

TRINITY REMNANT CHURCH
THE DOCTRINES OF GRACE (FIVE POINTS OF CALVINISM)

Total Depravity

Romans 3:23 "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."

➤ **INTRODUCTION**

- Today there is immense interest in understanding human behavior. Entire fields of study have developed their own specialized vocabulary to describe the human condition and explain what is wrong with the world. Christianity also seeks to understand human behavior, but it does so from God's perspective. The Bible provides its own diagnosis of the human condition, and it is far more searching than any offered by human philosophy. It teaches that every man and woman, without exception, is a sinner by nature and by choice. Historically, theologians have summarized this biblical teaching with the expression total depravity.
- To the natural mind, that phrase is deeply offensive. It is certainly not popular in our culture and is often misunderstood. Some assume it means that every person is as wicked as he or she could possibly be. That is not what the doctrine teaches. Rather, it means that the corruption of sin has affected every part of our being—our minds, our wills, our emotions, and our bodies—so that no part of us remains untouched by sin. Left to ourselves, we neither love God as we ought nor seek Him as we should.
- Because this diagnosis is so unpopular, there is a constant temptation for churches to soften the message. In many places the emphasis has shifted toward making Christianity as attractive, comfortable, and non-confrontational as possible. Sermons are often designed to entertain rather than convict, to reassure rather than expose sin, and to make people feel accepted rather than to bring them face to face with their need of a Savior. Sin is frequently described in terms of emptiness, brokenness, or lack of purpose, while its guilt before a holy God is minimized or ignored.
- When that happens, people may conclude that Christianity is simply an optional aid to a happier or more meaningful life. They may leave thinking that the gospel is designed merely to improve self-esteem, strengthen relationships, or provide emotional support. Yet the Bible presents a far more urgent message. It tells us that our greatest problem is not that we are unhappy, but that we are guilty before a holy God. Apart from Christ, we stand under His righteous judgment because of our sin. For that reason, faithful gospel preaching must include both the seriousness of our condition and the greatness of God's remedy. A person who does not understand the depth of his disease will never appreciate the wonder of the cure. The apostle Paul himself said, "Knowing therefore the fear of

the Lord, we persuade others" (2 Corinthians 5:11). He understood that people must first see their danger if they are to flee to Christ for refuge.

- Consider the work of a physician. Suppose a patient comes with severe chest pains, but instead of examining him honestly, the doctor repeatedly assures him that there is nothing to worry about. He jokes with him, dismisses his concerns, and tells him that it is only indigestion. The patient leaves comforted, but he is actually suffering from a life-threatening heart condition. Has that doctor acted with compassion? Certainly not. His reassuring words have become a deadly deception. A faithful physician tells the truth about the disease because he desires his patient to receive the cure. The same principle applies in the ministry of the gospel. If preachers minimize the seriousness of sin, they may temporarily comfort people, but they do not truly help them. The most loving message is not one that hides the diagnosis but one that honestly reveals it and then points sinners to the only Savior who can heal them. The gospel is good news precisely because it addresses our greatest need.
- This is exactly where the apostle Paul leads us in Romans 3:23. "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." That is God's diagnosis of the entire human race. Every one of us has sinned. Every one of us has fallen short of God's perfect standard. Until we understand that solemn reality, we will never fully appreciate the grace that God freely offers to sinners through Jesus Christ.

➤ **ALL OF US ARE SINNERS IN THE SIGHT OF GOD.**

- The Word of God does not evaluate human life according to changing human standards—public opinion, cultural consensus, personal conscience, or the moral fashions of a particular age. Scripture judges every person by one perfect and unchanging standard: the law of God. It weighs every life on God's own scales, which are absolute, holy, and eternal. It is by that standard alone that God assesses our thoughts, words, and actions. Sin, therefore, is not merely doing what is impractical, socially unacceptable, or politically incorrect. Sin is a violation of the holy law of God. The Bible uses several words to describe the nature of sin, each revealing another aspect of our guilt before Him.

First, sin is missing the mark.

