



### Jack Cottrell: Depravity: Total, Partial, or None at All?

Jack Cottrell's Notes

#### Depravity: Total, Partial, or None at All?

Friday, October 2, 2009 at 3:27pm

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Does Scripture Teach TOTAL, PARTIAL, or NO Depravity?

A QUESTIONER ASKS, what Scriptures disqualify (I take this to mean disprove) Total Depravity in human beings? And if Total Depravity is ruled out, does that mean we are PARTIALLY depraved?

MY REPLY:

Depravity as such has to do with the sinfulness of our human nature, i.e., having a nature that has been infected with sin like the body can be infected with disease. It means having a sinful, evil, spiritually diseased or dead nature. The first issue is WHETHER a sinner's nature is even depraved at all. (1) Pelagians (those who agree with Pelagius—lived late 4th, early 5th centuries) would typically say no one ever has a depraved or sinful NATURE. (2) Non-Pelagians believe in depravity but are divided into two categories: semi-Pelagians, who say all human beings have a PARTIALLY depraved nature; and Augustinians, who say all have a TOTALLY depraved nature. I am a non-Pelagian on this, since I believe it is clear that sinners have a sinful, depraved, evil nature. (See my book, "The Faith Once for All," 195-197.)

The second issue is HOW the sinner's nature becomes depraved. Most say that the sinful nature is part of the condition called "original sin" that is inherited by or imputed to every human being as the result of Adam's sin. The other possibility is that depravity is an acquired condition, the result of the individual's succumbing to temptation and committing personal sins. The main Scripture that is relevant to this issue is Romans 5:12-19. Augustinians and semi-Pelagians typically say this text teaches that all human beings are born in original sin as the result of Adam's sin. I deny this interpretation of this text, and argue instead that it teaches ORIGINAL GRACE—that any consequences of Adam's sin that WOULD have come upon all are in reality removed from all by the atonement of Jesus Christ. No one is actually born with any spiritual consequences of Adam's sin. (See "The Faith Once for All," 181-190; see my Romans commentary on this text.)

Putting these two paragraphs together, I believe that every human being does actually ACQUIRE a depraved nature, as one result of personal sins.

The third and last issue is TO WHAT DEGREE does a person become depraved? Here I argue strongly against total depravity and for partial depravity. The key difference is this: those who believe in total depravity say that sinners have a total inability (lack of free will) to believe and repent in response to the gospel call. This requires God to unconditionally choose whom he will save, and then to bestow upon these chosen ones the irresistible gift of regeneration, with subsequent gifts of faith and repentance. On the other hand, those who believe in partial depravity say that no matter how evil sinners may be, they all have the ability to make a free-will choice to accept the gospel.

In "The Faith Once for All" (pp. 197-200) I show that Bible texts that supposedly teach total depravity (e.g., Rom. 8:7-8; John 6:44) do NOT do so, and that other Bible texts specifically disprove total depravity. The main example of the latter is Colossians 2:12, which says a sinner is buried and raised up with Christ in baptism THROUGH FAITH in the working of God. Remember: the total depravity advocate says that regeneration must precede faith; until he is regeneration he is not able to believe. But in this passage, regeneration (i.e., dying and being raised up with Jesus, see v. 13) comes THROUGH faith, which means that faith must precede regeneration. This is a death blow to total depravity.

Our spiritual history includes this sequence: because of original grace, we are born with no depravity; through personal sin we acquire partial depravity; through a free-will choice we accept God's double cure of grace, the second part of which begins to heal our depraved nature; in our eternal state our depravity is completely removed. At no point are we totally depraved.

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**Jack Cottrell** "Denying that the Word of God has the power to draw all sinners to Christ disregards the very purpose and character of the written word as being addressed to sinners. The gospel is the good news of salvation to sinners and is clear to sinners. John says his accounts of Jesus' life and miracles have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God" (John 20:31). This writing has not been in vain."

October 2 at 4:43pm · Report



**Duane Schwingel** to Joe Bertone: This is thought provoking. Is the Tree of knowledge of good and evil then better described as the Tree of Free Will? And if so, and it is true that God removed us from that Tree, and has denied access... have we no free will?

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**Kurt Charles Juergens** If John 12:32 (six chapters later) satisfies the full scope of John 6:44-65, why would Jesus say in verse 64 "there are some of you who do not believe", and John explain "For Jesus knew from the beginning who those were who did not believe..."? (In the very same chapter and the very same conversation) Why would specific peoples' (and not everybody's) unbelief motivate Jesus to say vv. 44 and 65? He doesn't seem to be suggesting they will eventually believe.  
Tue at 7:55pm · Report



**Jack Cottrell** I don't see the problem. At stake are free will, the power of the Word to move the will (Jn 6:44-45, 63, 65), and divine foreknowledge of which f-w beings will accept His Word. The same gospel message DRAWS ALL, but only SOME choose to YIELD to this drawing. The only specific person to whom Jesus is calling attention in this context is Judas, whom Jesus foreknew would NOT respond.  
Yesterday at 11:34am · Report



**Joe Bertone** To Duane--did not see that before! lol. But I think the tree is only a choice--eat or don't eat. Free will equals choice. The tree God took away that matters is the tree of life. Revelation shows we regain that in heaven in the plural (a forest!). As long as we have choice we have two possibilities we can choose and thus free will. God created choice and thus free will. My point is the cost of that free will and thus the worth of free will.  
Yesterday at 1:42pm · Report