

TULIP – TOTAL DEPRAVITY

Therefore all men are conceived in sin, and by nature children of wrath, incapable of saving good, prone to evil, dead in sin, and in bondage thereto, and without the regenerating grace of the Holy Spirit, they are neither able nor willing to return to God, to reform the depravity of their nature, or to dispose themselves to reformation – THE CANONS OF DORT, “Third and Fourth Heads of Doctrine of the Corruption of Man, His Conversion to God, and the Manner Thereof,” Article 3.¹

Some defenders of Calvinism will seek to make their harsher doctrines more palatable to a larger community by pointing out that, although they believe in *total depravity*, it should not be confused with *absolute depravity*, by which they mean that man is not as evil as he could be (*absolute depravity*), but rather, that sin has impacted all aspects of man – physically, spiritually and mentally. Other Calvinists are quick to object to this distinction and contend that man is *totally depraved*, by which they mean that “he is rebelliously and deliberately evil, that he loves and delights in wickedness of every kind.”² That is the extreme position, and is less frequently held today; considering Jesus’ words that even a sinner can do good (Luke 6:33), it would seem that there is little basis for going that far. It is more generally accepted that sinful men are not “as a [sic] bad as they can be, but rather, that the effects of the Fall have completely ruined the total being of man” – by this they include both the material (body) and immaterial (soul) parts of man.³ C. Matthew McMahon goes on to define the extent of depravity this way: 1) *fallen man cannot do or work any good*, 2) *fallen man cannot comprehend or apprehend the good*, and 3) *man cannot have any desire towards the good*.⁴ The progression that is included here is very interesting: no one can *do*, no one can *comprehend*, and no one can *desire* good. The popular Calvinist, John MacArthur, agrees that sinners are not “always as bad as they could be” and goes on to say: “Total depravity means sinners have no ability to do spiritual good or work for their own salvation from sin. They are so completely disinclined to love righteousness, so thoroughly dead in sin, that they are not able to save themselves or even to fit themselves for God’s salvation. Unbelieving humanity has no capacity to desire, understand, believe, or apply spiritual truth . . .”⁵ It is notable that these two definitions are very, very similar and that they both conclude with man’s inability to *desire good* or to *desire or believe spiritual truth*.



C. Matthew McMahon

As I have had opportunity to consider the teachings of Calvinism from time to time during my other studies, something that I have noticed on occasion is that a logical conclusion regarding one aspect of their argument will surreptitiously be extended to include something that goes beyond

¹ <https://prts.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Canons-of-Dort-with-Intro.pdf>.

² http://www.reformedspokane.org/Doctrine_pages/Calvinism%20%26%20Sovereign%20Grace/books_folder/Saved%20By%20Grace/Saved_By_Grace2.html.

³ <https://www.apuritansmind.com/tulip/total-depravity-compiled-by-dr-c-matthew-mcmahon/>.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ John MacArthur, Jr., *The Vanishing Conscience*, p. 88, 90.

the scope of their immediate consideration. This is particularly evident with MacArthur, in this case. He defines man's *total depravity* as his inability to *do spiritual good or work for his own salvation* (no problem with this), but then he goes on to say that *unbelieving humanity* has no ability to even *desire, understand, believe or apply spiritual truth* – this is a mixed bag of *inabilities*, some of which do not necessarily fit within the definition of *total depravity* that he has just given. *Desire* and *believe* are actions of the will and are representative of the image of God



John MacArthur

that is still a part of humanity, even though the sin nature is universal. God clarified to Noah that His image was still present in sinful mankind, even though He had just purged the world of everyone except Noah and his family (Genesis 9:6). In essence, both MacArthur and McMahan have subtly extended man's *total depravity* to mean his **total inability**, and have thereby declared that it is impossible for anyone to even have a desire to believe the words of the Lord Jesus – and this is deliberately done in order to establish a foundation for the other four primary doctrines of Calvinism. As one proponent put it: “Because the doctrine of total depravity describes man's sinfulness and wretched condition, it shows the need for the grace of God that is described in the other four points”;⁶ *total depravity*, therefore, forms

the foundation upon which everything that follows in the TULIP of Calvinism is built – this is their *cornerstone*.

