

# Tulip - Part 3 (Total Depravity 2)

by John Piper

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*John Piper explores the concept of total depravity, emphasizing humanity's complete inability to please God without His grace and the necessity of spiritual rebirth.*

**Duration:** 33:03

**Scripture:** Romans 6:17

**Topics:** "Total Depravity", "Salvation"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of recognizing our total depravity and our need for God's redemption. He highlights the significance of understanding our sinful nature in order to fully appreciate the work of God in our lives. The speaker also reflects on a worship song and questions if the congregation truly feels the depth of God's love and salvation. The sermon concludes with a reminder of the eternal punishment of hell and the necessity of acknowledging our desperate condition.

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## Transcript

One more text on this point. The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth. So the point of those texts is to say that our rebellion and hardness of heart is total.

That is, apart from grace, we don't delight in the holiness of God, and there's no glad submission to the sovereign authority, supreme authority of God. Here's the third meaning of total in the phrase total depravity. In his total rebellion, in our total rebellion, total in the sense of point number two, everything man does is sin.

Now, this point I've already made, so I won't linger over it, but a few texts that I didn't refer to. The first one I did. Whatever is not from faith is sin.

In other words, if our rebellion and our distaste for holiness and our hardness against the beauty of God is such that without grace we can't yield to Him, then we won't believe, and in our unbelief, everything we do is sin. Romans 14:23. Hebrews 11:6. Without faith, it is impossible to please Him. Now, I think that's saying the same thing.

Without faith, you can't please God. Well, surely God is pleased by everything that's praiseworthy and good. Behold, it is very good.

He's pleased. So, if without faith you can't please Him, it must be that without faith everything you do is blameworthy, not praiseworthy in God's eyes, even though it could be worse than it is in the horizontal dimension. It is worse to kill than to be a good pagan nurse.

But in God's eyes, He's not pleased by pagan nursing. Nursing that doesn't trust Him. Nursing that doesn't nurse to His glory.

Nursing that doesn't have a sweet demeanor of reliance upon Christ about it. It's not pleasing to God. God can make those distinctions, and He does make those distinctions.

Romans 7.18. For I know that nothing good dwells in me, Paul says, that is, in my flesh. For the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not. Now, he says, nothing good dwells in me.

And then he qualifies it, that is, in my flesh. Why does he qualify it like that? Is he qualifying and saying, there's a good part of Paul, and there's a bad part of Paul. And the flesh is the bad part of Paul, and the good is the good side of Paul.

Is that what he's saying? I don't think so, because in Paul's vocabulary, the opposite of flesh is the Spirit, that is, the Holy Spirit. We'll see this in just a minute under this next point. I think what Paul is saying is, as soon as he said this, this is one of the reasons, by the way, for those of you who are advanced enough to struggle with these things, is Romans 7 pre-Christian experience, or is it Christian experience? See, people argue to say, when he's writing here, he's not talking about the struggle of a Christian.

He's talking about the struggle of a person before they get saved. I don't think that's right. This is one of the reasons I don't think that's right.

Because I think Paul is writing precisely as a born-again Christian here who does have these struggles, and he says, there is no good in me. And as soon as he says that, as a believer in whom the Holy Spirit dwells and in whom there is sanctifying work going on, he realizes he's overstated his case. He probably realized it beforehand, and he meant to write this, but he's going to qualify it.

For I know nothing good dwells in me, that is, left to me. Flesh means me apart from faith, me apart from God, me apart from the Holy Spirit. The self-reliant me, that's what has nothing good in it.

Left to me. There's nothing good coming out of me. Nothing good coming out of me.

And nothing good did come out of Paul until God met him on the Damascus Road. But as a believer, he had to qualify that, just as you right now. You may not stand up and say without qualification, there is no good in me.

You can't say that as a believer. Faith is good. The fruit of the Holy Spirit.

You going to call that bad? Love, joy, peace, patience, goodness, kindness, meekness, faithfulness, self-control. You going to call that bad? You going to call the work of God filthy rags? No way. It is good.

And you do it. And that's good. But God does it.

It's the fruit of the Holy Spirit. It's not flesh. That's why the works of the flesh are distinguished from the, not the works, but the fruit of the Spirit.

Because they are grown in you so naturally by His work. Okay, the fourth meaning of totality in total depravity is man's inability to submit to God and do good is total. Romans 8, 5-9.

For those who are according to the flesh, for those who are, that's their existence. He would get this flesh again. Those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh.

But those who are, that's defining their being and their character, according to the Spirit with a big S. That's right. Who are according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. So there's an identity to two kinds of human beings here.

