

## **Total Inability (to Believe)** **Does Fallen Man Have the Ability to Believe in Jesus?**

**Review:** This is the 2<sup>nd</sup> session in a series on divine election and predestination (two nearly synonymous terms). Since the word predestination is in the Bible, if you believe the Bible, you have to believe *something* about predestination. Pre = before; destination = where you are going.

**All Are Agreed (Common Ground):** In eternity past, before the foundation of the world, God chose to save some members of the human race, and to let the rest perish. All Christian denominations are agreed about this. No matter if Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian, Pentecostal, Catholic or Eastern Orthodox: *Every group believes this doctrine.*

**Introduction:** *Why was predestination necessary? Did you ever think about that? One reason has to do with our sinfulness. Does a natural, fallen man, in and of himself, have the ability to have a saving faith? (Rhetorical).*

Man is a free moral agent; we make our own decisions. The problem is that while we are free, we are, at the same time, biased. We are not neutral. We are born with a natural inclination toward sin. The issue: *How bad is our inclination toward sin? How deeply, how radically, has sin impacted our decision-making faculties (mind, will, emotions)?*

**Does a natural, fallen man, in and of himself, have the ability to have a saving faith? (Rhetorical).**

**Pelagius:** Yes; so much so, that no grace from God is needed for salvation. This is patently false, and was condemned at Council of Carthage in A.D. 418. No branch of the church has ever adopted it.<sup>1</sup> This could be called **Total Ability** in the ultimate sense! Roughly speaking, this is the view of Unitarian Universalists today. Just as Tina Turner sang “What’s love got to do with it”, the Pelagians could sing, “What’s grace got to do with it?”

**Semi-Pelagian:** At the anti-Reformation the Council of Trent (1500s), Roman Catholicism essentially declared that mankind is sinful and needs grace, but still retains—in his natural state—the ability to believe in Jesus.<sup>2</sup> This might be called **Partial Ability**. They further declare that we are saved by God’s grace, plus man’s faith, plus man’s good works. In Catholicism, man not only has to cooperate with God, and be also has to do something (good works). This is called synergism.

---

<sup>1</sup> HC Thiessen, *Lectures in Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949), 260.

<sup>2</sup> “Sproul on Pelagianism, Semi-Pelagianism, Roman Catholicism, and the will of man”, [BeggarsAllReformation.blogspot.com](http://BeggarsAllReformation.blogspot.com). Accessed 03/31/2024

**Augustine:** Augustine taught **Total Inability** to believe—that God’s grace is essential even in man’s initial response to the Gospel. In this Arminians and Augustinians are agreed.<sup>3</sup> Arminius wrote: “in his lapsed and sinful state, man is not capable, of and by himself, either to think, to will, or to do that which is really good; but it is necessary for him to be ... renewed in his intellect, affections or will ... by God in Christ through the Holy Spirit, that he may be qualified rightly to understand, esteem, consider, will, and perform whatever is truly good.”<sup>4 5</sup>

## The Evidence for Total Inability (to Believe)

### John 6

It has been said that the hard part in evangelism is not getting people saved, it is getting people lost. People often simply do not believe that they are bad enough to end up in hell.

\*\*\*\***Left to themselves, who can come to Jesus (John 6:65)?** Jesus said that “no one” could.

**Just to state the obvious: Who does “no one” include (6:65)?** This is a universal negative. All people are included in being excluded from having the ability to come to Jesus.

**What does “can” mean?** It means ability. There is some confusion because in English, “can” is sometimes used in the sense of “may” (permission), but grammatically, that’s a misuse of the word. **Example:** Perhaps when you were a school kid, you raised your hand and asked, “Teacher, can I go to the bathroom?” Likely she replied, “I’m sure you can, and yes you may.” The word in our text is can, not may. Of course, this was written in Greek, where the word “can” denotes ability. **Example:** “No one can run 50 m.p.h.”

- **“can” (6:44):** From *dunamai* (“dynamo; dynamic, dynamite”); the Greek lexicon says it mean “power, might, strength, force.”<sup>6</sup> It has to do with ability and capacity. No one has the power to come to Jesus. No one has the strength to come to Jesus. No one has the force to come to Jesus.