In defence of his position on the *total inability* of man to respond to God, MacArthur quotes 1 Corinthians 2:14. Let's look carefully at this verse: “But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know *them*, because they are spiritually discerned.” A *natural man* is someone whose life is guided by his senses apart from the Spirit of God⁷ – i.e., someone who remains spiritually dead (they remain spiritually aligned with Satan) and separated from God. Notice that the *natural man* is spiritually dead to the Lord but very much alive unto Satan; this is someone whom Jesus describes as being *against* Him (Matthew 12:30). Such a man *is not accepting of that which pertains to the Spirit of God because foolishness to him it is, even being unable to have understood it since it is examined with the aid of the Spirit* (1 Corinthians 2:14, literal).⁸ Since the *natural man* does not have the Spirit of God abiding within him, he is missing the key Element to having his understanding opened to the truths of God, His truth is as *foolishness* to him. It is noteworthy that *receiveth* (*accepting*) and *neither can* (*being unable*) are in the middle voice, which means that the subject (in this case, the *natural man*) is performing the action **and** he is the recipient or beneficiary of the action taken; on the other hand, *discerned* (*examined*) is in the passive voice, which identifies the subject as receiving the action that is carried out by someone else – in this case, the Spirit of God.⁹ Clearly, since the *natural man* does not have the Spirit of God abiding within, he cannot conduct a proper evaluation of spiritual matters. However, does this mean that such a person is unable to *desire* or to *believe* some of the

⁶ <https://prts.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Canons-of-Dort-with-Intro.pdf>.

⁷ Friberg Lexicon, *Bibleworks 8*.

⁸ Stephanus 1550 NT, *Bibleworks 8*.

⁹ https://www.ntgreek.org/learn_nt_greek/verbs1.htm#AORIST.

spiritual truths of the Lord? Paul tells us that the *natural man* is *not accepting*, or is refusing, those things that have to do with the Spirit of God – in other words, he is making the choice in this matter. Let’s study this a bit further, considering Adam by whom sin entered into the world (1 Corinthians 15:22).

Jehovah prepared a garden specifically for sinless man, whom He had made in His own image: “And the LORD God planted a garden eastward in Eden; and there he put the man whom he had formed. And out of the ground made the LORD God to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil ... And the LORD God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it. And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die” (Genesis 2:8-9, 15-17). God created man as a sinless, perfect being, provided him with an idyllic setting where he had a job to do, and placed only one restriction upon him. As we look at the whole of Scripture, we can recognize that God desires a people (and that included Adam) who choose to follow Him – in other words, man was never to be robotic in his relationship with his Creator. The *image of God* is more than simply man being created with a body, soul and spirit – a three-part creation made by a triune God. God instilled within man the ability to think, to reason and to make choices based upon his cognitive abilities; all of the other creatures were made with physical bodies and given life (spirit). For the creation of man, God “breathed into his nostrils the breath of life [*lives*; this is plural]” (Genesis 2:7)¹⁰ – God breathed into man his eternal soul **and** the spirit of life; unlike all of the other creatures that God made with only life (*spirit*), He also placed within man an eternal dimension: his soul. Within the soul of man is the image of God: his emotions, his cognitive abilities and, out of these, his capacity to make choices. God brought all of the animals to Adam and he named them all, thereby demonstrating a tremendous ability to think and make choices based upon his reasoning (Genesis 2:20).

