

I find, then that man was by God constituted free, master of his own will and power; indicating the presence of God's image and likeness in him by nothing so well as this constitution of his nature.... you will find that when He sets before man good and evil, life and death, that the entire course of discipline is arranged in precepts by God's calling men from sin, and threatening and exhorting them; and this on no other ground than that man is free, with a will either for obedience or resistance.

-Tertullian (AD 155-225)

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PARADISE LOST: THE PLIGHT OF FALLEN HUMANITY

This inductive biblical investigation had to begin with an examination in the previous chapter of God's revelation about Himself and His creatures in the pristine period before the fall of mankind. Since most of human history has been lived under sin, it is now important also to look into the consequences of Satan's revolt and Adam's disobedience.

The Impact of Humanity's Fall

Universal depravity and spiritual death

Evangelical Christians and traditional Catholics are unique in believing that Adam and Eve's disobedience plunged the whole human race into a sinful condition. Although Judaism and Islam agree that Adam and Eve disobeyed God in Eden, they do not recognize that their descendants became sinners as a result. They, like followers of all other religions, hold that man is essentially good. However, the Genesis account is very explicit that God had warned them: "**From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die**" (Gen. 2:16-17). The immediate consequence of their sin was expulsion from the garden and from access to the tree of life, which represented the spiritual life they had enjoyed in fellowship with God.

Since they did not die *physically* when they disobeyed God's explicit command, the implication is that they died *spiritually*. Some suppose that this was just the beginning of the process of physical death, but the Bible is quite explicit about the spiritual impact of Adam's sin upon the whole human race. There was a constitutional change in Adam and Eve evi-

denced by several things: their attempt to cover their newly acquired sense of shame of nakedness (Gen. 3:7); their alienation from God seen in trying to hide from Him; and passing off the blame for their disobedience (Gen. 3:8-13). Although the account of God's judgments upon the snake as Satan's mouthpiece, the animals, Eve, Adam, plants, and the ground (Gen. 3:14-19) is very terse, the effects of those judgments are far reaching throughout human history (Rom. 8:18-23).

The immediate impact of their sin upon their first son reveals how quickly depravity spread throughout all humanity. This is evident in the way in which God confronted Cain for his deficient offering. Moses' account is brief and implies that God had told Adam and Eve that He required blood sacrifices to atone for their sins. Remember that God had covered the shame of their nakedness with the skins of sacrificed animals (Gen. 3:21). In faith and obedience Abel brought what was called "**a more excellent sacrifice**" (Heb. 11:4). But Cain, in his unrepentant pride, brought only vegetables, so "**for Cain and his offering [God] had no regard**" (Gen. 4:5). But God didn't give up on Cain. When God rejected his offering, he got angry. So God exhorted him: "**If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door; its desire is for you, but you must master it**" (Gen. 4:7, RSV). God was well aware of the depravity of Cain's heart, but nevertheless gave him opportunity to repent and to come in faith with an acceptable offering. Cain's destiny had not been predetermined, and although he didn't repent and went on in envy to murder his brother, this was not inevitable. Even after Cain killed Abel, God continued to deal with him patiently.

Cain's depravity was passed on to his descendants. There was a devolution of the Cainite civilization morally, even while it was advancing by leaps and bounds technologically. The Apostle Jude spoke of the "**way of Cain**" (Jude 11) which was derived from Satan, the evil one (1 Jn. 3:12). This is a self-righteous religion by which Cain and his descendants sought to attain right standing with God by their own works, ignoring God's way of blood sacrifice. Cainite civilization developed rapidly since Cain built a city for the exploding population of his descendants (Gen. 4:17). It became a technologically advanced civilization as seen in Tubal-Cain, who developed iron and bronze technology, and Jubal, who developed music and the arts (4:21-22). Lamech violated God's original marriage plan with a bigamous relationship and used poetry to magnify his violent manslaughter (Gen. 4:23-4). This set the pattern for the civilization which magnified revenge to the extent that "**the earth was filled with violence**" (Gen. 6:11) by Noah's time. The number of true believers on earth declined because "**the sons of God [believers] saw that the daughters of [unbelieving] men were beautiful; and they took wives for themselves, whomever they chose**" (Gen. 6:2). The notorious *Nephilim* ("fallen ones") were renowned for their deeds of violence (Gen. 6:4). This pre-flood period shows human free will gone amok! Sin and depravity spread throughout the whole human race.