---

<sup>3</sup> “Total Depravity”, en.wikipedia.org. Accessed March 29, 2024.

<sup>4</sup> Arminians have to answer the question: “Who maketh thee to differ from another?” If everyone has prevenient grace, but only some choose to believe, what accounts for the difference? The Arminian answer, if it is honest, is that the difference lies in the person not God, which in effect denies the doctrine of total depravity and turns it into partial depravity (Virginia Huguenot, “Arminius believed in total depravity? What am I missing?”. PuritanBoard.com. Accessed March 30, 2024.

<sup>5</sup> The difference between Augustinian and Arminian view of election/predestination concerns how God’s grace works. (More on this in a later session).

<sup>6</sup> Bauer, *Lexicon*, 207.

**Based on what Jesus said, does fallen man, in and of himself, have the ability to come to Jesus (6:65)?** No, he does not; no one has the ability to come to Jesus.

**Charles Wesley:** Arminian hymnist Charles Wesley wrote a song that Augustinians heartily sing: “Long my imprisoned spirit lay Fast bound in sin and nature’s night; Thine eye diffused a quick’ning ray, I woke, the dungeon flamed with light; My chains fell off, my heart was free; I rose, went forth and followed Thee.”<sup>7</sup> One hymnal changed Wesley’s original wording from “thine eye” to “mine eye” (full-blown semi-pelagianism!).

**Total Inability:** This condition of fallen man is called “total inability” (to believe).

**What does it mean to “come” to Jesus (6:65)? Interpret what it means to come to Jesus?** It means to come (*erchomai*) to Him in faith for eternal life:

ESV **John 5:40** ... you refuse to come (*erchomai*) to me that you may have life.

ESV **John 6:35** ... whoever comes (*erchomai*) to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst. (*Note the parallel between come and believes.*)

ESV **John 6:45b-47** Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me ... whoever believes has eternal life. (*Note the parallel between come and believes.*)

ESV **John 7:37b-38** If anyone thirsts, let him come (*erchomai*) to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.' (*Note the parallel between come and believes.*)

### Total Inability

**Total Inability:** If there had been a period after the word “me”, no one could be or would be saved. Statements like this by Jesus are why Arminians and Augustinians both hold to total inability.

**Up to this point I have asked observation questions. Now, let’s consider an interpretation question: Why is no one able to come to Jesus (6:65)?** It is not that God has a force field to keep people away. No; we run away on our own. The problem is that sin has impacted every area of our being (mind, will, and emotion) in such a way that we ultimately would never believe in Jesus in a saving way: total inability to believe in a saving way.

---

<sup>7</sup> Charles Wesley, “And Can It Be”, 1738.

**Grammatically, what function does the word “unless” (6:65) serve in a sentence?**

It functions as an exception clause: “except if”. It introduces a prerequisite, a necessary condition that must be met for something to happen.

**Review: According to 6:65, what is the necessary condition that must be met in order for a person to come to Jesus?** It is impossible to come to Him unless it is granted by the Father.

**What does the word “granted” mean (6:65)?** It is from *didomi*, “to give.” Land-grant colleges were given great tracts of land by the government. Grants are given for research funding, and to cover for tuition costs. God gave a grant for at least some people to be able to come to Jesus.

The NIV interpreted this a little for us:

NIV **John 6:65** ... no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled him.  
(*To be granted is to be enabled*).

In a very similar statement, we learn that there are a group of people that the Father has given (granted) to Jesus:

ESV **John 6:37** All that the Father gives (*didomi*) me will come to me ...

ESV **John 6:39** ... this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given (*didomi*) me ...

Note the same words in both statements (**6:65/6:37**): “Father”, “grants (gives)”, and “come to me.” If the Father gives (grants) you to Jesus, you will come. It appears to be a closed loop.

