

Family Foundations Series, Pt. 10: Total Depravity (Gen 6:5)

Preached by Pastor Phil Layton at Gold Country Baptist Church on February 8, 2009

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As you know, in the evenings we have been continuing our study through the book of Genesis verse-by-verse that we took a break from in the mornings services over a year ago. I have been calling our more recent series “Family Foundations,” and I really believe it’s one of the more important studies I have ever done and that our church will ever go through. The early chapters of God’s Word have so much vital fundamental worldview-shaping truths for all of life, as well as for marriage and family in particular. As I study each week I have never been disappointed seeking relevance and riches of insights and truths that are found in the earliest chapters of Scripture; my only disappointment is that so many of our families and people have *not* been a part of that study to learn along with us, because not many in our church come back to Sunday evening services as a priority or part of their Lord’s Day.

This evening, I actually won’t be here as I have been asked to speak as an outreach at a retirement center, but we look forward to hearing from Pastor Dale the next couple Sunday evenings. As I studied the next verse in our study, I really felt compelled to bring the message I would have given this evening to you this morning, because this is a message all of us need to hear and this will be sort of a culmination of our foundations series (if you missed any or all of the series, I would really encourage you to get the former messages in the series to follow the flow, and a few things I said in the series I will repeat this morning as well briefly, which the past messages developed in more detail). I really feel that every message from God’s Word is something we all need to hear, and today’s message may be the most important truth in this series, the most foundational truth for parents to know about their children, and the most critical truth to know to understand what is going on in our society, why horrible things happen that you see on the news, why salvation has to be all of God, and why sin is so enslaving and life-dominating ... total depravity.

⁵ Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man *was* great in the earth, and *that* every intent of the thoughts of his heart *was* only evil continually.

Let’s seek to consider the depths of this teaching about the depths of sin, the extent of man’s depravity, the totality of the sinfulness and corruption within fallen humanity.

There are 13 verses in Scripture that use the term “depraved” or “depravity,” depending on which English translation you use:

- Hosea 5:2, 9:9 (NASB) speaks of sinners deep in depravity
- 2 Peter 2:19 says (NIV) “They promise them freedom, while they themselves are slaves of depravity – for a man is a slave to whatever has mastered him.”
- Paul speaks of living in “a crooked and depraved generation” (Phil. 2:15 NIV) and men of “depraved mind” (Rom. 1:28-29, 1 Tim. 6:5, 2 Tim. 3:8) – it’s not that man’s *actions* are corrupt always, but the *attitudes* of their mind/heart are depraved

Scripture is not saying that every outward deed of man is depraved, but it repeatedly and consistently declares the totality of *inward* depravity or corruption, using terms like mind or heart or will or thinking (essentially synonymous terms in the Bible). But perhaps nowhere is it more clearly and concisely stated as Genesis 6:5.

Some of the various English translations render as follows:

HCSB: “every scheme his mind thought of was nothing but evil all the time”

NAB: “no desire that his heart conceived was ever anything but evil”

NIV: “every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time.”

NLT: “The LORD observed the extent of human wickedness on the earth, and he saw that everything they thought or imagined was consistently and totally evil.”

There is no more total picture or statement of the extent of total depravity of the total inner nature of the total human race. This is not language that was made up by Calvin, Luther, or the Reformers, or Augustine, or anyone in church history. This is the view of God Himself at the earliest chapters of human history after the Fall. There have been other views of man in history:

Humanism – mankind is basically good (view of most Americans, most parents about their kids, even many Christian parents). Some religions will modify that somewhat and say that man may not behave basically good, but deep within is an island of goodness, or a great positive inner-something to be discovered or cultivated.

Ligon Duncan tells of driving to a conference somewhere in San Antonio and seeing a massive banner in front of one of the biggest churches in the biggest State there – the banner read “Discover the *Champion Within You!*” So he exclaimed to the guy driving with him something like, “Wow, Eastern religions are taking off here!” As he explained it, that’s a great motto if you’re a Buddhist, but it’s a lousy motto for those who know and study the Bible. If you read this book, you actually discover the chump within you!

The old man within you needs to be replaced by Christ in you, the hope of glory. The Apostle Paul himself said “I know that nothing dwells in me, that is, in my flesh” (Rom. 7:18).

