

## Neo-Calvinism vs. the Bible 012

Jeremiah 17:9

December 15, 2024

Dr. Andy Woods

Let's take our Bibles this morning and open them to Colossians 2:8. We are continuing our look at "Neo-Calvinism vs. the Bible." For whatever reason—I guess because this subject has bothered a lot of people—we have a lot of interest on our various media platforms about this.

Here is the outline that we have been using to go through this material:

**Neo-Calvinism vs. The Bible**

- I. Calvinism's Mixed Blessing
- II. Why Critique Calvinism?
- III. **The Source of Calvin's Theology**
- IV. Calvin's Manner of Life
- V. TULIP Through the Grid of Scripture
- VI. Conclusion

A portrait of John Calvin, a French theologian, reformer, and pastor. He is depicted with a long, dark beard and a black cap, wearing a dark, heavy robe. The portrait is set against a dark background.

We started with Roman numeral I: how Calvinism, in a very real sense, is a mixed blessing. There is good in it, but also bad. We then moved into Roman numeral II, where we tried to ask and answer the question, "Why critique Calvinism?"

Then in number III, we got into the subject of Calvin's theology. What was its source? And I tried to show you that a lot of it is rooted in someone who lived over a thousand years before Calvin, named Augustine. We did a deep dive into Augustine and who he was.

Then we got into Roman numeral IV: What kind of person was John Calvin? Well, I am sure that Calvin had some admirable qualities, but he trended in the way of tyranny. So we talked about that.

So all of that stuff, believe it or not, is just introduction. What we are going to move into now is Roman numeral V. We will be spending the bulk of our time, the remainder of this series, on something called TULIP.

I was going to call this "Tiptoeing Through the Tulips," but decided that I probably should not do that. TULIP is the theological grid for Calvinism and Neo-Calvinism. In this section, we are going to be running that grid through Scripture.

In other words, what do Calvinists mean by TULIP? And do these points harmonize with the Bible? So, you may not know anything about TULIP. As my professor Dwight Pentecost used to say, blessed be your ignorance if you do not know anything about TULIP.

Let me explain where this whole TULIP thing came from. This is a quote from Dr. Robert Congdon in his great book, which I would recommend to you, called "Oops! I thought I Was a Four-Point Calvinist."

That title kind of spoke to me because I thought I was one too, until I started understanding what it meant. Congdon summarizes the history. He says,

"The theology of Arminianism,..."<sup>1</sup>

(Here at Sugar Land Bible Church, we are not Arminian nor Calvinistic.)

"...holds that salvation is conditioned upon one's continuing in the faith; that is, just as an individual may freely choose to believe and accept the gospel of salvation, he may also continue to turn away in unbelief and 'fall from grace,' or lose his salvation."<sup>2</sup>

A lot of people say, "Well, if you are not a Calvinist, then you are an Arminian." Well, obviously I am not.

We are not Arminian, because Arminians believe that you can have salvation and lose it. How do you lose eternal life? Think about that for a minute. If it is eternal, you cannot lose it, right?

"At this point a little history will help clarify the tensions between Calvinism and Arminianism. In 1610 a group of forty-six Arminian ministers met in Gouda, Holland, to protest the teaching of the growing Calvinist movement. They issued a Remonstrance (protest) declaring what they believed were five biblical teachings."<sup>3</sup>

So it was really the Arminians, following Jacob Arminius, that came up with the five points. The Calvinists did not do that at first, but later reacted to this protest revolving around Jacob Arminius.

"A few years later, a predominantly Calvinist group published a Counter-Remonstrance that was issued by the Synod of Dort (Dordrecht) in 1618. This document established the Calvinistic system, including its five

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<sup>1</sup> Dr. Robert R. Congdon, *Oops! I Thought I Was a Four - Pt Calvinist* (Greer, SC: Congdon Ministries International, 2014), 3.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

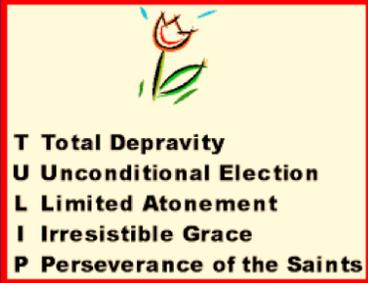
<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

primary doctrines that are represented by the acrostic, 'TULIP,' which is formed from the first letter of each of the five prime points."<sup>4</sup>

So Calvinism, in its purest sense, was probably founded at the Synod of Dort, which was a reaction against the five teachings of Arminius's followers. So that is where the five points of Calvinism come from.