Paul later confirmed this understanding: **“There is none righteous, not even one.... For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.... Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned”** (Rom. 3:10, 23; 5:12). Since in Romans 5:13ff Paul makes a contrast between the reckoning (imputing) of Adam’s sin to all mankind and the reckoning (imputing) of Christ’s righteousness to believers, it is clear that he is not just referring to our personal sins, but especially to universal guilt and depravity (Rom. 5:17). Then he summarized: **“For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord”** (Rom. 6:23). In writing to the Ephesian Christians, Paul explains Satan’s continuing involvement in man’s spiritual plight:

And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest (Eph. 2:1-3).

Personal sins, universal guilt, a sin nature derived from Adam and Eve, and universal spiritual death are all the clear consequences of Adam’s sin.

Spiritual death carefully defined

A precise definition of spiritual death is now essential. Some are prone to use the illustration of the impossibility of evangelizing a corpse in a funeral parlor as a picture of spiritual death. How valid is this illustration?

In the last chapter the constituent nature of mankind was examined. If soul and spirit are not distinct, spiritual death has to be taken as a figure of speech. The soul=spirit could not have died literally because fallen man clearly retains a soul. But since the soul and spirit of man are distinct, spiritual death can be understood literally. Since the human spirit is distinct and especially the God-conscious part of man, spiritual death is best explained as the death of the human spirit, and the new birth as the literal making alive or resurrecting of the human spirit.

This is confirmed by Christ Himself in John 5:24-29. In vv. 24-27 He uses the imagery of the new birth as a spiritual resurrection: **“I tell you the truth, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the son of God and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son to have life in himself”** (5:25, NIV). This is set in parallelism with the promise of bodily resurrection in similar language in vv. 28-29. Since the second is a literal resurrection (of the body), so also must the first be literal (of the human spirit). Note that the spiritually dead are able to hear Christ’s voice and respond. Thus, neither spiritual death nor the new birth are figurative language. *The human spirit died literally in Eden, and the human spirit is made alive literally when we are born again.*

Our understanding of this truth is significantly dependent upon the

definition of death. A comprehensive definition must fit spiritual, physical, and eternal death to be adequate. The common element of all three is separation. Spiritual death is separation from God (Isa. 59:1-2); physical death is separation of the soul and spirit from the body (as well as separation from loved ones); and eternal death is eternal separation from God (Rev. 19:20; 20:10, 14). As Paul explained in Ephesians 4:18: “...**being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart...**” Resultant definition: *the rendering of the God-conscious part of man inoperative and, as a consequence, the separation of man from God.*

Delegation of sovereign control

The disobedience of Adam and Eve in the garden not only explains human depravity, it is most instructive about God in His relation to mankind. It should be obvious that, having created them as autonomous beings, God allowed, but did not cause them to sin. By granting them this autonomy, He thereby chose to limit the exercise of His sovereignty. Being sovereign, He could have prevented them from sinning or manipulated them to sin. But it is unthinkable that a holy God would in any way do such a thing, for this would make Him the author of sin. James made this very clear: “**Let no one say when he is tempted, ‘I am being tempted by God’; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust**” (Jas. 1:13-14). God created Adam and Eve to reflect the glory of His being, but they became fallen creatures, their offspring continuing and growing in their disobedience to Him.

Satan’s limited autonomy. Satan’s success in causing the fall of mankind in the garden is later seen as a usurpation of that rule previously given to man. The book of Job is the earliest indication of Satan’s evil autonomy and authority (Job 1:6-12; 2:1-6). He was not acting as an agent of the sovereign God, but as an accuser working in opposition to God and His people. Again in Daniel 10 the heavenly conflict between God’s angels and Satan’s is worked out in conflict between people here on earth.¹ When Satan tested the Second Adam, the Lord Jesus, in the wilderness (Mt. 4:8-11) and offered Him the kingdoms of this world, He did not question Satan’s authority. Later He called Satan “**the prince of this world**” (Jn. 12:31; 14:30; 16:11), and Paul called him “**the god of this world**” (2 Cor. 4:4) and “**the prince of the power of the air**” (Eph. 2:2). Most astonishing are the words of Hebrews 2:14: “**Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil...**” Even the power of death was delegated to Satan. Obviously God’s exercise of His sovereignty has been greatly limited thereby. God retains the ultimate sovereignty but has allowed Satan and fallen man to do their own thing in opposition to Him.

Humanity's rebellion. The violent behavior of the human race before the flood (Gen. 6:6) was just the culmination of God's allowing mankind to 'do his own thing.' Some have appropriately termed the pre-flood period "the dispensation of human self-determination." It was human free will gone amok! The period of Israel's judges was also a time when "**every man did what was right in his own eyes**" (Judges 21:25). Even though Israel was God's chosen people, He allowed them to go into apostasy for centuries, which implies that He limited the exercise of sovereign control.