Pelagianism – view of Pelagius who lived in 4th and 5th century AD: mankind is neutral, no inherited original sin nature or guilt from Adam, he *becomes a sinner when he sins* because of influences and environment, etc., (many psychological theorists).

It’s been defined as ‘the belief that original sin did not taint human nature and that [sinful man’s] will is still capable of choosing good ... without Divine aid. Thus, Adam's sin was "to set a bad example" for his progeny, but his actions did not have the other consequences imputed to Original Sin.’¹ Pelagius was refuted by Augustine and considered a heretic even by orthodox Catholicism but it still survives in the minds of many Protestant churchgoers.

Semi-Pelagianism – mankind is sinful since Adam, but is still able by his own will to choose the good and choose God to save us from the good potential within man’s own heart. We must *initiate* salvation on our own, and God’s grace is necessary to complete it. This ancient view of Cassian and the Massilians, slightly modifying the view of Pelagius, was also considered heresy then although it affirms original sin and some even speak of depravity.

Roger Olson writes: ‘[This view] believed that people are capable of exercising a good will toward God even apart from any infusion of supernatural grace. This was condemned by the Second Council of Orange in 529 [officially by the church but unofficially] Semi-Pelagianism became the popular theology of the Roman Catholic church in the centuries leading up to the Protestant Reformation; it was roundly rejected by all the Reformers ...

Today, semi-Pelagianism is the default theology of most American evangelical Christians [I would add “who believe salvation is initiated by the human *will* but maintained only by grace, not *works* infused by grace – RCC version of view”]. This is revealed in the popularity of clichés such as “If you’ll take one step toward God, he’ll come the rest of the way towards you,” and [others with] almost complete neglect of human depravity and helplessness in human matters.²

Olson, himself a careful classic Arminian scholar, argues that the gospel preached and the doctrine of salvation taught today in most American pulpits and lecterns, and believed in most evangelical pews, is not classical Arminianism but semi-Pelagianism, if not outright Pelagianism. Charles Finney popularized this theology in America in the 19th century and is a man that theologians debate whether to classify him as semi-Pelagian or outright Pelagian.³

Arminianism – view promoted by some Christians in a 17th century council who rejected the Reformation doctrines of grace and followed the teachings of James Arminius (not a brand-new view, but somewhat modified version of Catholic view of man). Refuted by Council of Dordt in Holland by Puritan and Reformed Protestants. Classic Arminians will use the term “total depravity,” but because of God’s *prevenient grace* in the world (undoing full effects of the fall for all [some tie in with hearing the gospel] without special sovereign grace for some), man’s will is freed to overcome depravity by man’s own choice, and man’s heart can decide to complete what God starts (unlike the former view where God completes what man starts).

I don’t want to over-simplify, but it seems to me that Genesis 6:5 doesn’t fit with any of man’s views that teach a “depravity” that is not total in reality. Some Arminians may use the term, but it ends up being merely hypothetical – all sinners *would be* as sinful as Genesis 6:5 states except for God’s *prevenient grace* that undoes the full effects of the fall. If that’s the case, why does God see what He sees in this verse, and why does He say what He says?

Why are we spending time reviewing historical views about man’s nature before we look in-depth at the Bible’s view? Because I’m convinced many if not most Christians have imbibed human thinking from humanism and psychology and man’s thinking and man-centered theology, and this is not mere historical trivia – your theology of man has tremendous practical implications for all of life; raising children, how churches gear their worship / ministry, how you pray for people, how you understand the news when terrible crimes occur, how seriously you take sin in your own heart.

Ultimately, it’s a matter of whether we truly believe this verse or what men say or we like to think (“*many* inclinations of the thoughts of men’s hearts are *mostly* evil *much* of the time, but there’s a part in him that is good and can choose the good way of God”). That’s our natural thinking, but God’s supernatural truth declares here “*every* inclination of the thoughts of his heart is *only* evil *all* the time”).

Man looks at the outward appearance so he doesn’t think his nature is as bad as this verse says, but God always looks at the heart and this is what He sees.

In this verse, when it says “God saw” it should remind us of the first chapter of Genesis, where as God creates His good and perfect world, it says repeatedly “and God saw it was good . . . very good.” But now after the fall into sin, perfection has been lost, and God sees something that is not good; great wickedness and evil.