**V. Running TULIP Through the Grid of Scripture**

- A. Total Depravity**
- B. Unconditional Election**
- C. Limited Atonement**
- D. Irresistible Grace**
- E. Perseverance of the Saints**



**T Total Depravity**  
**U Unconditional Election**  
**L Limited Atonement**  
**I Irresistible Grace**  
**P Perseverance of the Saints**

The five points in TULIP are Total Depravity; "U," Unconditional Election; "L," Limited Atonement; "I," Irresistible Grace; and "P," the Perseverance of the Saints.

You might be looking at those and saying, "Well, I do not have any big problem with that," which is what I did for years.

I looked at those and I said, "Well, I agree with probably four of the five," until I started figuring out what Calvinists actually meant by those points. So I said, "Well, that one's not right."

So I went down from a five-point Calvinist to being a four-point Calvinist. And then I said, "Well, that one's not right, but it is a little bit right." So I started calling myself a three-and-a-half point Calvinist.

And then I kind of got talked out of that one, and I went down to three points. I was revising each of the points according to my understanding. I was not defining the points by what the Calvinists meant by it.

So I am going to be sharing with you, in this part of the series, what Calvinists actually mean by these points. What did they mean at Dort?

And many of those in Neo-Calvinism, the rise of the young, reformed, and restless, as they are called, have conferences all over the United States. What do they mean by these points?

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

And as you will indulge me in this and go through this exercise with me, you will start seeing that where Calvin departs from Scripture, I depart from Calvin.

I do not call myself a three-point, four-point, or five-point Calvinist anymore. I call myself a biblicist, because my authority is the Bible. And that does not mean that, well, if I reject this, then I must be an Arminian.

Clearly, I am not in the Arminian camp, since they teach that you can lose your salvation. So what do you do with someone like myself that just loves Jesus and loves the Bible and wants to follow Him? I call myself a biblicist.

But a lot of people are just absolutely stuck on these five points of Calvinism. If you will not acquiesce to these points, or say nice things about them, you are kicked out. You are out of their fellowship.

I have seen this divide churches. I have seen this divide families. So we have to figure out what in the world is this whole TULIP thing talking about.

Calvinists think that it is ironclad biblicism. In their minds, when they talk about TULIP, they are talking about "thus saith the Lord." Let me give you a few quotes from people to demonstrate that.

John Piper, a quintessential five-point Calvinist, writes,

"The doctrines of grace..."<sup>5</sup>

Now, I have noticed that Calvinists have changed a lot of their vocabulary. They are starting to use the phrase "sovereign grace." I guess TULIP got Piper some bad press.

So Calvinists say, "Well, we are 'sovereign grace.'" And I have noticed that when they say "sovereign grace," really what they mean is TULIP. They will call these "the doctrines of grace."

John Piper is a man who is confused on a ton of things, including the modern state of Israel. He does not in any way, shape, or form believe that the modern state of Israel means anything—it is just a fluke that they are there. Those are John Piper's beliefs.

John Piper writes,

"The doctrines of grace (Total depravity, Unconditional election, Limited atonement, Irresistible grace, Perseverance of the saints) are the warp and woof of the biblical gospel cherished by so many saints for centuries."<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> John Piper, *tulip: The Pursuit of God's Glory in Salvation* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethlehem Baptist Church, 2000), back cover.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

So in Calvinists' minds, it is as if you have Jesus, to the apostles, to the sixteenth century Calvinism, to us. That is how they think.

So if you question anything in Calvinism, you are questioning the Bible, because in their minds the two are one and the same.

Now, this next slide is not a recent slide that I put together. This man has had a moral fall. I do not take that lightly at all. To me it is very sad to see someone, because of immorality, lose their reputation and their ministry.

To me, it is a very sad thing to watch. So I do not take any glee or exhilaration out of this. The man is Steve Lawson, a very aggressive Calvinist, who had a moral failing.

He supposedly had an affair with a twenty-something-year-old while at The Master's Seminary, John MacArthur's school, which went on for about five years. That is the allegation, anyway.

But some time back, an interviewer asked this question of Steve Lawson:

"Reformed theology and Calvinism most certainly are considered a minority viewpoint. Why are so many Christians against, and actively against, these concepts?"<sup>7</sup>

And it is rather sad to listen to Steve Lawson's answer, because Steve Lawson's lifestyle, by his own theology, would disqualify him from being one of the elect.

Because he committed immorality over a long period of time, there are grounds to question whether he was saved at all. That is how Calvinists think. That is the "P," which refers to the Perseverance of the Saints.

We will have plenty of time to talk about the P along with the other anachronyms. But here is the way Steve Lawson was thinking about TULIP at the time of this interview. He was asked why Christians are against it. His answer is,

"They don't know the Bible. [laughter and clapping]..."

