.

But she was justified by faith like Abraham was. She was part of the faithful remnant of Israel. It says so in clear words.

So God saying, okay, here's my faithful daughter, a daughter of Abraham under the old covenant, faithful or worshiper of me. I'm going to let her hear the gospel so she can learn about Jesus. So God opened her heart to listen to Paul.

She could have ignored him even as a worshiper of God. She said, this guy's a heretic. I don't want to hear this.

But because he was God's true messenger, God made her open to hear it because she was already God's. And that's a very important thing to note. We're not talking about a totally depraved, unregenerate person here being given the gift of faith unilaterally.

This is a person already is on the trajectory of following God. And she's living at that time where God has done something new she hasn't heard about. Namely, he sent Jesus.

And that's just on his agenda for her. She's been faithful to the old information. Okay, I'm going to give her new information.

Jesus has come. Oh, cool. This is what we see.

We don't see a proof that regeneration happened prior. Even God opening her heart to receive it doesn't mean he regenerated her before she believed, as we will see when we look at the other side of the story scripturally in our next lecture. The final scripture to consider right now is part of the positive case for unconditional election that needs to be discussed.

1 John 5.1. Whoever believes that Jesus Christ is born of God. I'm sorry, everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God. So the argument here is, if you're a believer, that proves you've been born again.

Everyone who believes of necessity has previously been born again. Now, the verse sounds like it could say that, but there's more to the context of that. In the book of 1 John, John is speaking to believers about the various ways in which they can know that they're saved.

It's a book of assurance of salvation, and it gives basically four tests. If you believe in Christ, if you are obedient to God's commands, if you love the brethren, and if you have the Holy Spirit. As you read through 1 John, you'll find that these four things come up again and again, always in the context of, by this we know that we've passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren.

By this we know that he dwells in us and we have because he's given us of his spirit. By this, you know, the children of God are manifested, that they do righteousness and keep

his commandments. The point here is that John is writing to Christians about how they can know they really are Christians, really born again, and so forth.

And there's four tests that keep coming up. Do you believe in Christ? Do you follow God, his laws? Do you love your brethren? Do you have the Holy Spirit? Then you're in. This is just one of those verses of the type.

Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God. Well, he's not talking about coming to faith initially. He's talking about a believer saying, am I really a Christian? Well, do I believe in Christ? I do.

Okay, that's test number one. Let's go through the others. These tests prove that I'm born of God.

I would agree that if you're born of God, one of the things that's true about you is you believe in Christ. It is not saying that everyone who believes in Christ came to believe in Christ by being born of God. It's simply saying that those who are born of God have certain characteristics that mark them out.

One of them is their belief in Christ. It's making too much, far more than John is trying to do with this passage, to say he's trying to prove that you had to be born again before you believe. It's the ongoing life of trusting in Jesus Christ that is one of the marks of being a believer and being born of God.

Coming to faith, John is not discussing that. He's talking about people who are already believers looking at themselves, am I a Christian? Am I really saved? Well, do I believe? Yeah, I do. Okay, that's one gold sticky star there.

There's three more I got to put on the chart and I can know. And so that's what's going on in that passage in the whole book of 1 John. It's taking the verse to mean something it's not necessarily intending to say, I believe.

And thus we've looked at really all the case for unconditional election, which seemed so strong when we simply read the verses. When you look at them in context and cross-examine them with other passages, we see they're not saying, necessarily saying at least, and probably not saying what the Calvinist thinks it is. But there's another whole way to look at this and that is what scriptures are there that contradict total depravity? Well, there are some, and that's what we'll come to in our next lecture.