Covenant promises. Every promise and covenant God made with mankind is an additional limitation of His sovereign freedom. He has thus bound Himself and will not go against His word. He made many covenants with mankind, with Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, and the New Covenant of Christ's blood. These are all really contracts God made with mankind. One is bilateral (the Mosaic); the rest are essentially unilateral (although they have some contingent features). In these covenant promises God limits the exercise of His sovereignty even more overtly.

Kingdom predictions. The Bible is full of prophecies about the future kingdom of Christ, by which the coming Messiah would personally rule in righteousness, justice, and peace over all humanity. Since the first-coming prophecies were fulfilled literally, we must take second-coming prophecies as literally true as well. These prophecies clearly imply that God's rule and dominion were not yet manifest on the earth, certainly not before Messiah's advent, and not literally in the two millenniums since then. Is this not a limitation in the exercise of His sovereignty at present? God is not exercising the fullness of His sovereign rule now. We have to wait for the coming kingdom glory to see the fullness of His sovereignty manifested. *This must be factored into a definition of sovereignty.*

The image of God defaced, not erased

One dimension of the fall which has been seriously overlooked is its impact upon the image of God in humanity. Many of the early church fathers expounded this important issue and connected it with free will.² It is very clear from Scripture that the image was not lost in the fall.

Genesis 9:6. Moses, inspired by the Spirit, gives an important clue at this strategic juncture in the history of revelation—immediately after the deluge. Before the flood, violence escalated into a vengeance syndrome bringing on God's judgment of a worldwide deluge. But God, in making the Noahic Covenant with a remnant humanity, affirms in Genesis 8:21 that Adam's sin nature had been transmitted to all mankind: "**I will never again curse the ground on account of man, for the intent of man's heart is evil from his youth; and I will never again destroy every living thing, as I have done.**" Now a new provision for human violence and depravity must be initiated—the death penalty and attendant civil government necessary to implement it. "**Whoever**

sheds man's blood, by man his blood shall be shed, for in the image of God He made man" (Gen. 9:6). In so doing, God affirms that man still retains the image of God, and thereby, offers some positive hope for mankind's future.

Further important insight about God's self-limitation emerges. Here God gave up the responsibility to directly punish murderers. That responsibility is now in the hands of judges and magistrates, whose God-like authority is confirmed in Psalm 82:6, Matthew 22:15-22, and in Romans 13:1-7. Even though the Roman government abused that authority in crucifying the Lord Jesus, that delegated authority has never been rescinded. This is a further self-limitation of the exercise of God's sovereignty.

Apostolic confirmation. Paul in his message on Mars Hill used the words of a Greek poet to reinforce the truth of Genesis (Acts 17:28):

... that they should seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and exist, as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we also are His offspring.'

Paul implies that men are able to seek God based upon the image of God, even though he doesn't use that language to the pagan Greeks. Deterministic theology's concept of depravity does not leave room for man to seek God, despite the dozens of injunctions in Scripture to do just that. Paul's exhortation to seek God is based upon the remnant image of God.

Some of the other supporting references are: "**With it [the tongue] we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the likeness of God**" (Jas. 3:9). Here is a straightforward passing reference to the retained image of God in fallen mankind. "**For a man ought not to have his head covered, since he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man**" (1 Cor. 11:7). Again, this is a passing reference to man having been created in God's image as part of Paul's argument on a related subject, the relationship of men and women in the church.

Although the truth of the remnant image of God is nowhere directly developed in Scripture, it is an underlying presupposition of discussion of other doctrinal issues. Therefore, this foundational truth must be factored into the biblical doctrine of sin. It seems that most deterministic writers have not taken the image of God into account, but a balanced biblical view must include it. Although certain functional aspects of the image of God were damaged, it is clear that the reality survived the fall, and His image was not lost or erased. This implies that fallen mankind, still in God's image, is able to respond to God's entreaties. Depravity does not mean total inability!

