

Sovereign Grace, Chapter 1

Man's Need of Salvation: Total Depravity and Man's Inability

[Brian Schwertley](#)

We begin our study of God's sovereign grace in salvation with the biblical teaching regarding the effect of the fall upon man and the doctrine of original sin. This teaching is crucial for understanding the doctrine of salvation because one's understanding of the effects of the fall upon mankind will largely determine one's view of salvation. In other words, a person's view of man's state resulting from Adam's sin is foundational to that person's concept of how man appropriates salvation. Obviously, a person who views man as spiritually dead and unable to do anything that meets with God's approval will view salvation differently than a person who believes that man is sick and weakened but is still able to cooperate with God in the salvation process.

What Happened When Adam Sinned?

The Bible teaches that Adam was created in the image of God (Gen. 1:26) with true knowledge, righteousness and holiness (Gen. 1:31; Ecc. 7:29; Col. 3:10; Eph. 4:24). Adam's nature was intrinsically good and he had the spiritual and ethical ability to perfectly obey anything that God required of him. After God created Adam, He made a covenant or verbal agreement with him. God promised Adam that if he rendered a perfect and personal obedience to God he would never die. (This promise is clearly implied by Gen. 2:17; Gal. 3:10; Rom. 5:12-20; 10:5.) If at any time Adam violated God's law by eating the fruit from the forbidden tree, he would certainly die (Gen. 2:17). Genesis chapter 3 records Adam's failure to obey God. Adam sinned in eating the forbidden fruit (Rom. 5:12ff); fell from his original righteousness; lost his communion with God; was cast out of paradise; and "became dead in sin, and wholly defiled in all the faculties and parts of soul and body" (*Westminster Confession of Faith*, 6:2; see Gen. 6:5; Jer. 17:9; Rom. 3:10ff; Tit. 1:15; etc).

The Bible teaches that Adam's sin not only had very negative spiritual consequences for himself, but also for the whole human race (i.e. everyone descending from Adam by ordinary generation). The teaching that mankind is guilty of sin in Adam and corrupted in nature because of Adam's sin is commonly referred to as original sin. This teaching is part of the faith of every branch of Christendom. The disagreements on this teaching are over the nature and extent of man's corruption (this will be considered below).

God's Word says that the guilt of Adam's sin is imputed to all men. (To impute Adam's sin means that God reckons it to, or lays it to one's account.) The teaching that "in Adam's fall we sinned all" is explicitly taught by Paul in Romans 5:12, 15-19: "Through one man [Adam] sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned [in Adam's transgression]...by the one man's offense many died...judgment which came from one offense resulted in condemnation...by the one man's offense death reigned through the one...through one man's offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation...by one man's disobedience many were made sinners." There was a kind of solidarity between Adam and

the human race because God determined that Adam (the first created man) was the federal head of all mankind. “It is no less a doctrine of Scripture than a fact of experience that mankind are a fallen race.”¹ Tragically, as a result of Adam’s sin, all men also inherited Adam’s moral corruption. The pollution or inner corruption of sin passes from Adam to his posterity by ordinary generation. “That our first parents are now not only really guilty before God but also morally corrupt throughout their entire being is also immediately evident in the fact that their first transgression is immediately followed by a series of transgressions. It is now their nature to act in accordance with their new sinful condition. We see Adam and then Eve refusing to acknowledge openly their willful act of disobedience and to take the blame for it. Adam blames his wife and, indirectly, God himself for his situation. Eve then blames the serpent.”²

“The consequences of Adam’s sin are all comprehended under the term death in its widest sense.”³ Because of Adam’s sin spiritual and physical death passed to all men. All men naturally born of Adam’s seed come into this world spiritually dead; with an innate hatred and hostility toward God; with a depraved soul that loves sin and cannot cease from it; with ethical pollution that extends to every aspect of his nature. “The imagination of a man’s heart is evil from his youth” (Gen. 8:21). “Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me” (Ps. 51:5). “The wicked are estranged from the womb; they go astray as soon as they are born speaking lies” (Ps. 58:3). “For there is not a just man on earth who does good and does not sin” (Eccl. 7:20). “That which is born of the flesh is flesh” (Jn. 3:6). “We were by nature children of wrath” (Eph. 2:3; see 1 Ki. 8:46; Isa. 53:6; 64:6; Ps. 130:3; 143:2; Rom. 3:19, 22, 23; Gal. 3:22; Ja. 3:2; 1 Jn. 1:8, 10; 5:19, etc). According to Scripture, Adam’s sin and its consequences (real guilt, liability of punishment, spiritual death and man’s inherited moral corruption) have rendered man unable to respond to the gospel and even unable to cooperate by his own self-determining power or “free will” with the first motions of grace. Our state after the fall is spiritual death, not a mere sickness. Therefore, we must acknowledge the greatness of our sin, slavery and misery and earnestly acknowledge that salvation is absolutely and solely a work of God’s grace.

The Debate over “Free Will”

Before we proceed with Scriptural proofs for the teaching of total depravity and total inability, we would do well to spend some time examining the controversy over human ability in church history. The importance of the doctrine of the fall and its consequences, as it affects the doctrine of salvation, cannot be overestimated. Throughout history one’s concept of original sin has had a profound effect on many other doctrines such as regeneration, effectual calling, conversion, the nature and extent of the atonement, justification and perseverance. As we study the controversy over free will, some questions that we need to continually ask ourselves are: Which person’s theology is rooted in the exegesis of Scripture? What theologians are attempting to impose a human philosophy upon the text of Scripture? What doctrine ascribes all the glory for salvation to God? What teaching appeals to our fallen human nature? What doctrine of original sin supports rather than contradicts the other great doctrines of the Bible?

¹ Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 2:195.

² Robert Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 447.

³ Loraine Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination* (Philipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, [1932] 1979), 73.

Pelagianism

The first great controversy over the doctrine of original sin and its relationship to how God's grace operates was the Pelagian controversy. The Pelagian movement was named after Pelagius (A.D. 360-420), a British layman who advocated asceticism. Pelagius had become a teacher of asceticism in Rome (c. 400) and believed that the church's view of original sin, which at that time was dominated by Augustinianism, denied human responsibility and thus discouraged holiness. Pelagius was the first theologian to set forth the principle "that man must have plenary ability to do and to be whatever can be righteously required of him....The intimate conviction that man can be responsible for nothing which is not in their power, led, in the first place, to the Pelagian doctrine of the freedom of the will."⁴ The philosophical presupposition set forth by Pelagius regarding freedom of the will and human responsibility completely and consistently dominated his whole theological system.

In the attempt to preserve his concept of human responsibility, Pelagius and his followers taught the following: (1) Adam's sin only brought injury to himself and no one else. (2) There is no such thing as original sin, or inherent hereditary moral corruption. (3) Everyone born after Adam is the same as Adam was before the fall. (4) Adam's sin was only a bad example to his posterity and nothing more. (5) Since all men are born without the contamination of original sin and moral depravity, everyone has the full ability to do everything that God requires and many men have lived without sin. Pelagius and his followers taught that men could be saved without the gospel by keeping the law. "The only difference is that under the light of the Gospel, the perfect obedience is rendered more easy."⁵ (6) Adam in a state of innocence was mortal and would have died whether he sinned or not. Therefore, the fact that all men grow old, and die, has nothing to do with the fall. (7) The grace of God refers not to unmerited favor to undeserving sinners but simply to the natural endowments of men which are gifts from God. "[G]race merely enables us to do more easily what we could still do without it, albeit with greater difficulty."⁶

The teachings of Pelagius and his followers were condemned at the council of Carthage (A. D. 418) and again at the Council of Ephesus (A. D. 431). While Pelagianism was a dangerous heresy because it denied the grace of God and the gospel, it nevertheless was used by God to greatly sharpen the early church's understanding of original sin and the nature of saving grace. The controversy raised the question that is still with us today: Are sinners saved because of their own will, strength or exertion or are they saved solely by God's grace, solely by what God does? Although the modern evangelical will recognize the obvious, gross deficiencies of the Pelagian system, nevertheless the central presupposition underlying Pelagianism lives on. That is, the philosophical idea that responsibility presupposes human ability.

