

BIBLE TEACHES THAT EVERYBODY IS EVIL

Bad or good the doctrine of total depravity is in the Bible. We will see later which one of these it is. The doctrine does not say we are all mad evil animals but that all we do has to have some sin in it. So nice people sin all the time in all they do just as the not-nice do. Total depravity means that sin touches our whole being - in other words we want it to be always involved in what we do.

THE BIBLE TEACHES TOTAL DEPRAVITY

The Bible plainly teaches the total depravity doctrine that unsaved people are capable only of sin when it says that salvation is a gift from God.

Jeremiah said that the heart is full of deceit and is wicked beyond belief (Jeremiah 17:9). According to him you can be surprised at how wicked you are if you take a good look at yourself.

The apostle John declared that if he or anybody else says that there is no sin in themselves they are wrong at 1 John 1:8. Some say he is contradicting the notion that some people have that they have never sinned and is not thinking of people who claim to be freed from sin now and to be Catholic style saints. But he included himself and he certainly believed that repentance put you right with God but not completely right. The note on page 270 of the New American Bible says that the verse teaches that nobody can be completely free from sin.

David said that he was biased towards sin from his conception (Psalm 51:5). If we really are biased then we will sin rather than do good most of the time.

A number of times the Bible says that we are all sinful all the time unless we get saved (Job 15:15, 16; Job 25:4-6; Ecclesiastes 8:11, 9:3).

In Isaiah 64:6, the prophet says that we and all our right ways are filthy rags before God. He says we so he included himself too. And he would have lived like a holy man and he claimed to be totally evil.

Jeremiah 13:23 says that a leopard cannot change its spots or an Ethiopian his skin just like the evil cannot do good. Isn't that a nice piece of cynicism from the God of the Jews and the Christians? Jeremiah is saying they would pretend to be good but are not.

The Book of Proverbs states that nobody can claim to be free from all sin (20:9). It uses the present tense and tells me that I can't say now or anytime that my heart is clean from sin.

Paul at Titus 1:15,16 makes it clear that those who do not become proper Christians are to be considered to have nothing good at all in their minds or consciences and are worthless for any good work and are "detestable and loathsome".

The Bible says we all sin always (1 John 3:15) and that one sin is breaking every one of the commandments (James 2:10). 1 John 2:9-10 says that the man who hates his brother in Christ is in darkness and has his eyes blinded and doesn't see where he is going. This implies that there is no light in him at all only darkness and evil. Christians are not allowed to think of such a man as good in any way. 1 John 3:15 says that anybody who hates his brother is a murderer and eternal life dwells in no murderer's heart. This means that simply hating somebody makes you as bad as a murderer inside and that no murderer will have eternal life so its a very serious sin. This parallels Jesus' saying that whoever looks at a woman with desire commits adultery with her in his heart or thoughts as some translations put it (Matthew 5:28). Neither verse indicates that they are thinking of people who are planning to do anything. They are speaking of people who would murder and commit adultery if they got the chance and could get away with it. Jesus sees the desire to have sex with a woman as adultery even if you or she are not married because for him fornication and adultery are the same sin under different names. The sin he is against is sex outside marriage which can take the form of fornication or adultery. So he can say that an unmarried pair having sex is still adultery. He said that whoever divorces his wife forces her to commit adultery (Matthew 5:32). The man can't say that his wife makes her own decisions once she leaves. When he gives her a divorce he is trying to force her to commit adultery by giving her the freedom to wed again. He sins in making an adulteress of her. If he does that just by divorcing her, then how much more is it a sin to simply think of having sex or to have sexual fantasies?

If God exists then it is possible for him to keep us from sin at least sometimes. If we have him then we will not sin because we will be so happy and will not want to spoil it. So, if we could achieve perfection in this world and have ever done it, we

would not be here. We would be taken to Heaven lest we stain our white robes for as long as we cannot perceive God directly we can sin. So the doctrine of God infers that we are never free from sin. Our good works would be sins because a sinner cannot do real good.