In 1855, **Charles Spurgeon** preached to 12,000 people in a field off King Edward's Road in Hackney. He was commenting on Jesus' statement, “many will come from east and west and recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven.” Here's what he said about the certainty of God's “will”:<sup>8</sup>

“Oh! I love God's ‘shalls’ and ‘wills.’ There is nothing comparable to them. Let a man say ‘shall,’ what is it good for? ‘I will,’ says man, and he never performs; ‘I shall,’ says he, and he breaks his promise. But it is never so with God's ‘shalls.’ If he says, ‘shall,’ it shall be; when he says, ‘will,’ it will be. Now He has said here, ‘many shall come.’ The devil says, ‘they shall not come’; but ‘they shall come’. You yourselves, say, ‘we won't come’; God says, ‘You shall come’.

---

<sup>8</sup> Iain Murray, *The Forgotten Spurgeon* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1966), 92.

Yes! There are some here who are laughing at salvation, who can scoff at Christ, and mock at the gospel; but I tell you some of you shall come yet. 'What!' you say, 'can God make me become a Christian?' I tell you yes, for herein rests the power of the gospel. It does not ask your consent; but it gets it. It does not say, will you have it, but it makes you willing in the day of God's power...

The gospel ... knocks the enmity out of your heart. You say, 'I do not want to be saved;' Christ says you shall be. He makes your will turn round, and then you cry, 'Lord, save, or I perish.' Ah, might heaven exclaim, 'I knew I would make you say that;' and then he rejoices over you because he has changed your will and made you willing in the day of his power.

If Jesus Christ were to stand on this platform tonight, what would many people do with Him? If He were to come and say, 'Here I am, I love you, will you be saved by me?' not one of you would consent if you were left to your will. He Himself said, 'No man can come to me except the Father who hath sent me draw him.' Ah! We want that; and here we have it. They shall come! They shall come! You may laugh, you may despise us; but Jesus Christ shall not die for nothing. If some of you reject Him there are some that will not. If there are some that are not saved, others shall be. Christ shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in His hands. They shall come! And nought in heaven, nor on earth, nor in hell, can stop them from coming."

### "I told you"

In this verse (**6:65**), Jesus said "I told you." This means Jesus had previously made a similar statement. That statement is found in John 6:44.

### John 6:44

\*\*\*\***Who is the only person who can come to Jesus (6:44)?** This time, Jesus said that the only person who can come to Jesus is the one whom the Father draws. If let one verse interpret the other, to be granted the ability to come to Jesus is the same as being drawn to Jesus.

**What does "draws" mean (6:44) in English?** In English, we sometimes use the word "draw" in the sense of "woo." The Arminian position is that the Father woos us, entices us. He attracts us to Himself in a way similar to how bees are drawn to honey, or a young man is drawn to a woman's charms.

The Arminian understanding of the Father's "draw" is quite resistible. They believe that fallen man has the ability to believe, but if you resist, you will be lost. It is ultimately up to you (not God).

In English, the word “draw” can also have a more forceful meaning. **Example:** A horse-drawn carriage, or drawing water out of a well. How do you “draw” water out of a well? Do you stand at the top and woo it up? Do you call it up, “Here water, water, water”? How do you draw water out of a well? To draw water out of a well it is necessary to lower a bucket and haul it up. You have to compel it against gravity. If you install a pump, that pump puts its under pressure, and force it up.

**Word Study:** “Draws” is from *helko*; it means “to drag.”<sup>9</sup> Thayer wrote it means to move a person “forcibly and against his will ... to impel.”<sup>10</sup>

The best way to define or understand a word is to look how it is used other places in the Bible. What matters is how it was used in the original Greek, not how we use it today in English.

**\*\*\*\*How would you define the word “drew” (*helko*) as it was used in John 18:10?**

ESV **John 18:10** Peter, having a sword, drew it ...

**Did Peter woo the sword out of its sheath?** No, he had to draw (pull) it out; he had to overcome gravity and the resistance of the sheath. It was an act of force.

**This same word, *helko*, is found in James 2:6. Can you guess which English word was used to translate *helko*?**

ESV **James 2:6** Are not the rich ... the ones who drag you into court? *Re-read, substituting “enticed” and “wooed.”*

It is to compel by irresistible superiority.

