

Week 7 - Total Depravity

All Have Sinned

Learning Objectives

- To recognize the presence and impact of sin in our own lives.
- To confess recognized sin to God.

Steps to Prepare

- Decide how you'd like to use the designated time for confession based on your group dynamics. If you're opting for people spreading out to journal, etc., make sure you have adequate space for people to do so comfortably.
- Ensure you have enough **printed** handouts, pens, etc. for the designated confession time (this is an additional handout from the one that lists the questions in this study).

Pray for your time together as a group.

? Do you think people are inherently good or bad? Why?

Possible Answers: People are inherently bad; we are born sinful. This doesn't mean that people are emotionless monsters who do the most evil they possibly can; people still do kind, thoughtful, selfless things. At their core, though, people's hearts are eaten away by sin and can only be healed by Christ.

People are inherently good because they are born with a "clean slate." Being in the world and exposure to temptation, etc. is what leads them to sin.

Leader's Note: People may have strong feelings and opposite stances on this topic. Try to keep things from getting heated (if that's a concern in your group).

This study launches our look at another aspect of the Reformation, one most often associated with John Calvin, though it has its roots in earlier theologians and reformers. "The issue of the nature of salvation has been debated throughout church history. Some of the more pressing questions include: What is the proper balance between God's sovereignty and God's love in the salvation process? What is the nature of God's grace, and how does it work in a human life? To what degree has sin affected human freedom? And does human freedom play a central role in conversion?" (*Across the Spectrum*, pg. 133). One approach to these questions is summarized by the acronym TULIP.

T--Total Depravity

U--Unconditional Election

L--Limited Atonement

I--Irresistible Grace

P--Perseverance of the Saints

We'll spend several small group studies unpacking these concepts.

Read Out Loud: Total Depravity means that sin has infiltrated every single area of our lives. It means that we are in a fallen world where things are not the way they are supposed to be. It does not mean, however, that we are as evil as we could possibly be, or that people do evil deeds always. It just means that every single area of our lives is tainted by sin.

? What is sin? What does it mean that we are sinners?

Possible Answers: Sin is the wrong people do against one another and against God. Every person on Earth sins, with one exception: only Jesus was free of sin. Because we are sinners, we need a savior! Some references you can look at are Genesis 3 (the fall) and Romans 1.

Read Out Loud: Ephesians 2:1-3 (NIV)

¹As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, ²in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. ³All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath.

? What are the consequences of sin? How have you seen these in your life or the lives of those you know?

Possible Answers: All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23). Sin leads to death--most importantly, spiritual death, and often to damage in other more tangible ways. Sin causes separation from God. My sin struggles led me to emotional "death" in my inability to be real and connect with anyone. There was momentary fun and excitement in my choices, but it didn't actually fill me.

? What does it mean to gratify the cravings of the flesh? Why does that make us "deserving of wrath" (vs. 3)?

Possible Answers: Gratifying the cravings of the flesh means doing what you want to do, even if you know it's not what God wants you to do. Gratifying our sinful flesh leads to us disobeying and sinning against God. That makes us deserve His righteous wrath at our selfish disobedience.

Optional Transition: Paul has quite a bit to say about what sin means and its impact on our lives throughout Romans. Let's take a look at one passage in particular that helps us understand this more.

Read Out Loud: Romans 3:10b-23 (NIV)

¹⁰... "There is no one righteous, not even one;

¹¹there is no one who understands;

there is no one who seeks God.

¹²All have turned away,

they have together become worthless;

there is no one who does good,

not even one."

¹³"Their throats are open graves;

their tongues practice deceit."

"The poison of vipers is on their lips."

¹⁴"Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness."

¹⁵“Their feet are swift to shed blood;
¹⁶ruin and misery mark their ways,
¹⁷and the way of peace they do not know.”
¹⁸“There is no fear of God before their eyes.”

¹⁹Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. ²⁰Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God’s sight by the works of the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin.

²¹But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. ²²This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, ²³for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God...

? Paul utilizes strong imagery found in the Old Testament in this passage to evoke a response in his audience. How does his description of our unrighteousness make you feel? What images in particular land with you?