When it says God saw every intention or inclination of the heart, that’s a word that also has roots earlier in Genesis (2:7) where God *fashions* / *designs* mankind. Even the fashioning or imagining of thoughts (whether we act them out or not), every design of our thoughts within have been tainted and permeated by sin through and through. Sin corrupts God’s good creation and kindness to us. This word in v. 5 refers to human plans or intentions of our thinking.

Objection: doesn’t fallen man think and do good things?

James 4:13 says some men will say, “Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit.”¹⁴ Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are *just* a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away.¹⁵ Instead, *you ought* to say, “If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that.”¹⁶ But as it is, you boast in your arrogance; **all such boasting is evil.**

Even man’s plans (which include good things on a human level) when they are plans apart from God, God considers them evil.

Romans 14:23 says “whatever is not from faith is sin”

Romans 3:23 defines sin with “falling short of the glory of God”

Hebrews 11:6 says “without faith it is impossible to please God”

Acts of human goodness, apart from a changed heart of faith in Christ, and a motivation for the glory of God, do not please God.

The Hebrew word in Genesis 6:5 for man’s “intent” or “imagination” became a significant theological term in the literature of the ancient rabbis for the sin nature or evil inclination.

Ever since Adam and Eve ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, man’s nature is no longer good. His knowledge and thinking is thoroughly sin-soaked just as every drop in the ocean is thoroughly permeated by saltwater, that’s the sea of humanity.

We would be wrong if we think “total depravity” means all act as bad as humanly possible.

Outward manifestations of our sinful hearts are restrained by common grace, conscience, consequences, cops, etc. This verse speaks of the sin *in the heart*; just because we don’t always act out what’s in here doesn’t change what’s in here.

One theologian said this doctrine is the easiest to prove, because the evidence is all around us (news, etc.) and it’s inside of us. But “total depravity” is a doctrine rarely preached anymore. Why don’t we feel we are as sinful as the Scriptures say we are? For the same reason that a fish doesn’t feel wet—because it is immersed. One of the evidences of the extent of our sinfulness is that even as we look at Scriptures today, the nature of many of us will be to not want to believe we could ever be as bad as these verses say. That’s what makes our need so great; we don’t realize our need is so great. The heart of man’s problem is a problem with man’s heart.

Dr. Albert Einstein (not even a Christian, but someone smart enough to recognize this among other things), said in a 1948 lecture on the nature of man in the world: “The true problem lies in the hearts and thoughts of men. It is not a physical but an ethical one. . . . What terrifies us is not the explosive force of the atomic bomb, but the power of the wickedness of the human heart.”⁴

Most of the world would say our biggest problem is on the outside of us, and the solution is found within us. *The Bible teaches that our biggest problem is inside of us (in our sinful heart), and the solution is found completely outside of us (in the Word of God, in the gospel in particular, in the person and work of Christ).* In fact, some theologians prefer the term “radical” depravity or corruption, because the root for “radical” speaks of the root or very core of something. We are sinners to the core, the very fiber of our being. We are bad to the bone!

A correspondent of the *London Times* quite a while back, researching and reporting on many of the same problems we now have, ended every article with this statement: “What’s wrong with the world?” G. K. Chesterton once wrote a famous reply:

Dear editor:

What’s wrong with the world?

I am.

Faithfully yours,

G. K. Chesterton

We are the problem. The problem is inside us. We don’t become sinners because we sin – we sin because we’re sinners at heart.

You say, “God was just looking at one part of the earth, surely not all in the flesh are corrupt, maybe He needs to look some more?”

v. 12 “God looked on the earth, and behold, it was corrupt; for **all flesh had corrupted their way** upon the earth.

Well, you say, maybe this was just that generation before the flood

Genesis 8:21 “The LORD smelled the soothing aroma [Noah’s sacrifice after the flood]; and the LORD said to Himself, “I will never again curse the ground on account of man, for **the intent of man’s heart is evil from his youth ...**

Notice again it is speaking of the human heart, which is evil. The best of men need a new heart, and cannot make themselves one. And this verse says it is evil from youth, or your Bible may say childhood? How young does it start?

Ecclesiastes 9:3 (NASB95)³ This is an evil in all that is done under the sun, that there is one fate for all men. Furthermore, the **hearts** of the sons of men [mankind] are **full of evil** and insanity is **in their hearts throughout their lives**

Psalms 58:3 (NASB95)³ The wicked are estranged **from the womb**; These who speak lies go astray **from birth**.

