

**Section I.****Total Depravity**

1. Total depravity is one of the essential doctrines of Reformed theology. One of the best discussions appears in the Confession of 1967: "All human virtue, when seen in the light of God's love in Jesus Christ, is found to be infected by self-interest and hostility. All men, good and bad alike, are in the wrong before God and helpless without his forgiveness" (9.13). Nothing we do, think, or say is free from this taint of sin. Now when we look around at other people, we may not think we are totally depraved. It is easy to think, "I am better person than Hitler or Mussolini." But these men were also depraved: being "less sinful" (in my own eyes) does not mean we are perfect, any more than they were. We see our sin when we compare ourselves not to other people, but to Christ—the perfect human (9.12-13). In comparison to human perfection, we can recognize that we are imperfect, and because of our imperfection, we do not deserve any consideration from God.

Humans were not originally created totally depraved. God created the world good, and when God created humans, God said they were "very good." But then Adam and Eve sinned by disobeying God (Genesis 3), thus breaking their intimate connection to God. That disconnection has continued throughout history between humans and God, thus we are sinful as a result of their sin—as the Westminster Standards avow (7.016-017). Therefore total depravity is part of the human condition, part of our very nature (4.005). In that sense, no one is more or less depraved than anyone else. This is not a doctrine we use to bash others, but to look honestly at ourselves. In fact, the apostle Paul called himself the worst sinner!

This doctrine establishes the necessity of God's grace through Jesus Christ. If we thought of ourselves as capable of saving ourselves, then we might be tempted not to recognize the awesome gift of grace. Earlier in the Church's history, people like Pelagius thought we

could, by our own actions, be perfect. Augustine argued strongly against this, using Scripture—“all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,” proclaims Romans. Outside Christ, it is not possible for us *not* to sin; though in Christ, this becomes possible, and we long for the day in God’s perfect kingdom when it is *not* possible for us *to* sin. Augustine (and people such as Calvin who follow his writings) insist that we must recognize our total depravity, and then we recognize our reliance on God.

We can rely on God because God did not leave humans in their sinful condition, “helpless without his forgiveness” (9.13). Rather, right after the first sin, God gave Adam and Eve clothes to wear, and God established a covenant with their descendants, and in due time God sent Jesus Christ to re-establish humanity’s relationship with God. The Heidelberg Catechism, the same document that points out we are sinful in our very nature (4.005), begins with a discussion of sin. This discussion is not intended to be “gloomy,” but instead is the first thing we need to know “to live in blessedness and comfort” (4.002). The outline of this document starts by discussing “Man’s Misery,” which is the foundation for our understanding of “Redemption” and “Thankfulness” (how we live in thankful obedience to God for our redemption). The first section is a foundation for understanding the second and third.

For this reason, the doctrine of total depravity should never be separated from the doctrine of justification by grace. Depravity means that we cannot simply choose to turn to God, that we cannot by any effort save ourselves, because any of our efforts is tainted with sin. But justification by grace means that God, in God’s infinite love, has chosen to come to earth as Jesus Christ, who gave himself as a sacrifice for our sin—thanks be to God! Total depravity thus gives us a context to understand the Good News.

2. It is important for all four of these elders to understand what total depravity is; at least Bernie, Dora, and Alice do not seem to have a firm grasp of the doctrine, so teaching the truth in love is important. The first issue I would tackle is the one Dora brought up, that we are not depraved because we do good things. Total depravity means that everything we say, do, or even think is tainted with sin—our own selfish desires, motives, or interests. Only the power of the Holy Spirit working through us can accomplish good. This does not mean that we do nothing of value, because the Holy spirit *does* work through us to accomplish good! But when good does result, we must praise God, not ourselves. We are no less dependent on God's grace, no matter what good we think we do. It is grace, not works, that make us righteous in the eyes of God.