Those who are according to the flesh and those who have been wrought upon by the Spirit. For the mind that is set on the flesh is, now here, I'm not real happy with the NASB translation, because this implies some activity, the mind set on the flesh. Literally it is the mind of the flesh.

It's this R here. The mind of the flesh is death. But the mind set on the Spirit, again, I don't like using a verb there.

It's not good. It's literally the mind of the Spirit. That's this R here, these people here.

They have a mind that is of the Spirit. The mind of the Spirit is life and peace. The mind of the flesh, same translation problem, the mind of the flesh is hostile toward God.

For it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not able to do so. And those who are in the flesh cannot please God. Now that's what I'm getting at here with this inability.

See that? There's my textual basis for that word. Man's inability to submit to God and do good is total. Here it is.

The mind of the flesh is not able to do so, that is to submit to the law of God. Those who are in the flesh cannot, there it is again, cannot please God. And the only way you ever get to a position where you can please God is if verse 9 happens to you.

Verse 9. However, you, and I hope it applies to everybody in this room, and if it doesn't apply to you, you should linger tonight and pray and ask God to save you and pour out His Holy Spirit into your life. He'll do that. If you renounce sin and cast yourself on His mercy and call upon Him to save you and invite the Holy Spirit to master you.

However, you are not in the flesh, you Christians, but you are in the Spirit if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him. So there are two kinds of people in the world.

Those who are, and here the prepositions are interesting, in the Spirit. If you're in the Spirit, and that's the same as having the mind of the Spirit. If you're in the Spirit, that is if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you.

So to be in the Spirit, in the Spirit of the Spirit, in the power of the Spirit, in the influence of the Spirit, means the Spirit has come into you and dwells in you. And if anyone does not have, there's another way of putting it, be in the Spirit or have the Spirit in you, have the Spirit, three different ways of saying the same thing, I think. If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ.

So those who belong to Christ, because the Spirit has moved into their lives, they are able to submit to the law of God. And they are able to please God. Now here's a word from Jesus about the meaning of that flesh-Spirit dichotomy.

Jesus answered in John 3, 5-7, Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is just flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is Spirit. Do not be amazed, I said to you, you must be born again.

I think this means that which is born of the flesh is flesh. If you are born one time, like little Steinway, what was her name, Cecilia, born this afternoon, one and a half pounds, and we should be praying, even as you sit there, that she live, and that she be given good lungs and a good heart. Now if that little girl lives and grows into an adult, up until the time that she's born of the Spirit, she is just flesh.

And you are just flesh. That means just human. Flesh, I'm reading you this so that you'll understand this, the mind of the flesh is the mind of a human minus God, minus the Spirit, minus the irresistible grace, transforming, wooing, drawing, saving.

And then comes the new birth by which we are made spiritual. I think that's what this means. Those who are born of the Spirit are now Spirit in the sense of being like the Spirit or in the image of the Spirit or spiritual, having the capacities to discern and see spiritual reality.

Another text, Romans 6, 17. Thanks be to God, that's very crucial, because if you thank God, that means God did this. Thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, under sin, power on your life, you were slaves, it held you, you couldn't get out, you became obedient from the heart.

How did that happen? Thanks be to God, thanks be to God that you became obedient from the heart to the form of teaching to which you were committed and having been freed by whom? Passive. God. Thanks be to God that you were freed from sin, the power of sin, not sins, you still do a lot of those, but sin, the dominion and the power and the killing, assault of sin on your soul, and you became slaves of righteousness which will also now never let you go.

Because God is a much stronger slave master than sin was. Or Ephesians 2, 1-5, and we'll end with this, and we'll finish totality next week and move on. But don't panic.

If you had some questions, I'll make sure there's some time for them next week. But let me read Ephesians 2. You were dead in your trespasses and sins. Dead, dead.

The deadness there means, I believe, unresponsive as a dead person to truth and beauty. In any spiritual, Godward sense. You were dead in your trespasses and sins.

In which you formally walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air. I'd love to unpack all those with you. The course of this world, the world is so powerful.

Don't be conformed to this stage, this world. According to the prince of the power of the air, that's the devil. So the world was bringing you into accord with its way.

The devil was bringing us into accord with his way. The spirit, this is another meaning here for prince of power of the air. The spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience.

Those who are disobedient by nature. Among them we too, we too, these Jews. We're not talking about these bad Gentiles.

Jews and Gentiles alike, we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh. Indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind. And were by nature children of wrath.

Sons of disobedience. Dead. Nature.