He has this crowd of admirers egging him on as he is talking. He says,

"It's not that they know too much of the Bible that they have come to this position, it's because they know too little of the Bible that they have come to this conclusion, and it's really their lack of knowledge of the full counsel of God as taught in the Scripture. It allows them to continue to rebel against the truth that is presented in the doctrines of Grace."<sup>8</sup>

Notice the nomenclature "doctrines of Grace," sometimes called "sovereign grace." In Calvinists' minds, that is a synonym for TULIP.

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<sup>7</sup> Steven Lawson, <https://youtu.be/yorGsechzrl>.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

Lawson says,

"There are no truths that glorify God more than what are succinctly stated in the doctrines of Grace. It's not a secondary issue. It's not a minor point in the Bible. It's literally in the heart of God...He is a saving God. It is the very nature of God to be a saving God. The doctrines of Grace I believe bring into clearest focus and in most vivid detail the purity of sovereign saving grace."<sup>9</sup>

Basically, Lawson's point is that people reject Calvinism because they do not know much about the Bible.

Now, for me, it has been the opposite. The more I have learned about the Bible, the more I have walked away from Calvinism. And Lawson would say that I am tampering with the glory of God, which I do not think I am. I would not do that knowingly.

And Lawson would say that I am moving into not a secondary issue, but a primary issue. So this TULIP is everything to them.

Young Earth Creationism is a secondary issue. Premillennialism, the Rapture of the church, and the coming Tribulation Period are secondary issues. The modern state of Israel is a secondary issue.

But what about TULIP? Oh man, this is it. It is like you are touching the eye of God, if you say anything against, or marginalize, or minimize TULIP. I am just trying to get you to understand the way these people think.

So what do we mean by TULIP? TULIP, as we said earlier, was put together by Calvin's followers. A lot of people think that Calvin's followers out-Calvin-ed Calvin himself in some respects.

But I want you to understand that this kind of thinking, TULIP, is completely logically structured. The structure makes complete and total sense from a human logical standpoint.

You know what logic is: major premise, minor premise, conclusion. If you agree with the Calvinists' starting point, which is "T" (Total Depravity), then all these other points fall right into place beautifully.

Unconditional Election makes sense if Calvinists are right about "T" (Total Depravity).  
Limited Atonement makes sense if Calvinists are right about "T" (Total Depravity).

Irresistible Grace makes sense if Calvinists are right about "T" (Total Depravity).  
Perseverance of the Saints makes perfect sense if Calvinists are right about "T" (Total Depravity).

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

Calvinism is a syllogism that is beautiful in terms of its logic. You would expect that kind of thinking to come from the mind of John Calvin, who was off-the-charts brilliant from a human perspective.

Calvin was an attorney, or studying to be an attorney. Not that being, or studying to be, an attorney makes you brilliant. But that is the kind of mind Calvin had: extremely analytical.

As I said before, Calvin wrote "The Institutes of the Christian Religion" at the age of twenty-five to twenty-six. Calvin had a brilliant mind. You would expect that Calvin's followers would organize Calvinism logically.

And Calvinism makes perfect logical sense. But here is something very important to understand about human logic: human logic is only as good as its starting point—major premise, minor premise, conclusion.

Human logic works if the major premise is completely right. But what if the major premise is off? Or better said, what if the major premise is slightly off (which I think it is, in Calvinism)? Then the rest of the syllogism starts to fall apart.

So what we are seeking to do in this part of the study is to run each of these points of TULIP through the grid of Scripture. We are not so much interested in a logical syllogism, but interested in whether these points are found in the Bible, because the Bible is my authority.

In Colossians 2:8, Paul the apostle says,

*"See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy..." (Colossians 2:8).*

Who is "you"? It is the Christian. What is the result of being taken captive by philosophy? Well, you get held hostage to something that is not true? Where does philosophy come from? It is man-made.

*"See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ" (Colossians 2:8).*

"Elementary" is like the baby, ABC school. If you get taken captive by philosophy, it is like going back to kindergarten. You think that it is brilliant, but the truth of the matter is that you have jettisoned the Word of God, or you have read something into the Word of God.

So we have, in the process of being taken captive by worldly philosophy, exchanged the depth of Christ, the majesty of Christ—in Christ are found all secrets, all knowledge, and all wisdom—and substituted it for an artificial substitute.

That is what empty philosophy does. I largely believe that is what has happened to countless people. They have bought into a system that really is not derived specifically from the Word of God, as I have tried to show you.

The system of Calvinism goes back to a man named Augustine, who lived a thousand years before Calvin. Neo-Calvinism is resurfacing the whole thing.

So the philosophy started with Augustine, and it really started before Augustine with a man named Origen. As I have tried to explain, it went from Origen to Augustine to Calvin, into TULIP theology, into R.C. Sproul's conferences, if I can be that crass about it.

And when you are around these people, what they say to you is, "Oh, you just do not understand Calvinism. If you could understand it, you would embrace it."