Semi-Pelagianism

After Pelagianism was defeated with the help of great theologians such as Augustine (A. D. 354-430), bishop of Hippo,⁷ it went underground and reemerged in a milder, more palatable

⁴ Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 2:152. In defining the Pelagian system this author has depended primarily upon Charles Hodge's *Systematic Theology*.

⁵ Ibid, 2:154.

⁶ D. F. Wright, "Pelagianism" in *New Dictionary of Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1988), 500.

⁷ Augustine taught the following doctrines that are foundational to biblical Christianity and at one time were held universally by the Protestant Reformers. "(1.) That if men are saved it cannot be by their own merit, but solely through the undeserved love of God. (2.) That the regeneration of the soul must be the exclusive and supernatural

form. Although the original semi-Pelagians differed in many areas, the general teachings of semi-Pelagians are as follows. Contrary to Pelagius, the sin and corruption of Adam *did* pass on to his posterity causing disease, suffering, mortality and a propensity toward evil. Therefore, man needs divine assistance if he is to do anything spiritually good. But, contrary to the pure grace system of Augustine, they held: “(1) That the beginning of salvation is with man. Man begins to seek God, and then God aids him. (2) That this incipient turning of the soul towards God is something good, and in one sense meritorious. (3) That the soul, in virtue of its liberty of will or ability for good, cooperates with the grace of God in regeneration....”⁸

Although there are differences between semi-Pelagianism and classical Arminianism, the similarities between semi-Pelagianism and what is taught in many modern evangelical churches is striking. Most modern evangelicals do not believe that man is really spiritually dead and totally depraved as a result of the fall but merely that man is spiritually sick. In other words, man still has spiritual ability and, thus, can make a move toward Jesus and even choose Him if the right techniques are employed. Further, the common doctrine among evangelicals and fundamentalists called “decisional regeneration” is very similar to semi-Pelagianism. In many evangelical churches people are told to come to the front of the church (“the altar call”), choose Christ or pray a prayer, and the result will be that God will respond to man’s act or choice and then man will be born again. In other words, man cooperates with God and allows God to save him. This teaching is very different from the biblical view that men are dead in trespasses and sin and the Holy Spirit raises the dead heart to life, regenerates it and causes it to savingly embrace Christ.

Although semi-Pelagianism was condemned by the church at the Second Council of Orange in A. D. 529, the church accepted a modified version of semi-Pelagianism (a semi-semi-Pelagianism) and, thus, eliminated the contradiction between Augustine’s soteriology and ecclesiology. The Roman Catholic Church accepted a synergistic doctrine of salvation which better suited their man-controlled “channels of grace” concept of the sacraments. Thus, tragically in the sphere of salvation most of modern evangelicalism has unknowingly sided itself with Romanism and not the Protestant Reformation.

work of the Holy Ghost; that the sinner could neither effect the work nor cooperate in its production. In other words, that grace is certainly efficacious or irresistible. (3.) That salvation is of grace or of the sovereign mercy of God, (a.) In that God might justly have left men to perish in their apostasy without any provision for their redemption. (b.) In that men, being destitute of the power of doing anything holy or meritorious, their justification cannot be by works, but must be a matter of favour. (c.) In that it depends not on the will of the persons saved, but on the good pleasure of God, who are to be made partakers of the redemption of Christ. In other words, election to eternal life must be founded on the sovereign pleasure of God, and not on the foresight of good works. (4.) A fourth inference from the principles of Augustine was the perseverance of the saints. If God of his own good pleasure elects some to eternal life, they cannot fail of salvation. It thus appears that as all the distinguishing doctrines of the Pelagians are the logical consequences of their principle of plenary ability as the ground and limit of obligation, so the distinguishing doctrines of Augustine are the logical consequences of his principle of the entire inability of fallen man to do anything spiritually good” (Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 2:160-161).

This aspect of Augustine’s theology would be the seed of the Protestant Reformation that would be independently discovered by the Augustinian monk Martin Luther. The other side of Augustine’s theology, his ecclesiology and sacramentalism were inconsistent with his teachings on salvation by grace alone and would contribute to the apostasy of the Roman Catholic Church. Augustine believed that salvation was by a direct act of God. And, he unfortunately also taught that salvation was dispensed through the church hierarchy and its sacraments. With Augustine we find the pure water of the gospel mixed with the filthy oil of sacerdotalism.

⁸ Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 2:167.

Arminianism

Arminianism is named after a Dutch theologian Jacobus Arminius (1560-1609). As a professor in Leiden, Arminius began to challenge the doctrines of grace as then taught in the Dutch Reformed churches. His views were developed and systematized by his followers in the five theses of the Remonstrant Articles (1610); now commonly known as the five points of Arminianism. Regarding original sin and man's state after the fall the first point of Arminianism reads,

Free Will or Human Ability. Although human nature was seriously affected by the Fall, man has not been left in a state of total spiritual helplessness. God graciously enables every sinner to repent and believe, but He does so in such a manner as not to interfere with man's freedom. Each sinner possesses a free will, and his eternal destiny depends on how he uses it. Man's freedom consists of his ability to choose good over evil in spiritual matters; his will is not enslaved to his sinful nature. The sinner has the power either to cooperate with God's Spirit and be regenerated or to resist God's grace and perish. The lost sinner needs the Spirit's assistance, but he does not have to be regenerated by the Spirit before he can believe, for faith is man's act and precedes the new birth. Faith is the sinner's gift to God; it is man's contribution to salvation.⁹

Like semi-Pelagianism, Arminianism teaches that human nature is injured by the fall, but man still has the ability to do that which is spiritually good and turn to God.

Although Arminianism as a system is more developed and sophisticated than semi-Pelagianism, it still adheres to the central core of semi-Pelagianian teaching. That is, that man is only partially depraved and, thus, his will though damaged still has the ability to see spiritual good and generate faith toward Christ. Sinners just need a little help. Man needs "the preventing, exciting and assisting grace of God in order to their conversion..."¹⁰ Further, "This divine grace is afforded to all men in sufficient measure to enable them to repent, believe, and keep all the commandments of God."¹¹ Thus, man, and not God, is sovereign over his own salvation. Man, according to Arminian doctrine, does not need a spiritual resurrection from the dead in order to believe, but merely some first aid. According to Arminianism, salvation is a cooperative effort between God and man in which man plays the most important role. This teaching is synergistic in that man contributes something to his own salvation. Indeed, man allows God to regenerate and save him. "The Arminian order of salvation, while ostensibly ascribing the work of salvation to God, really makes it contingent on the attitude and the work of man. God opens the possibility of salvation for man, but it is up to man to improve the opportunity."¹²

John Wesley (1703-1791) and his followers made some changes in classical Arminianism by teaching that, as a result of the fall, man's depravity was total; that the natural man does not have any intrinsic power to cooperate with the grace of God. But, he argued, since Christ died for all men without exception and they are justified in Him, this guilt and total depravity is immediately removed at birth. Thus, all men come into the world with an ability (bestowed by Jesus) to cooperate with God in salvation. The Wesleyans called this new system Evangelical

⁹ As quoted in David N. Steele, Curtis C. Thomas, S. Lance Quinn, *The Five Points of Calvinism: Defined, Defended, and Documented* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed [1963] 2004), 5-6.

¹⁰ Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 2:327.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1958), 421.