What happened to Adam when he chose to sin? God’s promise was that in the day that he ate of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, *to die thou wilt be dying*.¹¹ This clarifies that there are two dynamics at work here: 1) one element of death will be immediate, and 2) another element will be perpetuated. The application of this is: 1) immediately: Adam and Eve died in their relationship with the Lord (their *souls* died toward God; they lost their God-ward orientation and were turned toward Satan) and their bodies began the dying process that took many, many years to complete, and 2) perpetuated: the deaths (physical and spiritual) that Adam and Eve experienced would be continued through their offspring. As the Lord pronounced His judgment upon Adam after he sinned, He declared: “for dust thou *art*, and unto dust shalt thou return” (Genesis 3:19); the death that came to Adam and Eve included their bodies dying and returning to the dust from which they came. As Solomon contemplated life, he observed that as man dies “then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it” (Ecclesiastes 12:7).

¹⁰ Brown, Driver, Briggs Lexicon (BDB), *Bibleworks 8*.

¹¹ Leningrad Hebrew OT, *Bibleworks 8*.

Two parts of man's being are clearly identified and accounted for, and now we must consider what happened (and happens) to man's soul, that part of man that bears the image of God.

As we have already noted, death entered into the soul of man; the fellowship that Adam and Eve had enjoyed with the Lord was immediately broken. However, despite death having entered their souls through choosing sin, they were still able to communicate with God; they hid from the Lord in shame, yet were able to provide Him with their self-justification for what had happened: it was the "woman whom thou gavest to be with me," and the "serpent beguiled me" (Genesis 3:12-13). Even though their souls had died, they still knew Who God was, knew their failure and could still speak to Him; this is not unlike Satan who, although forever separated from God, still came before Him to accuse His children who were on the earth (Job 1:9; Revelation 12:10). Nevertheless, Adam and Eve were unable to do anything to restore their relationship with the Lord; they had sinned, sin was their choice (and death was the consequence, Romans 6:23), they had broken their relationship with the Lord, and they could do nothing to change their standing before Him. From that moment, they (their eternal souls) were destined for an eternity separated from the Lord. However, before the foundation of the world, it was known by God that one day Jesus would come to deal with the debt of sin that man would bear but could do nothing about (1 Peter 1:18-20); before creation, the Lord already had a plan in place to make it possible for man to be restored to Him. While man was totally incapable of doing anything to restore the relationship, God had already designed a means of satisfying His perfect justice, righteousness and holiness while expressing His love, grace and mercy for the creature whom He had made in His own image. So far, we have seen that the *total depravity* of man is that he is absolutely incapable of doing anything to remove his load of sin in order to be made righteous and holy before God.

If there were two people who have walked this earth and knew the full extent of what sin had done, it was Adam and Eve; they went from open fellowship with their Creator to no fellowship, from sinless perfection to sinfulness that brought spiritual death and the promise of physical death, and from God as their Father to Satan (the adversary) as their taskmaster. What we are not told in Scripture, but what seems very evident through context, is that Adam and Eve accepted God's provision of the restoration of their relationship with Him – it was not as it was before (that would come later, if they remained faithful to Him), but the Lord had made a way to cover their sins. *And the LORD God made for the man and the woman skin tunics, and He clothed them* (Genesis 3:21, literal).¹² The Lord implemented His plan of salvation in the Garden of Eden: He shed the blood of animals so that, through faith in the promise of God (Genesis 3:15), Adam and Eve could enjoy fellowship with their Creator again. A life was given (blood was shed) as a substitute for Adam (likewise for Eve), and for each one, by faith identifying with the animal slain, the shed blood brought temporary cleansing from sin. Did Adam and Eve exercise that saving faith? We are not specifically told, but we do see that both Cain and Abel, their first children, understood the need for shedding blood in order to make an acceptable sacrifice unto the Lord (Genesis 4:3-5) – if they had not received such specific instruction, Abel would not have known what was required by the Lord and Cain would not have been so unreasonably angry with Abel when his own offering was rejected. Like so many today, Cain thought that he could approach God on his own terms. What

¹² Leningrad Hebrew OT; BDB.

we learn from all of this is that Adam and Eve knew that God's plan for salvation required the shedding of blood to bring cleansing from sin, and the fact that they taught this to their children tells us that they understood and accepted, by faith, what God had prepared for their salvation before they were created. God's first gift of salvation was given to Adam and Eve who chose to follow God's prescribed means in order to receive it (faith).