Well, what do they mean when they say, "I cannot understand it?" "I mean, I may not be the sharpest knife in the drawer necessarily, but I can understand a lot of things. Explain it to me."

"Oh, well, you have to sit under our system for a while. You have to be with our teachers and our preachers and our schools and our books."

In other words, "We have to impart to you some kind of mystical, Gnostic understanding. And if you would just submit yourself to that and put the Bible away for a minute—can you do that?—and listen to the thoughts of Augustine and others, you would buy into it."

So why do they say that? And they say it all the time. If you criticize Calvinism online, the Calvinists will jump on you and say, "Well, you just do not understand it."

Why would they say that I do not understand? Well, because what they are basically saying is that you do not understand our philosophy. If you understood our philosophy, you would not be so antagonistic towards it.

And this Neo-Calvinism idea is extremely deceptive, because what you are seeing in Neo-Calvinistic circles is a revival in expository preaching. John MacArthur is just the perfect example of it.

MacArthur started, along with Steven Lawson and others, a revival in expository preaching. Then John MacArthur started making correct statements against the seeker friendly movement of doing church.

And MacArthur started making correct statements against the evangelical move to bring humanistic psychology into the life of the church. And MacArthur started making some correct statements against Roman Catholicism.

And he was on the radio doing expository preaching. And this happened to me for years: I got pulled into John MacArthur because John MacArthur was teaching the right stuff, and I wanted someone to follow who was teaching the right stuff.

I did not know at the time exactly what John MacArthur was doing in the fullness of his ministry, which was reinterpreting the Bible through an a priori lens called the five points of Calvinism.

John MacArthur's ministry is called Grace to You. (My wife calls it "Grace to Few," but that is another story.) And MacArthur says on his ministry website, "Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time."

And on its surface, I am not sure if that works, because the Bible originally did not have verses. The verse divisions are more modern. But anyway, we will let that one slide.

"Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time." MacArthur is not unleashing God's truth one verse at a time. He is unleashing what he understands is God's truth, because he has a set of eyeglasses on called five-point Calvinism.

A lot of people do not want to hear that. I did not want to hear it for years, because I agreed with MacArthur on this point, this point, this point, and this point. And this is how so many people get pulled in this direction of five-point Calvinism.

Five-point Calvinism and Lordship Salvation have almost taken over the Bible Church movement. And the reason I say that is because my alma mater started to drift some time back.

And a lot of the elders in different Bible churches say, "Well, you know, we have to get back to the Bible. We have to get back to God's Word." That is a great motive.

"Let's hire someone from John MacArthur's school, because look, they are unleashing God's truth one verse at a time. They are against the seeker friendly movement. They are against Roman Catholicism. They are against humanistic psychology."

And all of a sudden, what comes into your pulpit is a guy who, at first glance, sounds wonderful on a lot of things. But he is promoting five-point Calvinism all the time.

This is not academic for me. I know of some churches here in the Houston area that today are completely steeped in five-point Calvinism and Lordship Salvation. The whole trajectory of the congregation changed because they hired someone with a Calvinistic grid.

I will tell you something else, since I am kind of laying it all on the line here. This church could have easily gone that direction, if I was not hired to stand in this pulpit.

And I am not promoting myself as some kind of savior. I was just the right guy at the right time. But this church could have easily hired a five-point Calvinist, and you would not be hearing grace theology.

You would not be hearing anything about Lewis Sperry Chafer. One of the things you will notice in John MacArthur's library is that they took Lewis Sperry Chafer's writings, which emphasized grace, and removed them from the library.

It is all Piper and Lawson. And I mean, this church could have easily gone that direction. And people get deceived in this because they do not recognize it for what it is.

People see something in it that they like—the Neo-Calvinists are right on certain things—they gravitate towards that. And what they do not know is that they are getting the proverbial camel's nose under the tent, and Neo-Calvinism comes roaring in.

So yeah, you will agree with Neo-Calvinists on stuff. You will agree with them on their revival of expository preaching. There is no one more excited about expository preaching than myself. I love expository preaching.

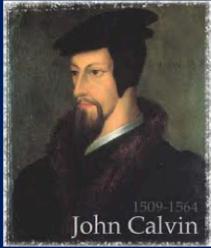
I think that the church's movement away from expository preaching is almost the destruction of Christianity here in the West and worldwide. And I have a natural tendency to gravitate towards those that want to emphasize expository preaching.

The problem is that those who are emphasizing expository preaching today are also Neo-Calvinists. So you are really not getting expository preaching. What you are getting is Scripture through an a priori lens called five point Calvinism.

So that is why we are going into the subject matter here. The first point in the TULIP acronym is Total Depravity. Here is our outline that we are going to use as we look at Total Depravity.

