

T - Total Depravity

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Preacher: Jonathan Smith

[0 : 00] Well, my name is Jono Smith. I'm one of the pastors here at the church.

As Paul and Glenn said, we're starting a new series tonight. A new sermon series which is going to reference what's known as the five points of Calvinism or TULIP or the doctrines of grace.

But the bigger theme that we're going to look at over these five sermons is salvation. We're going to be talking about salvation. How does someone get saved? Why does God save people?

How does someone go from being a non-Christian to being a Christian? From being someone who doesn't love God to being someone who loves God? That's the question we're going to be asking.

And particularly tonight, we're going to be looking at that question. How does someone go from being someone who doesn't believe, who's not a Christian, to being someone who does?

[1 : 08] And I'll tell you what, it's going to be heavy sledding for a bit, I think. A lot of this stuff is pretty heavy theology. We're going to be looking at church history, which I know you all love.

That's why he came tonight. And you're going to have to focus, and so am I. And so I'm going to challenge you to do that, to really tune in for the next 30 or 40, hour, 40, two hours.

And no, I'm keeping it to 30 or 40 minutes, and we're going to do this together. There's going to be quite a bit of church history tonight, just to set the foundation for the next five sermons.

And I need you to tune into that as well. A way that's going to, sort of a way of helping us to answer this question, to look at salvation, is to look at what's known as the five points of Calvinism, or to look at a couple of frameworks that seek to answer this question.

A couple of lenses that we can look through to answer the question. And two big frameworks that have been used over the last 500 years to look at this question of salvation are what's known as Arminianism and Calvinism.

[2 : 17] Don't worry about the names. It's the ideas that's important. We're going to look at that. I've got a slide that we're going to look at. It's going to help us, okay? Before we look at that, I just want you to know that this is a way of learning about what the Bible says about salvation, okay?

So, the best thing is not to go straight to these kind of theological concepts, but to go to God's Word to understand what God says about salvation. We believe at this church that the Word of God, that the Bible, is God's infallible Word to us.

This is God's very words to us. So, if we want to know something about God, like how He saves us, we need to go to the Bible. This is a way to help us understand what the Bible says, okay?

So, that's where we're going tonight. We're going to look at the first points of each of these frameworks. First being the Arminian concept of free will and the other being the Calvinistic understanding of total depravity or another way of saying that is total inability.

And we'll get to that in just a sec. I do need to say from the top that both of these people who hold these views, they're both Christians. These are both Christian views.

[3 : 33] If you land on the side of the Arminians, you're still a Christian. You're still welcome at this church. If you're a Calvinist, you're still welcome as well. This is a family debate, a family argument, okay?

There are understandings of salvation outside of the realms of Christianity that we're not going to go into. We're going to focus on these over the next five sermons. So, just by way of explanation, let's take a look at these five points of each.

First of all, with Arminianism. We've got the five points of Arminianism. First of all, their first point is free will. That is, that every human has a free choice to make between belief in God and unbelief.

They believe that every person has the capacity to either choose God or to reject God. That's free will. Second is conditional election. Election is the doctrine that God saves a group of people, okay?

So, this is the group of people that become Christians. They believe in conditional election, that God looks forward into history and he sees the people who are going to believe in him. And so, he cooperates with them and saves them.

[4 : 43] So, it's a conditional election, conditional on people believing in him. Then we've got universal atonement. So, they believe that Jesus Christ, our great Lord and Saviour, when he died on the cross, he died for the sins of all people for all time.

Everyone's included in the atonement of Jesus on the cross. Then we've got resistible grace, that God might desire to save you, but you've got the power to resist that. You've got the option to resist that and to turn away from him.

And finally, perseverance of some saints. This means that you can become a Christian, you can live part of your life as a Christian, but then you can turn away from that. You can reject your faith and walk away from God.

Five points of Arminianism. And I'm going to get into this a little more in terms of history, okay? So, again, I know that many of you here tonight have been Christians for 60 years and you get this.

There are many people here tonight as well who aren't church people, they're not Christians. And so, the reason I'm using this is so that all of us can get a grasp on some of these concepts.

