

## THE LOST CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE:

“If the case be such indeed, that all mankind are by nature in a state of total ruin, then doubtless, the great salvation by Christ stands in direct relation to this ruin, as the remedy to the disease.” Jonathan Edwards

The lost Christian doctrine of total depravity has been found by many who believe the Bible. Satan has done his best to try and rid it from the writings and language of most modern day preachers while any true Bible believing Christian needs only to go back two-hundred years and read the writings of all the great Baptist preachers of their day to know that the Baptist people back then believed the greatest doctrine in all of Holy Scripture preached by Jesus Christ, Himself. That is that human nature is utterly depraved. This treaty is written to disprove the lie propagated by such modern day preachers as the late Adrian Roger's, who claimed to have destroyed the Bible doctrine of total depravity. One only needs to read his defense of the goodness of human nature to see how the devil has deceived his thinking. Here is absolute proof, biblically, that human nature is depraved. No matter how spiritually ignorant Adrian Rogers was and how deceivingly he tried to destroy what the Bible plainly teaches on the great truth of complete depravity.

*Disclaimer:* As to Doctrine I am a Baptist from the top of my head to the soles of my feet. Baptist doctrine is Bible doctrine and if it is not Bible doctrine it is not Baptist doctrine. Many men of the past such as John Calvin and John Wesley were not Baptist's but still in their writings were sound biblically on such subjects as the inability of men to save themselves or the doing of any good to please God. Some quotes of these men are used here to prove and validate Holy Scripture. No Baptist in any age has ever disproven or denied that the Doctrine of Total Depravity is not sound biblical teaching. Thus, this writing is in defense of the total ruination of man through the fall of Adam in the Garden of Eden.

Written by Aaron Brake

Author Dennis Prager stated, “No issue has a greater influence on determining your social and political views than whether you view human nature as basically good or not.”

I think Prager is correct. But even more important and foundational than your social and political views, your view of human nature has important ramifications with regard to your theology. Perhaps second only to what you believe about God, no issue has greater influence on determining your theological views than whether you view human nature as basically good or not. It is no coincidence that theological liberals who deny doctrines such as original sin and human depravity also, more often than not, end up rejecting other Scriptural teachings such as justification by grace through faith, the necessity and exclusivity of Jesus Christ for salvation, penal substitutionary atonement, the biblical doctrine of hell, or just simply scratch their head and wonder inquisitively when reading Scriptural passages concerning God’s judgment on sin, the flood, destruction of the Canaanites, etc. They ask themselves, “Why is God so mad all the time? I don’t understand!”

Much of modern secular sensibility seems attracted to the idea that human beings at their core are basically good. In his book *What Americans Believe*, George Barna of Barna Research Group found that 87% of non-Christians agreed with the statement “People are basically good.” But this belief in the inherent goodness of humankind isn’t peculiar to non-Christians. It has found its way into the Church as well. In that same study, Barna also found that 77% of self-described born-again Christians agreed with the statement. Perhaps most shocking, of those self-described born-again Christians who identify themselves as mainline Protestant, 90% agreed with the statement “People are basically good.”

This was the thinking of teacher and theologian Langdon Gilkey before he became a prisoner at a Japanese internment camp during World War II. But after spending two-and-a-half years with 2,000 other men, women, and children, and directly witnessing the inherent selfishness, greed, and general rudeness of his fellow internees, he came to the exact opposite conclusion:

“The camp was an excellent place in which to observe the inner secrets of our own human selves, especially when there were no extras to fall back on and when the thin polish of easy morality and of just dealing was worn off. For one of the peculiar conceits of modern optimism, a conceit which I had fully shared is the belief that in time of crisis the goodness of men comes forward. Nothing indicates so clearly the fixed belief in the innate goodness of humans as does this confidence that when the chips are down, and we are revealed for what we ‘really are,’ we will all be good to each other. Nothing could be so totally wrong and in error.

A Lesson from Calvin: “Knowledge of God and Knowledge of Self”  
One of the original and most influential Protestants, John Calvin viewed the matter of human depravity quite differently than self-described Christians today. The 16<sup>th</sup> century Protestant Reformer is best known for his masterpiece “Institutes of the Christian Religion.” What is interesting to note is the topic which Calvin chooses to begin his entire magnum opus with: knowledge of God and knowledge of self. He states,

“Nearly all wisdom we possess, that is to say, true and sound wisdom, consists of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves.”

Calvin argues that unless a person possesses a proper knowledge of self he will never have a proper knowledge of God. He states, “Thus, from the feeling of our own ignorance, vanity, poverty, infirmity, and what is more, depravity and corruption, we recognize that the true light of wisdom, sound virtue, full abundance of every good, and purity of righteousness rest in the Lord alone.” Calvin goes on to say that until we become displeased with ourselves we cannot aspire, nor would we ever be aroused, to seek God.

Likewise, unless an individual possesses a proper knowledge of God he can never have a proper knowledge of self. Calvin states, “As long as we do not look beyond the earth, being quite content with our own righteousness, wisdom, and virtue, we flatter ourselves most sweetly, and fancy ourselves all but demigods.” As long as we fail to see God for who He truly is, in all His majesty, we will never recognize or scrutinize our own lowly state but rather will continue to view ourselves in our natural fallen condition as “basically good.”

If Calvin was right and I think he was, this means that anyone believing in the intrinsic moral goodness of fallen man in his naturally born, unregenerate state has two problems: he possesses a false sense of self as well as a deficient understanding of the holiness of God.