A. Total Depravity

1. The starting point
2. Total Depravity properly defined
3. Calvinism: Total Depravity = inability
4. Calvinism's overstatement of Total Depravity



John Calvin

Don't panic. We are not going to get through all this in the next thirty or forty-five minutes now. But I want to show you how Total Depravity is the Calvinists' starting point.

Also, before I criticize what Calvinists mean by Total Depravity, I want to show you what we think total depravity actually means. Then we will compare and contrast that to the Calvinistic understanding of total depravity.

In the Calvinists' minds, total depravity is a synonym for inability. The lost sinner has no ability to trust in the Savior (I will show you the quotes) even when the Holy Spirit convicts the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment.

That is what the Holy Spirit does, right (John 16:7-11)? I agree with Calvinists that no man can come to Christ without divine enablement. I think that divine enablement has been provided through the worldwide convicting of the Holy Spirit.

But even as the Holy Spirit does that (and I will show you the quotes) the Neo-Calvinists say, "That is not enough." Well, if it is not enough, then why does God do it? It seems as though He is wasting his time.

In the Calvinists' minds, man is nothing more than an insensate rock. He has no more ability to trust in the Savior than does a rock. Well, how do people get saved then?

Oh, well, that is where if you buy into the "T" (Total Depravity), the rest of it starts making sense. It is logic. God has to impart the gift of faith to some because they cannot believe on their own.

Another way of saying it is God has to regenerate them—make them born again—so they can believe. Yet your Bible says that it is the exact opposite.

Your Bible says that you trust Christ, then you get born again. In Latin, it is what we call the "ordo salutis": order of salvation. (I paid a lot of tuition money to learn those fancy words, so I have to use them on somebody.)

The Bible communicates an ordo salutis. In other words, you are convicted, then you believe, then you are regenerated. That is the order. The Calvinistic system inverts the whole thing.

Why would they invert the whole thing? Because of the starting point: you are a rock. You could not believe if you wanted to believe. And you do not want to believe anyway. And you do not have the ability to believe.

And that is why Calvinists will say things like what Jay Adams says in his counseling book. He says that he does not tell everybody that God loves them, and that Jesus died for them, because he does not know if they are one of the elect.

Who gets this gift of faith? The elect do—the small fraction of humanity that God has chosen unto salvation get this gift of faith. Everyone else is doomed from the womb with no chance to be saved whatsoever.

Now, if that is your theology, you have to give me a very aggressive definition of total depravity, as inability. So I will show you what Calvinists mean by the starting point.

We will then define total depravity properly. We will then look at what Calvinists mean by it, and I will show you how Calvinism has taken a good concept of total depravity and perverted it beyond the proportions of God's Word.

So first of all, the starting point. Calvin was a lawyer. Logic includes a major premise, a minor premise, and a conclusion. The whole Calvinistic system is logical, and will flow logically in a person's mind if the initial premise is right.

If the initial premise is slightly off, everything starts to kind of unravel. Scripture warns us against the use of human logic, telling us not to depend upon human logic. It tells us not to depend upon unaided reason.

God, at the very beginning, made this clear with Adam and Eve. When you look at the two trees that are emphasized in the garden, the tree of life and the tree of knowledge, they probably looked identical.

The tree of the knowledge of good and evil did not have a sign hanging around it, a neon sign that said, "Don't eat from this one." They were just two trees. That was all they were.

God had to come in with His Word and explain the difference between the two trees. In other words, if God had not come in with His Word, Adam and Eve would not know the difference between those two trees.

"This tree is the good tree. It'll give you life. This tree over here will kill you." And unless God with His Word had come alongside and aided their reason, they would not have known the difference between the two trees.

And Adam and Eve, in that state, were still unfallen. Yet they still needed the Word of God to explain the general revelation of God all around them.

Now, if that is true, how much more do we need the Word of God to understand things? You cannot understand life—you cannot understand reality—without God's Word.

Someone may sound brilliant. Someone may sound philosophical. Someone may sound very, very logical. But the Scripture warns us against unaided reason.

Calvinism is very logical to the human mind. But to get to the truth of it, you have to get to the foundational point, and you have to scrutinize it through God's Word, because that is what God wants you to do.

God does not want you to rely completely on human logic. Look at all the things the world tells us to do.

The youth today are told, "Hey, before you buy the car, you have to check under the hood, right? What is the matter with sex pre-marriage? How do you even know if you are sexually compatible? You have to have sex before marriage."

God says not to do that. "Yeah, but my emotions and all my sexual energy are telling me to do the opposite."

God says, "That is not how life works. You are not free to go out and interpret everything on your own. You have to interpret general revelation around you through My Word. So do not rely on human logic.

"If you rely on human logic and discard My Word, you are going to be in a lot of trouble. Look at what happened to the human race when Adam and Eve discarded the revelation of God and ate from the wrong tree because it looked good and it felt right."