[5 : 48] If you hear a big word that you don't understand, it's my job to explain them, okay? So, don't get freaked out by that. Five points of Arminianism. Five points of Calvinism. First of all, this is where we get the acronym TULIP, if you look at the first letter of each of these.

And the first one there is total depravity, or also known as total inability. This is that we are so sinful, born sinful, that we are incapable of choosing God.

If it comes down to a choice between God and sin, or belief and unbelief, we're always going to choose sin. We're always going to choose unbelief. Secondly, unconditional election.

This is that God, before the foundation of the world, before history began, he chose for himself a people who would become Christians. And it wasn't based on whether they would come halfway and kind of believe in him.

It wasn't based on whether they were good people or whatever. It was unconditional. It's according to his own free choice. Then we've got limited atonement. This is that Jesus, when he died on the cross, he died specifically to save the elect, to save the people who he chose.

[6 : 58] Limited in that way. Then we've got irresistible grace. This is that if God wants to save you, you can fight and you can resist and you can try and walk away, but in the end he's going to win.

You're going to become a Christian. Last of all, perseverance of all saints. This is that if you're a Christian, if you've put your trust in Jesus, if you've repented of your sin, you're going to be a Christian the rest of your life.

You're going to make it to heaven. The question there is not, can I lose my faith? That's what we often say. Can I lose my faith? Can I lose my salvation? That's not the question for Calvinists because we don't have salvation.

We're given salvation by Jesus. So, the question is, can Jesus lose a Christian? Can a Christian sort of jump out of Jesus' hand? So, that's the next five weeks.

We're going to take one of each and just put them out there and then we're going to go to the Bible and see what the Bible says. Tonight, we're going to look at free will, total depravity.

[7 : 56] How do I become a Christian? How do I make the decision to love Jesus? The best way for us to understand some of these big concepts, I think, is to go to church history.

So, we're going to go back about 500 years. If we don't understand history, then we don't understand where people were coming from and we'll just end up confused. So, you've got to stick with me. We're going to church history and we're going to go first to 1466.

In 1466, a guy was born named Erasmus. Pretty cool name. Glenn, you might want to think about that for the bean, Erasmus. He was a humanist scholar, a philosopher, not a theologian proper, but he was a Christian and he was big into free will.

So, he said for someone to genuinely believe in God, he must have a genuine choice to reject God. He even went as far to say that he would put more emphasis on free will than he thought the Bible did.

Okay? Big into free will. A humanist scholar, so interested in human autonomy, human responsibility, human decision making. Fast forward to about 100 years later and we'll come to 1560 and this is where a guy named Jacob Arminius came on the scene.

[9 : 24] Have a guess at what his position was. Jacob Arminius, he was a Dutch guy as was Erasmus and he went from being a Calvinist on that side of the page to being more on this side of the page.

A way to better understand this maybe, just by way of analogy, before we get deeper into it, I forgot to say this. When we're talking about the Arminian position and the Calvinist position, I'm going to talk about the one-handed or the, sorry, the two-handed position and the one-handed position.

You need to look at me because this is important. When it comes to the Arminians, they have a two-handed position. It's known as synergism. Okay? Sin meaning cooperation, bringing together of two or more.

Two-handed. They say that God, when he saves someone, reaches down his hand, offers them a hand and the sinner turned Christian reaches up and grabs hold of that hand and he lifts them into heaven.

That's how they get saved. Two-handed. Cooperation. The Calvinists are monogistic in their understanding.

[10 : 35] They're one-handed. They believe that there's no kind of reaching up and grabbing hold of God's hand. He just reaches down, grabs you by the scruff of the neck and he makes you a Christian. One-handed.

So, the analogy might be you're in the water, you're whitewater rafting, you've come out of the boat. Does God reach out a hand and it's your responsibility to grab hold otherwise you'll be swept downstream?

Or is it that God reaches down and rips you back into the boat? Jacob Arminius started as a one-handed guy and as he looked into this and as he taught at a seminary, taught theology, he moved into a two-handed position.

That's 1560. Fast forward a little way and it's one year after his death now, it's 1610. And a bunch of his students, his very influential teacher, a bunch of his students have come together and they're calling themselves the Arminians after their teacher.

