

*There is none righteous, no, not one...*  
— Romans 3:10

# Total Depravity

by E. Jack Chandler, Jr.

**A**ll men are by nature totally depraved; that is, they are incapable (and unwilling) in and of themselves of movement toward God. Grace believers have for generations embraced this great truth.

But the Bible doctrine of the total depravity of men must never be equated with moral turpitude. That a man is morally reprehensible does indeed evince his spiritual condition, but the inverse does not logically follow: a man's good moral character does not necessarily connote a regenerate state. In fact, morality often camouflages a cold, stony heart.

The writer of Hebrews states that *"without faith it is impossible to please him"* (11:6). Paul, in his letter to the Romans, writes that *"whatsoever is not of faith is sin"* (14:23). Even an act which we might naturally deem a great human good — say, a large endowment to a children's charity — is **sinful** before God if it does not flow from a heart of faith.

Without God, man's heart is *"deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked"* (Jeremiah 17:9). The fairest pretensions and best deeds springing from an unregenerate heart are as black as the darkest crimes before a holy, pure God whose essence demands righteousness (and not empty, faithless works).

The Pharisees themselves were highly moral characters, but Jesus frequently spoke harsh words of condemnation against them, for their focus was an external, go-through-the-motions sort of obedience aimed to please what they considered to be an arbitrary, capricious God. They gave good *lip service* to serving Him, but failed to comprehend true worship: *"This people draweth*

*nigh unto me with their mouth,"* Jesus would say, quoting Isaiah, *"and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me"* (Matthew 15:8). Serving God is not about meriting His favor; it's a heart matter.

The Pharisees are not alone in their belief in works-based righteousness. Many works-doers will stand before the throne *"when the Son of man shall come in his glory"* (Matthew 25:31), presuming that they've earned a home in heaven. Imagine their surprise — *and terror!* — when the King commands them to *"Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels"* (Matthew 25:41). They will protest, says Jesus, claiming as merit their good works. But it will be for naught; as they have not faith, their end is destruction.

*Good works* without faith are *not good*; they are sin. Yet James writes that *"faith without works is dead also"* (2:26). The faith God gives is a faith that works... to His glory.

Why is it that faith is so important? Faith is God's gift to His children in the quickening act of regeneration. Only in those with faith is God honored, for it is through faith that His majesty is reflected. He looks at the hearts of His regenerate children and sees... **Himself!** And thus He is glorified!



May we all reflect with redoubled brightness the beauty of His holiness.