Arminianism. Wesley believed this clever method of arriving at a universal unencumbered will, while maintaining the orthodox doctrine of original sin, eliminated the charge that he was teaching a form of semi-Pelagianism. Although we must give credit to Wesley for attempting to avoid semi-Pelagianism, his free-willism through the back door of the atonement has no basis in Scripture at all. It suffers from a number of exegetical and theological difficulties (e.g., How is the removal of the guilt and pollution of sin attained without regeneration and faith? Why would Jesus' death only restore human ability and yet not forgive all sins, past, present and future? If the merits of Christ's death are applied at birth, then why is faith, conversion and repentance needed later on? If Jesus' death is universally applied, then why is there not a universal salvation? Wesley has placed free will in a citadel of iron at the expense of the atonement. His system is arbitrary; has no biblical proof and is irrational.).

Although Arminianism was condemned by the Synod of Dordt (1618-1619) and was soundly and thoroughly refuted by Scripture, it spread throughout the whole world; permeated every branch of Protestantism; and came to thoroughly dominate modern evangelicalism and fundamentalism. Because of Arminianism's affinity with semi-Pelagianism, Romanism and humanism, the sharp antithesis that once existed between Protestantism and Roman Catholicism has in recent years been greatly obscured (e.g., In 2005, when the Pope died, several "evangelical" leaders spoke of his greatness, piety and orthodoxy.).

The Biblical Evidence for the Bondage of the Will

The one thing that Pelagianism, semi-Pelagianism, Arminianism and Roman Catholicism have in common is the idea that after the fall man still has the ability to think, do or will spiritual good; that man still has a "free will." "This is the Helen whom they so ardently love and for whom they do not hesitate to fight as for their altars and firesides."¹³ Such a view shades their whole doctrine of salvation. Therefore, it is extremely important that we carefully establish the biblical teaching that man's heart is spiritually dead because of the fall and so thoroughly corrupt spiritually that the unsaved sinner is dead, blind and deaf to the things of God.

In order to deal with the question of "free will" we need to carefully define two terms. First, what do we mean when we speak of the human will? Second, how do we define the freedom that is attributed to this will? These questions are important because: (a) Many people assume that the will is some entity that is independent of the human heart; (b) The Augustinian or Calvinistic position is almost always misrepresented by Arminians as holding that men are mere robots. We will see that the Bible upholds the validity and freedom of man's decisions as secondary agents; yet, also teaches that every person's choices are determined by the heart.

Although there are many different definitions of the term will, this term in the context of the debate over free choice or determination refers to volition or a choice of the mind. When people discuss the soul or heart of man they often will speak of different aspects of the soul such as the intellect, the emotions and the will. Indeed, it is proper to think of the will as a function or part of the human mind. Therefore, as we consider the subject of "free will" we must not separate the will from the intellect or mind as if it has some independent power. The debate over "free will" cannot be settled unless we understand that the will always decides in accordance with the mind or, as Scripture puts it, the inclinations of the heart (Pr. 4:23; Lk. 6:45; Mt. 7:17,

¹³ Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1992), 1:659.

21). “[T]he decision of the intellect is terminated in the will, so the liberty of the will has its roots in the intellect.”¹⁴

For example, when a man decides to go to the refrigerator to get a piece of pizza, he exercises his will. This act of the will, however, did not occur spontaneously or in a vacuum. Before the act of the will, the mind received hunger pangs from the stomach; the mind thought about the food options available; the mind decided what food it preferred (this choice was based in part on culture, habit, availability and ease of preparation) and this choice terminated with an act of the will. The will had a prior reason, argument and motivation to get the pizza. If that person’s mind did not like onions but did like pepperoni, then that person would never choose onion pizza but rather would always choose pepperoni pizza in such an incident. The man’s will was free to choose onions; but his will was subservient to this mind which did not like onions. The mind chose something else instead. Similarly, a lion in Africa is free to eat grass when it is hungry. But it never does so because lions, by nature, are carnivorous. Their minds crave meat. A water buffalo is also free to eat whatever it desires. But it only chooses grass because it is in the buffalo’s nature to do so.

Now that we have an understanding of the will (that the human will is not an independent force but rather always follows the mind) we can begin to understand human freedom. On the one hand, we can, in accordance with Scripture and experience, affirm that man is truly a free agent. As beings which are created in the image of God with rationality and intelligence, men are valid secondary agents that are free to make choices. Men are not puppets, robots or impersonal machines. Men have the ability to observe, evaluate, deliberate in the mind and then choose between a, b, c, or d. Men are not coerced by anything outside of themselves to choose something they do not want to choose. If this is a person’s definition of “free will,” then we can agree and say that people have a free will. Unfortunately, this definition is not what the proponents of “free will” have in mind.

While in one sense we can say that man has a free will (i.e. men are free to choose and are not coerced by outside forces), in another sense we can say that man’s will is not free. Men are free to choose whatever they want; but, because of the fall, man’s heart or soul is thoroughly corrupt. If, as we have previously demonstrated, the will always follows the mind or heart, then a corrupt heart will not and cannot choose spiritually good things. The will of man always acts in accordance with his sinful nature. This is not simply the opinion of someone like Augustine, Luther or Calvin, but is the explicit teaching of Scripture. Jesus says, “A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart brings forth evil. For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks” (Lk. 6:45). A man’s outward life is a reflection of what is in his heart. Men speak and do evil deeds because they are, by nature, evil. Thus, Solomon warns believers, “Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life” (Pr. 4:23). “For from within, out of the heart, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders...” (Mk. 7:21).

Christ says that the source of sinful thoughts and acts is the heart, not the will. The will carries out the desires, inclinations, habits, etc of the heart. Thus, in the Sermon on the Mount our Lord teaches that “a bad tree bears bad fruit” (Mt. 7:7). “Heart” in the Bible refers to the innermost core of man’s being. It includes the whole human nature (i.e. the mind, will, intellect, emotions, etc). So, although man is at liberty to choose whatever he desires, since his heart is evil he will only choose between greater and lesser evil. Those outwardly good deeds that he does do are not prompted by love for God and thus are not spiritually good. “Why does the

¹⁴ Ibid, 2:662.

sinner choose a life of sinful indulgence? Because he prefers it, all arguments to the contrary notwithstanding, though of course he does not prefer the *effects* of such a course. And why does he prefer it? Because his *heart* is sinful.”¹⁵ Boettner writes, “Man is a free agent but he cannot originate the love of God in his heart. His will is free in the sense that it is not controlled by any force outside of himself. As the bird with a broken wing is ‘free’ to fly but not able, so the natural man is free to come to God but not able. How can he repent of his sin when he loves it? How can he come to God when he hates Him? This is the inability of the will under which man labors.”¹⁶

Total Depravity

Because the Bible describes fallen man’s heart as thoroughly wicked and corrupt, theologians refer to man as totally depraved. This doctrine does not mean that man is as wicked as he could be. Obviously, there are some men that are more wicked than others. The pagan man who works hard to support his family, who is faithful to his wife, who obeys the civil laws, is much better than a hardened criminal or serial murderer. Further, this teaching does not mean that an unsaved man cannot do good deeds. Jesus Himself acknowledged that evil men could give good gifts to their children (Mt. 7:11). Also, contrary to certain false misrepresentations, this doctrine does not mean that the image of God in man in the broader sense is destroyed. Man still has reasoning capacities and a conscience that discriminates between good and evil. Man has an active spirit that creates beautiful works of art, music, architecture, engineering and makes great strides in science and technology.