The Fall and Human Depravity

Human depravity not in dispute

Many extreme Calvinists assume that they alone hold a biblical view of depravity. They insist on "total depravity," perhaps unaware that the Latin

depravare is an intensive compound word already signifying “totally corrupt” or “completely crooked.”³ Thus, adding the word ‘total’ is an indication of a doubly intensified concept of depravity. But knowledgeable Calvinists recognize that Arminius and Wesley had a fully biblical view of depravity, even though many Arminians have a weakened and shallow understanding.⁴

Norman Geisler suggests that extreme Calvinism has an “intensive” view of depravity, in contrast to a biblical, “extensive” understanding. The intensive view, in effect, holds that the image of God and the human will are essentially destroyed.⁵ The extensive view holds that the whole person of man was corrupted by sin, but that the image of God and the human will have not been destroyed but rather corrupted. This is essentially the semi-Augustinian view of the Synod of Orange (AD 529), not the semi-Pelagianism* of the later Roman church (cf. pp 321-22).

Does mankind retain any autonomy?

After the fall man retained some God-given autonomy, although limited by sin. Indeed, in his sin mankind continued increasingly to abuse that autonomy. God had not programmed humanity to play out the violence, concerning which Moses stated that “**The LORD was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart**” (Gen. 6:6). The history of Israel is hardly more encouraging. Man was ‘doing his own thing.’ This is not only clear throughout the Old Testament narrative but stands out in boldface. It would be depressing to read of humanity’s descent into progressive rebellion if we believed that God had programmed this in eternity past, and if we did not believe that God was working behind the scenes to accomplish His purpose in preparing His plan of salvation for lost mankind.

In the Gospels the rapidity with which Israel began to oppose and plot the demise of their Messiah is proof that mankind consistently and grossly abuses its autonomy. The Lord repeatedly warned His Apostles of the opposition they would suffer (Mt. 10:16-42), which began shortly after the day of Pentecost. Acts is a detailed chronicle of ongoing persecution. Not just in history, but also in apostolic prophecy there is testimony to its unmitigated continuance until Christ returns (Mt. 24-25; 1 Tim. 4:1ff; 2 Tim. 3:1ff; 2 Thess. 2:1-12; 2 Pet. 3:1-9). Not only did the church suffer severe persecution under the Romans for three centuries, but especially in recent years, severe persecution of true Christians around the world has become commonplace and escalating. Certainly this is not the record of man acting out some imagined eternal decree; it is man abusing the autonomy God gave him at creation by becoming Satan’s instruments of hostility to God.

Does depravity mean total inability?

Human depravity in a real sense is affirmed by most evangelical theologians, even though there is significant semi-Pelagianism* at the popular fringe. On the other hand, there has been a subtle semantic shift or extrapo-

lation in extreme Calvinistic circles from depravity to total inability. However, depravity does not imply inability. The biblical testimony is clear that humanity is totally unable to save itself. The new birth is one-hundred percent a work of the Spirit of God, as John 1:12-13 makes clear. Man cannot contribute one iota to his regeneration. But since repentant faith is the required condition of regeneration, then the whole question of whether fallen human beings can exercise repentance and faith must be examined (cf. Ch. 17).

One would never get the notion from the Old Testament narrative that mankind is totally unable to respond to God's confrontations. It gives a consistent picture of God confronting fallen man and expecting a positive response. God is portrayed as taking the initiative from the very beginning in confronting lost mankind. God confronted Adam and Eve in the garden. It is implied from His provision of shed-blood garments to cover their nakedness that they responded positively. Their expulsion from the garden, while denying access to the tree of life, had the positive impact of impressing their descendants with their alienation and spiritual need. Abel responded in faith and obedience, but Cain did not. One wonders why God would confront persistent rejecters like Cain, if the missing element was a repentant faith which God Himself gives only to some elect group? Enosh, the son of Seth, marked the beginning of men calling upon the name of the LORD (4:26). God then confronted mankind through prophets, such as Enoch and Noah (Jude 14; 2 Pet. 2:5). In the latter case none responded. The main point here is that God is not operating on the premise that man is totally unable to respond to His confrontation. The history of Israel makes it abundantly clear that God continued to confront the nation in many different ways, especially through the prophets, as to their need to seek Him, to repent, and to return to Him.

The New Testament record of John the Baptizer, Christ, and the Apostles, likewise, shows them adopting a very confrontational style, designed to bring about repentant faith in their hearers, indeed, *demanding* repentant faith from their hearers. All of this assumes the possibility of a positive response from their hearers. Thus those who argue that, apart from irresistible grace, evangelism is like preaching to corpses in a funeral parlor, have exaggerated the impact of the fall. Based upon a biblically accurate definition of spiritual death and the remnant image of God, such analogies are totally inappropriate. In any case, analogies prove nothing!

Does fallen man retain free will?