Both Adam and Eve heard God's judgment that He gave to Satan: "And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it [*He*; this is a masculine pronoun in the Hebrew] shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel" (Genesis 3:15).¹³ Contained within this pronouncement by God is the clarification that: 1) Satan and his forces will always be adversaries to humanity, and 2) there will come One Who will be born of woman, and Who will, through suffering, deal a death-blow to Satan's control over humanity. Adam's sin made all of his posterity subject to Satan, but Satan has never been a benevolent taskmaster – he has always dealt with mankind in the spirit of *enmity*. However, through all of this came the shining promise of a time when Satan's power would be *crushed* (*bruise thy head*), the first promise of the coming Messiah Who would defeat Satan by willingly giving His life in payment for sin (Matthew 27:50; Hebrews 2:14). Adam and Eve brought sin to all of humanity, but their faith in God's promise of a coming Redeemer ensured that their posterity knew what God had done and what He required in order to restore man's fellowship with Him.

As we consider how the Lord dealt with Adam and Eve after they chose to disobey Him, we can see His love and compassion for fallen humanity – a compassion that had already put into place a means of providing them with a way to overcome the devil's grip on their lives. However, as we see exemplified in Cain and Abel, there was the necessity of choosing to obey the Lord's requirements; both Cain and Abel *brought* their offerings to the Lord (Genesis 4:3-4) – the action was theirs and there is nothing to indicate that it was anything other than according to their own determination.¹⁴ We must not forget that man was created in the image of God, which includes the ability to reason and make choices based upon such. Even though sin had entered into the heart of man, God's image was not obliterated; the Lord said to Noah (many generations later, and after He had destroyed everyone, except Noah and his family, because of their *wickedness*): "Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man" (Genesis 9:6). Sinful man still retains *the image of God*! That is very significant in our consideration.

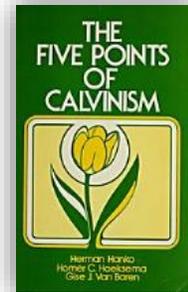
How does the Calvinist view God's obvious love and mercy toward Adam and Eve? They like to underscore that *sin* is always against the Lord, and consequently, it requires a great punishment – so far that is acceptable for we are told that the *end result* (*wages*) of sin is *death* (Romans 6:23), which is nothing less than the fulfillment of God's promise to Adam (Genesis 2:17).¹⁵ Early on we noted two different brands of Calvinism: the one that believes in an absolute, aggressive depravity within humanity, and the other that acknowledges that man is not as actively evil as he could be – he is totally depraved but not absolutely so. Herman Hanko, who holds to an absolute view of

¹³ BDB.

¹⁴ Strong's Online, <https://onlinebible.net/>; https://uhg.readthedocs.io/en/latest/stem_hiphil.html.

¹⁵ Friberg Lexicon.

depravity, declares that “the punishment ... is that God killed Adam”; he goes on to explain that this means two things: 1) “that God poured out upon Adam the fury of His wrath and hatred. God hated Adam,” and 2) “God made Adam totally depraved. That is what death is. Death and total depravity are synonymous.”¹⁶ Let’s consider these for a moment; Hanko is at the extreme end of the Calvinistic scale, but let’s take the time to deal with his understanding of depravity.