What total depravity does mean is that man’s inherent corruption extends to every part of man’s nature. Because of the fall man’s whole being or heart is in rebellion against God. “Everything that unregenerate man does or thinks is undergirded by rebellious inclinations against God or motivations that are sinful.”¹⁷ Since the fall man’s whole nature has been polluted by sin. As a result man has an innate hostility toward God and spiritual truth. Paul tells us that *all men* (apart from a prior work of special grace) suppress the truth about God in creation and replace God with idols (Rom. 1:21-25). Man’s mind or will is not neutral or a blank state at birth, but is evil. “The imagination of a man’s heart is evil from his youth” (Gen. 8:21). “The wicked...go astray as soon as they are born speaking lies” (Ps. 58:3). “We were by nature the children of wrath” (Eph. 2:3). “The heart is deceitful above all things, who can know it” (Jer. 17:9)? Consequently, men are actuated by wrong principles. The natural man’s thoughts, words and deeds are corrupt, because they all flow from a corrupt source. Thus, unregenerate man cannot choose nor do *spiritual* good. He cannot generate the love of God or Christ in his heart and he cannot do anything meriting salvation. It is for this reason that Paul, writing under divine inspiration, can say that not even one man in the whole world “seeks God” (Rom. 3:11).

The fact that men can do outward good deeds or what theologians refer to as “civic goodness” does not in any way contradict the doctrine of total depravity. The Bible teaches that if a man’s thoughts or deeds are to be truly good in the spiritual sense, they must flow from a true love of God and His glory. They must originate from a heart that has been spiritually reborn by the power of the Holy Spirit. An unbeliever may work at a soup kitchen or donate to charity

¹⁵ Arthur Pink, *The Sovereignty of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1976 [1930]), 133-134.

¹⁶Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed [1932] 1979), 62.

¹⁷ Leonard J. Coppes, *Are Five Points Enough? The Ten Points of Calvinism* (Manassas, VA: Reformation Education Foundation, 1980), 44.

to feel good about himself or impress his friends. But, he never does these things in Christ's name to glorify God. The unbeliever (whether he is aware of it or not) does "good deeds" with selfish, humanistic, evil motives. To the unregenerate man, even religion is something for man's glory (anthropocentric), to make himself feel good; or to receive glory from other men (cf. Gal. 6:12-13).

The fact that man is inherently corrupt or totally depraved explains why the Bible teaches that spiritual goodness can only be founded upon faith in the triune God of Scripture. The author of Hebrews says that "without faith it is impossible to please Him" (11:6). Paul says, "Whatever is not from faith is sin" (Rom. 14:23). Unbelievers cannot do anything that is well pleasing to God simply because they do not have faith in God or His Word. They continually suppress the truth about God in order to serve their own sinful lusts (Rom. 1:18-32). Because everything the unbeliever does is rooted in his wicked heart and actuated by corrupt principles, Solomon can say that even "the plowing of the wicked [is] sin" (Pr. 21:4).

True faith in Christ, which issues forth from a regenerate heart, is the foundation of genuine virtue. An act which is outwardly good, but done in the service of self and Satan cannot please God. "The carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God" (Rom. 8:7-8).

Man's Spiritual Inability

The doctrine of total depravity is intimately connected to the biblical teaching regarding man's total inability. Since the corruption of sin extends to every part of man's nature and men have hearts that are hostile to God and spiritual truth, men do not have the spiritual power or discernment to savingly embrace Christ or believe the gospel. Berkhof writes, "When we speak of man's corruption as total inability, we mean two things: (1) that the unrenewed sinner cannot do any act, however insignificant, which *fundamentally* meets with God's approval and answers to the demands of God's holy law; and (2) that he cannot change his fundamental preference for sin and self to love for God, nor even make an approach to such a change. In a word, he is unable to do any spiritual good."¹⁸ The Westminster Confession of Faith describes total inability as follows: "Man, by his fall into a state of sin, hath wholly lost all ability of will to any spiritual good accompanying salvation; so as a natural man, being altogether averse from that good, and dead in sin, is not able, by his own strength, to convert himself, or to prepare himself thereunto" (9:3). Gordon Clark writes, "...Adam's ability to will what is good was lost by the fall. From that time on man could not choose to will 'any spiritual good accompanying salvation.' True, a man might will to be honest, to support his family, to discharge most of his obligations as a citizen. In colloquial language these things are called good. But they are not spiritual goods, and they have nothing to do with salvation. Furthermore, a man cannot will to be saved. He cannot convert himself, nor even make preparation for conversion. The simple reason is that he is dead in sin."¹⁹

The doctrines of total depravity and spiritual inability are foundational to one's understanding of the nature of Christ's redemptive work. If men are dead in sin, helpless, spiritually blind and cannot believe in Christ; then the salvation of sinners, of necessity, involves much more than Christ dying for all men and then waiting passively to see who will accept His gift. If unsaved men are unable to choose or to will any spiritual good, then, apart from a spiritual rebirth, no man would choose Christ. If the doctrine of total inability is true, then

¹⁸ L Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 247.

¹⁹ Gordon Clark, *What Do Presbyterians Believe?* (Philadelphia, PA: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1965), 109.

Christ's death not only removed the guilt of sin and God's curse against sinners, but also must be the foundation and guarantee of the *application* of His work to specific individuals. Thus, salvation must be a supernatural work of God from beginning to the end. All synergistic views (semi-Pelagianism, Arminianism, Romanism) must be rejected in favor of a monergistic view of salvation (Augustinianism, Calvinism).

The common evangelical view is that Christ, by His death, made salvation *possible* for all men; that forgiveness is there waiting for men to receive; that the Holy Spirit may gently urge men to change, but cannot interfere with man's free will. In other words, the sovereign almighty Spirit of God can only do what the sinful, corrupt, depraved will of man allows Him to do. Man is in charge of the application of redemption, not God. But, we ask, can the Arminian position be true biblically or even be logical if men are spiritually dead and don't simply need a gentle push or a little medicine? What if men need a spiritual heart transplant, a spiritual resurrection, a quickening? The diagnosis determines the nature of the remedy.

A biblical understanding of man's state after the fall ought to cure us of the sinful and somewhat blasphemous notion that a thrice holy God has associated Himself with sinful depraved man as *only a minor partial cause* of a sinner's salvation. The fact that the natural man is a spiritual corpse without any ability to seek God or take even one step toward Jesus means: that regeneration must precede and not follow saving faith; that God works directly upon the human soul in salvation; that Christ is not passively waiting, but is actively saving His people. An understanding of the fall leads to the doctrine of salvation by the grace of God alone. Salvation is totally a work of God. Man does not have the ability to contribute anything to his own salvation; even faith and repentance are gifts from above (Eph. 2:8; Phil. 2:13; Ac. 5:31, 11:18). Therefore, let us bow the knee to Christ and give our precious Redeemer all the glory for our salvation.

Since the doctrines of total depravity and inability are so important as they relate to our understanding of salvation, let us carefully consider the biblical evidence for these teachings. We will see that the biblical evidence for these doctrines is overwhelming. What follows is a summary of the biblical teaching regarding the state of fallen unregenerate man.

1. The Unregenerate are Spiritually Dead

In Genesis 2 God told Adam that if he ate the forbidden fruit, that very day he would most certainly die (vs. 16-17). In this passage Jehovah was speaking of spiritual death which refers to the dissolution of man's union with God and its consequences. In Romans 5:12 and following, Paul says that because of Adam's sin spiritual death spread to the whole human race. In Ephesians the apostle says that everyone (except Christians who have been born again or made [spiritually] alive by God) is dead. "And you He made alive, who were once dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we [Christians] all once conducted ourselves in the lust of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature the children of wrath, just as the others. But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)" (2:1-5, cf. Col. 2:13).