The same Greek word, *helko*, is also used several places is in Acts:

ESV **Acts 16:19** ... they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them ... before the rulers.

ESV **Acts 21:30b** They seized Paul and dragged him out of the temple ...

**\*\*\*\*Which word in John 21:6 translates *helko*?**

ESV **John 21:6** "Cast the net on the right side of the boat..." So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in, because of the quantity of fish.

---

<sup>9</sup> Bauer, *Lexicon*, 251.

<sup>10</sup> Thayer, *Lexicon*, 204.

The truck-rental company is called “U-Haul”, not “U-Woo.” You have to haul your furniture to its new home; it is not going by itself!

### Romans 3

**\*\*\*\*What sinful reality is revealed in Romans 3:9-12?** The awful truth is that no one is righteous, no one understands, no one seeks God, no one does good. This is the essence of total depravity.

- **“under sin” (3:9).** This whole paragraph explains what it means to be “under sin”. To be under sin means to be under sin’s influence in such a way that no one is righteous, no one seeks for God, no one does good

**In 3:10, what does it mean to be righteous (3:10)?** It means to be right with God. This text declares that no one under sin has righteousness in and of themselves.

**Why did the author add, “no, not one” (3:10)?** This declaration of man’s condition is hard to accept; it seems to be hyperbole. Too often people read a clear statement like this and think, “except me.”

**According to 3:11, who, on his own, seeks for God?** Under sin, no one seeks for God. This is the essence of total inability.

**What is it that no one understands (3:11)?** In context, the idea is that no one in his natural state really understands about the depth of their own sinfulness or the righteousness of God. People might understand math or medicine or electronics, but not their sinfulness. Certainly, people are religious, but the fact is there is no real understanding of metaphysical reality (apart from Christ).

**Based on 3:11, what percentage of people turn aside?** 100% have turned aside.

**What have all turned aside from (3:11)?** In context, they’ve turned away from God.

**In what sense have people become “worthless” (3:12)?** It is that all peoples have turned aside from the truth about God, and are worthless with respect to being able to find God. We are worthless with respect to saving ourselves. We have a total inability to save ourselves.

**According to 3:11, who does good?** No one does good.

**Would it be good to have a saving faith in Jesus?** That would seem to be a good thing, but those “under sin” just won’t do it.

**Why did the author add, “not even one” yet again (3:12)?** It is so hard to believe, to accept, to fathom, that no one does good, that Paul repeated it. Roman Catholicism rejects this as hyperbole.

-----

**\*\*\*\*In 3:13-18, Paul wrote of throat, tongues, lips, mouth, feet. What is the main point of this anatomical tour (3:13-18)?** The point is we are thoroughly sinful, from head to foot (“head, and shoulders; knees and toes”). All people are by nature under the power of sin.

**Speculate: In light of the truth of 3:9-18, what is the possibility of anyone ever come to Jesus on his own?** The fact is that no one would come to Jesus for salvation apart from God’s grace (either prevenient or irresistible).

ESV **Romans 8:7-8** ... the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

ESV **1 Corinthians 2:14** The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.

## Ephesians 2

**\*\*\*\*How Ephesians 2:1-3 describe us before we were saved?**

**What word does the Bible use in 2:1 to describe us before we were saved?** It says we were “dead” in trespasses and sins.

**If you ask a physically dead person a question, will he answer? If you ask a physically dead person to move, will he move? Do the physically dead have the ability in and of themselves to cease being dead? Why?**

**What does it mean to be dead in trespasses and sins (2:1)?** This refers to spiritual death. The Greek word for “dead” (2:1) is *nekros* (“necrotic”). In general, it means “destitute of force or power, inactive, inoperative.”<sup>11</sup> Physically, dead is the opposite of being alive (lifeless).<sup>12</sup> Because we are spiritually dead, we are therefore separated from God: “destitute of a life that recognizes and is devoted to God ... given up to trespasses and sins; inactive as respects doing right.”<sup>13</sup>

---

<sup>11</sup> Thayer, *Lexicon*, 424.