They love this guy, they love what he thought, what he taught. And so, they gathered together his teaching, maybe read in a few other things and they came up with the five points of Arminianism.

[11 : 45] They called it the remonstrance, which means it's a protest. Because at this time in Holland, the documents that were governing the church, what the church believed were the Belgic Confession and the Heidelberg Catechism.

And these were Calvinist documents, okay? They were one-handed documents. And so, these guys got together and they were like, hang on a second. We don't want Calvinist documents governing what our church believes.

We want what our teacher Jacob Arminius came up with or what he taught. And we've put together five points of Arminianism and they're right here on the left side.

So, they went to the church officials and they said, you guys need to change these confessions, these documents to be more in line with this.

Okay? 1610. So, what these guys did, the church elders, they took eight years somehow to digest these five points.

[12 : 51] So, we're going to take five weeks, but they took eight years and in 1618, they got together with a number of church elders from England, from Scotland, from Switzerland, from France, from Germany, right around Europe.

And they came together for a massive council called the Synod of Dort. Synod of Dort, which is another cool name. Holy Trinity Dort. That would be cool.

Anyway, so, they came together, the Synod of Dort, and they met together for seven months in what's called the Synod of Dort. Seven months, 154 sessions, just purely to talk about the five points of Arminianism.

So, they felt that this was sufficient enough, a document, that they need to do some real hard thinking about this. So, they came together with the express purpose of judging the five points of Arminianism against the Bible.

They believed, like we do, that the Bible is the absolute authority in the church. We need to be in line with the Bible. And so, they thought, all right, we're going to look at the Bible. We're going to look at the five points of Arminianism.

[14 : 02] We're going to see what we come up with. Seven months, 154 sessions. And this is what came out of it. I've got a quote here from a guy. He talks about what they came out with seven months later.

He says, They've been called into question.

They proceeded to do so, embodying the Calvinistic position in five chapters, which has since been come to know as the five points of Calvinism.

Seven months, looking at the five points of Arminianism. They believe that it's not in line with God's word. So, they come up with the five points of Calvinism.

Now, to understand why it's called Calvinism, we need to track back a bit to the time of John Calvin. So, he was around right at the start of the Reformation. Even if you've done a secular history class at school, you will know the name of Calvin.

[15 : 43] He's shaped much of modern history, really. They took the name Calvinism because he was very influential. Scholars from both sides of the fence will say that he's probably the greatest Bible teacher outside of Scripture ever.

But he, along with Martin Luther and a few other guys, were the forerunners of the Reformation. And they came up with, or they at least made popular and expounded a lot of these views that are encapsulated in the five points of Calvinism.

Now, people will be quick to tell you that Calvin didn't really sign off on those five points and they came out after his time at the Synod of Dort. But I think they're a fairly good summation of his theology along with the other reformers, okay?

So, Calvin was a forerunner of the Reformation. So, was Martin Luther. And he did battle with, Luther did battle with Erasmus and these other guys who loved their free will and their five points of Arminianism.

So, that's how we came to have these two differing opinions. It needs to be said now that this is not the best way to figure out the answer to our question, how does someone get saved, right?

[16 : 58] The best way of doing theology is not to take someone else's views that you don't agree with and counter them. The best way is just go to the Bible, read what the Bible says. That's the best way to do theology.

You with me? So, these guys haven't done it the best way. They haven't taken the ideal route. Having said that, I think that the...

I'll just say out, you know, come out of the closet now and say that I'm with the Calvinists, all right? I'm with those guys. And I'll try and represent both fairly, but I'm with those guys.

And I came from a position of being totally with the Arminians. And the majority position today of most churches and most Christians will be the Arminian position.

It's the one that most sort of feels right with us, you know, before we look too carefully at it, I think. So, I went from being on the left side, from being a two-handed guy to being a one-handed guy.

[17 : 58] And the way I did that was to look at the Bible, and that's what we're going to do tonight. These are helpful, but we need to go to the Word of God.

So, we're going back to the question now. How do non-Christians, how do unbelievers, go from being non-believers to being believers?

We're going to look at the monogistic, the single-handed option, and the synergistic, two-handed option. First, we'll look at the Arminian free will position. I'm just going to encapsulate it in one or two brief points, just to summarise, okay?