- This is the word Paul uses in Romans 3:23: "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." The picture is that of an archer aiming at a target. God has placed before every human being the perfect standard of His own holiness. We are to love Him with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, and to love our neighbor as ourselves. That is the target. But Scripture declares that every one of us has missed it. Indeed, we have done more than miss the bull's-eye. Our entire lives have fallen short of God's glorious standard. We have failed to live as He created us to live.

Second, sin is transgression.

- God has established clear boundaries for human life in His holy law. The Ten Commandments mark out the borders of His kingdom. We are to worship Him alone, reject all idols, honor His holy name, keep His day holy, honor our parents, refrain from murder, maintain sexual purity, respect the property of others, speak truthfully, and refuse to covet what belongs to our neighbor. These are not suggestions but God's righteous commands. He has fixed these boundaries, and no one has the authority to move them. Yet every one of us has crossed those lines. Sometimes we stumble across them through weakness; often we cross them knowingly and willingly. Again and again we trespass into territory that God has forbidden. That is what the Bible calls transgression.

Third, sin is disobedience.

- God, as our Creator, has every right to command His creatures. His voice speaks through the law written upon the human heart, through His revelation in creation, and most clearly through the Scriptures. He says, "This is the way you are to live." He instructs fathers, mothers, children, employers, employees, neighbors, rulers, and citizens. He tells us how to worship Him and how to love one another. Yet the natural response of the sinful heart is resistance. Humanity says, "We will not have this man to reign over us." Sin is not merely ignorance of God's will; it is willful refusal to submit to His rightful authority.

Fourth, sin is lawlessness.

- God never intended men and women to live autonomously—to become their own authority and determine for themselves what is true, good, and right. Yet this is precisely the spirit of our age. People say, "I have my own truth," or, "This is how I choose to think about God," as though the Creator's authority could be replaced by personal preference. That is lawlessness. It is living as though we ourselves were the highest authority. Such independence from God never leads to freedom; it leads only to confusion, disorder, and destruction. In contrast, God created us to live under His gracious rule. True freedom is found not in self-government but in joyful submission to His will—in loving Him with all our hearts and loving our neighbors as ourselves.
- These four descriptions help us understand what Paul means when he says, "All have sinned."
Every life has missed God's perfect standard.
Every life has crossed God's holy boundaries.
Every life has disobeyed God's righteous commands.
Every life has lived in rebellion against His rightful rule.
The standard is nothing less than the glory and holiness of God Himself, and every one of us has fallen short.
- The Bible describes sin as a hard heart that refuses to respond to God, a stiff neck that refuses to bow before Him, blindness that keeps us from seeing the

truth, and a savage beast crouching at the door, ready to devour us. It is like garments stained with a scarlet dye that cannot be washed away by human effort. It is like a crippling disease that leaves us unable to walk as we ought. It is like a deadly infection or leprosy that has spread from head to foot, leaving no part of us untouched. That is God's diagnosis of the human race. This is what sin is. And until we understand the depth of that disease, we will never fully appreciate the greatness of the Savior who came to heal sinners and reconcile them to God.