We also need to respond to Alice, who considers total depravity a "gloomy" doctrine. Alone, it does sound gloomy to think of us as miserable sinners. However, when we put together the doctrines of our total depravity and God's sovereign loving grace, this is very good news! Romans 3:23 alone sounds gloomy, "the wages of sin is death." But with the next verse, "but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus," the pair is pure gospel—and the first is necessary to understand the second. We cannot understand God's grace in saving us if we do not recognize our need to be saved. Jamal is therefore correct: "God is so great to save people as totally sinful as we are!" (Of course, we would need to recognize that even Jamal's comment, by his own human endeavor, is tainted as well!) We need to remember never to separate the doctrine of depravity from the doctrine of God's grace.

## Section II.

1. A major theological issue raised here is, what is the significance of Jesus' life and ministry for our lives today?

2. The importance of Jesus' life and ministry is that it serves as a blueprint for the Church's and each Christian's life and ministry as well. In what the Church has called Christ's "Great Commission" in Matthew 28:19-20, Jesus starts by proclaiming that all power on heaven and on earth has been given to him, and then on this foundation Jesus commissions his disciples that as they are going out into the world, they shall make disciples, baptizing them and teaching them to obey everything Jesus taught. Jesus did not leave the disciples with the promise that they're going to heaven so should just wait around until that happens, nor even a mere instruction to convert the nations. Rather, they were called to "be my witnesses" (Acts 1:8) in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the nations—and this witness involved their every action, and teaching others to obey.

Modern theologians echo this biblical perspective. In the book *Transforming Mission*, twentieth century theologian Lesslie Newbigin notes that Matthew 28:20 has been used throughout history to justify forced conversions and all manner of missionary abuse, but its main emphasis is on teaching the ways of Jesus. Karl Barth also focused the latter sections of his *Dogmatics* on how we Christians should live in the world, not because Christ's act of redemption was unimportant, but because in response we are called to mission. If we emphasize only the cross and resurrection, we risk doling out what Dietrich Bonhoeffer calls "cheap grace"; in *The Cost of Discipleship*, he discusses the full measure of Christ's call, which involves taking up our cross and following Jesus. Christ calls us to a new life on Earth, not merely one in heaven.

This should never overshadow what Jesus did on the cross. The gospels have been called passion narratives with long introductions, because they focus so heavily on the cross and resurrection—fully half of Mark, for example, is spent on Jesus' last week on earth, leading up to

the crucifixion and resurrection. Paul's letters focus on the cross and resurrection—he vowed to “know nothing among you [the Corinthians] but Christ, and him crucified.” The cross is the centerpiece of the gospel.

However, Jesus' life should not be downplayed. Though the gospels focus on the cross, they also include Jesus' ministry and teachings for our lives. And Jesus' teachings strongly focused on God's reign in the earth (called “the kingdom of heaven” in Matthew and “the kingdom of God” in Mark and Luke), in which we believers are called to participate. In a sense, the cross and resurrection are the starting line of the Christian race, not the finish line. We run the race by following Jesus' teachings and ways. We are called to live as Jesus lived, since Jesus was the only fully human person, the only one whose humanity in the image of God was not distorted by sin.

In a sense, Christ's ministry is a third element of the gospel. We first recognize our dependence on God, then God's redemption of us through Christ. But there is then the third element of thankfulness (consider the Heidelberg Catechism), by which we respond to God. In our weekly worship service, we first gather around the Word—which means Jesus (John 1:1), which includes confession, then we hear the proclamation of the Word as expressed in Scripture, and *then* we respond to the Word, seal it, and bear it into the world. Three of these five categories of our worship service involve our response to God. We are called to participate with God's action as “God is reconciling the world to himself in Jesus Christ” (2 Corinthians 5:19). To do this, we need to study Christ's ministry of reconciliation on earth. We follow Christ's example, for he is both our Savior and Lord.

3. Martin, I would agree that Jesus' teachings are somewhat less important than his awesome work of salvation on the cross and resurrection, which reunited humanity with God. But that does not mean that Jesus' teachings (and his actions!) are *unimportant*. Once we understand that God has redeemed us by grace through faith, then we must ask, "How should we respond?" Understanding how Jesus, who was God incarnate in human form, lived gives us a roadmap for how we are to live as God's people. Remember, God's covenant includes two parts: "I will be your God"—God being for us, and "You will be my people"—our responsibility to God.