The guys over on the Arminian side, they have a big emphasis on human responsibility, okay? You are a free agent. It's your choice.

It comes down to whether you choose God or don't choose God. In addition to that, they believe in what's called prevenient grace, that God makes grace available to you, and then it's up to you to pluck it.

[19 : 08] And the key principle for them is this, that you cannot have genuine love for God, genuine faith in God, unless you've got a genuine choice before you, unless you've been responsible to make that decision.

Calvinists, on the other hand, where Arminians emphasise the responsibility of humanity, they emphasise the sovereignty of God, okay? God is free to choose people, whoever he wants.

God is free to make decisions. God is free to see his will done, and he's powerful to make sure it happens. They have a kind of high view of sin.

So, when Adam and Eve sinned in the garden in Genesis 3, we didn't just kind of get cracked. We didn't just, you know, things went a bit awry. They say everything went to hell.

When you are born, you are born in an original sin. You are born with imputed sin. That is, that you effectively took the apple yourself off the tree, or the fruit yourself.

[20 : 08] That you are born completely spiritually dead. Even the cutest little baby is born spiritually dead. You cannot turn to God of your own volition. They say we are by our very nature sinners.

We are by our very nature against God. It's like if you had a shark, and you offered him, you know, a side of seal, and you offered him some seaweed, the shark is always going to go for the seal, right?

That's in his nature. He's programmed to take the seal and not the seaweed. And they say that we, by virtue of our sin, by virtue of our sinful condition, our nature is always to choose sin.

It's not that we don't have any choice. It's just that when the choice is there, we're always going to choose unbelief. We're always going to choose sin. Their key principle is that the Arminians say if there's not choice, then there isn't genuine faith.

The Calvinists say if there is choice, there's not going to be any salvation. You're always going to choose sin, Satan, hell. So, why don't we go to some scriptures.

[21 : 22] They're the two positions in big picture. We'll be tracking with them over the next few weeks. But we need to go to the Bible. The reason I'm with the Calvinists is because I think that that's what the Bible thinks.

And I'm going to give you some scriptures to back up why I think that. The reading tonight, Romans 3, 9 to 20. Paul just gives a massive indictment on human capability.

It's kind of the nail in the coffin for human responsibility when it comes to salvation. He says there is no one righteous, not even one. There is no one who has understanding.

There is no one who seeks God. All have turned aside. Together they have become worthless. There is no one who shows kindness. There is not even one.

Their throats are open graves. They use their tongues to deceive. The venom of vipers is under their lips. Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood.

[22 : 29] Ruin and misery are in their paths. And the way of peace they have not known. There is no fear of God before their eyes. That is his summary of humanity in its fallen state.

Genesis 6, 5. The Lord saw that the wickedness of humankind was great in the earth and that every inclination of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil all the time.

John 6, 4. Jesus says, No one can come to me unless drawn by the Father who sent me and I will raise that person up on the last day.

Again, John 3, 19. Jesus says, And this is the judgment that the light has come into the world, that Jesus has come into the world and that people love darkness rather than the light because their deeds were evil.

Paul says in 1 Corinthians 12, 14. Those who are unspiritual, people who don't believe in Jesus, people who aren't saved, do not receive the gifts of God's spirit because they are foolishness to them.

[23 : 38] And they are unable to understand them because they are discerned spiritually. Romans 8, 7 to 8. For this reason, the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God.

The mind that is unregenerate, the mind that is not a Christian mind, it's not just indifferent to God. It's not just, well, that's nice for you. It's not for me. It's hostile to God. It's against God.

It does not submit to God's law. Indeed, it cannot. And those who are in the flesh cannot please God. And then finally, Ephesians 2, 1 to 9.

He says to Christians who were once unbelievers, he said, you were dead. Not, you know, physically alive, spiritually dead.

You were dead through your trespasses and sins in which you once lived, following the course of this world, following the ruler of the power of the air, that is Satan, the spirit that is now at work among those who are disobedient.

[24 : 38] And all of us once lived among them in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of the flesh. And we were by nature children of wrath like everyone else.

He says, by nature, we deserve condemnation. Our nature is sinful. Our nature is evil. It deserves punishment from God.