So this is my problem with this constant appeal to logic by Calvinism. Yes, it is logical, but I am having a problem with the starting point. And the reason that I am having a problem with the starting point is that I am reading my Bible.

And you should examine everything, not just with this issue, but any issue you face, because God has spoken on every issue that is to be spoken on.

Paul warns us of human logic in Romans 3:5. He says,

*"But if our unrighteousness demonstrates the righteousness of God, what shall we say? The God who inflicts wrath is not unrighteous, is He?..."*  
(Romans 3:5).

The idea that if my unrighteousness reveals God's righteousness, then God is wrong to discipline or judge unrighteousness in me, is what Paul is responding to.

Paul is responding to a logical argument. That is why he puts in parentheses here:

*"...(I am speaking in human terms.)"* (Romans 3:5).

In other words, "I am responding to the stupidity of man here." "I am responding to the finite abilities of man who thinks that he can get to truth merely through human logic."

So right there in Romans 3:5, you find Paul condemning an overreliance on human logic. Now, don't get me wrong. God is logical. The things that God does make sense when you examine them.

However, you cannot get to the mind of God simply through human logic, because your initial starting point might be wrong. And the only way to figure out where you are in terms of the initial starting point is to go back to God's Word.

This is why you have these kinds of things in the Proverbs. Proverbs is filled with these things.

*"There is a way which seems right to a man [and looks right], But its end is the way of death" (Proverbs 14:12; see also Proverbs 16:25).*

And then, of course, there is that proverb that you guys probably have on your refrigerators at home, Proverbs 3:5-6.

*"Trust in the Lord with all your heart, And do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight" (Proverbs 3:5-6).*

But what about that second point there?

*"...And do not lean on your own understanding...."* (Proverbs 3:5).

Why should I not lean on my own understanding? Because your mind is not capable, through human logic, to totally and completely arrive at truth.

Reason is a wonderful thing. But if it is unaided reason, then you have a problem, because God never designed us to live with unaided reason.

So if the Calvinistic system is right on the "T" (Total Depravity), then election, regeneration preceding faith, and faith being a gift, flow beautifully from it.

But what if the Calvinists are wrong on "T" (Total Depravity)? What if they have overstated the "T" (Total Depravity)? Then the system is rather like dominoes in a row, right? If you knock over one domino, the rest start to fall.

If you knock over the "T" (Total Depravity) in TULIP, the rest of the points in TULIP start to tumble, as I will try to demonstrate.

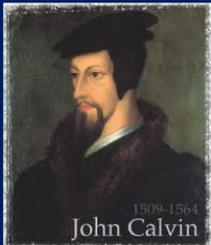
So the whole Calvinistic system begins with their understanding of "T" (Total Depravity). If you do not understand what they mean by "T" (Total Depravity), or buy into what they mean by "T" (Total Depravity), then you can never become a Calvinist.

So before I show you what Calvinists mean by "T," that Total Depravity equals inability, I want to show you what the Bible says about "T," total depravity, which is a concept I believe in.

I believe in total depravity defined by Scripture, not by the Synod of Dort. So what is total depravity, exactly? Well, let's talk about what it is not.

**Total Depravity**

- What total depravity *is not*:
  - ◆ Man is as evil as he can possibly be & indulges every possible sin
  - ◆ Man is incapable of doing good things
    - ◆ Gen. 3:22
    - ◆ Matt. 7:11
    - ◆ Acts 10:1-2
    - ◆ Rom. 2:14-15



Total depravity does not mean that we are as evil as we possibly can be in our unsaved state. Total depravity does not mean that we have indulged every sin there is to indulge.

There are some sins that we have not committed yet, right? I hope that is true with you guys, right? I mean, there are some sins that you have not done, right?

Boy, it is getting quiet in here. There are some sins that you could watch on TV, fantasize about them, maybe saying, "Well, at least I have not done that one."

So total depravity does not mean that I am as evil as I can possibly be. It does not mean that I have indulged every sin that can be indulged.

When I was unsaved, I used to apply the brakes when I saw someone walking in the crosswalk. I did not put the pedal to the metal and say, "Let's run them down." And I was a nice person in a lot of respects before I was saved.

The atheists, or unsaved people, give money to the Cancer Research Society, right? Total depravity does not mean that we are as evil as we can possibly be. Lots of Scripture shows us this.

Notice Genesis 3:22, just to give you a taste of this. This is after the Fall. It says,

*"Then the Lord God said, 'Behold, the man has become like one of Us, knowing good and evil;...' (Genesis 3:22).*

Man in his fallen state was capable now of doing evil and good. Before, he just did good. But in his fallen, unsaved state, he can do both.

Notice Matthew 7:11. Look at what Jesus says here, speaking about prayer—how we ought to pray to God, because God wants to bless us with good gifts.