Calvinism vs. Arminianism: Why Can't We All Just Get Along? Isn't human depravity just a Calvinistic doctrine then? No, it's a biblical doctrine first and foremost, and though Calvinists and Armenians have traditionally been at opposite ends of the theological spectrum on a number of issues, historically they have agreed on at least one point: total depravity. Total depravity of course does not mean that human beings are as bad as they possibly could be. All people are not always bad all of the time. Rather total depravity means that no part of our being remains untouched and unaffected by the corruption of sin. Sin has enslaved the total person:

It is not just that some parts of us are sinful and others are pure. Rather, every part of our being is affected by sin, our intellects, our emotions and desires, our hearts, the center of our desires and decision-making processes, our goals and motives, and even our physical bodies. Paul says, "I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh" Rom. 7:18, and, "to the corrupt and unbelieving nothing is pure; their very minds and consciences are corrupted" Titus 1:15. Moreover, Jeremiah tells us that "the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately corrupt; who can understand it?" Jer. 17:9. In these passages Scripture is not denying that unbelievers can do well in human society in some senses. But it is denying that they can do any spiritual good or be good in terms of a relationship with God. Apart from the work of Christ in our lives, we are like all other unbelievers who are "darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart" Eph. 4:18. Our totally depraved human nature as fallen human beings leads to a total inability on our part to do any spiritual good or to please God:

Not only do we as sinners lack any spiritual good in ourselves, but we also lack the ability to do anything that will in itself please God and the ability to come to God in our own strength. Paul says that "those who are in the flesh cannot please God" Rom. 8:8. Moreover, in terms

of bearing fruit for God's kingdom and doing what pleases him, Jesus says, "Apart from me you can do nothing" John 15:5. In fact, unbelievers are not pleasing to God, if for no other reason, simply because their actions do not proceed from faith in God or from love to him, and "without faith it is impossible to please him" Heb. 11:6. When Paul's readers were unbelievers, he tells them, "You were dead through the trespasses and sins in which you once walked" Eph. 2:1-2. Unbelievers are in a state of bondage or enslavement to sin, because "everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin" John 8:34. Though from a human standpoint people might be able to do much good, Isaiah affirms that "all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment" Isa. 64:6; Rom. 3:9-20. Unbelievers are not even able to understand the things of God correctly, for the "natural man does not receive the gifts 'things' of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned" 1 Cor. 2:14. Nor can we come to God in our own power, for Jesus says, "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him" John 6:44.

This then is the sad state of fallen humanity into which we are born: dead in trespasses and sins Eph. 2:1-2, by nature children of wrath Eph. 2:3 and enemies of God Rom. 5:10, darkened in understanding, excluded from the life of God, ignorant, and hard of heart Eph. 4:18, in bondage to sin John 8:34, unable to please God Rom. 8:8, unable to accept and understand the things of God 1 Cor. 2:14, and unable to come to God in our own power John 6:44.

This is the teaching of Scripture. Historically, this has also been the teaching of Baptist and both Calvinists and Armenians. That Calvinists affirm total depravity is a given. But what is not so well known is that Jacob Arminius, after whom Arminianism is named, agreed with the doctrine of total depravity and affirmed the bondage of the will:

James Arminius was emphatic in his rejection of Pelagianism, particularly with respect to the fall of Adam. The fall leaves man in a ruined state, under the dominion of sin. Arminius declares: "In this state, the Free Will of man towards the True Good is not only wounded, maimed, infirm, bent, and weakened; but it is also imprisoned, destroyed and lost. And its powers are not only

debilitated and useless unless they are assisted by grace, but it has no powers whatever except such as is excited by Divine grace.”

Commenting on this quote from Arminius, R.C. Sproul states,

“The above citation from one of Arminius’s works demonstrates how seriously he regards the depths of the fall. He is not satisfied to declare that man’s will was merely wounded or weakened. He insists that it was “imprisoned, destroyed, and lost.” The language of Augustine, Martin Luther, or John Calvin is scarcely stronger than that of Arminius.

After further citations of Arminius regarding his view of the effects of the fall and human depravity, Sproul summarizes the views of Arminius this way:

“Arminius not only affirms the bondage of the will, but insists that natural man, being dead in sin, exists in a state of moral inability or impotence. What more could an Augustinian or Calvinist hope for from a theologian? Arminius then declares that the only remedy for man’s fallen condition is the gracious operation of God’s Spirit. The will of man is not free to do any good unless it is made free or liberated by the Son of God through the Spirit of God.

When it comes to “Calvinism” then, it could be said that Jacob Arminius was really a one-point Calvinist! But Arminius was not the only “Armenian” to hold to total depravity and the bondage of the will. John Wesley, the eighteenth-century revivalist after whom the Wesleyan-Armenian theological tradition is named, also affirmed the total corruption of fallen humankind, our bondage to sin, as well as our inability to choose the good and choose God:

I believe that Adam, before his fall, had such freedom of the will, that he might choose either good or evil; but that, since the fall, no child of man has a natural power to choose anything that is truly good. Yet I know and who does not? That man has still freedom of will in things of indifferent nature.

Such is the freedom of the will; free only to evil; free to “drink iniquity like water;” to wander farther and farther from the living God, and do more “despite to the Spirit of grace!”

Wesley scholars have acknowledged these points:

Harald Lindström: “Wesley maintains that natural man is totally corrupt.” He is “sinful through and through, has no knowledge of God and no power to turn to him of his own free will.”

Robert V. Rakestraw: In Wesley’s theology “men and women are born in sin and unable in themselves to make the least move toward God.”

Colin W. Williams: “Because of original sin, the natural man is ‘dead to God’ and unable to move toward God or respond to him.”

Leo G. Cox: “By nature man receives nothing that is good. He is free but free only to do evil and to follow on in the way of sin.”

Thomas Schreiner sums up Wesley’s view of the human condition this way:

The Wesleyan analysis of the human condition does not differ fundamentally from the Calvinistic or Baptist one. Indeed, in 1745 John Wesley said that his theology was “within a hair’s breadth” of Calvinism “In ascribing all good to the free grace of God. It is in denying all natural free-will, and all power antecedent to grace. And, in excluding all merit from man; even for what he has or does by the grace of God.” Wesley’s analysis of the human condition and his bold proclamation of divine grace should warm the heart of any evangelical Christian.

Historically then, what the Calvinists and Armenians have disagreed on is not the utterly depraved and corrupt condition of fallen man in his naturally born, unregenerate state. They both acknowledge that the natural man is born in bondage to sin and can do no good apart from the grace of God. What they disagreed on was the SOLUTION to this problem. Calvinists argued that God’s saving grace, which is only for those born again, is always irresistible and efficacious it always accomplishes its purpose in bringing the penitent sinner to salvation.