Marcus, it is true that Jesus was a great teacher, and that his life can be a "blueprint for the spiritual life." But Jesus was not just any religious teacher. He was God incarnate! As Christians, we affirm that Jesus was the Word of God (John 1), which means he was God's proclamation and reason and essence all wrapped into one, by whom the cosmos was created. While other religious teachers—such as Augustine, Calvin, Barth, or Bonhoeffer—may give us insight, they are not on the same level with Christ. No other religious leader I know of has, at a trial for his life, affirmed his own divinity! Following Christ is following God, while following others is simply following other people who were (imperfectly) following God.

Gustavo, I agree that Jesus taught people how to stand on the side of the oppressed. In the last century, Richard Niebuhr, James Cone, and Gustavo Gutierrez have pointed out how Jesus has favored the oppressed in society, and Jesus himself told the parable in Matthew 25 about the sheep and the goats being separated based on how they treated the needy. But we also must remember that Jesus both loved and challenged all people. While Jesus talked about his heart for the poor in Luke 4, the sermon on the mount in Matthew 5-7 talks largely about personal morality, rather than social structures. Standing on the side of the oppressed is

important, but Jesus cried for all of Jerusalem, that he could gather them together as a hen gathers her chicks—and this surely included the rich together with the poor. Jesus loves and challenges all humanity, and we are called to do the same, though the poor probably need more advocates than the rich do.

### Section 3, Question A.

1. The Protestant Reformation rediscovered salvation by grace through faith. The medieval Catholic Church (following Thomas Aquinas) held that God dispensed grace through the sacraments and through good works, as two different feet stepping up a ladder. Grace was an important part of his conception, but grace *with* good works. The reformers rejected this notion, emphasizing grace *alone*, because all of our works are as “filthy rags,” tainted by our sinfulness. This left a problem: of what use then was the law? Martin Luther stated that the law had two functions: (1) it shows us how far we all are from obeying God, and thus encourages us to profess our dependence on God’s grace; and (2) it is useful in maintaining civil order, for God’s commandments to Israel were excellent rules for living together in society. God’s Old Testament law thus still had a use, but it was *not* for the purpose of building up a bank account of good works.

Calvin, who was trained as a lawyer, added a third use of the law (3): it guides Christians as we respond to God’s grace in newness of life (*Institutes*, Book 2, Chapter 7). Calvin considered this third use the primary use for Christians. The law is not meant merely to show us our sin. Rather, God created us, and therefore knows what is best for us. And God loves us, and therefore shows us what is best for us in the law. We will never be perfectly righteous—though

in Christ, God reckons us as righteous—but we can, through grace, strive toward perfection, and thus live as close to God’s image as we possibly can.

This emphasis is in line with the Bible. In the Old Testament, the Law was given on Sinai *after* God had redeemed people from slavery in Egypt.<sup>1</sup> The Ten Commandments start by recalling God’s great work of redemption: “I am the Lord your God who brought you up out of Egypt” (Exodus 20). The law is useful after redemption, but it also provided a basis for prophets to correct the people, and to guide their civil society throughout their history.

Jesus’ own teaching followed this model as well. Jesus proclaimed that “not a letter will fall from the law” because of his teaching (Matthew 5); he came to fulfill the law, not to abolish it. However, he focused not on the letter but on the spirit of the law. For instance, Jesus healed on the Sabbath, which some Pharisees considered against the letter of the law, but Jesus proclaimed was within the spirit of the law. Jesus also proclaimed that the two greatest commandments, to love God and to love our neighbors, sum up the law and prophets. Jesus himself showed perfect love for both God and neighbor, most particularly in his death on the cross for sinners.