Jesus says, "You know how to bless your children with good gifts. So if you know how to bless your children with good gifts, how much more will your Father, who is in heaven, who is untainted by a sin nature, have the ability to bless His children with good gifts?" (Matthew 7:11, paraphrase).

And in the process of that teaching, found in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says,

*"If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him!" (Matthew 7:11).*

Notice that in our fallen state, our evil state, we still know how to do good things. We know how to bless our children with good gifts. We know how to save up for college tuition and bless our children that way.

We have Acts 10:1-2, which you might recognize from our studies on Wednesday.

You will remember this man, Cornelius, who was unsaved when this statement was written. He did not get saved until Peter showed up. Acts 11:14 clearly says that

*"...he [Peter] will speak words to you [Cornelius] by which you will be saved,..." (Acts 11:14).*

So in Acts 10:1-2, Cornelius was unsaved, and yet he was capable of doing good things. It says in Acts 10:1-2,

*"Now there was a man at Caesarea named Cornelius, a centurion of what was called the Italian cohort, a devout man..." (Acts 10:1-2).*

You mean that an unsaved person can be devout? Yes, they can.

*"...one who feared God..." (Acts 10:2).*

You mean that an unsaved person can fear God? Apparently.

*"...with all his household,..." (Acts 10:2).*

Cornelius was the spiritual leader of his home, and he was not a believer yet.

*"...and gave many alms to the Jewish people..." (Acts 10:2).*

Look at that. Cornelius was pro-Israel when he was unsaved. And look at this:

*"...[he] prayed to God continually" (Acts 10:2).*

Cornelius, an unsaved man, was a man of prayer.

I am taking some time with this depravity issue, because if you get this wrong, you will fall right into five-point Calvinism. If you do not understand what the Bible says about total depravity, you will fall into it.

Romans 2:14-15 is talking about unsaved Gentiles.

*"For when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves, in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them" (Romans 2:14-15).*

So there is a law in the heart of all people. And it is easy to experiment with this, if you are an experimenter and want to see if it is true.

If you have two kids or two grandkids at home, you say to kid A, "Take out the trash and I will take you to Burger King." And then within earshot of kid A, you tell kid B, "If you take out the trash, I will take you to Disney World."

Kid A is going to say, "That's not fair!" Well, where in the world did you ever get the idea that life was supposed to be fair? How is it that little kids can instinctively recognize unfairness?

Because God put a barometer in all people called conscience. Unbelievers do a lot of stuff that violates their conscience. And their conscience accuses.

But this same passage (Romans 2:14-15) says that they do a lot of other stuff that does not violate their conscience, which their conscience does not accuse, but excuses.

So that text right there says that unsaved people can do an awful lot of good by living a life that harmonizes with conscience.

Now, as I will show you, that does not save anybody. I am just showing you that what you have in this Calvinistic mindset is an exaggeration. They do not go to passages like this as I will demonstrate.

One of the best statements on total depravity was written by Henry Clarence Thiessen. If you can find his books or book lectures on systematic theology in a used bookstore, you have just hit a gold mine.

This is what Thiessen says about depravity:

"The Scriptures speak of human nature as totally depraved. However, the doctrine of 'total depravity' is easily misunderstood and misinterpreted. From the negative standpoint, it is important to know both what it does not mean and what it does mean."<sup>10</sup>

Amen. Where is your church, Mr. Thiessen? I want to join.

"This does not mean that every sinner is devoid of all qualities pleasing to men; that he commits, or is prone to every form of sin; or that he is bitterly opposed to God as it is possible for him to be."<sup>11</sup>

Man is not as bad as he could be.

"Jesus recognize[d] the existence of pleasing qualities in some individuals (Mark 10:21);..."<sup>12</sup>

In Mark 10:21, Jesus recognized admirable qualities in the rich young ruler.

"...He said that the scribes and Pharisees..."<sup>13</sup>

Of the very people that Jesus said, "You are inspired by Satan,"—of that crowd, he also said

"that the scribes and Pharisees did some things God demanded (Matt. 23:23); Paul asserted that some Gentiles 'do instinctively the things of the law' (Rom. 2:14); God told Abraham that the iniquity of the Amorites would grow worse (Gen. 15:16);..."<sup>14</sup>

In other words, the Amorites were going down the wrong road. But at the time that statement was made, they were not as bad as they could possibly be. They would get that way, but it would take four hundred years for them to get that bad.

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<sup>10</sup> Henry Clarence Thiessen, *Lectures in Systematic Theology*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 191.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

"...and Paul says that 'evil men and imposters will proceed from bad to worse' (2 Tim. 3:13)."<sup>15</sup>

In other words, there is bad, there is badder (Is that a word?) and then there is baddest. Not every single lost person you run into is baddest.