Armenians agreed that God's grace is indeed prevenient, it comes before conversion, but argued that this grace is given to all men indiscriminately such that it overcomes the effects of the fall to the extent that humankind is now enabled to cooperate with this grace by properly exercising their free will in choosing to accept the offer of salvation, or else resist God's grace and continue in their willful rebellion.

Historically then, the debate was not over the fact of human depravity and the inability of man in his fallen condition to choose the good and to choose God. Rather it was over whether or not the grace of regeneration was resistible Arminianism or irresistible Calvinism, whether prevenient grace was merely a necessary condition for salvation, Arminianism is both a necessary and sufficient condition for salvation, Calvinism, whether God's grace for salvation is resistibly sufficient for faith and conversion Arminianism or irresistibly efficient for faith and conversion, Calvinism.

To summarize, Christians today who hold to the innate goodness of fallen, unregenerate man do not stand squarely with Scripture. But neither do they stand squarely in either the historic Calvinist or Armenian tradition.

The idea that "people are basically good" simply isn't a Christian one. For any Christian who may deny, protest, or be hesitant to accept the teaching of Scripture with regard to human depravity, I would simply challenge you to produce a single verse which says anything positive regarding the spiritual condition or spiritual ability of the "natural man" in his naturally born, unregenerate state. As far as I know, there are none.

I'm okay, you're okay, and we're all okay: Are people "basically good"? So where does the idea that "people are basically good" come from? Certainly, not from Scripture! As discussed above, Scripture does not paint a pretty picture of the natural man and the current human condition. Where then does it come from?

What about Experience? Does experience lend credence to the innate goodness of human beings? Perhaps some will say, "I know a lot of good people." More often than not I think this confuses niceness with



goodness, an idea we will develop further below. For now I simply want to draw your attention to the daunting task of parenting.

If the idea that “people are basically good” is true, then the segment of our population which should best evidence this is children. After all, if children are born pure and innocent, inclined toward good, or perhaps as a “blank slate” without any inclination toward good or evil, then we would only have to keep them from immoral influences in order to guarantee or solidify their “basic goodness.”

But anyone who has raised children already has insight into the depravity of our fallen human nature, and along with this reason to reject the idea that people are basically good. As parents we do not need to teach our child how to lie or disobey, be selfish, impatient, or self-serving. Children from a very early age, from the very moment they are able to engage in sin, not only do engage in sin but struggle not to. Why is this? Why the struggle if people are basically good? It seems we are struggling against our innate immoral inclinations. If we were born inherently good our struggle would be the exact opposite: it would be a struggle to be selfish, impatient, rude, and self-serving. But I don't know anyone who wrestles with that problem. And why do we have inclinations to engage in immoral behavior at such a young age if people are basically good? Where did these inclinations come from? As soon as our children are old enough to disobey and lie to us, they do. As soon as they are old enough to be selfish and rude, they are. These things seem to come naturally to them, indeed, to all of us.

What we do find ourselves doing as parents is working hard to instill moral virtues and right principles in our children. Again, why is this if people are basically good? Perhaps it is because human beings possess a fallen nature and are inherently selfish, prideful, and narcissistic. When things become difficult and our present situation isn't looking so good, our first and natural inclination is to always look out for ourselves before others. Isn't this true? We fight against those urges precisely because we are not innately good nor inclined toward moral virtuosity. The inherited corruption children possess from the womb is evidence for our sinful and fallen condition, not the idea that people are basically good.

Some may respond to this by arguing it is the corrupting effect of degenerate society that is spoiling our children. This answer is problematic:

Man is born in a state of innocence, they say, but he is subsequently corrupted by the immoral influence of society. This idea begs the question, how did society become corrupt in the first place? If all people are born innocent or in a state of moral neutrality, with no predisposition to sin, why do not at least a statistical average of 50% of the people remain innocent? Why can we find no societies in which the prevailing influence is to virtue rather than vice? Why does not society influence us to maintain our natural innocence? Even the most sanguine critics of human nature, those who insist that man is basically good, repeat the persistent axiomatic aphorism “Nobody’s perfect.” Why is no one perfect? If man is good at the core of his heart and evil is peripheral, tangential, or accidental, why does not the core win out over the tangent, the substance over the accidents? To be sure, it seems hard to make sense of the war, violence, corruption, hatred, selfishness, narcissism, and general human wickedness in this world if you start with the premise “people are basically good.” Again, for those who may deny, protest, or be hesitant to accept the reality of human corruption and depravity evidenced from human experience, I would simply challenge you to answer these questions honestly: What would happen if the restraining effects of law enforcement and government were suddenly removed from societies around the world? Would we enter into a blissful state of utopia, holding hands and singing “Kumbaya,” because people are basically good? Or would we rather see anarchy and chaos break out on a worldwide scale as the true nature of fallen humankind becomes unrestrained and unencumbered? Answering these questions honestly gives us insight into the human condition. The very need for evil-restraining entities such as law enforcement and government presupposes the depravity of man.

What about Evolution?

Supposing the grand theory of Darwinian evolution is true, could it ground the fact that people are basically good? It doesn’t seem so. How can the truth that “people are basically good” arise from a system which purportedly produced all living things through a dog-eat-dog, survival of the fittest process? A “survival of the fittest”

mentality has more in common with narcissism and self-preservation than it does the maxim “Love your neighbor as yourself.” And how are altruistic virtues such as charity, self-denial, and love derived from time, matter, mutation, and natural selection? Naturalistic processes working on material entities cannot explain the emergence and existence of immaterial objective moral values and principles. Some Darwinists will argue that morality itself is the product of evolution since “being moral” can aid in self-preservation. This simply proves my point. Morality that is used merely as a means to the end of preserving oneself is not truly altruistic but rather narcissistic. This should not even qualify as a morality, nor does it lend credibility to the idea that people are basically good.

What about Human History?