1. *God poured out upon Adam the fury of His wrath and hatred. God hated Adam.* Consider the Scriptures: “And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree ... cursed *is* the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat *of* it all the days of thy life; Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou *art*, and unto dust shalt thou return ... Unto Adam also and to his wife did the LORD God make coats of skins, and clothed them” (Genesis 3:17-21). Does this sound like *God hated Adam* or that this is the *fury of His wrath*? Physically, God decreed that the man would have a life of labor in order to provide sustenance, and this would continue until death when the body would return to the ground from which it had been formed. However, that can hardly be construed to be the *fury* of God’s wrath; Revelation 16 describes the fury of God’s wrath being poured upon the earth and, clearly, being condemned to a life of labor pales in comparison. What immediately follows God’s judgment against Adam is the unveiling of His means of restoring the broken relationship through shedding blood – it was not a permanent fix, but foreshadowed the coming of the Savior Who would pay the price for sin, satisfy the pure justice of God and introduce a permanent solution to sin. Rather than expressing His hatred for Adam, God extended His grace and mercy to him and Eve.

2. *God made Adam totally depraved.* This is an interesting thought, and lest we miss what the author is saying, he repeats it: “**God brought upon Adam** the horror of total depravity. **He made him** a slave of sin with the whole of his being and nature” (emphasis added).¹⁷ **Adam chose** to heed the lies of the devil, and yet it is **God Who made him depraved** and the *slave of sin*? God placed upon Adam one restriction in the Garden **and** He clarified for him what the consequences of disobedience would be: death (Genesis 2:17). Therefore, when Adam sinned he received the forewarned results of his action: death; that was the prescribed consequence of his disobedience, but to lay the blame for the promised results upon God seems to hint of God’s determination of all things. Although Calvinists, generally speaking, try to remove themselves from anything that would suggest that God is responsible for Adam’s sinful condition, this writer does not.

This is an ardent Calvinist’s opinion, but how would a more “moderate” Calvinist like John MacArthur view this matter? We heard from him as we began our investigation; let me repeat his summary statement: “Unbelieving humanity has no capacity to desire, understand, believe, or apply spiritual truth.”¹⁸ Although MacArthur openly acknowledges that not “all people play out

¹⁶ Herman Hanko, Homer C. Hoeksema, Gise J. van Baren, The Five Points of Calvinism, p. 15.

¹⁷ Hanko, Five, p. 16.

¹⁸ MacArthur, Vanishing, p. 88.

the expression of their sin to the ultimate degree,” by saying that *humanity has no capacity*, in essence, he has boxed everyone in with their sinfulness and denied that the image of God is still a part of everyone born into this world. Let’s unwrap this very carefully so as not to damage the concepts at play here – something of which I believe MacArthur is guilty.

We are all agreed that when God created Adam and Eve, they were made in His image (Genesis 1:27); we have seen that when God breathed into the nostrils of Adam, He filled him with both *ruach* (breath, spirit; that which gives life to the body) and *nephesh* (his eternal soul): He gave Him the *breath of lives* (Genesis 2:7).¹⁹ After Adam brought sin into the world, we have noted that the body and spirit now had an expiry date when the body would return to the ground and the spirit (the breath) would return to God Who had given it (Genesis 3:19; Ecclesiastes 12:7). That leaves us with the *image of God* that is forever linked to that eternal part of everyone: the soul. Therefore, MacArthur (and all Calvinists) are declaring, as a minimum, that everyone’s soul has absolutely no capacity to *desire* or to *believe* anything about Who God is and what He has done for him – in other words, the *image of God* is gone!