The first denial of free will. Free will is a dirty word among extreme Calvinists. But not with early church fathers, who not only coined the term but defended it against the determinism of Neo-Platonism, Gnosticism, and Manicheanism. *It is especially significant how many of them connected the image of God with free will.* For example, Tertullian (c. 155-225) writes:

I find, then, that man was by God constituted free, master of his own will and power; indicating the presence of God's image and likeness in him by nothing so well as by this constitution of his nature.... —you will find that when He sets before man good and evil, life and death, that the entire course of discipline is arranged in precepts by God's calling men from sin, and threatening and exhorting them; and this on no other ground than that man is free, with a will either for obedience or resistance.⁶

Novatian of Rome (c. 200-258), Cyril of Jerusalem (c. 312-386), and Gregory of Nyssa (c. 335-395), all made an explicit connection between the image of God and man's free will. "Not a single church figure in the first 300 years rejected it [free-will] and most of them stated it in works still extant."⁷

Who makes us do it? Comedian Flip Wilson became famous for saying, "The Devil made me do it." Some theologians, in trying to explain how Adam with a good nature could perform an evil act, have pushed the problem back to Satan. But since it is clear that God did not create any sinful beings, this only pushes the problem back one step. Martin Luther, an Augustinian monk, pushed the problem back one more step to God by including Satan's sin in God's decrees. Extreme Calvinist R. C. Sproul is not willing to go that far, but admits that it is an "excruciating problem."⁸

Norman Geisler has argued quite effectively, both rationally and biblically, that self-caused actions are the best explanation for the origin of evil. God's creation of His creatures with free choice best explains the possibility of evil. God created Lucifer as a holy cherub, but unrighteousness was found in him and he became Satan. How did this happen? It is clear that Satan originated sin and rebellion against God (Isa. 14:12-15; Ezek. 28:12-17). Geisler suggests that there are only three options: "My actions are (1) uncaused; (2) caused by someone (or something) else; or (3) caused by my Self. And there are many reasons to support the last view." He shows that extreme Calvinists make a fundamental error in failing to distinguish between self-caused *being*, which is impossible apart from God, and self-caused *action*, which is the only way to explain Lucifer's sin.⁹ Clearly, Lucifer's unrighteous pride was self-caused.

God's judgment of the sin of Satan (Ezek. 28:16-19; 1 Tim. 3:6; Rev. 20:10), of fallen angels (Jude 6-7; 2 Pet. 2:4; Rev. 12:4, 9), and of Adam and Eve (Gen. 3:1-19) makes it clear that God holds free creatures morally responsible for their free choices. Since God holds all mankind morally responsible for their moral choices, fallen people must have adequate freedom of the will to make moral choices; otherwise, He could not justly judge them for their deeds (Rev. 20:12). One of the most dominant ideas of Scripture, from Genesis to the Revelation, is that God judges the sins of individuals, families, and nations, and that He is just in His judgments.

Direct Scriptural evidence. There is direct Scriptural evidence for the idea that fallen man continues to exercise his uncoerced will, not only in the ordinary decisions of life, but also in moral decisions relating to God. Moses

challenged Israel: “I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. So choose life in order that you may live, you and your descendants, by loving the LORD your God, by obeying His voice, and by holding fast to Him;” (Deut. 30:19-20a). A generation later, Joshua made the same challenge: “And if it is disagreeable in your sight to serve the LORD, choose for yourselves today whom you will serve:...” (Josh. 24:15). Isaiah similarly exhorted Israel: “Come now, and let us reason together,... if you consent and obey,... but if you refuse and rebel,...” (Isa. 1:18-19). (See also 1 Kings 18:21 and Isaiah 45:22.) Didn’t Moses, Joshua, and the prophets understand the doctrine of total inability and know that man cannot “choose life”? Some people think that expecting people to choose robs God of His glory and sovereignty. Not in the least!

Christ identified the problem of the Jewish leaders: “You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; it is these that testify about Me; and you are unwilling to come to me so that you may have life” (Jn. 5:39-40). At the Feast, He explained the contingent factor in our coming to the truth: “If anyone is willing to do His will, he will know of the teaching, whether it is of God or whether I speak from myself” (Jn. 7:17). This is capped off with the words of His final lament over Jerusalem: “Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling. Behold, your house is being left to you desolate” (Mt. 23:37-8). Many other direct invitations must be considered (Mt. 11:28; 22:3; Jn. 7:37-39). Judgment came upon those who were unwilling. *It is the will of man, not the will of God which is the problem.* So for those who positively respond and those who reject, Christ declared that the issue is the human will.

In Peter’s warning about the end-time mockers: “But they deliberately forget that long ago by God’s word the heavens existed and the earth was formed out of water and with water” (2 Pet. 3:5, NIV). Creation and the flood are two key issues that modern man does not want to accept, because then he would have to respond to God’s claims.