Does human history teach us that people are basically good? To answer this I point you to an article by Clay Jones, **“We Don’t Take Human Evil Seriously so We Don’t Understand Why We Suffer.”** In this paper Jones quickly surveys only some of the most horrendous atrocities perpetuated by human beings, and these only within the last 100 years:

1. Soviet Union: From 1917-89, 20 to 26 million people were murdered for political reasons, including 6 million Ukrainians who were starved to death.
2. Germany: 13 million people murdered in the Holocaust, including approximately 6 million Jews. All of this was despite the fact that Hitler was calling for the death of the Jews 20 years before his rise to power.
3. China: Under the Chinese communists, 26 to 30 million “counter-revolutionaries” were murdered or died in prison. Mao Tse Tung boasted of burying 46,000 scholars alive.
4. Japan: In December, 1937, over 300,000 Chinese were raped, tortured, and murdered in the city of Nanking.
5. Turkey: From 1915-23, 1.2 million Armenians were murdered, introducing the phrase “crimes against humanity.”
6. Cambodia: From 1975-79, under Pol Pot 2 million Cambodians were murdered out of a population of 7 million in an effort to return to an agrarian culture.
7. Rwanda: In 1994, out of a population of 8 million, 800,000 people were murdered in 100 days, mostly by machete.

8. United States: Since 1973, 50 million unborn human beings have been murdered through abortion, largely though scalding alive with saline solution, dismemberment, or suctioning apart piece by piece. Reflecting on the horrible things human beings can do to one another, we may be tempted to say, "That's inhuman!" On the contrary, humans did this! This is the human condition. Apart from the grace of God, fallen humankind is capable of horrendous evil. The evidence of human history is no friend to the idea that people are basically good.

The failure of the Marxist enterprise was due not only to poor economic theory but also because it took for granted the idea that people are inherently good. For example, Karl Marx famously said, "From each according to his ability, to each according to his need." This assumes the innate goodness of humankind by supposing that individuals will work their hardest to ensure the greatest productivity possible, it assumes the greatest producers will act completely selfless even though the fruit of their labor will go to someone else. It also assumes individuals will not take advantage of the system by being lazy since regardless of their work ethic they will still receive their "fair share." So if man is indeed good, as the thinking goes, all that is needed is the creation of an egalitarian society and utopia on earth would inevitably result. But the utopian dream is a myth which will never be realized precisely because it fails to take into account the depravity and self-interest of fallen humankind. Despite the failed attempts and mass casualties associated with communism, many are still attracted to this worldview. In the words of Thomas Sowell, "Socialism in general has a record of failure so blatant that only an intellectual could ignore or evade it."

What about Psychology? "The Stanley Milgram Experiment:"  
What does psychology tell us about man? Due to space restraints we will only look at one of the most well known psychological experiments of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a study on obedience to authority conducted by Stanley Milgram from 1960-63:

This exploration of obedience was initially motivated by Milgram's reflections on the ease with which the German people obeyed Nazi authority in discriminating against Jews and, eventually, in allowing Hitler's Final Solution to be enacted during the Holocaust. As a young

Jewish man, he wondered if the Holocaust could be recreated in his own country, despite the many differences in those cultures and historical epochs. Though many said it could never happen in the United States, Milgram doubted whether we should be so sure. Milgram states,

“It has been reliably established that from 1933 to 1945 millions of innocent people were systematically slaughtered on command. Gas chambers were built, death camps were guarded, and daily quotas of corpses were produced with the same efficiency as the manufacture of appliances. These inhumane policies may have originated in the mind of a single person, but they could only have been carried out on a massive scale if a very large number of people obeyed orders.”

The details of Milgram’s experiment are as follows:

Two people come to a psychology laboratory to take part in a study of memory and learning. One of them is designated as a “teacher” and the other a “learner.” The experimenter explains that the study is concerned with the effects of punishment on learning. The learner is conducted into a room, seated in a chair, his arms strapped to prevent excessive movement, and an electrode attached to his wrist. He is told that he is to learn a list of word pairs; whenever he makes an error, he will receive electric shocks of increasing intensity.

The real focus of the experiment is the teacher. After watching the learner being strapped into place, he is taken into the main experimental room and seated before an impressive shock generator. Its main feature is a horizontal line of thirty switches, ranging from 15 volts to 450 volts, in 15-volt increments. There are also verbal designations which range from slight shock to danger, severe shock. The teacher is told that he is to administer the learning test to the man in the other room. When the learner responds correctly, the teacher moves on to the next item; when the other man gives an incorrect answer, the teacher is to give him an electric shock. He is to start at the lowest shock level, 15 volts and to increase the level each time the man makes an error, going through 30 volts, 45 volts, and so on.

The “teacher” is a genuinely naïve subject who has come to the laboratory to participate in an experiment. The learner, or victim, is an actor who actually receives no shock at all. The point of the experiment is to see how far a person will proceed in a concrete and measureable situation in which he is ordered to inflict increasing pain on a protesting victim. As the voltage level on the shock generator was increased, the “victim” or “learner” would give corresponding increasing signs of discomfort:

the victim indicated no discomfort until the 75-volt shock was administered, at which time there was a little grunt, at 120 volts the victim shouted to the experimenter that the shocks were becoming painful. Painful groans were heard on administration of the 135-volt shock, and at 150 volts the victim cried out, “Experimenter, get me out of here! I won’t be in the experiment anymore! I refuse to go on!” Cries of this type continue with generally rising intensity, so that at 180 volts the victim cried out, “I can’t stand the pain,” and by 270 volts his response to the shock was definitely an agonized scream. Throughout, from 150 volts on, he insisted that he be let out of the experiment, At 315 volts, after a violent scream, the victim reaffirmed vehemently that he was no longer a participant. He provided no answers, but shrieked in agony whenever a shock was administered. After 330 volts he was not heard from.

Upon reading this, one may wonder why anyone in their right mind would even comply with administering the first shocks. Milgram states,

“Would he not simply refuse and walk out of the laboratory? But the fact is that no one ever does, a commonly offered explanation is that those who shocked the victim at the most severe level were monsters, the sadistic fringe of society. But if one considers that almost two-thirds of the participants fall into the category of “obedient” subjects, and that they represented ordinary people drawn from working, managerial, and professional classes, the argument becomes very shaky, I must conclude that Arendt’s conception of the banality of evil comes closer to the truth than one might dare imagine. What were the results of these experiments? All subjects willingly administered at least 300 volts to the victim, while 65% of the subjects continued in the experiment all the way to the maximum 450

volts, despite the agonizing screams and pleas of the victim to be let free. The men and women subjects of this experiment favored no differently.” Milgram concludes,

This is, perhaps, the most fundamental lesson of our study: ordinary people, simply doing their jobs, and without any particular hostility on their part, can become agents in a terrible destructive process. Moreover, even when the destructive effects of their work become patently clear and they are asked to carry out actions incompatible with fundamental standards of morality, relatively few people have the resources needed to resist authority. Milgram was asked,

After the final 450 volt switch was thrown, how many of the participant-teachers spontaneously got out of their seats and went to inquire about the condition of their learner?” Milgram’s answer: “Not one, not ever!”