➤ **ALL OF US SIN INWARDLY.**

- According to the Word of God, sin is fundamentally an inward reality. Of course, there are obvious, visible, and concrete sins. When most people think of sin, they think of public scandals, corruption, theft, violence, drunkenness, drug abuse, cruelty, sexual immorality, or other outward acts of wrongdoing. Our attention is naturally drawn to what can be seen. We are concerned with human actions and observable behavior, and rightly so, for these things matter greatly. Yet the Bible probes much deeper. It does not stop at outward conduct but reaches into the hidden depths of the human heart. Scripture teaches that sin is found not only in our words and actions but also in our thoughts, ambitions, desires, affections, emotions, and motives. The root of our problem is not merely what we do but who we are.
- Our Lord Jesus made this abundantly clear. He taught that a person is not defiled by what enters the body through food but by what proceeds from the heart. Evil thoughts, greed, pride, lust, hatred, deceit, and every sinful action originate within. The heart is the fountain from which sinful behavior flows. The problem is not merely sinful deeds; it is the sinful heart that produces them. This inward focus distinguishes the moral law of God from every merely external system of ethics. Many religious and philosophical traditions prohibit murder, theft, and adultery. But Scripture goes beyond outward conduct and addresses the desires of the heart. The Tenth Commandment declares, "You shall not covet." That commandment exposes the true depth of God's law. It condemns the sinful desire for what belongs to another person. A man may never steal his neighbor's possessions or commit any outward act against him, yet if his heart burns with envy and selfish longing, he has already sinned before God. Covetousness may never appear on the face or express itself in words, yet God sees it and condemns it. Sin exists not only in outward actions but also in cherished desires.
- We are often tempted to think that as long as sinful thoughts remain hidden and never become actions, they are relatively harmless. But the New Testament teaches otherwise. The desire to sin is itself sinful. Illicit lust, selfish ambition, bitter envy, and sinful longing are not merely temptations when they are welcomed and entertained; they are themselves violations of God's holy law.

- Our Lord makes the same point when explaining the Sixth Commandment: "You shall not murder." He teaches that this commandment is not limited to physical violence. Certainly, it condemns murder, assault, abuse, abortion, euthanasia, and every unlawful taking of human life. But Christ goes further. He says that hatred, sinful anger, bitterness, and contempt are also violations of this commandment. A person may never strike another or utter an angry word. He may carefully maintain a respectable appearance while inwardly nursing resentment and hostility. Fear of consequences, concern for reputation, or simple self-control may prevent outward violence, but the heart may still be full of hatred. Jesus declares that such hatred is sin before God.
- Likewise, our Lord applies the Seventh Commandment to the heart. Adultery is not merely the outward act of sexual immorality. Lust itself is sinful. A person may never commit the physical act, never speak an immoral word, and never be exposed publicly, yet if he delights in impure thoughts and cultivates unlawful desires, he has already sinned in his heart. We must therefore recognize that sin is not confined to our words or our deeds. It reaches into the deepest recesses of our souls. Our thoughts, motives, desires, and affections all stand exposed before the all-seeing eyes of God.
- This inward corruption can be observed even from our earliest years. Children often lack the strength or opportunity to express all that is in their hearts through actions, but their desires frequently reveal the sinful nature within. We hear the constant cry of, "More! More! More!" A child quickly grows dissatisfied with new toys and longs instead for those belonging to a sibling or friend. Such envy and selfishness reveal a heart already affected by sin. The same sinful heart remains throughout life. Consider the temptations that often accompany old age. Complaining, impatience, bitterness, self-pity, constant demands for attention, and a spirit of discontent are not merely unpleasant personality traits; they too must be confessed before God. Grey hair does not remove the need for repentance. Whether young or old, our greatest problem lies within.
- Nor are our emotions exempt from the effects of the fall. Even the emotional life bears the marks of sin. How much sinful anxiety remains in otherwise mature Christians? How often does fear replace trust in God's promises? How frequently do we indulge in self-pity, resentment, or discouragement? At times we overreact emotionally to situations that require calm faith. At other times we remain unmoved by tragedies that ought to break our hearts. We may witness great evil and remain strangely indifferent. We may hear of suffering without compassion or become consumed with our own concerns while neglecting the needs of others. Our emotions are often disordered—not only because we feel what we ought not to feel, but because we fail to feel what we ought. Both reveal the corruption of sin.
- When we speak of the total depravity of man, this is what we mean. Sin has penetrated every part of our being. It has affected not only our actions but also our thoughts, our motives, our desires, our ambitions, our emotions, our

conscience, and our will. Every faculty of our nature has been touched by the fall. The problem is not merely that we sometimes do sinful things; it is that our hearts themselves are sinful. That is why we need more than moral improvement. We need a new heart, given by the grace of God through Jesus Christ.