As soon as they can after they’re born they will speak lies, but it’s already there. In fact, young ones learn how to deceive even before they can speak! Don’t confuse naïve or undeveloped with innocence or lack of sin nature. As soon as that nature can express itself, it will!

I know they're cute, and my son Adam is no exception. But I also know he's a reprobate (the most adorable reprobate I know, but a reprobate nonetheless)! He's very appropriately named after the first sinner. And all since the first Adam in Genesis are corrupt, despite their cuteness.

Adam and Eve's first son Cain murdered their second son Abel. Where did that come from? The first two boys ever, just 1 chapter away from perfect Paradise, with the most perfect parents ever, who walked with God in the garden, the boys had no bad friends to blame, no TV, no crime yet in their neighborhood, no school administration to blame ... where does sin come from? Not every child acts out the sins that came from Cain's heart, but Scripture is clear we all have this potential and we all have the same sins in our heart, even if modern laws and consequences may restrain many from fulfilling all of our sinful desires, the heart evil is still there.

The Minnesota Crime Commission said this: "Every baby starts life as a little savage. He is completely selfish and self-centered. He wants what he wants when he wants it; his bottle, his mother's attention, his playmate's toys, his uncle's watch. Deny him these once, and he seethes with rage and aggressiveness which would be murderous were he not so helpless. He's dirty, he has no morals, no knowledge, no developed skills. This means that all children, not just certain children, all children are born delinquent. If permitted to continue in their self-impulsive actions to satisfy each want, every child would grow up a criminal, a killer, and a rapist."⁵

Even the world recognizes this, but many Christians don't. As I've said before, if momma's boy is getting in trouble, momma's quick to tell you the problem is his environment or his peers (or his school, or the church, or the list could go on and on). She is sure there must be some other explanation as to the external source of the folly her child gets into. But Proverbs 22:15 says "folly is bound up in the heart of a child." It's already there in his heart, and that verse says "the rod of discipline will drive it far from him."

There are Christians who don't believe in spanking or discipline because they think it will ruin or scar their kids to turn out bad. But Scripture says kids *are* scarred by sin and need loving discipline so that they won't turn out worse and ruin their lives going their way.

Mom says "he's really a good kid but he's in with the wrong crowd." Well, why is his heart drawn to the wrong crowd? And are others responsible when he sins, or is he?

Or maybe with younger kids, when they are acting out we excuse it with "Yeah, it's just because she's tired" (as adults, we may excuse *ourselves* when we snap or get angry when we're sick and tired). The question is "Does lack of sleep *create sin in our heart* or does the sin that's already there *come out more* when we don't have full energy of faculty to try and restrain our sin as we normally do"? Why is it that kids don't do *good things* when tired? Why don't we find ourselves saying things like, "There little Sally goes sharing and being nice to her friends again, she must be tired!" No, it's hard work to be good because it goes against our nature, and fatigue or stress just brings out the real you.

But Christian parents will think if my kid just had a different school or teacher or if we could just get a different youth pastor or different attention for my kids, they wouldn't be getting in trouble. But if you believe the Bible "folly is in the heart of your child."

Or maybe we're tempted to think with how sinful our world is that if we could just isolate and insulate our kids from all sinful influences, they won't turn out bad. I understand that as a parent, but it's not biblical. It's not wrong to want to protect our kids minds from being polluted with filth and from ungodly friends, but even if you were a homeschool family in Iceland in a tiny conservative community, and only let your kids hang out with others like you once a week in your tiny community of 300 people, God's Word still says "folly is in the heart of a child."

Scripture does indicate children are influenced by parents and peers, and are imitators for better or worse. There's no question kids will tend to learn much and emulate their influences, and we have a responsibility not to lead little ones into sin, Jesus said, but little ones also have a responsibility and are accountable to God for their sin. No man or woman or child can point to others as the cause of their sin, as Adam and Eve tried to do in the garden, God calls each of us to account individually for our sin from our heart which is never excusable and God always provides a way of escape in temptation. God says children are not innocent, they're born sinful.

Psalm 51:5 (NASB95) ⁵ Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, And in sin my mother conceived me

Sex is not sinful, it is good as God designed in marriage, and David was not born out of wedlock. This verse is saying from the moment he was conceived he was "in sin" in his nature.