Some may ask, why quote these familiar verses? Sometimes we miss the obvious force of the familiar. Norman Douty’s comment is pointed:

Moreover, in the Apostolic preaching of the Gospel, sinners were spoken to as if expected to act then and there—without any suggestion that, after all they were under some insuperable necessity of doing nothing. It is simply a matter of record that the primitive preachers did not tell their hearers that they had absolutely no ability to do anything in response to God’s call, invitation, command and threat.¹⁰

Can mankind respond to general revelation?

God holds human beings responsible, not only for the special self-revelation in His word, but also for the revelation of Himself to all mankind in nature and conscience. Speaking of hard-core unbelievers, Paul wrote:

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness

and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse (Rom. 1:18-20).

Then, in Romans 2:14-16 Paul explains the part that the human conscience, as the law of God written on the heart, has to play in helping people to respond to God's revelation in nature. Today the revelation of God in His creation is even clearer to us with our increased scientific knowledge. Whether in the macrocosm of astronomy or the microcosm of atomic physics, God's intelligent design is so manifest that many non-Christians are admitting that there must be an Intelligent Designer.

God has used this general revelation to prepare the minds of untold numbers of non-Christians for the gospel. For example, missionary surgeon Dr. Viggo Olsen and his wife were converted while he was an intern. As agnostics they first struggled with the question of the existence of a Creator God. Through apologetic literature they got a positive answer and then went on to the question of which book is a true revelation of that God. While struggling with this apologetic sequence, they both were saved.¹¹

This all seems like an exercise in futility, if mankind is totally unable to respond to God's message. Why should God reveal Himself thus *to all mankind* and hold them accountable for it, if indeed He has already determined that only certain elect people can ever respond, believe, and be saved? Why should He write His law on human hearts, if people are totally unable to respond? It seems absurd!

Can mankind seek God?

The only time an extreme Calvinistic colleague ever admitted to any problem with his Calvinism was when he said that Isaiah 55:6 troubled him. However, if he had checked them out, he would have found a host of other passages which totally contradict the notion of inability simply by opening his concordance to "seek."

Many Christians base their view of inability on the English of Romans 3:10-11: "**There is none righteous, not even one; There is none who understands, There is none who seeks for God.**" In Paul's paraphrase of the Septuagint of Psalm 14, he was careful to use the intensified verb *ekzētein*, rather than the simple *zētein*. From its usage in Acts 15:17; Heb. 11:6; 12:17; and 1 Pet. 1:10, it is clear that Paul is not referring to an indifferent seeking, but a 'diligent seeking' for God. So Paul was not affirming that no one ever seeks God at all, but rather that *no one diligently seeks God*. It is also significant that this verb is a present participle, which likely has a customary force. This would refer to a regularly recurring action,¹² and thus, could be rendered, "**no one**

customarily and diligently seeks God.^A Otherwise, if neither of the above were true, Scripture would be in contradiction with itself. *There are only fifty verses which contradict a superficial reading of Romans 3:10-11!* Why do people ignore the fifty and focus on the one? William A. Butler got it right: *“We hold a few texts so near the eyes that they hide the rest of the Bible.”*¹³ In this case, it is just one text! Here are just a few of the fifty.

Consider God’s predictive warning of exile to a disobedient Israel: **“But from there you will seek the LORD your God, and you will find Him if you search for Him with all your heart and all your soul”** (Deut. 4:29); God’s rebuke to apostate Israel: **“I will go away and return to My place until they acknowledge their guilt and seek My face; in their affliction they will earnestly seek Me”** (Hos. 5:15); Amos’s double exhortation: **“Seek Me that you may live”** (Amos 5:4, 6); and **“Seek the LORD, all you humble of the earth”** (Zeph. 2:3). (cf. 1 Chr. 22:19a; 28:9b; 2 Chr. 15:2b; Ps. 105:3b-4; Isa. 55:6-7; Jer. 29:12-13).

If someone naively responds that these are all part of the old dispensation, hear Paul, the Apostle of monergistic grace on Mars hill, Acts 17:26-28a (see quote on p. 31), and **“... to those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life”** (Rom. 2:7). The remaining references can be found in any concordance.