The Bible has a pretty pessimistic view of our capability to please God, to turn to God, to put our faith in God.

The Bible says that you and I, before we become Christians, are spiritually dead. The drowning illustration doesn't work very well because it's not that we're drowning and we want to reach out to God.

It's that we're dead in the water. We're floating along, face down, blue in the face. Spiritually dead. Some might say, what about free will?

[25 : 42] Surely we have the right to choose. Surely God respects our freedom, respects our intellect, respects our reason enough to allow us to choose. And I would give you a few reasons why I don't put much stock in free will.

First of all, only God has free will. Only God has true free will. I mean, I can't will myself to be a duck. I can't will myself to be nine foot tall.

I can't will myself to be really good looking. Although I've tried. We do have choices. Martin Luther helpfully pointed this out.

Erasmus wrote a book called The Bondage of the Will. Luther wrote one called The Freedom of the Will. Luther wrote one called The Bondage of the Will. He didn't have a lot of time for Erasmus.

Actually, I've got a quote here. This is great. Luther was pretty liberal with his tongue and he said a few interesting things. About Erasmus, he said, Erasmus of Rotterdam is the vilest miscreant that ever disgraced the earth.

[26 : 55] Shame upon thee, a cursed wretch, whenever I pray. He prayed a lot. Whenever I pray, I pray a curse upon Erasmus. Okay?

So, he decided he'd write a book called The Bondage of the Will in Opposition to the Freedom of the Will. And he rightly said that only God has true free will.

We have choices to make. You can choose between Coke and Pepsi. Or between PC and Mac. Or between Ford and Holden. You can make these kind of choices.

But if you think about it, those choices are really limited. If you take into account your cultural upbringing, your genes, all of those factors, your choices are really limited.

They're certainly not free in the sense of true freedom. He also rightly said that the way we make decisions is that they flow out of the heart that we have.

[27 : 54] The decisions we make flow out of the heart that we have. So, if you're a sinner, like all of us have been, if you're not a believer, if you don't love Jesus, then the decisions you make are going to flow out of that heart.

Jesus said it this way. He said, a fig tree can't produce apples. Someone who's in opposition to God, someone who does not have their faith in Jesus, will not choose, if given the choice, to follow Jesus.

I think also, this emphasis on free will puts a, to be an emphasis on human, it's too human-centered.

That's why the humanist scholars lap it up. It's very human-centered. It doesn't take into account what God's will is for us to the same degree. Just before we move on, we do need to make one point, just so you're not completely wanting to slit your wrists when we come out of here.

Humanity is not totally depraved in the sense that we are completely evil to the greatest degree. We could be more evil if we wanted to be.

[29 : 12] The grace of God in restraining us, the threat of the law, our conscience, which is a reflection of our, being made in God's image, these all restrain us from being as, as evil as we might be.

Non-Christians, unbelievers can do great things and they have, obviously. They can achieve great things. But the point is, the point that the Bible makes, that apart from faith in Jesus, you can't do anything pleasing to God.

You can't do anything in line with God's will. You can't turn to God. You can't put your trust in God. You can't be obedient to God. Something needs to happen first.

If you're dead, if you're spiritually dead, something needs to happen and it's called regeneration. It's a big word worth hanging on to.

Regeneration. It means that you're born again. It means that you're made alive again, spiritually. Remember the story with Jesus and Lazarus?

[30 : 19] Remember that story? Lazarus is dead. He's dead in a tomb and the Bible says that he's starting to stink. He's been dead that long. He's starting to decompose. And he's a good friend of Jesus and Jesus turns up.

In the end, Lazarus is raised from the dead but it didn't happen like this. Lazarus didn't suddenly wake up and call out to Jesus and Jesus cooperated with his desire to be alive again and raised him from the dead.

It didn't happen like that. Dead Lazarus stayed dead and continued to stink and would have continued to decompose. If Jesus hadn't showed up and did everything from start to finish to raise him from the dead.

He called out to Lazarus and said, Lazarus, come out of the tomb. Lazarus got up, was raised from the dead, walked out again. He's alive.

God's got to initiate it. God has the power to raise people from death, physical death and he has the power to raise us from spiritual death.