Similarly, many of Paul’s letters talk about these uses of the law. Galatians, for instance, refers to the law in Greek as a *paidagogen*, a servant who led a student to class (often translated simply “teacher”): the law leads us to understand our need. While believers no longer have this need, since they recognize their dependence on God’s grace in Christ, Paul’s letters then move on to how we should live as new creations, often with a transition “therefore (see Romans 12:1, Ephesians 4:1), and these instructions involve our life together. All three uses of the law appear throughout Scripture.

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<sup>1</sup> Note that their trek through the Red Sea is a powerful image for baptism.

The Reformed tradition (including the modern P.C. (U.S.A.)) has followed his conception. For instance, the Heidelberg Catechism and Westminster Shorter Catechism contain discussions of the Ten Commandments, and these come *after* their discussions of God's grace. In Heidelberg, the commandments come under the third section heading, "Thankfulness," after discussions of human sin and divine redemption. Also, in a traditional Reformed worship service, reading the Ten Commandments should come as a response to the Word, after the confession.

Thus the law is not without value in the Reformed tradition. It is useful for point out our dependence on God. It is valuable in maintaining civil order. And it gives Christians a model for how to respond to God's redeeming grace. Christians can use all three uses to advantage. In evangelism, we employ the first use to point out how "all have sinned and fall short of God's glory," but God nonetheless is gracious to redeem us. Through public activism, we encourage the second use, extolling the principles of justice and virtue that underlie God's law. And in our own lives, we employ the third use, living as examples of godly living. Though we cannot increase our grace though following the law, God has given us the law as a gift to show us the best life.

2. Nancy, laws are necessary to maintain civil order. This is what Calvin would have called the second use of the law. Think about what would happen if our society had no laws! Traffic laws maintain the flow of traffic, or every intersection would have a wreck. Laws against murder, theft, and the like protect us from these things, if they are enforced well. And enforcing the laws, as much as we dislike getting traffic tickets or jail time, is essential to protecting us. If the laws were not enforced, they would be useless. And though we are sad and angry about our friend being caught stealing, the same law protects that friend from being robbed, too.

José, you're right that we should confess when we've done something wrong. And stealing is against the eighth commandment. But let's not be too hard on our friend. Remember, none of us is perfect, and we all break God's law. That's why we have a confession every week in worship. And if we do confess our sins, then God is faithful to forgive us (1 John 1). Remember, we are saved not because we're good people, but only because of God's grace in Jesus Christ.

Carol, Jesus didn't do away with the law. In fact, he says in Mathew 5 that not one letter will fall from the law. Jesus didn't come to destroy the law, but to fulfill it. We are saved by grace alone, but that doesn't mean that the law is worthless. God gave the law to the Israelites—after redeeming them from Egypt by splitting the Red Sea, remember—to show them how to live. God created us and knows what's best for us, so when God tells us what's best, we should believe it! In gratitude to God's grace, we live as new creations, doing our best through the Holy Spirit to live as God intended.

Stan, it is good that God gives us standards to live by, but let's remember that they are not *too* concrete. Jesus himself did not always wash his hands in the way the law prescribed, and violated Sabbath laws by healing a man with a disfigured hand. It is more important to live by the spirit of the law, and by the Holy Spirit within us. The law does give us principles and guidelines, but we as Christians are not *under* the law. As Jesus said about the Sabbath I would apply to the entire law: the law was created for people, not people for the law. The main principles in the law are to love God and to love our neighbor; those, Jesus says, sum up all the laws and prophets.

READER'S GRADING SHEET IN THEOLOGY

**I. OVERALL EVALUATION OF THIS EXAMINATION.** A single overall grade must be assigned by the reader to this examination. The overall grade for the examination will be the average of grades received on all three questions, with rounding up or down to be determined by the reader on the basis of the examination's overall merit. **However, the examination must receive a grade of "3" or higher on at least two out of the three questions in order to be considered "SATISFACTORY". The examination will fail if any one of the sections is omitted.**

Each examination will be read independently by two persons. If both grades are 3, 4, or 5, the final grade is **SATISFACTORY**. If both grades are 1 or 2, the final grade is **UNSATISFACTORY**. If one final grade is 1 or 2, and the other final grade is 3, 4, or 5, the paper will be given a third reading to determine the final grade.