The prodigal son. The parable of the prodigal son in Luke 15:11-32 is further evidence against inability. Some may be unclear as to whether it is referring to the restoration of a backslider or the salvation of a sinner. The Lord’s language is clear: **“... for this son of mine was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found”** (Lk. 15:24). The father repeats the same language to the older brother in v. 32. He was spiritually dead and lost. Yet the Lord makes the point that **“he came to his senses”** in the far country and repented of his sin and his unworthiness (15:17-19) and took the initiative to go to the father (15:20). This is in total harmony with the many other passages listed above and is impossible to reconcile with total inability. What is more, the Lord emphasized, in all three of the parables of lost things, the great joy in heaven when a sinner repents (15:7, 10, 25, 32)—there is even music and celebration! If sinners are saved by irresistible grace according to unconditional election by God in eternity past, what would be the point of rejoicing in heaven? The salvation of the ‘elect’ would be so cut and dried, there could be no surprise and rejoicing at what was a foregone conclusion.

Case studies. The New Testament supplies significant case studies. Consider Andrew and John, who sought the Lord after hearing the Baptizer’s witness. Nathaniel was dubious about Philip’s witness but took the trouble

A. The context of Psalm 14 is also very important, since Paul is quoting it. David is saying that the atheistic fool, who says in his heart that there is no God, does not diligently seek God. Although Paul expands the application of David’s words somewhat, he is giving a generalized statement about the human race as a whole, extending to both Jews and Gentiles, but not intended to be all-inclusive.

to check out Jesus of Nazareth (Jn. 1:35-51). Nicodemus sought out the Lord, albeit by night, and ultimately came to faith in Him (Jn. 3:1-21; 19:39-40). The Ethiopian eunuch, although an excluded Gentile, had traveled to Jerusalem to worship and found the Lord through the other Philip on the Gaza road (Acts 8:26-38). The Roman centurion, Cornelius, prayed and worshiped the God of Israel, although yet unsaved (Acts 11:14). God honored his prayers and alms to Israel with the privilege of becoming the first Gentile convert in the church (Acts 10:1-11:17). Consider the noble-minded Berean Jews who examined the Scriptures daily to verify Paul's message and "therefore" believed (Acts 17:10-12).

In the early 60s, the young Maulvi (Mullah) of a mosque in a village in central Pakistan, where there were no Christians, became disillusioned with Islam. Ismail came to the Lahore railway station to inquire about Christianity or Hinduism by crossing over to India. Providentially, he was directed to a born-again Christian, who took him to the leaders of Bethany Assembly. They took him in and worked with him for some time. He attended worship each Lord's day until one day it was my turn to preach. The message from 1 Corinthians 13 was on love (something Muslims hear little about). Totally oblivious to this Muslim in the congregation, I didn't even give a gospel appeal, as I now habitually do. After half an hour of open prayer time, as the bread was being distributed during the Lord's supper, Ismail said out loud, "Give me some!" When one of the stunned elders gave a nod of approval, he was included. He shaved off his beard after the service, was baptized in the canal the next day, and changed his name to Timotheus. He began immediately to join us in witness for Christ.

Controverted Scripture passages

Calvinists base their idea of inability upon a number of Scripture passages, which are also discussed elsewhere (Ch. 23, pp. 309-313).

John 6:44, 65. - "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day.... And He was saying, 'For this reason I have said to you, that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted him from the Father.'" Calvinists assume that apart from an irresistible drawing of the 'elect,' no one else (the 'non-elect') is allowed to come to Christ for salvation. However, this ignores the context, which is crucial.

The Lord is addressing those who have seen Him and yet have not believed (6:36), who are set in contrast with the believing remnant of Israelites who belonged to the Father, but now have been committed into Christ's hands. He refers to them in vs. 37 & 39 as "**all that the Father gives Me.**" He keeps stressing faith as the distinguishing feature of this remnant (6:35, 40, 47), who were taught by the Father (6:45). *This is a reference to the early disciples, who had readily responded to Him when they met Him (cf. Jn. 1), because they were already regenerate.* This becomes clear in His high-priestly prayer in John 17:6, 9, & 24, where He clearly identifies them as His

early disciples set in contradistinction from those who were to later come to faith through their word (17:20), thus not all the 'elect.'

Although John 6:65 is part of the same context, there are some additional considerations here. **"And He was saying, 'For this reason I have said to you, that no one can come to Me, unless it has been granted him from the Father.'"** Apart from the context, this might seem to refer to the 'non-elect.' However, many professing disciples had just been grumbling at His words (6:61), and then the immediately preceding verse is crucial, "... **'But there are some of you who do not believe.'** For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and **who it was that would betray Him**" (6:64). **"As a result of this many of His disciples withdrew, and were not walking with Him anymore"** (6:66). **"Did I Myself not choose you, the twelve, and yet one of you is a devil?"** (6:70).