Psalm 53:23 (NASB95) ² God has looked down from heaven upon the sons of men To see if there is anyone who understands, Who seeks after God. ³ Every one of them has turned aside; together they have become corrupt; There is no one who does good, not even one.

That's what God says, but Christian parents will say about their wayward kids, "I know he gets into trouble sometimes, but really he is a good kid at heart." If you say that you are contradicting God and basically telling Him: "God I know you looked down from heaven in David's day and didn't see any good kids, but if you look again today hard enough you'll see my kids are good in their hearts. If you looked again today, this verse would be different!"

As a parent, I can understand how sentiments affect what we say. Kids we love can display some human goodness, but if our trust is in God's Word and not our affections, the Biblical thing to say: "I love my child and always will, but I need to remember God says he's not a good kid at heart and my great task is to shepherd that heart of his in God's ways and truth rather than his own way. There is a world of evil potential in his heart ... and mine. And when kids sin, or when we sin, if we believe the Bible we must understand that the source and cause of that sin is never *ever* ultimately something outside of our heart.

Mark 7:21-23 (NASB95) ²¹ "For **from within, out of the heart of men**, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, ²² deeds of coveting *and* wickedness, *as well as* deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride *and* foolishness. ²³ "**All these evil things proceed from within** and defile the man."

This is the opposite of what the world thinks. When kids are behaving badly, the world looks diligently to see what defiled them from the outside. When someone takes a gun to school or work or McDonald's and begins killing people, the experts converge to try and figure out who else is to blame or who should have stopped it or done something different in his life. And they ask "where in the world did this come from?"

If we believe Jesus we don't have to be puzzled by that (though we should be saddened by it). The Lord says "All these evil things proceed from within and defile the man."

Thankfully not every person acts out the hatred in their heart, but in God's eyes our hate is as serious as murder. Remember that depravity is in God's eyes, who looks at our most righteous deeds and declares they are filthy rags in His sight (Isaiah 64:6). Some people can have good outward behavior at times, but as one rich young man found out when asking Jesus what good thing he could do to inherit eternal life, Jesus said: "Only one is good, God alone." Human good behavior is not true intrinsic goodness to God. In Luke 11:13, Jesus recognized that men give good gifts and do good things (in that example to their children), but He says they are still evil at heart even though they do or give good things outwardly ("If you being evil, give good gifts...")

Jesus also said, it's "from the abundance *of the heart* the mouth speaks" – in other words, when we sin with our speech, in our marriage or relationships, we're not mainly having *communication* problems, we're revealing a *corrupt heart* problem. We need to diagnose it properly to have the proper cure. We need to recognize the problem is not the occasion or other person that prompts us to say or do things in anger. The problem is our sinful heart has overflowed and manifested.

Job 15:14-16 (NASB95) ¹⁴"What is man, that he should be pure, Or he who is born of a woman, that he should be righteous? ¹⁵"Behold, He puts no trust in His holy ones [*if God doesn't trust the best of us, we are foolish to trust our own hearts*], And the heavens are not pure in His sight; ¹⁶How much less one who is detestable and corrupt, Man, who drinks iniquity like water!

Isaiah 1:5-6 (NASB95) ⁵ Where will you be stricken again, *As you continue in your rebellion?* The whole head is sick And the whole heart is faint. ⁶ From the sole of the foot even to the head There is nothing sound in it, *Only* bruises, welts and raw wounds, Not pressed out or bandaged, Nor softened with oil.

That's what "total depravity / corruption" means – the totality of our being, top to bottom, through and through. Sin is our spiritual bloodstream and it pumps through our entire body from our sinful heart. We could look at OT Law and observe the sacrifices, how some of them called the priest to put blood on his toe and thumb and finger, and you wonder "what's that all about?" I think the message is "I am completely sinful and I need all of me cleaned; my thoughts (forehead), my actions (my right hand), the walk of my life (my foot). I am permeated with sin on the inside, so the sacrificial blood needs to be all over me on the outside to remind me of that.

Jeremiah 17:9 (NASB95) ⁹"The heart is more deceitful than all else And is desperately sick [or "incurably wicked"]; Who can understand it?

Jeremiah 13:23 (NASB95) ²³"Can the Ethiopian change his skin Or the leopard his spots? *Then* you also can do good Who are accustomed to doing evil.