**II. THIS GRADING SHEET GOES TO THE CANDIDATE.** The reader's comments on this grading sheet should represent his or her considered appraisal of the paper, which will be read by the candidate and the committee on preparation for ministry. Use the back of the sheet for comments explaining why you have the grade for this paper has been assigned.

**III. GRADING EACH SECTION.** Indicate on the spaces below your grade for each section of this examination, using the following scale:

- 5 - EXCELLENT
- 4 - GOOD
- 3 - ACCEPTABLE
- 2 - LESS THAN ACCEPTABLE
- 1 - POOR
- 0 - SECTION OMITTED

PASSING LINE

GRADES:

Grade

Section I	(Required)	-	Total Depravity	<u>5</u>
Section II	(Required)	-	Jesus	<u>5</u>
Section III	A	-	Law	<u>5</u>
	- OR -			
	B	-	Elder	<u>    </u>

FINAL GRADE

5

*CP Musenquid*  
Reader's Signature (Please write clearly)

NOTE: Comments include message for Committee on Preparation for Ministry.  
(Please check if applicable) (Over for comments)

Each answer demonstrates superior integration  
of source material with theological reflection!

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**READER'S GRADING SHEET IN THEOLOGY**

**I. OVERALL EVALUATION OF THIS EXAMINATION.** A single overall grade must be assigned by the reader to this examination. The overall grade for the examination will be the average of grades received on all three questions, with rounding up or down to be determined by the reader on the basis of the examination's overall merit. However, the examination must receive a grade of "3" or higher on at least two out of the three questions in order to be considered "SATISFACTORY". The examination will fail if any one of the sections is omitted.

Each examination will be read independently by two persons. If both grades are 3, 4, or 5, the final grade is SATISFACTORY. If both grades are 1 or 2, the final grade is UNSATISFACTORY. If one final grade is 1 or 2, and the other final grade is 3, 4, or 5, the paper will be given a third reading to determine the final grade.

**II. THIS GRADING SHEET GOES TO THE CANDIDATE.** The reader's comments on this grading sheet should represent his or her considered appraisal of the paper, which will be read by the candidate and the committee on preparation for ministry. Use the back of the sheet for comments explaining why you have the grade for this paper has been assigned.

**III. GRADING EACH SECTION.** Indicate on the spaces below your grade for each section of this examination, using the following scale:

- 5 - EXCELLENT
- 4 - GOOD
- 3 - ACCEPTABLE
- 2 - LESS THAN ACCEPTABLE
- 1 - POOR
- 0 - SECTION OMITTED

PASSING LINE

GRADES:

Grade

Section I	(Required)	-	Total Depravity	<u>5</u>
Section II	(Required)	-	Jesus	<u>4</u>
Section III	A	-	Law	<u>5</u>
	- OR -			
	B	-	Elder	<u>    </u>

FINAL GRADE 5

Wayne Bell  
Reader's Signature (Please write clearly)

NOTE: Comments include message for Committee on Preparation for Ministry.  
(Please check if applicable) (Over for comments)

SECTION 1: Total Depravity

First, I need to thank you for typing the exam. Blessing upon you!!!!

1. What is presented in the paper is an excellent offering. Three (3) Book of Confession citations are given and then well supported with commentary.
2. The responses to the elders were well thought out and reasoned. Good work!

SECTION 2: Jesus

1. This may be just a quirk of this one reader, but I am not sure that the use of a question at this point is the best approach. A question allows us to raise larger issues-- issues that would not "fit" into one sentence.

2. This reader would take issue with the use of the word "blueprint", but as it was used in the question it is easy to see how it came to be inserted at the beginning of this section.

But, other than that one issue, what is presented shows a candidate who is well read and well versed in the theology of the church.

3. All three members of the class are addressed. The pastoral tone is commendable.

SECTION 3: Question A: Law

1. As above, again an excellent response.
2. More of the same great work!!!!

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ME