[31 : 31] Dead people don't make decisions. Dead people don't make choices. Dead people don't reach their hand up to cooperate with God in their own salvation.

It's got to be one-handed. It's a miracle. No matter what your experience of becoming Christian, whether it was immediate or it was gradual, it's a miracle.

We heard this morning from Linda who's here in the morning service. She talked about how she was saved when she was 36 years old. She went from, almost instantly from being in opposition to God, not interested in the Bible, God saved her.

He regenerated her heart. He brought her spiritual life to life. Suddenly, she wanted to read her Bible. She wanted to obey Jesus. She wanted to walk with Jesus. She was hoping in heaven.

That's what regeneration is. So, a couple of things just to finish. I know that this is really controversial and when I first heard these kinds of things, I went into fight mode.

[32 : 39] I wanted to fight the guy who was telling me that I wasn't the master of my own destiny. A couple of things. Some of you might say, what's the point of praying then?

What's the point of praying for my brother who's not a Christian or my parent who's not a Christian or my friend who's not a Christian who I brought along tonight to hear the sermon? What's the point if they can't make the decision?

What's the point of apologetics and arguing and debating and presenting Jesus to them? And I would say the point is that God is powerful to save them. It's the more encouraging view if you think about it.

We're not relying on our stupid friend with their stupid sins and their stupid brain like I have to make a godly righteous decision. We're relying on God who's powerful to raise them to belief.

So pray for them. Pray to the God who's able to save them, who doesn't have to wait for them, who can reach down and rip them out of the grave. Start praying to that God.

[33 : 43] Some of you might say, I don't care what you say, I don't care if that's from the Bible, I'm not going to believe that, I'm not going to yield my freedom to God. I'm not going to yield it to anyone. That's something someone from my generation would say.

We prize autonomy above all things. We've got choices in front of us more than we could ever count. All the advertising, all the media is playing into this, that you've got the choice.

You should choose this product, you deserve it. It's up to you. And I would say to you that you need to repent. Don't get angry at me, don't send me emails, don't try and fight me after the service.

You need to come to God and repent and be humble before His word. You're not yielding your autonomy to me, you're not yielding your autonomy to Satan, you're yielding it to a loving, generous, sovereign God who fulfills His promises.

Finally, if you're sitting here tonight and you're not a Christian and you're thinking, I want to be a Christian but I don't know how, does this mean that I can't step forward in faith?

[34 : 57] Does this mean that I can't become a Christian? Not at all. I'd want to tell you that if you want to become a Christian, that's because God has been working in you. So often when we think back in our lives, we think, I remember when I made a decision for God but really what happened was before you even had that inclination to choose God, to want to follow Jesus, He was working your life.

He'd regenerated your heart. It was only because He did that that you were able to say, I want to follow Jesus. So if you're sitting here tonight and you want to be a Christian, that's evidence that God has been working to regenerate you, to raise you from spiritual death.

It's a wonderful thing. And lest you despair that God won't accept you, that because of your total depravity, God won't welcome you.

I want to finish by reading this and then I'll pray. This is Romans chapter 10 verses 9 to 13. Paul says this, If you confess with your lips, if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.

for one believes with the heart and so is justified, made right before God. And one confesses with the mouth and so is saved.

[36 : 25] The scripture says, no one who believes in Him will be put to shame. For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek or male and female or rich and poor, uni student and TAFE student, working, unemployed.

There is no distinction. The same Lord is Lord of all and is generous to all who call on Him. For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.

Let's pray. Father, thanks for an opportunity to come together and to look at some tough theology and some big questions.

I pray now that you would move in the hearts of everyone here. To those who are Christians, I pray that you would encourage them, not discourage them because of their sin, but encourage them because you are powerful, you are mighty, you are Lord.

To those of us who aren't Christians, Lord, we pray that you would reach down and that you would rip them out of the grave of their spiritual deadness. That you would enable them to love you and serve you, be obedient to you, turn to you in faith.

[37 : 52] Lord, please keep us humble to read your word and to understand it and submit to it. We love you, Lord. We thank you so much that you offer salvation to all who would come to you in faith.

We praise you in Jesus' name. Amen.