It's part of our nature. See that's the frightening thing. There's where your love for the mercy and the grace of God in your life really takes off.

If you got it tonight, if you realize tonight that all of these things I've been saying are not because you with a neutral nature and a metrodome will. Metrodome, tick tock, tick tock, tick tock. Not metrodome.

Metronome, tick tock, tick tock. So here's a neutral nature. It's not sinful, it's not good, it's just neutral.

And you make it. Good tick, bad tock. Good tick, bad tock.

If that's your conception of your soul, you will never appreciate grace. Until you realize that you are by nature that at the bottom of the metronome is a to the sin side. And you are like me lying in the hospital with a spinal block.

Looking down at your feet saying, Move! And they won't listen. That was the weirdest feeling I've ever had in my life. To be dead from about a year down.

Some of you women who had it done when you had a baby, remember, or others. You're looking at your feet and you reach your hand down here to feel your leg and it's like a big piece of ham. Oh, that's awful! You can't feel it, it's just cold and clammy and you don't feel anything.

Oh, that's weird. That's our soul. And until we feel that that's the way we were.

I mean, many of you were saved when you were five, right? You don't remember having a great experience of conversion. But now, now tonight, you can let your heart, with God's help, run back to that moment and say, I was a piece of ham at six. Utterly impervious to my mother's or father's desires that I pray or obey or anything else.

And on a night in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, my conscience was awakened. Sin landed. I trembled at the thought of going to hell.

I wanted to be saved and your mother told you the truth. You can begin to interpret it now, what really happened, and fall in love all over again with what you may have never understood to be the grace of God in that kind of condition. Being rich in mercy, God being rich in mercy with His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead, like a big piece of ham, in our transgressions, made us alive.

I watched it happen. I lay there, looking at my toes. I used every ounce in me to pretend I was paralyzed and empathize with people paralyzed.

And what it's like for Johnny Erickson, Tata and others to sit in a wheelchair. I sat in a wheelchair and I watched the toe and one time I went, wiggle. Now it's a bad analogy probably because the gives me the credit for the wiggle, but really something was taking this medicine out of my nervous system.

And it wasn't me. I had nothing to do with overcoming this medicine. Something in another realm besides this will was moving that medicine out of my nerves.

And you do exercise your will to believe. Let me explain just in a moment here why we're going to I instead of you second. TULIP is T-U-L-I-P Total Depravity, Unconditional Election, Limited Atonement, Irresistible Grace and Perseverance of the Saints.

How come I'm going from T to I? And here's the reason. The order in which these things happen ultimately, at least the order in which God I think ordains them, is probably the T-U-L-I-P. There's some high level argumentation about that, but I won't trouble you with it.

The order in which you experience these things is T-I-first. That is, very few people contemplate unconditional election as a means of their getting converted. Everybody meets irresistible grace as a means of getting converted.

And they generally get convicted of their sin deeply before they experience that converting grace. So, I have found over the years that that's my first reason. It's the order of experience we're talking about here.

You get convicted for sin, and God's wonderful grace awakens you to His beauty, draws you to Himself. Then you start learning things about it. A second reason is, I have found that in the controversial nature of these doctrines, it has proved over the years to be much more persuasive to people to get to this point quick, because genuinely born-again people are usually quick to give God the credit for that wonderful work in their lives, whereas they have theoretical problems with unconditional election.

Experientially, they are eager to give God the credit that they're saved. Very few people want to talk like, I got saved because I was smarter, or because I was wiser, or because I was more courageous, or because I had the guts to go forward, or because I... anything. Most truly born-again people, when they give an account for how it is that they believe, how it is that they got saved, want to say, there but for the grace of God go I. To which I say, good, we don't need to talk about that point.

You already believe it. Because they do. And I just want to put biblical structure around the belief that the born-again people in this room have, namely, God saved you.

God opened your eyes. God gave you ears. God shed light in your heart.

God convicted you for sin. God got you to the meeting. God opened your heart to the truth.

God showed Himself to you. Oh, there's so many texts that I had to leave out in my preparations for tonight that would be wonderful to talk about, but those are the reasons why I am going in the order I'm going. Let's finish up last week.

Show you the point we were on here. Man's inability to submit to God and do good is total. That's the point we were on.

I'm giving five senses in which we are totally depraved, and this was sense number four, and we had looked at some texts there, and we might look at one or two more, maybe these two. Natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him. He cannot understand them because they are spiritually appraised.

Now, the natural man means a person who's just what they are by nature. That which is born of the flesh is flesh. A person who does not have the Holy Spirit working in their lives is a natural person, and that person cannot understand them because they regard them as foolishness.