We have already noted what God’s response was to the sin of Adam: it was the provision of a means of salvation through faith in God’s promise to one day pay the price for sin. Adam sinned, God heard his excuse, pronounced His judgment upon Adam (and all men) and immediately opened His plan for man’s redemption. God’s response was not hatred for Adam (as we’ve heard), but rather, an acknowledgement of the sin of Adam and an immediate implementation of His plan for redemption. “For when we were yet without strength [helpless], in due time Christ died for the ungodly” (Romans 5:6);²⁰ Peter describes the shedding of Jesus’ blood in order to bring salvation (as promised in Genesis 3:15) as having been *known before the foundation of the world* (1 Peter 1:19-20; the KJV translators used *foreordained* meaning to determine beforehand,²¹ but the Greek word is *proginosko*, which means to know beforehand²²). Notice that Paul identifies the state of the ungodly as being *helpless* – left to his own devices, man cannot restore his relationship with his Creator nor can he mediate with God for his own salvation. Jesus became that Mediator (1 Timothy 2:5): as a man, He could represent humanity; as God, He became that perfect Sacrifice that would appease the justice of God while breaking the power of Satan (death; Hebrews 2:14). Jesus, as the perfect and only Mediator between humanity and God through the blood that He shed for sin, has invited *whosoever* (anyone) to be persuaded that He has provided a means of redemption from sin. “Come now, and **let us reason together**, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool” (Isaiah 1:18). The Lord calls upon humanity to consider the salvation that the Lord has provided – to use the mind that God has instilled within everyone (the *image of God* that is still within sinful man) to come to the realization that God has made a way to cleanse the sin that clings to everyone. “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that **whosoever believeth** in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). Jesus declared that everlasting life is available to everyone who *is believing*; *pisteuo* (*believeth*) means to carry out an

¹⁹ Strong’s Online; BDB.

²⁰ Friberg Lexicon.

²¹ <http://webstersdictionary1828.com/Dictionary/foreordain>.

²² Strong’s Online; Gingrich Lexicon.

intellectual evaluation that leads to being persuaded of the truth of the matter.²³ Moreover, *believeth* is in the present tense (it is to be a continual, unending action) and the active voice, which means that it is *whosoever* who is doing the believing.²⁴ Consider this: the one who is believing has evaluated God's offer of salvation by faith and has been persuaded of the veracity of His offer. *Believing* is so much more than mental assent; the persuasion that leads to belief includes the necessity of obedience. As we consider God's Message to mankind, it becomes clear that His call is to evaluate the plan of redemption that He devised and implemented through the Lord Jesus Christ; as such, there is no place for man's *total inability* to respond to the Lord.

In fairness, let's take some time to consider the Scriptures that Calvinists will use in an effort to support their doctrine of *total depravity*.

Genesis 6:5 – “And GOD saw that the wickedness of man *was* great in the earth, and *that* every imagination of the thoughts of his heart *was* only evil continually.” Indeed, it is evident that, in general, men were living according to the dictates of their sinful hearts. Yet consider what we read just following this: “But Noah found [secured] grace [favor] in the eyes of the LORD” (Genesis 6:8);²⁵ Noah, who lived at this time, evidently was not among those whose *thoughts were only evil continually*. We read that “Noah was a just [or righteous] man *and* perfect [or blameless] in his generations, *and* Noah walked with God” (Genesis 6:9);²⁶ Noah was like unto every other descendant of Adam who was living on the earth at that time, except that he *walked with God*. Furthermore, three generations from Adam, Cainan had a son and called his name Mahalaleel – praise of God (Genesis 5:12);²⁷ one generation further and we read that “Enoch walked with God” and the Lord *took him* (Genesis 5:22, 24). What becomes clear is that from Adam to Noah there were those who were persuaded that the promise of God was true and faithful. Yes, these men were all *depraved*, in that they were unable to restore their relationship with Jehovah through their own efforts, yet each one (and there were undoubtedly many more who are not named) chose to believe in the promise of God and expressed their faithfulness to Him by offering a blood sacrifice. The people before the flood were not ignorant of what God required, yet even then it was only a remnant who would heed the Lord's requirements. Demonstrating that the general population of earth was consistently evil does not discount the fact that the Lord has always had His children – even though they are typically few in number.