<sup>12</sup> The definition is *nekros* is dead, not “separated”. To be separated from one’s body is the result of physical death.

<sup>13</sup> Thayer, *Lexicon*, 424.



**Example:** When your car battery is dead, it is powerless, with the result that your car won't start. The engine won't turn over. There is no spark to ignite the fuel.

NIV **Romans 5:6** ... when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly.

Those who are dead in their sins do not have the ability to escape their sins and trespasses. They cannot do anything about it. They cannot break the cycle.

Spiritually, a person dead in trespasses and sins might be compared to a spiritual zombie—the walking dead. Humanly speaking, there is no remedy, no hope. This is why no one has the ability to come to Jesus.

ESV **Romans 6:17** ... you ... were once slaves of sin ...

-----

**\*\*\*\*How can the spiritually dead be made alive (2:4-7)?** The words, “But God” are critical. It is God who made us alive. Only God can resurrect a dead person. It is not “But we”!

It is not that we chose God; it is not that we on our own turned away from being “dead”.

**All this leads us into 2:8.**

ESV **Ephesians 2:8** ... by grace (f) you have been saved (m) through faith (f). And this (n) is not your own doing; it is the gift of God ...

**Exactly what is it that is not our own doing (2:8)? To what does the pronoun “this” (Eph 2:8) refer? Does it refer to faith, saved or grace?** Normally a pronoun refers back to the immediately preceding noun. In this case that would be faith. Greek nouns have one of three genders (masculine, feminine or neuter). The word “this” will have the same gender as whatever word it refers back to. Both grace and faith are feminine; saved is a masculine participle. The pronoun “this” is neuter—meaning it refers back to the whole process of salvation. None of it is our own doing. Grace is a gift of God. Being saved is a gift of God. Faith is a gift of God. Thus, according to Augustine’s understanding of the Gospel, regeneration precedes faith; even our faith is the result of God’s grace.

## Conclusion

**Total Depravity.** The extent of our wickedness is described theologically as “total depravity”, but that’s a little misleading. It does not mean we are as totally bad as we possibly could be (there is obviously relative good among sinners). Rather, it refers to the totality of our being (mind, will, emotions). Sin has defiled every part of our being so that “no one seeks God” (**Ro 3:11**), we “are not able to understand” the things of God (**1Co 2:14**).

Some prefer instead to call it **radical depravity**.

**What does radical mean?** Radical is transliterated from the Latin word *radix* and means “root”. The word “radish” comes from *radix* also (a radish is a root).

**Radical Depravity.** The extent of our wickedness is described theologically as radical depravity. It refers to our “dead” (Ep 2:1), “natural” (1Co 2:14), “flesh” (Ro 8:9) condition. It does not mean we are as totally bad as we possibly could be (there is obviously relative good among sinners). Rather, it means sin has defiled every part of our being (mind, will, emotion) so that “no one seeks God” (Ro 3:11), we “are not able to understand” the things of God (1Co 2:14), and “no one can come” to Jesus (Jn 6:44).<sup>14</sup>

### So What?

1. When you evangelize, realize that you are talking to someone who is spiritually dead.
2. Even though you try to persuade him, realize that you can’t reason/argue someone into believing. God has to do that.
3. If you screw it up, that’s OK. It is God has to convict the person of sin, righteousness, and judgment.
4. There is nothing special about us as believers; we were just as messed up as they are.
5. Paul endured all things in his evangelism for the sake of the elect.

### Cliff Example

**Pelagius:** Man fell off a cliff, but is basically OK and conscious, and has the ability to rock climb back up to the top.

**Semi-Pelagianism:** Man fell off a cliff, is conscious, but can’t rock climb. God lowers a rescue basket on a rope down to him, and the man is able to climb into it.

**Arminianism:** Man fell off a cliff, and was knocked unconscious. Can’t respond. God slithers down the rope, pours water in the man’s face to wake him up, and then gives him the choice of climbing into the rescue basket or not.