How can we natural sinners with incurably sick hearts just choose to do good or love God or choose to change our nature? The rhetorical answer is we cannot. It's as impossible for us to change our inner nature by a choice of our will as it is for a man to change his outward nature of his skin by mere will-power, or a leopard to make a decision that makes his spots go away, or as impossible as it is for a camel to go through the eye of a needle even if it wanted to. When Jesus said a similar thing to His disciples, they cried out the right question: "Then who can be saved?" Christ's answer: "With man this is impossible. But with God all things are possible"

When you understand the bad news of total depravity, the gospel becomes truly good news. If you understand the depths of our radical sinfulness you can sing with far greater understanding Amazing Grace

Romans 3:10-18 (NASB95) ¹⁰ as it is written, “THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE; ¹¹ THERE IS NONE WHO UNDERSTANDS, THERE IS NONE WHO SEEKS FOR GOD; ¹² ALL HAVE TURNED ASIDE, TOGETHER THEY HAVE BECOME USELESS; THERE IS NONE WHO DOES GOOD, THERE IS NOT EVEN ONE.” ¹³ “THEIR THROAT IS AN OPEN GRAVE, WITH THEIR TONGUES THEY KEEP DECEIVING,” “THE POISON OF ASPS IS UNDER THEIR LIPS”; ¹⁴ “WHOSE MOUTH IS FULL OF CURSING AND BITTERNESS”; ¹⁵ “THEIR FEET ARE SWIFT TO SHED BLOOD, ¹⁶ DESTRUCTION AND MISERY ARE IN THEIR PATHS, ¹⁷ AND THE PATH OF PEACE THEY HAVE NOT KNOWN.” ¹⁸ “THERE IS NO FEAR OF GOD BEFORE THEIR EYES.”

That’s total depravity – the totality of man’s being from head to toe. Did you notice the terms? Vs. 13-18: “throat [it comes up from within] ... tongue ... lips ... [whole] mouth ... feet ... known [mind] ... their eyes.” And v. 11 says “**no one seeks God.**”

Does it make a difference in your worship and ministry whether or not you believe fallen man seeks God, that people are seekers? It makes a huge difference in your philosophy of ministry if you don’t take verse 11 into account. You can’t build your church and ministry on the philosophy that everyone is a seeker of God and we just need to find the itch they want scratched when v. 11 says there is none who seek God!

Fallen man is lost and needs God to seek Him. Jesus came to seek and save the lost. He’s the seeker, He’s the rescuer, the redeemer, the regenerator and as He does His work we then *can* seek and love Him *because* He first loved us (1 Jn 4:19). That’s what we sing in the first line of amazing grace – we were lost but found by God, blind given sight. Ephesians 2 says we were dead spiritually -- God gave us life, saved us by grace through faith, and even that faith is a part of the gift of God so no one can boast.

As we give the gospel, which all of us are commanded to do, it makes a difference whether or not your theology is sound here, and it will affect how you pray for the lost and preach to them. I would be miserable if I was an Arminian or semi-Pelagian as I preach. If I thought the reason men reject is that I wasn’t able to persuade their free will enough or find the right felt need – how discouraging if man is actually the cause of salvation and if we gauge success (like many do) by how many profess Christ as we proclaim His truth.

If I plead with sinners to repent with all my heart, and they don’t, are we to conclude the problem is our church doesn’t have the right things going on onstage (interpretive dance, etc.) or the right kind of music to move man’s will? Please don’t get me wrong, but please hear me – man cannot cause salvation, it is impossible, Jesus said. Man cannot convert himself or others, we are responsible to give the gospel, but the results are only accomplishable by God, the only One who can convert someone. Biblical success is measured by faithfulness, not by numbers.

We’ve seen a lot of bad news, is there good news? Yes, there is. Keep reading in Romans 3:

²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ being justified **as a gift by His grace** through the redemption [*buy from slavery*] which is in Christ Jesus

Romans 4:17 speaks of Abraham, who is the father of faith for all who are saved not because of anything man does, but it says:

as it is written, “A FATHER OF MANY NATIONS HAVE I MADE YOU”) in the presence of Him whom he believed, *even God, who gives life to the dead and calls into being that which does not exist.*

Did you catch that? God is the only one who can give life to the dead, and God is the only one who can call into being what does not exist, including a heart that can love Him and that is not in bondage to total depravity, a total new creation within instead.