TOTAL DEPRAVITY IN THE GOSPELS

Jesus regarded all people as being totally depraved.

He taught that if your eye is evil then you will be full of the darkness of evil (Matthew 6:22). This implies that you can have no good in you at all. You can act good but you are still totally evil.

A man came up to Jesus calling him good teacher. Jesus said that nobody was good only God: “Why do you call me good for nobody is good but God?” (Mark 10:17,18). Christians say that the man thought Jesus was a good man and Jesus was telling him that he could only be good if he was God. If right their interpretation would mean that all are sinners and cannot stay out of it. And the same interpretation holds true if Jesus was just telling him that his idea of good was wrong and that only God knows what good is and lives that goodness.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said to the people that the scribes and Pharisees only acted for show. For ordinary listeners, he would have been taken to mean that were complete fakes. That is why we should interpret him as saying just that.

The man called Jesus a good teacher. Yet Jesus rejected this. It was not flattery for Jesus was famous as a teacher. The man meant it. Jesus just didn't like being called good by anybody human for he thought that humans have an unclear idea of what good is and don't understand real goodness as represented by almighty God. He thought humans were too sinful to have a clue about what it meant to worship God as good.

There are other interpretations but they don't fit the Christian faith. For example, we could hold that Jesus rejected the compliment for he was a sinner like everybody else. Some say Jesus only meant that the man was flattering him and didn't mean it which was why he rejected the compliment. But there is no hint of that in the text. You don't say, “Why do you call me good for nobody is good but God?” to somebody that is flattering you. You say, “You flatter me.” And besides the man asked him about how to inherit everlasting life and Jesus answered him thus acknowledging him as sincere not as a flatterer.

A slave is a person who is forced to work for nothing. Jesus said that anybody who sins is a slave to sin (John 8:34). Then he promised to free anybody who was a slave and who wanted to be free. This implies that you cannot free yourself from sin and that you need him to shatter the chains. In other words, he was testifying to total depravity.

Jesus said that it was easier for a camel to pass through the eye of needle than for a rich man to enter God's kingdom. He claimed that with man entry is impossible but not with God. So God must change the rich man's desires to save him. The rich man is too bad to want the happiness of Heaven enough to turn to God without God's help. That is extreme badness meaning that the man couldn't deserve anything else but everlasting punishing in Hell showing Jesus certainly taught an everlasting Hell. The rich man could see to it that he will have entry into the kingdom when he is dying for he is going to lose all he has anyway. Jesus says no – it's still impossible. The rich man must be totally depraved and only God can get him out of that state. The reason then people stay in Hell forever is because nobody can manage to live up to the moral law of God properly and it is because they cannot put things right that they need to suffer forever in Hell. Salvation is declared to be difficult and sincerity is obviously declared to be insufficient for eternal salvation for you could sincerely believe there is no sin in being rich. Also, the problem Christ has with being rich is that the rich person will prefer the riches to God and one can be poor and still prefer something that is not God to God so they are in the same mess as the rich.

Luke 16 has Jesus saying that whoever can be trusted in tiny things can be trusted in bigger and whoever cannot be trusted in tiny cannot be trusted in bigger. He said whoever is dishonest in tiny things will also be dishonest in bigger things. He said that if you cannot be trusted in earthly riches nobody will trust you with heavenly riches. He said that if you cannot be trusted with somebody else's property nobody will give you property of your own (verses 10-12). The Bible says we all fall in little things (James 3:2). Jesus made the law of Moses even tougher – wilful desires or temptations are declared to be sinful which means there has to be a lot of sinning every day. Jesus said our failures however small mean we cannot be trusted and if we cannot be trusted then we are totally depraved.