This is not a physical, intellectual cannot. I think God probably has great mercy upon what you might call imbeciles. It's not a very nice word.

I have a very good friend who has a daughter who's 17 and probably the mind of an 18-month-old. Now, how will God relate to that person? Well, I don't know, but I am very inclined to believe that God will not hold her accountable the way He'll hold you accountable, to know, to understand, and to yield. He will deal with her in her own special way what she can understand, and that's just not mine to judge.

I just think there'll be mercy. That would be a cannot that's physical. This is a cannot that's moral, but it's a real cannot.

The Bible calls it a cannot, but it's because there's such a moral corruption. We use the word depravity. There's such a moral corruption that things of the Spirit are regarded as foolish, and if you regard the gospel as foolish, you cannot believe it.

You cannot. Deep down, there's this rebellion against it that's regarding it as foolish, and therefore, you don't put your whole life into something foolish. You cannot put your life into something foolish.

Something profound has to happen at the perception level. So, there is a signal of deep depravity, a profound moral cannot, for which we are still responsible. Whether you can account for that in your own philosophy or not, that is what we believe the Bible teaches.

We will be held accountable, for this cannot. Jeremiah 17:9, the heart is more deceitful than all else, and desperately... Now, I did a little study of that word. I looked up all the places where this Hebrew word is used, and in the lexicon, this is given as its main meaning, and it means that almost everywhere, incurable, diseases and so on.

There is an... desperately sick. The human heart is desperately or incurably sick. That's a totality of depravity that we're talking about.

Who can understand it? And until... I said this last week, I'll say it again. Until we come face to face, and sometimes you do in the dark night, sometimes you do in the 589th time you sin the same sin. You just scream at yourself, wretched man that I am, who will deliver me from this body of death.

Until we start talking about ourselves that way from time to time, not wallowing, just from time to time getting honest, we probably won't appreciate grace. We won't understand grace until these kind of texts... hit home. So that's the reason for talking about total depravity, so we can get a hold of grace.

And then the last point on this was our rebellion is totally deserving of eternal punishment. We are totally depraved in the sense that our rebellion is totally deserving of eternal punishment. And I don't want to linger on this, but I just put texts up here about wrath and hell.

If hell is real, which I believe it is, and frighteningly so, and tremblingly so, and tearfully so, as many of you have shed tears over losing loved ones who have no warrant to think they were saved, and you just agonize from time to time over that thought. If that's real, which the Bible says it is, from texts like

Ephesians 2.3, 2 Thessalonians 1.8 and 9, Matthew 25.46, there must be something about us that's pretty bad. That's the only point I want to make.

Because hell is horrible, it's torment, and hell is long, it's eternal. That takes your breath away. I can remember as a little boy just shuddering at the thought of eternity.

You need to shudder. And if you shudder at the thought of that kind of punishment, what could possibly give rise to such punishment? The only way to describe it is total depravity. So, that's the only point I wanted to make.

The fact that there is such a punishment must mean that we're on the right track in describing our condition as extremely bad. Summary of T. In summary, total depravity means that apart from any enabling grace of God, our hardness and rebellion against God is total. Everything we do in this rebellion is sin.

And if you're here for the first time tonight, you may stumble at that, but I tried to explain how building a hospital and throwing your body on a grenade or losing your legs as you push your child off a railroad track can be sinful. Whatsoever is not of faith is sin. Our inability to submit to God or reform ourselves is total, and we are therefore totally deserving of eternal punishment.

It is hard to exaggerate the importance of admitting our condition to be this bad. If we think of ourselves as basically good or even less than totally at odds with God, our grasp of the work of God in redemption will be defective. If we humble ourselves under this terrible truth of our total depravity, we will be in a position to see and appreciate the glory and wonder of the work of God discussed in the next four points.

As I sit back there where Mike Rustin is sitting and we're singing that last song, which I think is a very good worship song, I think the music and the lyrics at the point of, Thank You, O My Father, is a perfect, almost perfect wedding of sound and sense. At least in my uneducated musical heart, the emotion of that note and that word is almost perfect. And I look out across this congregation and I just wonder, does anybody feel this? Are we feeling this? Thank You, O. I mean, the word O is so right there.

It is perfect. It is perfect at that moment. If he had left out the word O, it would have been a defect.

Thank You, O my Father. I tell you, if you felt your wretchedness and then you felt grace, you'd sing it the way whoever wrote that, I think, wrote it. And I pray for the day when we will as a congregation, deeper and deeper, sing them, feel them, say them.

That's the end of T.

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