5:6 For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.

6:6 ... our old self was crucified with *Him*, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin;

7:23 I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members [*depravity's effects*]. ²⁴ Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death? ²⁵ Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!

8:7 the mind set on the flesh [fleshly or fallen man] is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so,

8:30 ... these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified.

v. **33** Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies;

v. **35** Who will separate us from the love of Christ? [*ANSWER: NO ONE CAN SEPARATE THE FATHER'S ELECT FROM THE SON'S ETERNAL LOVE!*]

9:14 What shall we say then? [*Context of God choosing one but not another, the age-old question*] There is no injustice with God, is there? May it never be! ¹⁵ For He says to Moses, “I WILL HAVE MERCY ON WHOM I HAVE MERCY, AND I WILL HAVE COMPASSION ON WHOM I HAVE COMPASSION.” ¹⁶ So then it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy.

When you understand the radical sinfulness of man, you won't rebel at this verse, *you'll rejoice that it doesn't depend on you!* Believing only God's will can save man doesn't prevent our evangelism and prayers and passion for the lost, it should actually increase it and increase our dependence upon God for it. It did that for Paul:

Romans 10:1 (NASB95) ¹ Brethren, my heart's desire and my prayer to God for them is for *their* salvation ... ⁹ if you confess with your mouth Jesus *as* Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved ... ¹³ “WHOEVER WILL CALL ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED.”

Do I believe the eternal security and salvation of believers can only come from the call of God on elect sinners? Yes. Romans 8 and dozens of Scriptures say that. Do I believe everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved? Yes. Romans 10 and numerous Scriptures teach that. My job is not to fully explain how all that works, my job is to fully proclaim to sinners how they must be saved, not by works or mere willpower but by Christ alone.

Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5:17f any man is in Christ he is not in bondage to total depravity like he was before, he is a new creation where old things have passed away and new things have come. Paul knows only God can take out our old heart and give us a new heart and regenerate us and enable me to do what is good and pleasing in His sight, but that doesn't stop Paul from pleading with sinners. He says right after that, our ministry as ambassadors is to plead with sinners, to beg them even, to implore them: *Be reconciled to God!*

You can't do anything to save yourself or change your nature, I can't do anything to save you either but Jesus can. And he promises the one who comes to Him truly He will never cast out.

Romans 11:33-36 (NASB95) ³³ Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! ³⁴ For WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, OR WHO BECAME HIS COUNSELOR? ³⁵ Or WHO HAS FIRST GIVEN TO HIM THAT IT MIGHT BE PAID BACK TO HIM AGAIN? ³⁶ For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him *be* the glory forever. Amen.

Come to the Lord whose unfathomable mercy is available to all who will repent. I beg you to beg God for grace. Ask Him to create in you a clean heart as David prayed, and change your entire inner nature so that you will no longer live as is everything is about you, of you, through you, and to you. Plead with the Great Physician for a spiritual heart transplant as Ezekiel 36 speaks of, so that everything will be about Him, from Him, through Him, and to Him for all things in your life so that to God will be the glory forever.

¹ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pelagianism>

² Roger Olson, *Arminianism: Myths and Realities*, p. 30-31.

³ Olson writes of Finney (p. 27): 'He denied original sin [inherited corrupt nature of all from Adam], except as a misery that has fallen on the majority of humanity and is passed on through bad examples ... He believed that every person has the ability and responsibility, apart from any special assistance of divine grace ... other than enlightenment and persuasion, to freely accepting the forgiving grace of God through repentance and obedience to the revealed moral of government of God. He wrote "There is no degree of spiritual attainment required of us, that may not be reached directly or indirectly by right willing" [emphasis on] "... liberty of the human will, and the natural ability of men to obey God."'

The first of Finney's published sermons had the title "Sinners Bound To Change Their Own Hearts." Point #6 of that message was "if the sinner ever has a new heart, he must obey the command of the text, and make it himself."

⁴ M. P. Green, *Illustrations for Biblical Preaching : Over 1500 sermon illustrations arranged by topic and indexed exhaustively* (Revised edition of: The expositor's illustration file.). Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1989.

⁵ John MacArthur, *The Fulfilled Family*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1985.