---

<sup>14</sup> Even though Arminians hold to total inability, because of their belief about prevenient grace, the end condition of all men is the same of that held by the semi-Pelagians: fallen man has the ability to believe. God’s election and predestination are hinged on man’s faith.

**Augustinian:** Man fell of a cliff, and was knocked unconscious. Can't respond. God lowers rope, slides down it, picks up the unconscious man and places him in the stretcher basket, pulls it up, and only then revives him after he is up at the top.

### **Sick Man Example**

**Semi-Pelagian Example:** Fallen man is not dead, but he is really sick. He is terminal, on his death bed, but he is still alive. A miracle cure called the Gospel is held it up to the sick man's lips. The man must accept it or refuse it. If he opens his mouth he will be saved. If he clamps it shut, he will be lost. Key to this scenario is that the man is still barely alive; it is the man who makes the decision.

**Arminian Example:** Fallen man is not sick; he is dead (total inability), but it is a near-death experience. He is clinically dead, and cannot respond to the cure (he has no ability to come to Jesus). "But God", via prevenient grace, resuscitates him just enough to give him the ability to believe (he's still really sick though). Then the gospel cure is offered, holding it up to the sick man's lips. The man now has the ability to accept it or refuse it. If he opens his mouth he will be saved. If he clamps it shut, he will be lost. Key to this scenario is that it is the man who makes the ultimate decision, after God has empowered him to do so.

**Augustinian Example:** Fallen man is not sick, he is dead (total inability). It is not merely a near death experience. The coroner has already examined the body, and issued the death certificate. The body is at the funeral home. The only hope is for God to resurrect a corpse, and that's what God did. "But God" means that made him alive again via irresistible grace.

Stephen E. Atkerson  
NTRF.org  
03/30/2024

## Extra Material

### Discussion Questions

Can just anybody believe in Jesus? Explain.

If God had looked down the tunnel of time to see who, if left to his own free will would believe, what would He have seen?

Jesus said no one can come to Him unless it has been granted by the Father. Is it possible that the Father grants it that everyone can come, and tries to draw us to Jesus, but we have the free will choice to come or not?

What is radical depravity?

Why is radical depravity a better description of man's condition than total depravity?

-----

**Continental Divide:** How one answers the above question is the major difference between the Arminian and the Augustinian view. It is very much a theological continental divide.

**Arminian Answer:** Man is indeed sinful, but thanks to God's prevenient grace, he is still able to believe in Jesus in a way that brings salvation. If you believe that God's election is based on God's foreknowledge of man's faith, you are on the Arminian side of the continental divide. God's election of people is ultimately conditioned upon something people do (believe). This is called "conditional election".

**Augustinian Answer:** Fallen man does not have the ability to have a saving faith, and there is no such thing as prevenient grace. If you believe that God's election is not based on foreseen faith (because no one would believe), but rather is based on God's pleasure, God's mercy, God's purpose, then you are, in essence, Augustinian. God's election of man is not based on anything people do (because there is nothing they would do or believe to qualify them to be chosen). This is called "unconditional election".

-----

### Genesis 6:5-7

\*\*\*\***Let's go back to the beginning. Exactly how bad were people before the Flood (Ge 6:5-7)?** Every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.

**ESV Genesis 6:5-7** The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually ... So the LORD said, "I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land, man and animals and creeping things and birds of the heavens, for I am sorry that I have made them."

### **Genesis 8:21**

**\*\*\*\*How bad were people after the flood (Ge 8:21)?** Even after the flood, God testified that "the intention of man's heart is evil ..." Nothing changed!

**ESV Genesis 8:21** ... the LORD said in his heart, "I will never again curse the ground because of man, for the intention of man's heart is evil from his youth. Neither will I ever again strike down every living creature as I have done.

**According to Genesis 8:21, how early do people begin a course of evil?** It is from his youth. A baby rattle snake is still poisonous (there only difference in a baby and an adult is size). As sweet and cuddly and cute as they are, toddlers are still are little vipers in diapers.