➤ **ALL OF US ARE SLAVES OF SIN.**

- The Bible teaches that there is no moment, no action, and no area of human life that remains untouched by sin. Sin is not something that occasionally influences us; apart from the grace of God, it dominates the whole person. How can we know this? Because of the language Scripture uses to describe our condition. Consider one of the Bible's most striking descriptions. The apostle Paul says that apart from Christ, we are slaves of sin.
- Listen to his words in Romans 6:16–18: "Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey—either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to the pattern of teaching to which you were committed, and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness." Paul reminds the Christians in Rome that before they came to Christ, they were slaves of sin. Likewise, in Galatians 3:22 he declares, "Scripture has imprisoned everything under sin." The whole world stands under sin's dominion.
- Think about what slavery meant in the ancient world. A slave belonged entirely to his master. He possessed no independent rights. His time was not his own. His labor was not his own. His possessions were not his own. His abilities were not his own. There was not a single hour of the day in which he could say, "This belongs to me alone." Everything about his life was under the authority of his master. That is the image Paul uses to describe every unbeliever. Before God rescued us through Christ, we were not merely people who occasionally sinned. We were slaves of sin. We lived under its authority and were unable to free ourselves from its dominion.
- The tragedy is that sin disguises our true condition. It persuades us that we are completely free, that we are independent men and women exercising our own unrestricted free will. We imagine that our decisions originate entirely within ourselves. Yet all the while sin quietly directs our desires, shapes our thinking, and governs our choices. A person often does not realize he is enslaved until he attempts to escape.
- The Bible says that every unbeliever lives under the domination of sin. Day after day sin speaks with persuasive authority:
"Ignore Jesus Christ."
"Do not think about your guilt before God."
"Do not read the Scriptures."

"When someone speaks to you about Christ, change the subject."

"Do not think seriously about death."

"Do not pray."

"Do not question the assumptions of this world."

"Do not seek God."

- And humanity willingly obeys. The whole world lives in submission to this cruel master. That is why Scripture says that all are prisoners of sin. This is one of the Bible's most humbling truths. What we often imagine to be independent choices are, apart from God's grace, expressions of our bondage to sin. Left to ourselves, we do not naturally choose Christ because our hearts are held captive by another master. That is precisely why Jesus declared, "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him" (John 6:44). We cannot come to Christ by our own strength because sin has enslaved our wills.
- Paul makes the same point in Romans 8:7, where he says that the mind governed by the flesh does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. The problem is not merely unwillingness but inability. Sin has so corrupted us that we lack both the desire and the power to submit ourselves to God. Again, in 1 Corinthians 2:14, Paul writes that "the natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him." The gospel of forgiveness, reconciliation, and eternal life appears foolish to the unregenerate heart because it remains under the dominion of sin.
- This, then, is God's diagnosis of the human race. Apart from His saving grace, we are not spiritually neutral. We are not merely weak. We are slaves of sin, prisoners under its power, unable to free ourselves. That is why salvation must be entirely the work of God's grace. Unless the Father draws us, unless the Son redeems us, and unless the Holy Spirit gives us new life, we will remain exactly where sin has kept us—in bondage. Only Christ can set captives free.

➤ **ALL OF US ARE AFFECTED IN EVERY PART BY SIN.**

- We have now come to the much-discussed doctrine of total depravity. It is one of the most misunderstood teachings of Scripture. It does not mean that every person is as wicked as he or she could possibly be. It does not mean that all people are equally depraved. Nor does it mean that human beings are devils or beasts, devoid of every trace of goodness in their relationships with others. Rather, total depravity means that sin has affected the whole person. Every faculty of our being—our mind, our conscience, our emotions, our affections, our will, and our body—has been corrupted by the fall. There is no part of our nature that has escaped sin's influence. We are entirely devoid of original righteousness, and every aspect of our humanity bears the marks of our rebellion against God.
- That is the sobering testimony of Scripture. Left to ourselves, there is no hope within us. Even our best works are stained by sin. As Isaiah declares, "All our

righteous deeds are like a polluted garment" (Isaiah 64:6). Likewise, the prophet describes our condition in these solemn words: "The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even to the head, there is no soundness in it" (Isaiah 1:5–6). The point is clear. There is no area of human life that remains untouched by sin.