In this passage Paul makes it clear that everyone who is spiritually dead is a slave of sin, the flesh or the corrupt human nature. All persons who are spiritually dead are in a state of

subjection to Satan and live in a continual state of condemnation. Not only their specific sins, but their *very nature* makes them “children of wrath.” The apostle also teaches that spiritual death is the universal state of all men apart from Christ. According to God’s infallible Word, the state of spiritual death can only be remedied *by a direct act of God* upon the human heart, a spiritual quickening. This fact is totally at odds with the common modern evangelical notion that unregenerate man has the ability to choose Christ. According to Paul, regeneration must *precede* saving faith.

Paul, under divine inspiration, used the word “dead” for a reason. There is no middle ground between being alive and being dead. Unregenerate men are not just sick, handicapped or impaired, but dead. Clark writes, “A certain Bible professor, whom I knew only too well, explained to his classes that man was spiritually sick, that Christ had provided the remedy in the corner store, and that we must drag ourselves there, take the medicine and so regain our health. This is utterly unscriptural and anti-Christian. The Bible in many places tells sinners that they are dead and must be resurrected. No medicine in a drug store ever brought a dead man back to life.”²⁰ Obviously, a man who is spiritually dead can no more see spiritual truth or choose Christ than a rotting corpse can play tennis or debate philosophy. A Christian can quote Scripture and speak the gospel to an unsaved person from morning until late in the evening. But, if the gospel message is not accompanied by the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit, that person will not believe. “You may use all human persuasion possible, but you cannot give spiritual life where death reigns. God alone, by a creative act, can bring life out of death. Spiritual arguments to an unregenerate man are only warm clothes to a corpse.”²¹ “If a man is dead spiritually, therefore, it is surely equally as evident that he is unable to perform any spiritual actions, and thus the doctrine of man’s moral [or spiritual] inability rests upon strong Scriptural evidence.”²²

2. The Unregenerate Cannot Understand or Receive Spiritual Truth

The Lord Jesus Christ taught that the human nature is so thoroughly ruined and corrupted by the fall that the Holy Spirit must *first* radically change it before a person can understand and embrace spiritual truths. “Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see [comprehend, perceive] the kingdom of God’” (Jn. 3:3). As the man who is born blind has no power to see, the unregenerate man whose mind is spiritually darkened (Eph. 4:18; 5:8), whose heart is made of stone and devoid of spiritual sense (Ezek. 36:26), cannot know spiritual truth or do anything spiritually good.

Therefore, Paul could declare, “But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Cor. 2:14). The apostle tells us plainly that the natural man (that is, the unregenerate person who is devoid of the Spirit of God) does not receive any spiritual truths from God at all because he regards such things as foolish, stupid, absurd or ridiculous. Such a person may take a Bible class and give accurate answers on a test regarding the crucifixion, the resurrection and even the doctrine of salvation. However, he does not regard any of these

²⁰ Gordon Clark, *Ephesians* (Jefferson, MD: Trinity Foundation, 1985), 57-58.

²¹ W. E. Best, *Regeneration and Conversion* (Grand Rapids: Guardian), 11. “Man can no more turn to God than the dead can sit up in their coffins. He can no more originate a right desire than he can create a universe. God and God the Holy Ghost alone, by sovereignty, special interference, calls dead sinners to life, and ‘creates’ within them the desires of their hearts” (George Sayles Bishop, *The Doctrines of Grace*, 147).

²² Warburton, *Calvinism*, 48, as quoted in Loraine Boettner, *Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*, 66.

doctrines as true; and, he will not embrace these teachings, but rather ridicule them. Why? Because, as Paul says, such things are “spiritually discerned.” That is, they can only be discerned or truly understood and lovingly embraced by a person in whom the Spirit of God dwells.

When our Lord confronted the unbelieving, self-righteous Jews He said, “Why do you not understand My speech? Because you are not able to listen to My Word. You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do” (Jn. 8:43-44). In this passage Jesus explains why the unbelieving Jews repeatedly misunderstood His language. The reason is that these Jews did not have the spiritual or moral ability to hear His word, message or doctrine. The word “hear” (KJV) is a Hebrew idiom which means to receive, believe or obey. These wicked men repeatedly twisted the meaning of the Savior’s speech and refused to believe and submit to His doctrine because they were unable to do so. Why? Christ tells us that they did so because they were of the devil. They had a devilish nature. “Identity of inner passions and desires established spiritual descent: they are *constantly* desiring (present continuous tense) to carry out the wishes (desires, yearnings) of the devil; so he must be their father.”²³ Like their father whose desires can only be for evil and against all spiritual goodness, the unregenerate Jews hated the Messiah and His message. Obviously, then, if a man is to embrace Jesus, God must first change his nature. Regeneration must precede faith. Now we can understand Paul when he says, “The LORD knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile. Therefore let no one boast in man” (1 Cor. 3:20-21).

3. The Unregenerate Cannot Please God

If a person defines “free will” as an unsaved man’s autonomous ability to choose Christ, then we must ask a few simple questions. Is choosing the Savior a good thing or a bad thing? Obviously, it is a good thing. Does choosing Jesus please the Father? Of course it does. If the unregenerate human will is capable of choosing God’s Son and this choosing pleases God, then how are we to interpret Paul’s explicit statement that unbelievers *cannot* do anything that pleases God? “For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God” (Rom. 8:5-8).

Paul teaches that people who are unregenerate live according to the flesh (that is, their sinful depraved human nature). Further, their minds, by nature, are focused on the things of the flesh. Why is this so? Because, by nature, the carnal or unregenerate mind hates God and always takes a position of hostility toward Him, His Son and His Word. Luther writes, “Let the guardian of ‘free will’ answer the following question: How can endeavors towards good be made by that which is dead, and displeases God, and is enmity against God, and disobeys God, and cannot obey him?”²⁴ Murray writes, “Here we have nothing less than the doctrine of the total inability to be well-pleasing to God or to do what is well-pleasing in his sight. In the whole passage we have the biblical basis for the doctrine of total depravity and total inability. It should be recognized, therefore, that resistance to these doctrines must come to terms not simply with the present day

²³ William Hendriksen, *The Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1954), 2:60.

²⁴ Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will*, translated by J. I. Packer and O. R. Johnston (Cambridge: James Clark, 1957), 300.

proponents of these doctrines but with the apostle himself. ‘Enmity against God’ is nothing other than total depravity and ‘cannot please God’ nothing less than ‘total inability.’”²⁵

4. *The Unregenerate Cannot Come to Christ*

Two passages that speak very clearly on the issue of human inability come directly from the lips of Jesus Christ in the gospel of John. The Savior said, “No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him” (6:44). “I have said to you that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted to him by My Father” (6:65). There are a number of things that both these passages have in common. First, they both begin with a universal negative (“no one”). This means that what our Lord says applies to every human being. Not one sinner is excluded.

Second, the word “can” refers specifically to human ability. In Greek the passage literally reads: “No one *is able to come to Me*.” Jesus assures us that not even one person has the moral or spiritual power, strength, wisdom or ability to come to Christ. Why is this true? Because, when man fell, every part of his being was corrupted by sin. Man’s heart is darkened. His will is enslaved to sin. His carnal mind is at enmity with God. Man cannot embrace that which he hates. Man can no more come to Christ than can water flow uphill. Thus, the world cannot receive the Spirit of truth (Jn. 14:17). “[M]an likes to think that his salvation is in his own power. Such notions are flatly contradictory to the text before us. The words of our Lord here are clear and unmistakable, and cannot be explained away.”²⁶ “To predicate the freedom of the will is to *deny* that man is totally depraved. To say that man *has* the power within himself to either reject or accept Christ, is to *repudiate* the fact that he is the captive of the Devil.”²⁷ It is to totally contradict Paul when he says there is not one good thing in the flesh (Rom. 7:18); there is not one who does good (Rom. 3:12); there is none who seeks God (Rom. 3:11). Further, it explicitly contradicts this teaching of the Son of God.