This experiment has been replicated on several occasions with similar results. David Mantel repeated this experiment in Germany in 1970, just 30 years after the holocaust in the very place where it occurred. He found that 85% of test subjects were willing to deliver the highest dose of voltage of 450 volts even though the victim was screaming, begging to be released, and complaining that their heart hurt. Mantell states,

This experiment becomes more incredulous and senseless the further it is carried. It disqualifies and delegitimizes itself. It can only show how much pain one person will impose on another. And yet, the subjects carry on. That is at once the beauty and the tragedy of this experiment. It proves that the most banal and superficial rationale is perhaps not even necessary, but surely is enough to produce destructive behavior in human beings. We thought we had learned this from our history books; perhaps now we have learned it in the laboratory.

Is this inhuman? No humans do this. The point is this: if all it takes for the average, ordinary human being to inflict pain and torture on another human being is a man standing in a white lab coat saying, “The experiment requires that you continue,” then there is something desperately wrong with humankind. If nothing else, these

experiments demonstrate the ease with which human beings can find themselves participating in evil. Clay Jones states,

“Humans have an amazing capacity for evil, and for each person who pulled the trigger or scalded the unborn, there are family, friends, and even majority parties who knew of the slaughter and did nothing to stop it. We cannot argue that unusually depraved people perpetrate these evils. Difficulties may encourage their actions, but otherwise they’re just ordinary folk, sons and daughters, brothers and sisters, mothers and fathers.

### Ordinary Men

In his book “Ordinary Men”, Christopher Browning follows German Reserve Police Battalion 101, chronicling their participation in the Final Solution in Poland. This particular battalion was responsible for shooting 38,000 Jews and transporting another 45,200 to Treblinka for extermination.

The title “Ordinary Men” is revealing. Often when we think of the perpetrators of the Holocaust we may be tempted to demonize and distance ourselves from such moral monsters. We reason that these heinous individuals must have been degenerate aberrations of society, brainwashed through propaganda and absent any moral constraint in order to participate in such atrocities. We think to ourselves, “I could never do something like that!” That is exactly the point. Reserve Police Battalion 101 was made up of ordinary men. Browning states,

“They were middle-aged family men of working and lower-middle-class background from the city of Hamburg. Considered too old to be of use to the German army, they had been drafted instead into the Order Police. Most were raw recruits with no previous experience in German occupied territory. These were middle-aged men: old enough to know what Germany was like before Hitler came to power. They were family men: men with wives, children, and homes. They were working men: responsible enough to provide for their families and sufficiently well-adjusted to hold down a full-time job. They were reservists: not professional full-time military men. And yet these ordinary men from Reserve Police Battalion 101 were either directly or indirectly responsible for the deaths of 83,200 Jews.



Is this inhuman? No humans do this. The vast majority of genocide researches have come to the same conclusion: it is the average members of a population that commit genocide. Even in his book, Browning himself states, “I must recognize that in the same situation, I could have been either a killer or an evader, both were human.” And it is not just a few ordinary people who commit genocide, but a lot of them. It takes a lot of regular folk like you and I who are either directly participating or are simply not doing anything to stop it.

What does this say then about the human condition and our nature as fallen human beings? That we are basically good? Quite the opposite! So what do we learn from this? If it is regular, average individuals like you and I who willingly inflict pain and torture on other human beings as Milgram demonstrated, if the perpetrators of genocide are just ordinary people as Browning and other genocide researchers argue, what does this say about our own inherent nature? Are we ourselves just as fallen and corrupt? Could I just as easily participate in such horrendous evil? To bring the question closer to home,

“If my life had turned out differently, if I was a German living in Germany during World War II, apart from the grace of God, could I have been a guard at Auschwitz?”

If I answer the question honestly, I must answer “Yes.” And if you ask yourself this question and also answer “Yes,” you are beginning to understand the depth of human depravity.

Reflecting on this question you may be tempted to say, “No! I could never!” If that is your response I would challenge you with this: to answer “No” is to implicitly claim you have been born innately superior than the millions of other ordinary people who have either committed or condoned such evils in history. Not only is this claim without scientific or logical foundation, but to claim you were born innately better is the Nazi position and the mentality which fathers genocide. After all, it was the Germans who thought they were born innately superior.

Back to the Bible

In the book of Deuteronomy, as God establishes His covenant with Israel, He lists a number of blessings and promises for Israel which

are conditioned on their faithfulness to the covenant and to their Lord. After listing the blessings, God warns Israel that if they disobey the Lord and fail to keep His commandments, if they follow after false gods and engage in the practices of the Canaanites, then they will not be blessed but cursed. They will be plagued with sickness and disease, their enemies will lay siege to their cities, and they will eventually be vomited out of the land. As enemies surround and lay siege to Israel's cities, listen to what God says concerning human nature and the atrocious behavior even otherwise "nice" people are capable of:

"The most gentle and sensitive woman among you, so sensitive and gentle that she would not venture to touch the ground with the sole of her foot will begrudge the husband she loves and her own son or daughter the afterbirth from her womb and the children she bears. For in her dire need she intends to eat them secretly because of the suffering your enemy will inflict on you during the siege of your cities" Deut. 28:56-57.

It is during times of crisis that the true nature of human beings shines forth. Here the Lord uses the example of the sweet, innocent woman, so gentle and sensitive she wouldn't even dare touch the sole of her foot to the ground. This same woman, when things aren't going so well, when the city is laid siege and resources are scarce, not only is this "gentle and sensitive" woman going to eat her own children, but she's going to be selfish about it! There are historical records of Israelites engaging in this very behavior, and on more than one occasion. Josephus gives us one account from the Roman siege and destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD:

There was one Mary, the daughter of Eleazar, illustrious for her family and riches. She having been stripped and plundered of all her substance and provisions by the soldiers, out of necessity and fury killed her own suckling child, and having boiled him, devoured half of him, and covering up the rest preserved it for another time. The soldiers soon came, allured by the smell of victuals, and threatened to kill her immediately, if she would not produce what she had dressed. But she replied that she had reserved a good part for them, and uncovered the relics of her son. Dread and astonishment seized them, and they stood stupefied at the sight.

