

## **Doctrine of Total Depravity**

### **The Remonstrance**

1. An event took place in 1618, just prior to the Pilgrim's landing on the shores of New England having come across the ocean on the Mayflower.
2. The Synod of Dordt (1618-1619), was held in order to settle controversy in the Dutch churches initiated by the rise of Arminianism, a system of theology based on the teachings of Jacobus Arminius (October 10, 1560 – October 19, 1609).
3. The Synod met in the city of Dordrecht as a national assembly of the Dutch Reformed Church, to which were also invited voting representatives from the Reformed churches in eight foreign countries.
4. The convocation and proceedings of the Synod of Dordt (1618- 1619) may be considered among the most interesting events of the seventeenth century.

“The Westminster Assembly was indeed more immediately interesting to British and American Presbyterians, yet the Synod of Dordt had a species of importance peculiar to itself and altogether pre-eminent.

It was not merely a meeting of select divines of a single nation, but a convention of the Calvinistic world, to bear testimony against a rising and obtrusive error; to settle a question in which all the Reformed churches of Europe had an immediate and deep interest.

The question was whether the opinions of Arminius, which were then agitating so many minds, could be reconciled with the confession of the Belgic churches" (Thomas Scott, *The Articles of the Synod of Dort*, Sprinkle Publications, 1993 reprint, p. 5.).

5. The Synod of Dordt convened on November 13, 1618 consisting of 39 pastors and 18 ruling Elders from the Belgic churches, 5 professors from the universities of Holland, 19 delegates from the Reformed churches in Germany and Switzerland, and 5 professors and bishops from Great Britain.
6. France was also invited, but did not attend.
7. The Synod constituted of 86 voting members in all.
8. There were 154 formal sessions, and many side conferences held during the six months that the Synod met to consider these matters.
9. The last session of the Synod was held on May 9, 1619.
10. What the Synod produced was a document called the Remonstrance, because those who were in attendance were protesting the formal principles of the Reformation, beginning with the idea of the total depravity of the human heart.

11. Total Depravity became the first of five core doctrines objected to by the Dutch protestors.
12. An acrostic was formed, based on the first letter representing each doctrinal distinctive. The acrostic formed the word, TULIP.
  - Total Depravity
  - Unconditional Election
  - Limited Atonement
  - Irresistible Grace
  - Perseverance of the Saints
13. The Doctrine of Total Depravity sets forth the Biblical view of the terrible plight, and sinfulness of man.
14. Every person is born physically alive, but spiritually dead, in the sight of God. The natural condition of man is that of exceeding sinfulness.

***Special Note.***

This is a vital doctrine. If a person comes to understand, and embraces the doctrine of man's total depravity, the rest of the doctrines will naturally fall into place. If a person rejects the doctrine of man's total depravity, then, logically, every Protestant can return to the Roman Catholic Church, for salvation becomes a work of synergism where by man, by his will, and God, by His grace, unite to effect salvation. The Protestant Reformation will have been for nothing, and Romans 1:17 will be overthrown.

- *Romans 1:17 For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith.*
15. The first time the teaching of the desperate condition of the natural man become a controversy in the church was during the days of St. Augustine (November 13, AD 354 – August 25, AD 430, age 75).
  16. A British monk named Pelagius (c. AD 360- 418), protested against a statement written by Augustine, wherein he said, “Oh God, command what Thou wouldst, and grant what Thou dost commanded.”
  17. Pelagius did not mind the first part of the prayer, but was offended by the latter part of the prayer.
  18. Pelagius did not want God to grant what He commanded, for the creature would not morally be able to do the will of God. The controversy began.
  19. The controversy had to do with the doctrine of original sin.