Jeremiah 17:9-10 – “The heart *is* deceitful above all *things*, and desperately wicked: who can know it? I the LORD search the heart, *I* try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, *and* according to the fruit of his doings.” Their understanding from this is: “God asserts here His right as judge and also gives His judgment telling us that our depravity ... is ... a matter of our hearts.”²⁸ However, within the same context, we read this: “Blessed *is* the man that trusteth [*is continually trusting* (imperfect); an action carried out by *the man*] in the LORD, and whose hope the LORD is. For he shall be as a tree planted [*has been planted*; passive – the Lord plants the one

²³ Strong's Online; Friberg Lexicon.

²⁴ Strong's Online.

²⁵ BDB.

²⁶ BDB; Holladay Hebrew Lexicon, *Bibleworks 8*.

²⁷ Strong's Online.

²⁸ <https://prts.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Canons-of-Dort-with-Intro.pdf>.

who is *trusting*] by the waters, and *that* spreadeth out her roots by the river, and shall not see when heat cometh, but her leaf shall be green; and shall not be careful in the year of drought, neither shall cease from yielding fruit” (Jeremiah 17:7-8).²⁹ It goes without much thought that God is the judge of all humanity, but it is also evident from this passage that for the one who is trusting in the Lord, God will provide great blessing (not necessarily physically, but spiritually) because **he is trusting** in the Lord!

John 3:3, 5 – “Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God ... Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and *of* the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.” Their understanding goes like this: “Jesus tells Nicodemus and us here that we cannot even see (understand) the kingdom of God except by ... the miracle of a whole new life ... there is no hope.”³⁰ They use this to underscore man’s hopeless condition, which is not untrue. However, consider Jesus’ explanation to Nicodemus as to how this new life could be accomplished: “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). The premise for accomplishing this miraculous new life is this: God loved humanity to the extent that He willingly gave His only Son, begotten of a woman and the Holy Spirit (in keeping with Genesis 3:15; Matthew 1:18) in order to bring *new life*. On that premise, Jesus declares: whoever is believing (present tense – describes a continuous action; active voice – identifies *whosoever* as the one who is doing the *believing*) will not die (*perish*) but is having (again, present tense, active voice) everlasting life.³¹ Both *perish* and *have* are in the subjunctive mood, which, in a purpose clause (such as this), means that they (the clauses: *does not perish* and *is having everlasting life*) are only dependent upon the presence of the *believing* in *whosoever*; there is no uncertainty here – in other words, if the believing is there (the condition), then so are not perishing and having everlasting life (the results).³² As we have noted before, to *believe* requires the use of our intellect to evaluate, and a result of that evaluation is that we are persuaded of the truth of our consideration. Therefore, to *believe* (a verb [*pisteuo*]; what *we* do) on Jesus, the only begotten Son of God, requires that we evaluate Who He is, what He has done to bring hope, and what He requires of those who consider following Him; faith (a noun [*pistis*] is our believing formed into a conviction) in His ability to bring spiritual life (1 John 5:12), counting the cost of making Him top priority in all things (Luke 14:26-33), abiding in Him (John 15:4), and obedience to His commands (John 14:15).³³ What we find here is that man, who has been created in the image of God, is required to *believe* on a continuous basis in order to find that new life in Christ. By contrast, we are told that during the time of the Antichrist (*that Wicked*) there will be a deceit of unrighteousness in *those who are perishing* because they would not accept (*received not*; active voice) a love of the truth so that they could be saved (passive voice); the refusal of the truth is an action of the *perishing* (active voice), while *saved* (passive voice) is the

²⁹ Strong’s Online.

³⁰ <https://prts.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Canons-of-Dort-with-Intro.pdf>.

³¹ Strong’s Online.

³² A subjunctive verb often introduces an element of uncertainty but, in cases such as this, they are certain as long as the action upon which they are dependent holds true; https://www.ntgreek.org/learn_nt_greek/subj-purpose.htm.

³³ Strong’s Online.

work of God (2 Thessalonians 2:8-10).³⁴ Once again, context and Scripture provide a different view of the quoted texts.