First, our intellect has been corrupted.

- Many suppose that the human mind has escaped the effects of the fall. Surely reason alone can lead us safely to the truth? Yet Scripture says otherwise. Sin has distorted our thinking as surely as it has corrupted our conduct. Human history demonstrates remarkable achievements in science, medicine, and technology. These are evidences of God's common grace. Yet intellectual brilliance does not remove spiritual blindness. Fallen men and women often interpret God's world while refusing to acknowledge God's existence. Instead of allowing creation to lead them to the Creator, they suppress the truth revealed in creation, just as Paul teaches in Romans 1.
- Our powers of observation, reasoning, and analysis remain real gifts from God, but they are no longer morally neutral. Every mind approaches reality with presuppositions shaped by the sinful heart. There is no such thing as complete moral neutrality before God. Apart from His grace, the natural mind resists His truth and seeks to explain the universe without reference to its Creator. This is why Paul says that sinful humanity "suppresses the truth in unrighteousness." The problem is not merely intellectual ignorance but spiritual rebellion. Our minds have been darkened by sin.

Second, our conscience has been corrupted.

- Many people assume that conscience is an infallible guide. Yet Scripture never teaches this. Conscience can be informed by truth, but it can also be misinformed, hardened, defiled, and seared. History provides tragic examples of people committing terrible acts while sincerely believing they were doing what was right. The religious leaders who condemned the Lord Jesus believed they were defending God's honor. Jesus Himself warned His disciples that the day would come when those who killed them would think they were offering service to God. This reminds us that sincerity is no guarantee of truth. A person may act with a clear conscience and still be terribly wrong. Conscience is only as reliable as the truth by which it has been instructed. Apart from God's Word, it cannot safely guide us.
- The atrocities committed throughout history under the banners of false religion, political ideology, and human philosophy demonstrate that conscience itself has been affected by sin. It is not an independent source of moral perfection but another faculty that needs to be renewed by the grace of God.

Third, our will has been corrupted.

- Perhaps nowhere is the doctrine of total depravity more clearly seen than in the human will. People often imagine that although the mind may be confused and the emotions disordered, the will remains spiritually free to choose God whenever it pleases. Scripture teaches otherwise. The natural person may admire certain aspects of Christ's teaching or appreciate Christian morality, but apart from God's grace, he does not willingly submit himself to Christ as Lord. The problem is not merely a lack of information. It is a lack of desire.
- Jesus lamented over Jerusalem, saying, "How often would I have gathered your children together... and you were not willing." Again, He declared, "You refuse to come to me that you may have life." The sinner hears the gospel. He learns of Christ's virgin birth, His sinless life, His atoning death, His resurrection, His coming judgment, and His gracious invitation to all who will believe. Yet left to himself, he does not come. His will remains enslaved to sin. That is why Jesus also says, "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him" (John 6:44). Saving faith is never the product of fallen human will alone. The Holy Spirit must graciously renew the heart, enlighten the mind, and liberate the will so that the sinner gladly comes to Christ.
- Why, then, are not all people Christians? It is not because the gospel is insufficiently clear. It is not because God has failed to make a sincere offer of salvation. The invitation of the gospel is genuine: whoever comes to Christ will certainly be received. The problem lies within us. By nature we do not want Christ. Our wills are in bondage to sin. The very center of our being—the citadel of the soul—is under sin's dominion. Unless God graciously intervenes, we will continue to reject the Savior whom we so desperately need.
- This is the doctrine of total depravity. It does not teach that every person is as wicked as possible. It teaches that every part of our nature has been affected by sin and that, apart from the sovereign grace of God, no one will come to Christ. Our only hope is that God, in His mercy, gives us a new heart, renews our minds, frees our wills, and draws us irresistibly to His Son.

➤ ALL OF US WILL PAY THE WAGES OF SIN.