Third, the word “unless” signifies that before any person can come to Jesus something must occur *first* that will make that coming possible. There are no exceptions. Because man does not have the power or ability in and of himself to come to the Savior, God must do something so that certain people will come. In this passage Christ explicitly contradicts the Arminian notion that sinful man and not God is the ultimate decider of who will or will not be saved. God is sovereign over salvation. “Man never of himself begins with God. God must first begin with man.”²⁸ “So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy” (Rom. 9:16). When Jesus said, “Without Me you can do nothing” (Jn. 15:5), He really meant nothing. Luther writes, “It is totally unheard of grammar and logic to say that *nothing* is the same as *something*; to logicians, the thing is an impossibility, for the two are contradictory!”²⁹ Turretin concurs: “He does not say, without me ye can do little or can do something with difficulty, but without me ye can do nothing. He does not say, without me ye do nothing or will do nothing, but ye can do nothing (which excludes not only the act, but the power itself)...Now why should the Holy Spirit so often [e.g., 1 Cor. 2:14; 2 Cor. 3:5; Rom. 8:7; Mt. 7:18; Jn. 6:44; etc] insist upon

²⁵ John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959), 1:287.

²⁶ J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels: St. John*, 1:388.

²⁷ Arthur W. Pink, *Exposition of the Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, [1945] 1975), 1:337-338.

²⁸ J. C. Ryle, 1:389.

²⁹ Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will*, 262.

that impotence except to take away from man all power to good and ascribe to grace alone the entire work of regeneration and salvation?”³⁰

Fourth, God is the only one who can give sinful depraved men the ability to come to Christ. One passage (Jn. 6:65) says that in order for a man to come to Jesus, it must first be granted to him by God. This means that the ability to come to Christ is a gift from God. If man already had this ability, or if man had a free will spiritually, then our Lord could not make such a statement. Therefore, the common evangelical notion that salvation is like a cup of medicine that is of no use whatsoever until a person accepts the cup and drinks it is unscriptural. The Bible teaches that the work of Christ is a gift and the ability to understand and savingly embrace the Savior and His redemption is also a gift. This means that God “in his saving operations, deals not generally with mankind at large, but particularly with the individuals who are actually saved.”³¹ This teaching explains why the Bible calls both faith (Eph. 2:8; Phil. 1:29; 2 Pet. 1:2-3; Jn. 6:44, 45, 65) and repentance (Ac. 11:18; 16:14; 2 Tim. 2:25) gifts from God. If man could generate his own faith or if man only needed a little assistance from God, then the ability to come would not be a gift.

The Lord’s statement in John 6:44 helps us to understand why the ability to come to Christ is a gift. Jesus said, “No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him.” God actively does something to a sinner *before* he will come to the Savior. This activity is described by the word “draw.” What exactly does this word “draw” mean?

Before we go to Scripture to give the biblical definition of this word let us consider some common misconceptions regarding its meaning. A very common understanding of “draw” in John 6 is that it refers to a gentle wooing of the sinner on the part of God. The Father is attempting to entice men to come to Jesus but they can resist this divine activity. This is essentially the view of John Wesley. He writes; “No man can believe in Christ, unless God gives him power. He draws us first by good desires, not by compulsion, not by laying the will under any necessity; but by the strong and sweet, yet still resistible motions of his heavenly grace.”³² In other words, God’s power or grace is applied to sinners but the human will is really the ultimate deciding factor in salvation. This is the typical Arminian interpretation. God’s grace is necessary for a man to come; but, it is not sufficient to guarantee a man’s coming. This interpretation not only explicitly contradicts the biblical definition of the word “draw” (as we shall see in a moment), but also completely contradicts the immediate context. Note the promise our Lord attaches to His statement about God’s drawing power. Jesus said, “No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; *and I will raise him up at the last day* (Jn. 6:44, italics added). According to the sinless Son of God the drawing activity of the Father always results in a resurrection unto life.

Further, earlier in the same discourse Christ said that a person cannot come to Him unless he is given to Him by the Father; and, the all who are given *will certainly come*. “All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out” (Jn. 6:37). This whole statement presupposes that God’s granting and drawing power are irresistible. If the Arminian interpretation was true then our Lord could not make such promises. If Wesley’s interpretation was true the passage would read, “All that the Father gives Me who of their own free will cooperate with God’s grace and do not resist and reject it will come to Me.”

³⁰ Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1992), 1:674.

³¹ B. B. Warfield, *The Plan of Salvation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 87.

³² John Wesley, *Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986), Vol. 1, n. p.

Unfortunately Wesley and his Arminian followers have a bad habit of following their own humanistic presuppositions instead of the clear teaching of God's infallible Word.

Another interpretation ascribes the drawing power of the Father to the Word of God itself. The idea is that the Holy Spirit operates upon the heart of man through the Word and entices the sinner to embrace the Savior. While there is no question that the Holy Spirit can accompany and apply God's Word to convict men of sin, to convert hearts (cf. 1 Pet. 1:23; Ja. 1:18), and sanctify believers (cf. Jn. 17:17; Ps. 119), one cannot ascribe the conversion of one person over another to the influence of the Word *alone*. For, if the Spirit operated through the Word alone and all were equally drawn by the use of the Word, then it ought to have the same effect upon all. Yet many men reject the Word and others heartily embrace it. The difference lies in those who hear the Word and are regenerated and effectually drawn to Christ by the Holy Spirit. With the unregenerate the Holy Spirit must work *immediately* upon the human soul before He works *mediately* through the preached word. As noted above, Christ says this drawing power is irresistible. It always results in a resurrection unto life. This means that the Holy Spirit operates on some men and passes others by. While man is the architect of his own damnation, (contrary to Arminianism) he is not the architect of his own conversion. How could he be? He is dead in trespasses (Eph. 2:1-5), helpless (Ezek.16:4-6), spiritually blind (1 Cor. 2:14) and cannot repent (Jer. 13:23). Further, Paul says that the Word apart from the converting-drawing power of the Holy Spirit brings death (Rom. 7:10). It only brings greater judgment, not life (2 Cor. 2:14-16).

All Arminian and semi-Pelagian concepts of grace are utterly destroyed by the biblical meaning of the word *draw*. "The Greek word used here is *elko*. Kittle's *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* defines it to mean to compel by irresistible superiority. Linguistically and lexicographically, the word means to 'compel.'"³³ This word means much more than a mere moral influence of the Word, or a gentle wooing by the Father. God does not merely woo, beg, beckon, or attempt to influence, He compels with divine power. Hendriksen writes, "The same verb (*elko, elkuo*) occurs also in 12:32, where the drawing activity is ascribed to the Son; and further, in 18:10; 21:6, 11; Acts 16:19; 21:30; and Jas. 2:6. The *drawing* of which these passages speak indicates a very powerful—we may even say, an *irresistible*—activity. To be sure, man resists, but this resistance is ineffective. It is in that sense that we speak of God's grace as being irresistible. The net full of big fishes is *actually drawn* or *dragged* ashore (21:6, 11). Paul and Silas are *dragged* into the forum (Acts 16:19). Paul is *dragged* out of the temple (Acts 21:30). The rich *drag* the poor before the judgment-seats (Jas. 2:6)...Jesus *will draw* all men to himself (12:32) and Simon *drew* his sword..."³⁴ The Greek word *elko* means what it means. All attempts to deny the meaning of this term are not based on Scripture, but on humanistic concepts of fairness that are imposed on the text.