Christ told the Pharisees and scribes that they were literally nothing but hypocrites (Matthew 23:5), they wanted everybody to be eternally lost (Matthew 23:14,15), they were blind – don't see at all (Matthew 23:19) and they were full of greed and badness (Matthew 23:25-28). If they were full of wickedness then there was no good in them at all. Some would say a person is full of themselves without meaning that they are really full of arrogance and pride. But it is wrong to exaggerate

like that and it is abusive. The Christian has to take Jesus literally. Jesus did not talk as if he meant some of the Jewish leaders. The ones he had for acquaintances like Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus were not said to be good or to be exceptions. If the Jewish leaders were all bad despite all the spiritual training they got and all the unpleasant things ministers have to accept as part of their calling then the laypersons must have been worse not better.

TOTAL DEPRAVITY IN PAUL

The doctrine of human inability to love God without divine assistance comes out most clearly in Paul.

Psalm 14 seems to say that nobody ever really does right in the eyes of God. Some argue that you can't take that too literally for it refers to God's people who are victimised by those who never do good. Paul uses the Psalm when seemingly trying to tell us that everybody needs God's forgiveness for everybody sins all the time. Those who deny that all sin all the time say the Psalm is only emotive poetry and is not dogmatic theology. But it could be both!

One argument against the Psalm condemning everybody is how other Psalms such as 11:5 which says there are righteous people, 33:1 which tells the good to rejoice and Psalm 84:11 says God gives good things to those who walk the right path.

The Psalm puts its condemnations in a framework. It starts off by calling those who say there is no God fools. They are the ones who have no good points according to many. But it can be said that everybody rejects God and denies him in that sense at some point. You can argue that language is dangerous and the Bible knows that so its condemnation is thought to be the literal truth.

A commentary reads, "The meaning of the words in the beginning of verse 3: **הכלל סר יהדיו** in English "everyone has gone astray" in the context of the psalm is that no one from among the nations protests the atrocities perpetrated by his leaders against Israel (see Rashi)". This actually shows that not only in context is the Psalm saying nobody does the right thing but they are gravely bad. Paul correctly used the Psalm as proof that all we do is tainted with deep rebellion against God.

The third chapter of Romans is where the citation of Psalm 14 appears and it declares that there is not even a single righteous person, that nobody understands that they should love God alone and that nobody is truthful or honest. Even the good they do is dishonest and a lie for it is a mask. They are full of cursing and bitterness. Their kind words are bitter curses. For example, to praise one person while denigrating another in your heart is to really insult the one you praise for it is unjust discrimination and is asking her or him to approve. A person can claim to fear God and not do it right. A person who lives well out of fear of retribution is one who wants to sin and wills sin but who avoids it because of selfish fear. The chapter emphasises that all means literally all. No one can argue that the alls are not literal on the grounds that all do not curse or lie or whatever for it is done internally when it is not obvious. The passage certainly teaches the total depravity of humanity because it mentions no exceptions and plainly says it means all.

Paul said that none of the Jews were able to be put right with God by keeping God's Law because they could not observe it fully - Romans 3. If they were not totally depraved they would have been able to fulfil it at least for short periods. But when Paul said that God had to give another way of salvation, the way of faith, to do what Law keeping could not we know that according to him they were never holy. Many believe that Romans says that we have got that bad we are incapable of being good. Others say it does not say it but it can be read either way. It can be read as supporting the Calvinist notion that we are so bad that only God's grace can change us for we are totally unable.

The Jews were the one true religion according to the Bible and the Gentiles were all non-Jews.

Paul said that there was no distinction or difference between the two groups for they were "all sinful" – he then said that not one person was good showing he meant all individuals. The heathens who murdered and raped and left babies exposed on hillsides to die of cold were not more evil than the Jews who did not. He listed the sins. He said that their mouths were full of curses. If we adhere to sin then our sweet words are really bitter curses for they are not said out of goodness but out of a spiteful desire to gain human adulation.

Romans 3 quotes Psalm 14 in part. We cite it in full and have underlined the parts he cites.