Is this inhuman? No humans do this. You see? If all of this is true, if human beings really are this corrupt, wicked, desperate, and depraved apart from the grace of God, then what Paul says about the human condition in Romans 3 starts to make a lot more sense:

“There is none righteous, not even one; there is none who understands, there is none who seeks for God; all have turned aside, together they have become useless; there is none who does good, there is not even one. Their throat is an open grave, whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness; their feet are swift to shed blood, there is no fear of God before their eyes” Rom. 3:10-18.

How could Paul have been any clearer?

The Root of the Problem: Original Sin

“I’m basically a good person. My good deeds outweigh my bad.” This is the most common answer I have heard from non-Christians in response to the question, “Why should God allow you into heaven?” This answer, including the presumption behind it, actually has its root in original sin.

After Adam and Eve rebelled against God and brought sin into the world, they experienced for the first time both guilt and shame. Because of their guilt they attempted to hide from God, and due to their shame they attempted to cover themselves through their own effort. This first sin had devastating effects, not only for Adam and Eve but also for all of their posterity. Once Adam and Eve became corrupt all they could produce was corruption, they couldn’t produce anything better than themselves. And so Adam and Eve gave birth to corrupt human beings, who gave birth to corrupt human beings, who gave birth to corrupt human beings, who eventually gave birth to you and me. In that sense, each one of us is born into this world as a little fallen Adam and Eve. And like Adam and Eve, fallen humankind today attempts to hide and cover from God. But rather than sew fig leaves together, one of the most prevalent ways we attempt to cover our moral shame and guilt is by appealing to our own moral “goodness.” That is, we point to our “basic human goodness” and “good deeds” in an attempt to justify ourselves before God. Often this even becomes a rationalization as to why we don’t need God, “Why do

I need God? I'm living a good enough life on my own." Ironically then, these "good deeds" performed by fallen human beings, when appealed to as evidence of one's own goodness or as an excuse to ignore the need for God, are a testimony not to moral virtue and meritorious character but rather to a continued state of rebellion against God. It is an attempt to cover one's own guilt and shame by the power of the flesh, our own hard work and self-effort, just as Adam and Eve did in the Garden of Eden. This is moralism, the attempt to fix and perfect oneself in the power of self, and it is antithetical to the gospel of grace.

This is an important point to grasp. What I am saying is that man's charade of "good deeds" is in reality often self-serving, and therefore not "good" at all. They allow unregenerate men and women to continue to hide and cover from God, suppressing the truth of their need for Him, while at the same time allowing them to point to their works and say, "You see? Look at all the good things I've done. I'm a good person."

Responding to the "I'm basically good" fallacy how then should we respond to those who reject the gospel of grace and attempt to hide and cover from God through their own good works and self-righteousness? At least three things can be said.

First, everyone thinks they are "basically good."  
The Police officer said, "If there is one thing I have learned while working in law enforcement, it is that most everyone thinks they are 'basically good,' murderers, rapists, and child molesters." Inmates convicted of horrendous crimes still manage to find a way to justify themselves in the sight of God and man:

Sure officer, I made a mistake, who hasn't? Maybe what I did could even be considered "wrong" whatever that misused and misunderstood word means. But you know what? I've done a lot of good things too. I'm basically a good person.

Often when people say "I'm basically good" what they have in mind is comparing themselves with other people. They might say something like, well, I've done some bad things, but I'm not like that guy over there. Look at what he does. All in all, I think I'm pretty good.

Even among convicted criminals there is a “code among thieves,” a list of do’s and don’ts, even a moral hierarchicalism by which certain actions are judged more heinous than others and by which a rationalization of one’s own actions becomes possible. The petty thief points to the drug abuser and says, “I’m not like him, I’m basically good.” The drug abuser points to the kidnapper and says, “I’m not like him, I’m basically good.” The kidnapper points to the murderer and says, “I’m not like him, I’m basically good.” The murderer points to the child molester and says, “I’m not like him, I’m basically good.” It isn’t criminals alone who are plagued by this mentality. It is the average law-abiding citizen as well. And in my experience, this type of moralism even impacts police officers, often at an even deeper level. In fact, I think moralism in general is more perceptible and can be a greater danger among those who work in the criminal justice system due to the simple fact that we are confronted with a corrupt aspect of society every day that others only see on TV. In the face of daily evil it is easy for individuals involved in criminal justice to retreat to the state of mind which says,

Look at that guy over there. Look at his charges. Look at what he’s been convicted of. I’m not like him, that’s for sure. I could never do something like that. I work to stop bad people from doing bad things, after all. I’m one of the good guys. I’m basically a good person. Moralism can be one of the greatest obstacles to the gospel. The problem with all of these comparisons is that they do not take into account the universal corruption of sin that affects all of humankind. If fallen, unregenerate human beings are your standard of comparison, it’s easy to come to the conclusion that you are “basically good.” All you need to do is find someone a little bit worse off than you! Comparing one depraved human being with another depraved human being will always produce this result. This type of comparison has the wrong reference point. It is the same Pharisaical attitude that says “I’m better than him” and which was condemned by Jesus in the parable of the Pharisee and tax collector Luke 18:9-14. Jesus is our correct reference point, and Jesus said quite plainly, “No one is good except God alone” Luke 18:19. Paul says, “For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God” Rom. 3:23 and “There is none righteous, not even one” Rom. 3:10. In other words, there is none who are “basically good.” Basically good compared to whom?

Certainly not God; and it is God who we will stand before on Judgment Day, not fallen unregenerate man.

Second, niceness isn't goodness. Okay, so everyone thinks they're basically good, and no one lives up to God's standard of holiness. But there are a lot of nice people. What about them? In short, niceness is not goodness and being nice is easy much of the time. Jesus Himself said,

“If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do that. And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, expecting to be repaid in full Luke 6:32-34.