**What paradox can you detect in Genesis 8:21?** God made this promise despite the fact that man's wickedness had not lessened. Nothing changed with mankind after the flood.

**What do these statements in Genesis suggest about the likelihood of a person turning away from his sins and coming to Jesus on his own?**

### **Psalms 51:5**

**\*\*\*\*How did David poetically express the extent of his sinfulness in Psalm 51:5?** He said that from the moment of his conception he was prone toward iniquity and sin. The point is that all of us are rooted in sin. (This does not mean that conception or giving birth is sinful in and of itself).

**ESV Psalm 51:5** Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.

**Joke:** Medical science confirms this truth: every baby is born with an "unbiblical" cord!

**Application:** If this condition was true of King David, even in his infancy, what would you suppose that *our* natural condition is? We are born morally retarded.

### Isaiah 64:6

\*\*\*\* **What was Isaiah's estimate of people's self-righteousness (Isa 64:6)?** Even our best righteousness is polluted.

ESV **Isaiah 64:6** ... all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment.

**When you think of a "polluted" (Isa 64:6) river, what do you think of?** A polluted river, fouled by sewage and industrial waste. A polluted garment might be a dirty diaper, or bandage removed from a nasty wound (full of puss and blood).<sup>15</sup>

**If this condition was true of the people of Isaiah's day (64:6), how much different do you think the people of our day are?**

ESV **Psalm 143:2** ... no one living is righteous before you.

### Jeremiah 17:9

\*\*\*\***What insight did Jeremiah give into the human heart?** We are messed up and self-deceived.

**ESV Jeremiah 17:9** The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?

**To what does the word "heart" refer (Jer 17:9)?** It is from *leb*, "inner man, mind, will, heart."<sup>16</sup>

-----  
It is possible for a fallen man to have the wrong type of faith, but not a saving faith.

**Example:** James wrote about a demonic faith that won't save people:

ESV **James 2:19** You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder!

James also wrote about a dead faith that won't save people:

ESV **James 2:17** ... faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

-----

---

<sup>15</sup> The Hebrew for "polluted" is *iddah* (5713c) "menstruation."

<sup>16</sup> Strong, *Concordance*.

## Synthesis

**Jesus declared twice, “no one can come to me” (Jn 6:44, 65). Do people come to Jesus because the Father granted it? — or— Did the Father grant it because people came? Why? What is cause and what is effect? What is affect and what is effect?** People under sin do not have the ability to come; people come only because they were chosen. If we were not chosen, then we would have neither the ability nor the inclination to come to Christ. Apart from God’s election, no one would ever truly seek God, nor understand the things of the Spirit.

ESV 1 John 4:19 We love because he first loved us.

ESV 1 John 4:10 In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us ...

ESV John 15:16 You did not choose me, but I chose you.

---

## Free Will

**Let’s talk about free will. What is free will?** A free moral agent always chooses according to the greatest desire at the moment of choice. **Example:** If a criminal puts a gun to your head and says, “You money or your life”, you have a choice. You do not want to give him your money, but the greater desire is for you to live, so you give him your wallet.

**Moral Neutrality:** If you are up on the 10<sup>th</sup> floor of a building, you have freedom of will: you can jump off the roof or stay on top. If you exercise your free will, and decide to jump, you no longer have a free will. You become bound by the consequences of your decision and you become a slave to the law of gravity.

The problem is that the last people to be morally neutral were Adam and Eve. They had no sin nature. They made an unbiased choice when they sinned. Even since then all people have been bound by the consequences of that free-will decision. Unlike Adam and Eve, we have a sin nature, a bent toward sin, that in our natural state we are slaves to sin.

To be born with a sin nature is part of what is meant by original sin. Adam polluted the stream of humanity, and anyone who drinks from that stream will be infected.

ESV Romans 5:19 By the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners ...

**Does fallen man have a free will?** Yes! We have a free will, but it is within the context of a sin nature. Fallen man has the ability to choose what he wants, but what he wants is ultimately sinful. Fallen man does not have the ability to have saving faith. We have free will, but we do not have free ability. Our will is in bondage.