Arminians reject the plain meaning of the text because they believe that it would violate the idea that man has a free will. But this objection fails to consider three important things. First, as we have previously demonstrated the will of man is not free in the sense that the will always follows the depraved heart which cannot do anything which pleases God. Second, the state of unregenerate man's heart (spiritually dead, dark, blind, depraved, etc) necessitates a drawing power that powerfully effects in us to will and to do. A gentle persuasion or a wooing is ineffectual on a spiritual corpse. Thus, the Bible describes this drawing in terms of a creation, a spiritual resurrection, a quickening, a regeneration. The removal of heart of stone and replacing it

³³ R. C. Sproul, *Chosen by God* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1986), 69.

³⁴ William Hendriksen, *The Gospel of John*, 1:238.

with a heart of flesh (i.e. a heart with a new spiritual nature) is obviously much more radical than a gentle urging. Third, the drawing power of God should never be falsely characterized as some form of mindless coercion. God in the new birth implants a new spiritual life in the heart of a sinner which powerfully influences every aspect of that person's being in such a manner that: (a) his will or personal responsibility is not violated; and (b) he now has an understanding and love of Christ so that he voluntarily embraces the Savior. As a flower is drawn to the rays of the sun in spring, the new heart of the regenerate person looks to Jesus with a living faith.

The biblical meaning of the word "draw" is supported by Paul in 1 Corinthians: "For who makes you to differ from another? And what do you have that you did not receive? Now if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?" (4:7)? Paul teaches that God is the one who makes the difference between those with and without Christ. The apostle explicitly rejects the whole Arminian paradigm. "And yet if after the fall the free will has still some strength by which it can dispose itself to good and admit the offered grace, man will make himself to differ from another and will have what he had not received and of which he may boast because the admission of grace (and his own act) distinguishes him from another who rejects it...Could he not glory against the unbeliever because he cooperated with the grace of God which he [the unbeliever] despised?"³⁵ The consistent Arminian allows exactly what Paul prohibits. Therefore, we must reject the synergistic notion of wooing in favor of the monergistic concept of drawing. "Salvation is of the Lord" (Jon. 2:9).

5. The Unregenerate Cannot Repent

Because men are depraved by nature and spiritually dead, they in and of themselves do not have the power to repent. "Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots? Then may you do good who are accustomed to evil" (Jer. 13:23). "Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? Not one" (Job 14:4). "A good tree cannot bear bad fruit" (Mt. 7:18). "They are spots and blemishes, carousing in their own deceptions...having eyes full of adultery and that cannot cease from sin...It has happened to them according to the true proverb: 'A dog returns to his own vomit,' and, 'a sow, having washed, to her wallowing in the mire'" (2 Pet. 2:13-14, 22). "That which is born of the flesh is flesh" (Jn. 3:6). "Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of, nor indeed can be. So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God" (Rom. 8:7-8).

Biblical repentance involves a change of mind regarding sin, Christ and the gospel. It involves a turning from a sinful, selfish lifestyle to the true and living God. The Arminian view is that men need some assistance from God to repent. With careful persuasion and a gentle urging by the Holy Spirit, men can repent and turn over a new leaf. This view, however, explicitly contradicts Scripture. Because man is so thoroughly corrupt, only the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit applied to man's heart can enable a man to repent and believe. Therefore, repentance is something that must be granted to a sinner by God. "They glorified God, saying, 'Then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life'" (Ac. 11:18). God circumcised their hearts (Dt. 30:6) and replaced their stony hearts with hearts of flesh (Ezek. 11:19). Because men are spiritually dead and hostile to God by nature, only the Holy Spirit by the miracle of the new birth can make men new creatures. This is the clear teaching of Scripture. "For it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure" (Phil. 2:13). "Him God has exalted to His right hand to be Prince and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and

³⁵ Francis Turretin, 1:675.

forgiveness of sins” (Ac. 5:31). “In humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth” (2 Tim. 2:25). The whole New Testament teaches that conversion is in the hand of God, that He has the power to grant repentance unto unsaved sinners so that they become new creatures.

6. The Unregenerate are Under the Power of Satan

Mankind apart from Christ is enslaved to the god of darkness and lives, breathes and thinks in terms of the great satanic lie that sin and idolatry are true freedom. “But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them” (2 Cor. 4:3-4). “You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do... When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it. But because I tell you the truth, you do not believe Me” (Jn. 8:44, 45). “I [Jesus Christ] will deliver you [the Apostle Paul] from the Jewish people, as well as from the Gentiles, to whom I now send you, to open their eyes in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me” (Ac. 26:17-18).

If man is bound by his sinful flesh to the prince of darkness and is blinded by Satan, then obviously his will is not free. Men who have “been taken captive by him [Satan] to do his will” (2 Tim. 2:26) can only be set free by someone stronger than Satan—Jesus Christ and His Spirit (Mt. 12:29). Because “the whole world lies in the power of the evil one” (1 Jn. 5:19), all unbelievers are children of the devil who do not practice righteousness (1 Jn. 3:10) and everyone walks “according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience” (Eph. 2:2), we can only be liberated by the almighty power of the Holy Spirit sent by the victorious Mediator at the right hand of Power. Thus of Jesus we read, “Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage” (Heb. 2:14).

7. The Unregenerate Dwell in Darkness

As a result of the fall, men live in spiritual, ethical and epistemological darkness. “In Him [Jesus Christ] was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it” (Jn. 1:4-5). “And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed” (Jn. 3:19-20). “The words ‘every one that doeth evil,’ mean every unconverted person, every one whose heart is not right and honest in God’s sight, and whose actions are consequently evil and ungodly. Every such person ‘hateth the light, neither cometh to the light.’ He cannot really love Christ and the Gospel, and will not honestly, and with his whole heart, seek Christ by faith and embrace His Gospel, until he is renewed.”³⁶ Unbelievers prefer the moral and spiritual darkness of sin *not* because they are simply ignorant or partially corrupt, but because they are totally depraved: every aspect of their nature hates the light. Such people cannot cooperate with grace or the Holy Spirit because their darkened natures have an innate antipathy toward the light.

³⁶ J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels: St. John*, 1:167.

“People of this type resemble loathsome insects that hide themselves beneath logs and stones, always preferring the darkness...”³⁷

When Paul sets out to demonstrate the ethical darkness, guilt and helplessness of the whole fallen human race he writes, “They became futile in their thoughts and their foolish hearts were darkened...God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting” (Rom. 1:21, 28). Pure darkness is the absence of all light. Those who are not born again dwell in spiritual darkness. How can those who are in total darkness, who hate the light, choose or cooperate with light? The unregenerate will not choose the light because he cannot choose the light. It is impossible with man. “Non-existent spiritual life cannot give being to itself. Light is not brought out of darkness, neither does love come from hate. Every seed bears its own kind. ‘That which is of flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit’ (Jn. 3:6). A new creature, therefore, cannot be the product of natural power.”³⁸

8. *The Unregenerate Do Not Seek God*

The idea that unregenerate men are *objectively* examining different philosophies and religions in search of the truth is totally false. Unregenerate men turn to false religions, philosophies and ideologies to escape reality, to escape from the true God. Paul says in Romans chapter one that all fallen men have a knowledge of the true God from natural revelation, but they continually “suppress the truth in unrighteousness” (v. 8). Fallen mankind did not glorify God as God (v. 21). All men became futile in their thoughts and their foolish hearts were darkened (v. 21). Further, they exchanged the true God for a variety of gross, foolish idols (v. 23). They all “exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the creator” (v. 25). We see here the historical manifestation of the fall. The degeneration and degradation of mankind into the practice of perverse, abominable idolatries is the result of falling away. False religions and perverse, demonic cultures are simply the nature of man externalized. Such men do not cooperate with grace or with God’s Spirit, but suppress the truth and run to their idols. Such men need new hearts.