In other words, these sorts of acts simply reflect the normal human niceness we see in most every area of society. Someone said, “Everyone feels benevolent if nothing happens to be annoying him at the moment.” Isn't this true? It is easy to be nice when there is money in the bank, food on the table, and sunshine on your face. We often see the true nature of fallen humankind emerge when things aren't going so well. When the chips are down and times are tough, the “basic goodness” of humankind, more often than not, quickly vanishes.

Again, does this mean that fallen human beings are as bad as they possibly could be, or that they can do no good in any sense? No. Thomas Schreiner states,

Do unregenerate human beings always sin? Is there not some good in their lives? We are not saying that they are as evil as they can possibly be. Jesus says, “...you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children” Luke 11:13. If people were as evil as they possibly could be, they would not desire to give good things to their children. They would presumably find ways to inflict only evil upon their children. Unbelieving parents often love their children and their friends Matt. 5:46-47. They also may do much that is good for society. It should be noted that Jesus still says that they are evil. Evil people

still give good gifts to their children and do kind things for other people.

Evil human beings still do nice things for one another. This doesn't mean they aren't evil nor does it mean they aren't slaves to sin. This is because sin is not merely outward action or inaction which fails to conform to God's law but an attitude which fails to acknowledge God and give Him His proper glory. Schreiner explains:

Romans 1:21-25 clarifies that the heart of sin is failing to glorify God as God. The heart of sin is a belittling of God and a scorning of his glory, which involves a failure to glorify and thank him Rom. 1:21. Sinners do not give God the supreme place in their lives, people "serve created things rather than the Creator" Rom. 1:25. Sin is not first and foremost the practice of evil deeds but an attitude that gives glory to something other than God. People may be loving to their children and kind to their neighbors and never give a thought to God. The essence of sin is self-worship rather than God-worship, such a conception of sin helps us understand how people can perform actions that externally conform to righteousness yet remain slaves of sin. These actions are not motivated by a desire to honor and glorify God as God. Actions that externally conform to righteousness may still be sin, in that they are not done for God's glory and by faith. Slavery to sin does not mean that people always engage in reprehensible behavior. It means that the unregenerate never desire to bring glory to God, but are passionately committed to upholding their own glory and honor.

True moral goodness then isn't merely being "nice." True moral goodness is much closer to the teaching "love your enemies" Matt. 5:44 which no fallen human being can do apart from God's grace. Again, Jesus said quite plainly, "No one is good except God alone" Luke 18:19. Niceness isn't goodness, and we need to know the difference.

Third, goodness isn't even the issue. Badness is. When someone says, "I'm basically a good person, my good deeds outweigh my bad," they are assuming at least two things. First, they are assuming they have done more good than bad. Considering that we are guilty of numerous sins every day in thought, word, and deed, I don't think this is true of

anyone. Second, they are assuming that doing good works somehow counteracts all the bad things they've done. This line of thinking doesn't seem to properly take into account the concepts of law and justice.

To illustrate this, imagine you are pulled over for running a red light. In an attempt to avoid a ticket, you explain to the officer, "Sir, you don't understand. You see, before I ran that red light, I stopped legally for 100 red lights. And after you let me go here, I am planning on stopping legally for another 100 red lights. You see? My legal stops outweigh my illegal failures to stop. I'm basically a good driver. Therefore, I don't deserve this ticket."

Or what about the murderer who appears before a judge and says, "Your honor, I confess. I murdered that man. But you don't understand. I let hundreds of other people live! You see your honor? My good deeds outweigh my bad. I'm basically a good person! Therefore, you should allow me to go free."

We intuitively sense there is something wrong with the excuses and rationale offered by the guilty parties. So what's the problem? It's this:

You cannot make up for breaking the law by keeping the law; keeping the law is what you are supposed to do. In other words, you don't get a check in the mail or a get out of jail free card for being a law-abiding citizen. That is the standard you are held to! The issue is not that we keep the law most of the time. The problem is that we break it on occasion! And when we do, we deserve to face the consequences of our actions.

The same goes for God's law. Goodness is not the issue; badness is. The issue is not that we do what we are supposed to on occasion, the issue is that we have broken God's law many times over and stand as condemned sinners before Him who deserve to be punished. We cannot make up for breaking God's law by keeping His law, keeping God's law is what we are supposed to do. And justice requires that we be punished when we don't.



This, my friends, is why SALVATION MUST BE BY GRACE, and why any works-oriented salvation system is doomed to failure:

“For by grace you are you saved by faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not of works, lest any man should boast” Eph. 2:8-9.

You can't make up for breaking the law by keeping the law. Keeping the law is what you are supposed to do. And when we appear before God on Judgment Day, the appropriate attitude before the most holy, most perfect, most wise, most just Creator and Saviour will not be,

Well, you see God, you don't understand. Let me tell you how this works. Check it out: my good deeds outweigh my bad. I'm basically a good person.

I imagine God would look at us the same way the judge might look at the murderer who said, “Yeah, but I let hundreds of other people live!” and would appropriately respond, “Depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness” Matt. 7:23. When we do what is commanded of us, our only response should be “we are unworthy servants, we have only done our duty” Luke 17:10. Our attitude should be one of humility, reverence, and gratitude, one which says, “God, be merciful to me, a sinner” Luke 18:13.

He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit Titus 3:5. Acknowledging that we as human beings are not basically good not only frees us from the grip of moralism but allows us to fully embrace and appreciate the gospel of grace. It also has tremendous implications for the problem of evil.

Human Depravity and the Problem of Evil: Human beings apart from the grace of God are capable of horrendous evils. A discussion of human depravity in relation to the problem of evil is absolutely necessary because the most frequently asked question concerning the problem of evil is this: “Why do bad things happen to good people?” This is sometimes referred to as the emotional problem of evil.