Thus it is in reference to professing disciples, who had walked with Him for an extensive period of time and sat under His teaching and seen His miracles, especially to Judas Iscariot, that the Lord made the statement in John 6:65. They were rejecting the greatest light that anybody could reject. They had professed to believe, but they were counterfeits. These are the ones to whom God was not granting the privilege to come to Him. (For a fuller discussion of John 6 see pp. 310-313.)

John 8:43-44. Another similar statement comes in a similar context: **"Why do you not understand what I am saying? It is because you cannot hear My word. You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father"** (8:43-44a). This statement cannot be generalized to all unregenerate people, since it is clear that the Lord Jesus is addressing some hard-core unbelievers who were planning to have Him killed. They were the ones who could not hear His word.

John 12:39-40. This same principle is operative in John 12:39-40: **"For this reason they could not believe, for Isaiah said again, 'He has blinded their eyes and He hardened their heart, so that they would not see with their eyes and perceive with their heart, and be converted and I heal them.'"** The context is the passion week, when the hostility of the rulers was reaching a peak and a hostile crowd had challenged Him (12:34) and was ignoring His miraculous works (12:37). He had spoken of impending judgment (12:31). The Isaiah quotation speaks of judgmental blindness upon those who closed their hearts to such great light, which was now being fulfilled especially in Israel's rejection of their Messiah. It has nothing to do with any supposed inability of all mankind to respond to the gospel.

Pauline passages. Although Romans 8:7-8 is frequently quoted by Calvinists to support their concept of inability, it affirms the inability of unregenerate man to fulfill the law or please God morally, but it says nothing about mankind's ability or inability to believe the gospel.

Romans 9:15-16 is a favorite proof-text of Calvinists, which will be taken up fully in Chapter 22. The antecedent of 'it' in v. 16 is God's sovereign

purpose to choose Jacob over Esau as the progenitor of the nation Israel, as mentioned in v. 11. Thus, this passage also has nothing to do with human inability to believe the gospel message.

Similarly, 1 Corinthians 2:14-15 has nothing to do with the issue: **“But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised. But he who is spiritual appraises all things, yet he himself is appraised by no one.”** In this context, Paul is speaking about the whole process of revelation and inspiration by which the Holy Spirit communicated even the “deep things of God” through the Apostles, which were ultimately written down in Scripture. It is in obvious contrast to the “spiritual man” who appraises all these deep truths. Thus he was not speaking of an inability of all the unregenerate to understand and believe the simple gospel message. The fact is that we were all ‘natural’ men once, but we did come to understand the simple demands of the gospel. Subsequent chapters explain how this happens.

Conclusions

Thus, it was seen that not only before the fall, but also after, God continued to delegate to mankind areas of authority, which are a self-limitation of the exercise of His sovereignty. The fall did not cause man to lose the image of God with which he was created, so he retained his free will, although now polluted by sin. Indeed, the spiritual death into which he was plunged involved alienation from the life of God, as symbolized by his exclusion from the tree of life. This most affected the human spirit with depravity. This is not to be understood as inability to respond to God, since humans are not only expected to respond to God’s entreaties, but even to seek God, based upon the retained image of God and its consequent free will.

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1. Roger T. Forster and V. Paul Marston, *God’s Strategy in Human History* (Bethany House, 1973), ch. 1.
 2. Geisler, pp. 145-54; Tertullian, Novatian, Cyril of Jerusalem, Gregory of Nyssa. Many others could be found.
 3. Vance, *Calvinism* (2nd ed.), p. 185; D. A. Kidd, *Collins Gem Latin Dictionary*, 2nd ed. (Harper-Collins).
 4. Sproul, *Willing to Believe*, p. 126; Cunningham, *Theology*, II:389; Jewett, *Election and Predestination*, p. 17.
 5. Geisler, *Chosen But Free*, p. 116; Hoitenga, *John Calvin and the Will*, p. 69-70, 73.
 6. Tertullian, *Against Marcion*, Book II, ch. 5, cited by Forster and Marston, p. 250.
 7. Forster and Marston, pp. 244ff; Geisler, pp. 145-154.
 8. Sproul, *Chosen by God*, p. 31.
 9. Geisler, p. 25, full discussion, pp. 19-37.
 10. Norman F. Douty, *The Death of Christ*, p. 66.
 11. Viggo B. Olsen, *Daktar: Diplomat in Bangladesh* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1973), pp. 29-57.
 12. Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, pp. 521-3.
 13. Douty, *The Death of Christ*, p. 66, citing the Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia.