

The Three Eternal Destinies #172 The Total Depravity of Man (and God's Irresistible Grace)

It is widely assumed in books and other kinds of publications, that (St.) Augustine and John Calvin believed and disseminated the doctrine that teaches that all mankind is in a state of **utter ruin**. Unless God searches all men out and draws each one to Messiah, they cannot be saved or in any way escape the result of the fall. This means that everyone whom God *does not* search out, everyone to whom He *does not* grant His irresistible grace will go to the eternal Lake of Fire. They so richly deserve their eternal damnation because all of them, that is, all men have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Rom 3:23). And it doesn't really matter *how* short, or *how* far man has fallen from that glory of God. They miss the mark of God's standard of "glory." And this is "short of heaven" and there is no other alternative except eternal hell.

In the teachings of Calvin and Augustine the fact that God does not choose some for salvation, while choosing others, makes no difference in a universal judicial sense. That is, man's total depravity has settled the matter. God is under obligation to no one, because man *richly* deserves the eternal Lake of Fire. The doctrine of "total depravity" excuses God from any accountability to anyone as to His justice. It makes Him out to be supremely beyond scrutiny and is considered totally impartial in his election of those to be eternally saved, they know not how. In fact, He *cannot* show favoritism if He does choose some and not others, because He is far above partiality. All are sinners anyway, condemned to terrible, everlasting torture in the lake of fire, so how can anyone accuse God of being partial for His ways of dispensing His irresistible grace to some and not to others?

It matters not whether men are good or bad in God's election of those who would continue on their way to the Lake of Fire. "All have sinned" and deserve eternal torment with Satan and his angels.

According to this view Mt 25:31-46 is only a parable and cannot be taken as a factual account of what is reality. If it is taken to mean exactly what it says, then Augustine and John Calvin would be proven heretics and would find themselves tied to the stake some day to be burned. They are responsible for so many who have differed from their "orthodoxy." However, who are the heterodoxical maniacs? The ones with good doctrine always have those who disagree with them executed...

Was John Calvin an extreme Calvinist himself? Did he carry his view of his doctrinal position too far? Did he take it to the point of fatalism, saying that God selected some for salvation and others for perdition? If so, and if God is able to bestow His irresistible grace on anyone He chooses, why didn't He just bestow it on each and every man, since they all needed to be saved? Is God, then, partial? Or shall we change the meaning of the word?

Is God able to bring all men to eternal salvation in Messiah? If He is able, why doesn't He do it? Why does He choose one and not the other? Why does He allow one to go on his way to hell and damnation for eternity and keep some for Heaven, especially if He could just as easily have saved them all? Why doesn't He choose the man who is like the one in Jn 8:43-44? Why doesn't He cause the man in these verses to believe anyway? What makes one person "of God" and another "not of God"? (Jn 8:47). Why is God, who is able to apply His irresistible grace on whomever he chooses, not willing to just go ahead and bestow it on those all those who are *not* willing to do His will anyway? (Jn 7:17). Why not just illuminate them and bring them to the knowledge of salvation regardless of their attitude? If "God so love the world" so much, why does He just save those He wants to and not save those He does not want to? 1Tim 2:4 makes Calvin and Augustine both heterodox in their opinions.

Did John Calvin actually believe that Man had (or has) anything to do with his own salvation? Is a man's will considered *worthless* in all cases? Is it all left up to God, His irresistible grace and His "predeterminate counsels," which render choices not contingent upon the will of man in any way?

Did Augustine misconstrue what Jn 7:17 meant? Why did God choose David? (Was it not because he was a man after His own heart?) Why did He choose Abraham and not Lot? How did Lot get *righteous* before God without being *chosen* by Him? Was Lot righteous? Was he righteous in the same way that Abraham was righteous? (Gen 18:25).

Salvation is a free gift, but to whom is this free gift given? Does He give it to those who are not willing to do His will? Does He always have to bestow His irresistible grace upon those He chooses even if they don't seem to want it?

God's Irresistible Grace

When it is said that God's grace is irresistible, does "irresistible" mean God overpowers the unwillingness of those He chooses to save? Does this mean that He forces His salvation on those who are not willing to do His will? Or is it "irresistible" to them because they are already willing to do His will? In other words, doesn't God give grace to those who are willing to do His will, or is a person *made willing* to do God's will against his *own* will?

What does Jn 7:17, in conjunction with verse 18 (or Jn 13:20), mean? If a sent one preaches to one who is not willing to do God's will, will he "know" regardless, because God made His grace "irresistible"? What, then, was the use of our Master saying what He said in Jn 7:17? Augustine himself said that this "knowing" is the reward of faith, or, as he put it, "understanding is the reward of faith," and that to believe is to be willing to do His will or "the same thing as to believe" (as quoted from a footnote to Jn 7:17 in the NIV Study Bible). Augustine altogether missed the point of what our Master was trying to say in Jn 7:17. Augustine said "understanding is the reward of faith" and that "if any man is willing to do His will" is the same thing as "to believe." But our Master said whoever is *willing* to do His will will *know*! Clearly, that means that whoever is *not* willing to do His will will *not* know. He will not "*know*" when one sent from God comes to him. In other words, when a true "sent one" ("there is nothing false about him," from Jn 7:18, NIV) comes to him, the inner revelation necessary for his salvation will not be granted to him by the Spirit of God, because he is not willing to do the Father's will. But if he is *willing* he will *know*, like in Acts 8:31. (The eunuch *knew*.) So it does depend on something in the man, that is, his disposition, and God certainly does not *force* his "irresistible" grace on anyone.

This same comparison is seen in the *conscience* (the knowledge of good and evil), in relationship to the *choice* of good or evil. "Knowing" doesn't mean "choosing." *Conscience* in itself has no power to keep a person from choosing the wrong thing to do, but it alerts the man's soul as to what is right and what is wrong, leaving the choice up to him. This, naturally, leaves man responsible for his actions, his choices, making him subject to the judgment of God, as in Rev 20:12 or Rom 2:14-16. Man is rendered without excuse before God, since he is in possession of a workable conscience, which acts as his *friend*.

Man's Accountability

If a man knows nothing about the forgiveness found in Messiah, and the sins he committed are not sins as spoken of in Rev 21:8 — that is, they are the kinds of sins that *do not* bring upon him condemnation, but only cause guilt — is he *eternally* condemned? Is he held accountable for committing sins that were not forgiven by Messiah when in reality *they could not be*?! Does that really make sense? After reading Rom 6:23, we know that this kind of guilt can be erased by his *own* death, especially when he did what he could do, while living, to make good his wrongs and provide restitution to those whom he hurt and affected with his sins.

It is obvious by reading Jn 3:18 that those who have heard the good news are wholly without excuse and are condemned to the second death already. It matters not if their sins are the kind written about in Rev 21:8 or not, if they did not respond to the good news of forgiveness, they have been judged already, because of Jn 3:19.

It is different for the man who has never had the opportunity to hear of God's mercy in His Son's death for them that is, he may have heard *something* called "the gospel." But what he heard was from **impostors** whose sermons *begin* with the collection of money, then come the "message" and emotional altar calls. It is just like what we read in 2 Cor 2:17. That is the Christian gospel... So the man who has heard *that* message is *not* held accountable for Jn 3:18-19. It is only *if* he hears according to Jn 13:20 that he is held accountable for what he hears and *rejects* rejecting the light from Isa 49:6 (Lk 10:16; Mt 5:14).

So the man who has not sinned the sins of Rev 21:8 dies. He did what he could do (although not perfectly) to

make amends for his sins or wrongs committed against others. In his death he atones for, or pays the wages, for his own sins, as Rom 6:23 and Heb 9:27 indicate, and then rises from the first death to face judgment. If the discipline (or punishment) this man experiences in his own “first death” brings him to agree with God’s wages for his sins, and since he never knew the *gift of God* spoken of in Rom 6:23, he will be restored to man’s original state. That is, he will be restored to the state Adam was in before the fall with his original righteousness.

However, if this man has sinned to the extent that his guilt has so marred his soul that it cannot be removed by the punishment of this first death penalty, then his first death is merely the birth pangs of eternal torment for him. This man *became* evil mainly because he did not or *would* not even attempt to do what he could do to make amends for the wrongs he did to others, but *became* an unjust and filthy man. (Note: It takes time to stain or mar a man’s soul to the extent that it becomes permanent. It does not happen overnight, but is a lifelong process.) So in this case, the sin and guilt has unalterably permeated his being to all ungodliness and unrighteousness (Rom 1:28-29).

The Good Man

What about the “Good Samaritan”? What will his eternal destiny be? Do all members of the nations called to judgment in Mt 25:34 have to be sinless in order to inherit the kingdom prepared for them from the foundation of the earth?

Augustine taught the doctrine of *inherited* depravity and the necessity of divine grace. Otherwise, regardless of one’s behavior, without divine grace, one will be subjected to divine wrath eternally, a never-ending condemnation in the Lake of Fire. However, what Augustine never understood was that this eternal punishment was only for those who it says it is for in Rev 21:8, which is not everyone! According to Augustine’s wrong point of view, only those to whom God was *not* partial, or only those to whom He showed *no favoritism* were to be punished eternally for any and all sins, even the most minor, compared to those written of in Rev 21:8. He thought that since sin had to be punished, eternal punishment was in store for all without Christ, no matter how sorry they were for their minor sins or what they tried to do to make amends — since there were only TWO eternal destinies. Even if they did sin in such ways as those mentioned in Rev 21:8, they did not *continue* to do so, but were very sorry and repented to those they sinned against. Even if they murdered once or took someone’s life, they turned themselves in to be executed (or whatever punishment was administered by their government). God will judge them right, so as to determine their motives (Eccl 12:14).