To put it succinctly, the question “Why do bad things happen to good people?” is based on the false assumption that people are “good.” Given the reality of human depravity the problem with this question should become immediately apparent. Man is not innately good:

The terrible human evils in the world are testimony to man’s depravity in his state of spiritual alienation from God. The Christian isn’t surprised at the moral evil in the world; on the contrary, he expects it. The Scriptures indicate that God has given mankind up to the sin it has freely chosen; He doesn’t interfere to stop it but let’s human depravity run its course Rom. 1:24, 26, 28. This only serves to heighten mankind’s moral responsibility before God, as well as our wickedness and our need of forgiveness and moral cleansing. So the question is not “Why do bad things happen to good people?” but rather “Why do bad things happen to bad people?” But nobody ever asks that question. Perhaps the question we should be asking is this: “Why do good things happen to bad people?” Why has God out of His mercy chosen to dispense any goodness at all on willful rebellious sinners?

Christian apologists need to take the consequences of sin and reality of human depravity seriously when addressing the problem of evil. Many Christians simply pay lip service to what the Bible has to say about these topics. It’s no wonder then we are often at a loss for words when someone asks, “Why do bad things happen to good people?” A completely biblical, though partial, response is this: no one is good but God alone! Bad things don’t happen to good people because no one is good. Jesus raised no qualms about our naturally born status as sinners before God, the universal corruption and guilt of humankind, or our need for repentance. He introduced these very issues Himself in addressing the problem of evil. He took it for granted that the wages of sin is death Luke 13:1-5. Christian apologists should do likewise.

When addressing the problem of evil, Christian apologists also need to present a theodicy which minimally includes the biblical teaching of original sin and human depravity. G.K. Chesterton referred to original sin as “the only part of Christian theology which can really be proved.” And why God allows evil won’t make sense unless we have the problem of sin clearly before us:

The subject of sin is vital knowledge. If you have not learned about sin, you cannot understand yourself, or your fellow-men, or the world you live in, or the Christian faith. And you will not be able to make head or tail of the Bible. For the Bible is an exposition of God's answer to the problem of human sin and unless you have that problem clearly before you, you will keep missing the point of what it says.

The same is true for the problem of evil. The subject of sin is essential because in raising the problem of evil, the skeptic must put forth an anthropoid, justification of man by arguing that man is "basically good" and God is unjust for allowing the suffering and evil He does. In response, the theist must show these assumptions to be false, and in their place put forth a theodicy, justification of God, which includes evidencing the depths of human depravity and arguing that God has morally sufficient reasons for allowing evil. Until we clearly articulate and defend the gravity of sin, as well as the universal corruption and guilt of humankind, many of our answers to the problem of evil will largely remain unpersuasive.

Skeptics, however, are often inconsistent when it comes to the nature of man and the problem of evil. They want to hold to the basic "goodness" of man and at the same time complain about the evil, pain, and suffering which man perpetuates, all the while blaming God for allowing it:

On the one hand, skeptics argue that bad things shouldn't happen to good people and that the human race consists mainly of good people. On the other hand, their very objections concern the bad things people do to one another: murder, war, rape, child abuse, brutality, kidnapping, bullying, ridiculing, shaming, corporate greed, unwillingness to share wealth or to care for the environment. The longer the list of evil things done, the more it demonstrates the truth of what the Bible says: by nature, human beings are evil, not good. This undercuts the original argument that humans are good, and therefore it's utterly unjust for bad things to happen to them. Since the same human race that commits these evils also suffers from them, since we are not only victims, but perpetrators, of sin, what would God's critics have Him do? Would they insist he strike us all down

immediately for our evil? Or would they have him remove human choice in order to protect us from one another? They might as well say that since we are so good, God shouldn't allow us to be so bad.

**Conclusion: The Doctrine of Human Depravity Matters!**

How does a knowledge and understanding of the depths of human evil help us? In addition to largely answering the emotional problem of evil as discussed above, the following points prove insightful:

First, it reveals we have gotten the problem of evil exactly backward: There is a problem of evil alright. But it isn't God's problem He is only good and doesn't do any evil. It's humankind's problem because we are the ones who do evil. As C. H. Spurgeon puts it, "The Christian answer, that we have used our free will to become very bad, is so well known that it hardly needs to be stated. But to bring this doctrine into real life in the minds of modern men, and even modern Christians, is very hard." Indeed! And a Christian won't understand why God allows evil unless he or she thinks these things through.

Second, it demonstrates God's patience and justifies God's judgment. If you think that people are basically good you will often be tempted to ask, "Why is God angry all the time?" when reading passages in scripture relating to God's judgment, the flood, destruction of the Canaanites, etc. When you begin to fully grasp the depth of human depravity, sinfulness and corruption, you instead will say, "Wow, God is really patient. Why isn't He judging people sooner?" Spurgeon stated, "When we merely say that we are bad, the 'wrath' of God seems a barbarous doctrine; as soon as we perceive our badness, it appears inevitable, a mere corollary from God's goodness."

Third, it magnifies the significance of Christ's sacrifice. Jesus didn't suffer a brutal, agonizing, torturous death on the cross because you're basically a good person. If you were good enough to earn salvation on your own, then "Christ died for nothing" Gal. 2:21.

We may feel tempted to underestimate the horrors of the Cross, because to recognize them is to admit that our monstrous evil demanded a price so horrific. To make light of our sin is to make light of Christ's cross.

Charles Spurgeon stated, “Too many think lightly of sin, and therefore think lightly of the Saviour.”

Fourth, it impassions our witness. If you think that people are basically good, it will be hard for you to tell them they are corrupt sinners in need of salvation.

Fifth, it increases our desire for Jesus’ return. When we watch television and see examples of some of the horrendous evil and suffering that takes place around the world, we often cry out, “Come quickly, Lord Jesus.”

Finally, it reveals the greatness of our salvation. After all, if you think that you are basically a good person, your salvation doesn’t seem so grand.

We must contemplate men in sin, until we are horrified, until we are alarmed, until we are desperate about them, until we pray for them, until having realized the marvel of our own deliverance from that terrible state, we are lost in a sense of wonder, love, and praise. The good news just isn’t so good unless we have the bad news clearly before us. “Again, it is certain,” Calvin stated, “that man never achieves a clear knowledge of himself unless he has first looked upon God’s face, and then descends from contemplating him to scrutinize himself.”

Certain proof in truth that men and human nature is totally depraved and to think not is too lessen the chance for any man being saved. Which is exactly what the outcome the devil wants to achieve.