**If you offered a cat a choice between shrimp and an onion, why will he choose the shrimp every time of his own free will?** He would choose the shrimp because he likes meat more than onion; it is not in his nature to eat onions. He has a predisposition to meat. Similarly, lost man is predisposed toward sin. It is not in his nature to choose righteousness on God's terms. Fallen man prefers sin over God. A man is free to be a man just as a cat is free to be a cat. Cats freely choose shrimp and men freely choose sin.

Even as a Christian, when I sin, I sin because my desire to sin is greater than my desire to obey God. Free agents always act according to the strongest desire at the moment of choice.

**Omniscience:** The Augustinian position is that God knew that if left to ourselves, none of us would ever believe in Jesus for salvation. Therefore, God chose certain people for salvation and works in their lives so as to cause them to believe.

**Conclusion:** God chose people, but not because He knew who would one day believe. Instead, He chose people based despite foreseen ill-will. He chose us based on the foreknowledge that none of us would ever choose Jesus unless God first granted it.

**Hymn:** One hymn from 1945 reads, "whosoever will, may come". Some people think that that is a quote from the Bible, but it is not. Neither is "cleanliness is next to godliness" nor "spare the rod and spoil the child"! Never-the-less, it is true that whosoever will may come, but the only ones who will come are the elect, those who have been drawn by the Father. Biblically, the "whosoever wills" are those God elected and the "whosoever wonts" are those God left alone. Salvation is offered to everyone, but only the elect will accept it; the rest will freely reject Jesus (of their own desire).

**Door Example:** Over the door to heaven are the words, "Whosoever will, may come." Then, after you enter, you see over the back side of the door that it says, "Chosen Before the Foundation of the World".

-----  
**Continental Divide: Did the Father universally grant all people the ability to come to Jesus? *Rhetorical.***

**Arminius:** Yes. This is called "prevenient" (preceding; antecedent) grace. Grace is resistible. God's election is based on God's omniscient knowledge of who, due to



God's prevenient grace, would come to Jesus (believe in Jesus). This is called conditional election.

**Augustine:** No. There is no such thing as prevenient grace. There is only "irresistible" grace. God's election is based on God's omniscient knowledge that no one would come to Jesus (total inability), so God grants some people mercy, and God sends targeted grace to those He chooses. This is called unconditional election.

-----

**\*\*\*\*Scripture is clear that all people are either in Adam (in the realm of the flesh), or in Christ (in the realm of the Spirit). What does Romans 8:5-8 reveal about people who are in the "flesh"? (Systematically list each fact).** Those who live according to the flesh **1)** set their minds set on the things of the flesh, **2)** are dead, **3)** are hostile to God, **4)** do not submit to God's law, **5)** cannot submit to God's law, and **6)** cannot please God.

**One wonders how it is that people who are in a state of being "hostile" to God (8:7) ever get saved. Would it "please" God (8:8) for someone to come to Jesus? Yes, but they cannot do it.**

**Review: What does "can" mean (as in cannot submit, cannot please God, 8:7, 8)?** It is from *dunamai* "to have power, strength".<sup>17</sup> It means "having sufficient power, skill, or resources to accomplish an object" (Webster). **Synonym:** "able." The natural man does not have ability to submit to God's law and does not have the ability to please God.

### 1 Corinthians 2:14

**\*\*\*\*According to 1 Corinthians 2:14, what does the natural person not accept? He does not accept or understand the things of the Spirit.**

**Why does the natural person not accept the things of the Spirit (2:14)?** It is because the things of the Spirit appear to him as folly.

**According to 2;14, Why is the man described in 1 Corinthians 2:14 not "able" (*dunamī*) to understand the things of the Spirit?** These things are spiritually discerned.

---

<sup>17</sup> Thayer, *Lexicon*, Entry #1410.

**One wonders how anyone ever overcomes his natural state to accept the things of the Spirit. Since 1 Corinthians 2:14 is true, how does anybody ever get saved?** Let to themselves, they never would be saved. Salvation requires the supernatural work of God.