Thus the Psalmist could write, “The LORD looks down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there are any who understand, who seek God. They have all turned aside, they have all together become corrupt, there is none who does good, no not one” (14:2-3). Apart from Christ and His sovereign saving power, men are wicked (Ps. 51:5, 58:3), slaves of sin (Jn. 8:43; Rom. 6:12, 14), evil (Gen. 6:5; 8:21; Eccl. 9:3; Jer. 17:9; Mk. 7:21-23; Jn. 3:19), filthy or corrupt (Ps. 14:2); vile (Nah. 1:14), dross and refuse (Ps. 119:119); swine (Mt. 7:6); vipers (Mt. 3:7); devils (Jn. 6:70) and haters of Christ (Jn. 15:18).

Paul says that men are noetically blind, with no understanding, with absolutely no movement toward God. “There is none who understands; there is none who seeks after God” (Rom. 3:11). Why is it that not even one man seeks after God? It is because men *cannot* seek God. Luther writes, “Do we not know what it means to be ignorant of God, not to understand, not to seek God, not to fear God, to go out of the way and to be unprofitable? Are not the words perfectly clear? And do they not teach that all men are ignorant of God and despise God, and moreover go out of the way after evil, and are unprofitable for good? Paul is not here speaking of ignorance in seeking food, or of contempt for money, but of ignorance and contempt of [true]

³⁷ William Hendriksen, *The Gospel of John*, 1:44.

³⁸ W. E. Best, *Regeneration and Conversion* (Grand Rapids: Guardian), 14.

religion and godliness.”³⁹ Because of the fall and our corrupt natures men seek happiness in everything except God. Those who seek God do so only because God first sought them out and changed their stony hearts into hearts of flesh: “I [God] was found by those who did not seek Me; I was made manifest to those who did not ask for Me” (Rom. 10:20, cf. Isa. 65:1).

9. The Unregenerate are Helpless

Jesus died for His people when they were unable to obey Him; when they were without any ability to save themselves, cooperate with grace, or make any move toward God. “For when we were still without strength [i.e. helpless, powerless], in due time Christ died for the ungodly” (Rom. 5:6). The apostle points to our inability to magnify the grace of God and stimulate our love toward the Savior. Our salvation depends not on our ability, for we have no spiritual ability, but upon the love and grace of God. Arminian doctrine contradicts this passage by asserting human ability and by making this cooperation *the ultimate cause* of salvation. Such a view of faith as self-generated makes choosing Christ an act that merits salvation. Such a view is the philosophical cousin to Romanism. God through Ezekiel describes our total helplessness in terms of a newborn abandoned in a field to die in the hot sun. “And when I [God] passed you by and saw you struggling in your own blood, I said to you in your blood, ‘Live!’ Yes, I said to you in your blood, ‘Live!’” (Ezekiel 16:6). Paul says plainly that our ability does not arise from within ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God (2 Cor. 3:5). If we are to will that which is spiritually good, God must make us willing by His Spirit.

10. The Unregenerate have Uncircumcised Hearts of Stone

The Bible uses the expression “uncircumcised heart” to describe an unregenerate heart still enslaved to the filth and pollution of the flesh. “Thus says the Lord God: ‘No foreigner, uncircumcised in heart or uncircumcised in flesh, shall enter My sanctuary’” (Ezek. 44:9). “You stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears” (Ac. 7:51). “Then I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within them, and take the stony heart out of their flesh, and give them a heart of flesh” (Ezek. 11:19). A heart of stone is totally unresponsive to spiritual truth. An unregenerate man will no more respond to the gospel than will a rock. “Moreover, God wished to give a plain symbol of this thing in the writing of the law upon stony tables to intimate that the law is borne in a stony heart and cannot turn it (because devoid of the Spirit); but the gospel is borne in the fleshly tables of the heart because, animated by a life-giving spirit, it renews hearts and turns to them to obedience (2 Cor. 3:3).”⁴⁰ Regeneration is absolutely essential if fallen man is to believe. Note that God sovereignly bestows the new birth: “I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh” (Ezek. 36:26). “The wind blows where it wishes... So is everyone who is born of the Spirit” (Jn. 3:8).

Conclusion

Arminians believe that God has made forgiveness available through Christ and now is waiting for men to exercise their free will to cooperate with grace and appropriate the redemption provided. It is as though there is a pot of gold sitting there waiting for man to

³⁹ Luther, *Bondage of the Will*, 280.

⁴⁰ Turretin, 1:673.

discover it. The idea that Jesus can or will save only those men who of their own “free will” are willing to accept Him completely contradicts what the Bible says about the effect of total depravity upon the human race. All men are dead spiritually (Eph. 2:1-5); hate the truth and hate Jesus Christ (Jn. 3:19-21); are at enmity with God (Rom. 8:7-8); dwell in darkness (Jn. 1:4-5); have a heart of stone (Ezek. 11:19); are helpless (Ezek. 16:4-6; Rom. 5:6); cannot repent (Jer. 13:23); are slaves of Satan (Ac. 26:17-18); cannot see or comprehend divine truth (1 Cor. 2:14); and cannot come to Christ unless they are compelled to do so by God (Jn. 6:44, 65). This teaching is offensive to the natural man and is rejected by most churches today; but, it is unavoidable unless one is willing to abandon or completely twist the Word of God.

The doctrine of total depravity is important, for when it is properly understood, it proves that salvation is totally of God’s grace. Those who reject this doctrine and teach that the human will is the sole determining factor between who is and who is not saved have abandoned the biblical doctrine of salvation. The great theologian B. B. Warfield has pointed out that Arminians cannot even truly confess the apostle’s creed. He writes, “When one says... ‘I believe in God, the Father Almighty,’ he means it with reserve for in the domain of man’s moral choices under grace, man himself is almighty, according to God’s self-limitation in making man in his image and after his likeness. God himself, he goes on to declare, has a creed which begins: ‘I believe in man, almighty in his choices.’”⁴¹ The Protestant Reformer Martin Luther points out that once man contributes something of his own to salvation, even one little act of the human will, grace is no more grace. He writes, “Granted that your friends assign to ‘free will as little as possible,’ nevertheless they teach us that by that little we can attain righteousness and grace; and they solve the problem as to why God justifies one and abandons another simply by presupposing ‘free-will,’ and saying: ‘the one endeavoured and the other did not; and God regards the one for his endeavour and despises the other; and He would be unjust were He to do anything else!... They [the guardians of ‘free will’] do not believe that He intercedes before God and obtains grace for them by His blood, and ‘grace’ (as is here said) ‘for grace’. And as they believe, so it is unto them. Christ is in truth an inexorable judge to them, and deservedly so; for they abandon Him in His office as a Mediator and kindest Saviour, and account His blood and grace as of less worth than the efforts and endeavours of ‘free-will’!”⁴²

Arminianism is the first cousin to Romanism. It is a damnable heresy. If one man had the wisdom and will to choose Christ while his neighbor did not, then he has reason to boast. But if men are dead in trespasses and sins and totally unable to respond to Christ until He raises them from the dead through regeneration, then there is no reason for a man to boast. God receives all the glory. “Just as Lazarus would never have heard the voice of Jesus, nor would he have ever ‘come to Jesus,’ without first being given life by our Lord, so all men ‘dead in trespasses and sins’ must first be given life by God before they can ‘come to Christ.’ Since dead men cannot *will* to receive life, but can be raised from the dead only by the power of God, so the natural man cannot of his own (mythical) ‘free will’ *will* to have eternal life (cf. John 10:26-28).”⁴³ The gospel really *is* good news. Jesus Christ actually saves sinners.

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⁴¹ Benjamin B. Warfield, *The Plan of Salvation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 84-85.

⁴² Luther, *The Bondage of the Will*, 292, 305.

⁴³ Duane Edward Spencer, *Tulip: The Five Points of Calvinism in the Light of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1976), 28.