It is true that the sins mentioned in Rom 1:28-31 are sins that all men *could* at one time or other commit. But who can be absolutely obedient to parents, 100%? Does God expect such perfection from men who have only a secondary righteousness? Some people have lied on many occasions, but still are not determined a “liar,” as one who loves to lie, as in Rev 22:15. God does not hold the nations to the law at Sinai or to the New Testament law for the saints.

God will judge the motives of men’s hearts so every one will receive their just recompense from God (Mt 16:27)

No one will escape *proper* recompense. God will not show favoritism nor is He *partial* to any.

Judgment will be rendered according to one’s deeds and the motives of one’s heart in *absolute* justice (Gen 18:25).

Rev 21:3 speaks of *restored man*, restored back to his *original righteousness*. God’s dwelling is *redeemed man*, not restored man. God in redeemed man is with or in the midst of the men who are restored back to God’s grace after having passed through the first death sentence (Gen 2:9,17). Rev 21:4 says about the men of the nations, “The agony of death is no more.” Rev 21:24, read in the NKJV says, “the nations of those who are saved.” *Saved* here is not *saved* through Messiah’s death (Rom 6:23), but Heb 9:27, the first death and judgment found their names in the Book of life, the “second life” which is for those whose names are written in the Book of Life (Rev 20:12-15). Since the men of these nations did not have an opportunity to receive God’s *free gift*, they had to *pay* for their own “salvation” themselves in their own death — agony, crying, tears, weeping experienced in their lifetime and in their death, paying the wages for their sins. This suffering, not Messiah’s (whom they

did hear of), atoned for their sins, which were committed within the boundaries of the everlasting covenant.

Rom 6:23 says the wages of sin is death. But this is the *first* death, not the *second* death. The first death is certainly *not* eternal wages, as is the *second* death, is it? (Rev 20:15-16; 21:8). "Death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them... then Death and Hades were thrown into the Lake of Fire", which is the second death. So the first death ends! The death of Rom 6:23 and Rom 5:12 is not eternal. The error of believing it to be is the very heart of Augustine's theology. In reality, the first death ends at the judgment of Heb 9:27 and Rev 20:12-15. The second death does not begin until after that judgment, which is entirely based on a person's deeds. Augustine's confusion regarding the difference between the first death and the second death – for he everywhere equates the two, as all of Christianity does after him – is the seminal error from which so much evil has sprung. By it Christianity even condemns those who *have not yet sinned of their own individual will (including infants)* to the second death. This is the penalty due them, in a judgment that has nothing to do with their deeds.

While the world asks, "How can God hold men eternally accountable for evil they cannot help but do (for they cannot truly do good)?" the evil of Christianity, as Augustine reveals, is actually much deeper. That evil is what was behind what the gospel preacher said in Washington, DC, on October 4, 1997, "It is not your sins which separate you from God, it is your condition (as human beings)." Men were born for the greatest calamity of all time — the second death — according to the Augustinian-Calvinistic heterodoxy. By it men do not have to become depraved; they are born that way.

Just as Rom 3:21 says "*all* have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God." Only *redemption* can bring a person to God's ultimate glory without the necessity of his own death. His own death is his payment for his fallenness, expressed by the sins he committed during his lifetime. *All* have sinned, it is true, but not all have sinned to the *same degree* and the same consequences. Rev 21:8, for example, talks of total fallenness and deprivation of moral character, but not all have fallen to such a degree. Some men can be restored and others cannot be (Rom 1:24,26,28).

Filled Up (Rom 1:19)

God has not given all mankind up. In Rom 1:24, 26,28 say He has given up on some men. Rom 1:26-28 — Not all have been given over (verse 29, NKJV). Not all men are "filled" with unrighteousness so as to be as to fall into the first category mentioned in Rev 22:11, the unjust and the filthy. These are those that Rom 1:28-32 asserts are *depraved* because they themselves gave themselves to these things. Therefore God gave them over to depravity (Rom 2:6-11). They *became* evil, filled up.

The word "filled" in Rom 1:29 is a transition and not necessarily a one-time happening. This is something that happens over a period of time. "Filled" denotes one who *became* totally depraved. He was not born in that state, at least not as Paul teaches in Rom 1 and 2. "They were turned over to a depraved mind" (Rom 1:28). Once he was filled, he was "turned over," and not before.

John Calvin's teaching, or at least what is commonly known as his teaching, misuses the word "depravity" to denote man's fallen condition. However, man is not so completely fallen as to fit the dictionary definition of "depravity." Neither is he born in that condition. And neither does the definition fit the doctrine, for depravity is a consequence of action, in a person or thing, not a condition of creation. Calvin teaches that man's condition before God is as *if* he were totally depraved, since, as he saw it, it makes no difference to God whether man is still able to *do good* and *be good* in his fallen, or "depraved," condition.

When Augustine argues that there is nothing man can do to restore himself to God's grace, *he is thinking that there are only two eternal destinies*. John Calvin did not know there was a third eternal destiny. He only saw two, so his interpretation of the Bible and of man's condition made God out to be partial, showing favoritism to a few. A conclusion that leaves God's name to blow in the winds of distortion and unbelief across the nations of the world.