They can get that way, unfortunately, particularly in a society that interfaces with demons, like people did in the days of Noah. If you open yourself up to that, as our culture, unfortunately, is doing in a lot of ways, they will push you to that extent.

You can get to a point where God has no choice but to bring judgment (e.g., the Flood, Sodom and Gomorrah, etc.), but it takes a while for a civilization to reach that point. People are not like this automatically.

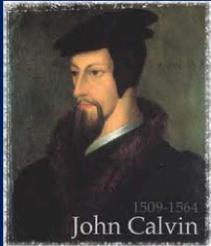
So the first thing that we have to understand about total depravity is that total depravity does not mean that people are as bad as they can possibly be. It does not mean that people have indulged every sin that can be indulged.

Calvinism would say that is how total depravity is. And I am saying that is not true. So with that being said, what does total depravity actually mean? What does it mean?

It does not mean that I have indulged every single sin. It does not mean I am as bad as I can possibly be. Well, what does it mean?

**Total Depravity**

- What total depravity *is*:
  - ◆ Every area of man's being is touched by sin
    - ◆ Intellect (Prov. 3:5-6; 14:12; 2 Cor. 4:4; Rom. 3:11a)
    - ◆ Conscience (1 Tim 4:2)
    - ◆ Will (Rom 1:28; 3:11b)
    - ◆ Deeds (Rom. 3:12)
    - ◆ Speech (Rom. 3:13-14)
    - ◆ Feet (Rom. 3:15)



1509-1564  
John Calvin

It means two things. Number one, sin has touched every aspect of our being. That is what the word "total" means. "Total" is a statement of breadth, not of intensity or depth.

Do you see the difference? I am not underselling total depravity at all, if you understand it correctly. "Total" means that every part of me has been touched by sin. There is no part of who I am as a human being that has not been corrupted or touched by sin.

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

Aquinas put a lot of emphasis on the human mind and human logic because he believed that people are corrupted from the neck down, but that the reasoning process is intact.

Some of the greatest apologists in the world are following Aquinas. I was sitting across the table from Norman Geisler at a prophecy conference, and I asked him, "Who is the greatest theologian that has influenced you?"

He said, without batting an eye, "Thomas Aquinas." Well, that would help us understand why Norman Geisler, a man whom I loved, by the way, and who made great contributions to Christianity, placed so much emphasis on reasoning people into Christianity.

There is this unwritten assumption that the mind is okay, and that if people are just given the right arguments, they will believe. No, I do not think so, because I think that depravity is total such that it has corrupted even my ability to think.

And the only thing that I am going to do with your Christian arguments is reprocess them through my corrupted mind that holds down truth.

So this is why, at the Christmas table, when you have unsaved people in your household, and you have just read the latest apologetics book and think, "Well, if I just tell them this, and tell them this, and tell them this, they will get saved," there is no guarantee they will be saved.

Maybe they will, but that is not guaranteed. That is an apologetics approach that assumes that people have the ability to think correctly, which they do not. Total depravity denies that.

So total depravity means that sin has touched every aspect of our being. That is the first thing to understand about total depravity. It is not a statement of intensity. It is not a statement of depth. It is a statement of breadth.

Sin has touched our intellect. It has touched our conscience. It has touched our will. It has touched our deeds. It has touched our speech. It has touched our feet. My feet are swift to shed blood, metaphorically (Proverbs 1:16, 6:18; Isaiah 59:7-8; Romans 3:15).

It has touched my heart. It has touched my physical body. Have you looked in the mirror lately? Have you been to your high school reunion lately? I went to my thirty-year high school reunion.

I called it, "the night of the living dead," basically. Most of the people were unrecognizable, as was I to them. What the heck happened to us? Total depravity has touched our total being.

I wish I had time today to walk you through these verses explaining "total." But I just want you to see the big picture of total depravity.

Total depravity also means that man, although capable of doing good things, is completely and totally incapable of doing anything good to merit God's favor.

A lost person in depravity can do a lot of wonderful things, but they cannot do a single thing that will merit God's favor towards them.

The only thing they can do to merit God's favor towards them in their fallen state is to trust in the work that Jesus did for him 2,000 years ago. Other than that, they are unaccepted.

That is what total depravity means. It does not mean that man is as bad as he can be. It does not mean that man indulges every sin that can be indulged.

It does not mean that man, even when he is convicted by the Holy Spirit, has no ability to trust in the Savior. It means none of those things.

But Calvinism has taken something that is basically true and brought it out in a disproportionate way to build a theological system.

What total depravity does mean is that every part of me has been touched by sin, even my mind. And in that state, I am completely and totally incapable of meriting God's favor.

You have to get these definitions straight from the get-go, or you will be pulled into all kinds of strange teachings. We will build on this when we reconvene next time.