- The apostle Paul declares, "The wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23). Sin is a cruel master. Whoever serves sin receives its wages. We sow the seeds of sin, and unless God's grace intervenes, we reap the harvest of His righteous judgment. Human beings are not machines or puppets. We are morally responsible creatures, accountable to our Creator for every thought, word, and deed. There is always a harvest. There comes a day when God calls every person to give an account. Sin results first in physical death, then comes judgment, and beyond that lies the dreadful reality that Revelation calls "the second death." It is the place our Lord Jesus so often described with solemn

warnings—a place of weeping and gnashing of teeth, where God's righteous judgment is fully revealed. Such is the inevitable end of sin when left to run its course.

- First, if there is any biblical doctrine that is confirmed by both Scripture and human history, it is the doctrine of man's depravity. Look honestly at our own civilization. We live in an age of extraordinary scientific advancement, unprecedented wealth, and remarkable educational opportunities. Yet alongside these blessings we witness the widespread destruction of unborn children, the steady erosion of marriage and the family, sexual immorality, addiction, greed, violence, dishonesty, and every form of self-indulgence. These are not merely the sins of the ignorant or the uncivilized. They are committed by educated men and women, professionals, scholars, scientists, artists, business leaders, and respectable citizens. Human culture has advanced, but the human heart remains unchanged. The evidence of our depravity surrounds us on every side. Before such a reality, there is only one proper response. As Paul says in Romans 3, "Every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God." We stand guilty before Him.
- Second. For salvation to be accomplished there was only one way, that the eternal Son of God had to come, take flesh and blood and lay down his life for us. If sinners were ever to be saved, there was only one possible way. The eternal Son of God had to leave the glory of heaven, assume our human nature, and offer Himself as the sacrifice for sinners. God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself. Jesus did not come merely to provide an example of love or morality. He came to bear the guilt of His people. On the cross He endured the judgment our sins deserved. There, beneath the wrath of God, the spotless Lamb took the place of guilty sinners. He who knew no sin was made to be sin for us so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. Grace triumphed over depravity because Christ bore the curse that depravity deserved. There was no other way by which sinners could be reconciled to a holy God.
- Third. For salvation to be applied to us there was only one way, that God the Holy Spirit had to come into our individual lives. If that salvation is to become ours personally, there is only one way. The Holy Spirit must apply Christ's saving work to our hearts. He must awaken us to our guilt. He must open our blind eyes to the glory of Christ. He must grant us spiritual life where once there was only spiritual death. He must create within us repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. He must continue His sanctifying work, cleansing us from sin and conforming us to the likeness of our Savior. From beginning to end, salvation is the work of God's grace. What, then, does this mean for Christian mission? It means we must faithfully tell people the truth about their condition. We must not encourage sinners to trust in themselves or imagine that they possess the moral ability to save themselves whenever they choose. We must not flatter human nature or minimize the seriousness of sin. Instead, we must point people away from themselves and to Jesus Christ alone.

➤ CONCLUSION

- Our message is not, "Believe in yourself." Our message is, "See your helplessness. See your guilt. Flee to Christ." Millions have already found mercy in Him. God has redeemed a people for Himself from every tribe, language, nation, and generation. Why should you not be among them? Perhaps you say, "But there is no good thing in me." Christ replies, "Whoever comes to me I will never cast out." Perhaps you say, "But I am totally depraved from head to foot." Christ answers, "Whoever comes to me I will never cast out." Perhaps you say, "I have spent my life serving sin." Christ still declares, "Whoever comes to me I will never cast out." Perhaps you say, "I have sinned against great light and abundant mercy." Again Christ says, "Whoever comes to me I will never cast out."
- Finally, you may say, "I cannot come unless the Father draws me." That is true. Our Lord Himself teaches it. Therefore, do not use that truth as an excuse to remain where you are. Rather, let it drive you to earnest prayer. Cry out to God for mercy. Ask Him to draw you to His Son. Plead with Him to give you a new heart and living faith. Continue seeking Him, trusting His gracious promises, until He answers. For the same God who commands sinners to come to Christ is also the God who delights to save all who call upon His name.