Leader’s Note: Romans 3:10b-23 is referencing eight different Old Testament passages: Psalm 14:1-3; Psalm 53:1-3; Ecclesiastes 7:20; Psalm 5:9; Psalm 140:3; Psalm 10:7, Isaiah 59:7-8; and Psalm 36:1.

? Why are we tempted to compare the severity of our sin with others’? How is this challenged by what we just read?

Possible Answers: It helps us feel better – like we aren’t as bad as “that” person. It helps us justify what we’re doing. All of us sin, and no one is better than anyone else: all who sin are sinners in God’s eyes.

? Which portions of this passage do you struggle to actually believe? What does it look like to have a healthy understanding of and attitude towards our own sins?

Possible Answers: It can be hard to believe that my own sin is “that bad”, especially when it’s “not as bad” as other people’s. I want to justify myself and believe that I’m a good person! A healthy understanding of my own sin means that I recognize sin and acknowledge its badness, and that I confess and ask forgiveness. I need to hate my sin and resist temptation, even when it’s hard to not do what I want.

“God regards the human race as an organic whole, a unity, represented by Adam as its head. And God also thinks of the new race of Christians, those who are redeemed by Christ, as an organic whole, a unity represented by Christ as head of his people.”

--Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, Pgs. 495-496

? How do we fight against sin and temptation? What should be our response as we come to understand our total depravity? Optional: Why is this response so counter-cultural?

Possible Answers: We fight sin and temptation by seeking God and turning away from our sinful desires. We can pray; talk to others who will hold us accountable; avoid situations that are likely to lead to sin; and seek others' wisdom about how they fight sin and temptation. We need to be utterly humbled and accept our brokenness so that we can fully accept Jesus' saving grace.

This idea of humble acceptance of brokenness would probably shock and confuse non-Christians, who place a lot of value on appearance and being seen to be good.

Optional Transition: Recognizing the depth of our sin should compel us to seek Christ.

? Do you have a preferred way of confessing sin to God? What does it look like? What impact does confession have on you?

Possible Answers: In writing, through spoken or unspoken prayer, to others, etc. There is no right answer, but a wrong answer would be that one does not confess their sin. Confession is essential for right perspective and to allow one to ask God for forgiveness!

Read Out Loud: As we've spent some time discussing sin tonight, we're going to also spend some time in confession.

Leaders' Note: Choose which format works best for your group, whether large groups of men and women, small accountability groups, one-on-one partners, or individual journaling and prayer. The goal for this time is not to make people feel like they need to confess something "big," but rather that they can have an open time of sharing what's on their mind. Distribute copies of the "Guided Confession" handout to your group for this time. Spend 15-20 minutes in this time before coming back together to close.

Spend time in prayer and confession.

Optional Transition As You Return To Your Large Group Time: Confession should draw us near to God and lead us to rejoice in His forgiveness. Today's study may be hard as you recognize your sinful nature. But we have hope! We're not going to spend a lot of time on this, since future studies will explore it more thoroughly, but God has good news for us. Let's re-examine the passage we read at the start of our study, adding a few verses.

Read Out Loud: Ephesians 2:1-5 (NIV)

¹As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, ²in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. ³All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath. ⁴But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in

The untamed God gives undeserved mercy to unresponsive sinners.

-Proof: Finding Freedom through the Intoxicating Joy of Irresistible Grace, Montgomery & Jones

mercy, ⁵ made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved.

? What freedom does God give you now that you live under grace?

Possible Answers: We have the freedom of forgiveness! We no longer have to live under the debilitating weight of our sin. God doesn't leave us wallowing in fear, guilt, and death. We have a living hope!

? How does viewing Jesus as your only hope change the way you relate to Him, think of Him, worship Him, and love Him?

Possible Answers: I feel awe of Him, gratitude, respect, hope, and a desire to share Him so that others may feel as free and clean and joyful as I feel!

For Discussion and Accountability

? As Christians we are called to live a life of repentance. How will you spend time this week in reflection and prayer about unconfessed sin in your life?

? What does it look like for you to truly live like someone who is forgiven?

Leader's Note: Depending on how you chose to spend your time in confession, you may wish to bring it up during accountability time and offer to follow up with people regarding what they've confessed/shared.