20. The term, original sin, is often misunderstood. It does not refer to the actual first sin of Adam and Eve, but to the consequences that occurred as a result of the Fall.
21. Virtually, every church, and every creed, confirms that something happened to the human race in the Fall. The first sin produced original sin.
22. As a result of the sin of Adam, the nature of man was changed, so that from birth, the soul is inclined to do wrong.
23. Humans are born in a state of sin.
- *Psalms 51:5 Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me.*
  - *Psalms 58:3 The wicked are estranged from the womb: they go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies.*
24. People are not sinners because they sin. Rather, people sin because they are sinners. By nature, individuals sin.
25. The doctrine of original sin has its roots in the teachings of St. Augustine. His teachings would one day influence Martin Luther, in Wittenberg and John Calvin in Geneva.
26. What Total Depravity does not mean is “Utter Depravity. No person is as bad as they can be at any given moment, for there are depths of sin which are deeper still.
27. No human being is as bad as they can be, not even Adolf Hitler. He showed kindness and affection to some, such as Eva Braun.
28. What Total Depravity does mean, is that the Fall was so complete it affects the totality of man.
- The body becomes ill and dies.
  - The mind is full of wicked imaginations, and is darkened.
  - The will is perverted, and chooses that which is sinful, and harmful, to self, and to others.
  - The soul is enslaved to the evil impulses of the heart. It has lost its moral purity.
29. Most Christians would agree that the Fall has affected man in every facet of his soul.
30. The issue then becomes, to what degree has man been affected. Augustine believed the degree to which the soul has been affected, or influenced, is so extensive as to render the natural person unable to do anything to effect, or cause their own salvation. Pelagius disagreed.
31. Pelagius argued that while the soul of man has been damaged by the Fall, the extent of that damage is not total.

32. Man is not wholly depraved. He can do something to affect, or influence, his own salvation. A person can do something to effect, or cause God to show them mercy and grace.
33. According to Pelagius, man can repent. He can feel sorrow for sin. He can choose to be saved. He can believe in Christ.
34. Such teaching by Pelagius alarmed Augustine, who insisted on the Radical Corruption of the soul.
35. The word, radical, has its root in the Latin word for, root or core. The idea of radical refers to something that permeates to the core. It is not something that is tangential, or superficial.
36. Sin is not something that has superficially affected man. Sin has penetrated to the core of man's essence.
37. Man is not basically good, as the world suggests, and as many Christians believe. Man is basically evil, according to Biblical revelation, and according to honest analysis.
- *Mark 10:18 And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God.*
  - *Romans 3:10 As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: 11 There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. 12 They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one.*
  - *Psalms 14:1 To the chief Musician, A Psalm of David. 14 The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God. They are corrupt, they have done abominable works, there is none that doeth good. 2 The Lord looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, and seek God. 3 They are all gone aside, they are all together become filthy: there is none that doeth good, no, not one.*
  - *1 John 1:8 If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.*
  - *1 John 1: 10 If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.*
38. While the doctrine of Total Depravity, or Radical Corruption, is not flattering, and does not enhance man's self-esteem, it is an honest analysis of the human heart. It is also an important analysis.
39. Every doctor knows that a wrong diagnosis can lead to the wrong treatment.
40. Theologically, the same is true. A wrong understanding of the nature of man can lead to a wrong treatment, or teaching, such as that man can do something to effect, or cause his own salvation.

- 41.** Pelagius could never sing the words written by August M. Toplady.

“Rock of Ages, cleft for me,  
 Let me hide myself in Thee;  
 Let the water and the blood,  
 From Thy wounded side which flowed,  
 Be of sin the double cure;  
 Save from wrath and make me pure.

Not the labor of my hands  
 Can fulfill Thy law’s demands;  
 Could my zeal no respite know,  
 Could my tears forever flow,  
 All for sin could not atone;  
 Thou must save, and Thou alone.

Nothing in my hand I bring,  
 Simply to the cross I cling;  
 Naked, come to Thee for dress;  
 Helpless look to Thee for grace;  
 Foul, I to the fountain fly;  
 Wash me, Savior, or I die.

While I draw this fleeting breath,  
 When mine eyes shall close in death,  
 When I soar to worlds unknown,  
 See Thee on Thy judgment throne,  
 Rock of Ages, cleft for me,  
 Let me hide myself in Thee.”

- 42.** By insisting on the basic goodness of man, people view sin as something that is accidental, or peripheral. Sin is not a core issue to be addressed, but a defilement to be understood, and treated with self-help programs, one of which is religion. Soon, the individual can feel good about themselves again.

“Every day, and in every way,  
 I am getting better and better.”

- 43.** Humanism teaches that while there are problems with humanity, education, social, and economic equality will solve the problems.
- 44.** The Bible teaches that sin has penetrated man to the core. No amount of moral reformation, self-esteem, or social welfare program will solve the natural condition of the human heart. Every person must be born again by the Spirit of the living God.
- 45.** Sin is something that comes from the core, or heart of man.

- *Matthew 15:19 For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies:*
- *Mark 7:21 For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders,*

**46.** Something more is needed than small adjustments, or moral reformation. The core of man, the heart of man, must change a person.