The fool says in his heart that there is no God. They are corrupt and they do terrible things and there is no one that does good. The Lord looks down from Heaven to see if there are any that act wisely among the children of men. To see if there are any that seek God. But they have all gone astray and they are all corrupt the same. There is not one that does good - not a single one. Do they know nothing at all all those evildoers who eat up my people as they eat bread and do not call upon the Lord? There they shall be in great terror for God is with the righteous generation. You would ruin the plans of the poor but the poor have refuge in the Lord. O that deliverance for Israel would come out of Zion! Israel shall be gladdened and Jacob shall find joy when the Lord restores the fortunes of his people."

It is said that Paul misread this Psalm. The Psalm is said to have two groups in mind. One group is the fool, corrupt and evil. The other is the righteous, Israel and poor. The Psalm is said to promise that the righteous will be delivered not the wicked whereas Paul thought that the wicked would be delivered from sin. The point of him looking for quotes to say that all on earth were bad was so to be able to say that God would save sinners. He was saying the opposite of the Psalm. He used the quotes to argue that Jews and Gentiles were just as bad as one another and there was no difference in their sinfulness and need for salvation (Romans 3:9). So it seems Paul distorted the Psalm. He knew the Old Testament too well for it to have been a mistake.

If Paul distorted a Psalm that denies that all are necessarily sinful to cherry pick it to get an out of context statement to make it say the opposite then he clearly did believe that there was no such thing as a good person on earth. The righteous in the Psalm would mean people who did sin but who were repentant and who were now reformed and good. But Paul doesn't want to see that at all. He did teach total depravity.

It might be argued that Paul was a prophet and so was giving the correct meaning of the Psalm before the Psalm was corrupted by Jewish copyists. This safeguards his infallibility and his integrity.

It might be argued that the righteous poor in the Psalm are hypothetical. In that case, the Psalmist is not saying there really are righteous people but saying what would happen if there were! This is what Christians would have to believe.

Paul said that one time his Ephesian Christians were dead in their transgression (Ephesians 2:1). Dead means separated from God (Luke 15:32). The one means that they did not flit to and from death to life. To be dead in sin is to be dead to good and unable to do it. These were adult converts so he is not talking about them just being useless and dead until they were baptised as babies or anything. They did nothing but sin until they converted to Jesus. Then he calls this a result of their sinful nature (2:3). Your nature is what makes you what you are. If you have a sinful nature then all you are capable of is displeasing God.

DOES BIBLE CONTRADICT T.D.?

Are those Christians who claim to find texts that challenge the doctrine of total depravity right?

Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount that we being evil still know how to do good. Does this deny that we are naturally only evil for it was spoken to people who were not Christians or saved and who were evil? But every sin is good in a sense. It is a warped sense of the good. When you rebel it is because you want something good. The Jews would have known that Jesus did not mean righteous good for their own scriptures and reason said that a person who harbours a sin cannot please God no matter how much good he does (Isaiah 64:6; Psalm 39:5; Job 14:4). If I help a sick person and in my heart I will the act not to please God I am doing good but not in my heart.

In Acts 10 we read about Cornelius who is praised in this book as a just man who served God. He is supposed to be proof that the unsaved can do good. It is taken for granted that Cornelius was not saved because when Peter preached the Spirit came down on the listeners and they were baptized in water. But Peter told Cornelius that he knew he knew about Jesus and the gospel. The Spirit coming down sometimes means the Spirit you already have giving you a new grace. Christians believing they have the Spirit still ask for him to fall afresh on them. So the notion that Cornelius contradicts total depravity is just reading into the Bible what is not there.

Acts 17:30 says that God commands all to repent which is supposed to prove that all men can repent and turn to God for God doesn't command the impossible. But God commands all to repent and live more harmless lives but this repentance could include the type that wins forgiveness from him and that which does not. Plus the doctrine of total depravity says we can do good but we necessarily do evil and it denies that we are forced to be evil so God can call the world to repent because the only thing that is stopping them is the evil they keep on doing and won't stop doing until God gets them to see the light.

CONCLUSION

The Bible God and Jesus are totally negative about the value of human goodness, it says it is really just disguised opposition to real goodness and to God. Thanks and appreciation and optimism are condemned as sinful.

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