John 6:44 – “No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day.” Their elaboration on this focuses on the first two clauses: “This passage is concerned with faith, described here as ‘coming to Jesus.’ This coming to Jesus or believing, Jesus says, is impossible except by the power of God. No man has that power of himself. This passage is especially important because so many Christians have the mistaken idea that believing is the one good action that sinful man can do. The Word of God here says that it is not so.”³⁵ The premise for their explanation for how Jesus’ words support their doctrine hinges on the word *draw*. *Helkuo* (translated from the Greek as *draw*) refers to a strong mental or moral attraction,³⁶ and is the verb of the conditional clause (protasis) of this two-clause statement. The condition is: “unless His Father ... should attract him” and the consequential clause (apodosis) that is dependent upon this condition is: “no one is able to come to Jesus.”³⁷ There is no definition given as to what the Father’s *attraction* of this undefined person might look like, and even more significant is that the Calvinist assumes that God is not *attracting* everyone, for if He was, in fact, *drawing* all men, then their doctrine would suffer a tremendous blow. Jesus, Who is the *express image* of God in human form (Hebrews 1:2-3) and Who carried out the will of the Father in fullness (Deuteronomy 18:18; John 12:49-50), declared: “And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw [*helkuo*] all *men* [meaning *everyone*] unto me” (John 12:32).³⁸ There is no question that Jesus was *lifted up* from the earth because John goes on to explain that Jesus used these words to indicate that crucifixion would be the manner of His death (John 12:33). However, not only was He *lifted up* at the time of His crucifixion, but He was ultimately *lifted up* to be seated with the majesty of the Father in glory (Mark 16:19). Since Jesus **was lifted up**, then it follows that *all (everyone)* will be *drawn* to Him; indeed, even though the Father is drawing everyone to His Mediator, the Lord Jesus Christ, He will not override the will of man (his ability to choose) in this matter – or any other.

However, once again it is important to look beyond the Calvinist’s quoted source that they use in support of their understanding of total depravity. John 6:45 records Jesus’ further comments on this matter: “It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me.” He begins by quoting from Isaiah 54:13 that follows a passage that bears some similarities to John’s description of the New Jerusalem in Revelation 21:10-21. It is difficult to fully comprehend the significance of this quote from the OT at this point, but it could be an assurance that those who are coming to God will be *taught* by Him – they will not be ignored or left to flounder in ignorance. Another thing that is important from this quote is that the Hebrew word for *taught* includes the thought of the instruction of disciples – i.e., the instruction springs from within an existing relationship (reinforcing the

³⁴ Strong’s Online.

³⁵ <https://prts.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Canons-of-Dort-with-Intro.pdf>.

³⁶ Friberg Lexicon.

³⁷ https://www.ntgreek.org/learn_nt_greek/conditional_sentences.htm#CONDITIONAL_PDF.

³⁸ Strong’s Online; Friberg Lexicon.

thought that God will instruct those who are coming to Him).³⁹ Jesus then goes on: *everyone, then, who has heard from the Father and has heeded, is coming to Me.*⁴⁰ *Heard* (*akouo*) includes the thought of comprehension – this is not simply an activity of the ear but involves the exercise of the mind resulting in understanding; *has heeded* (*learned; manthano*) takes the proper sense of *heard* to the level of obedience (in other words, what is understood, is being lived out – that is a true definition of *believe*).⁴¹ Jesus describes the one who is hearing and heeding the Father as someone who *is coming* to Him – not someone who has arrived but who is still *coming* (it is in the present tense); another interesting aspect to the Greek word translated as *cometh* is that it is in the middle voice, which means that the one who has heard and heeded the Father is doing the coming **and** he is also the beneficiary of this action.⁴²

As Jesus expounded on being the Bread of Life, He said this: “Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth [*is believing* (this is persuasion and conviction that will result in obedience)] on me hath [*is having*] everlasting life [*aionios zoe*]” (John 6:47); *believeth* is in the present tense (making it a continually present reality) and active voice (*he* is carrying out this action).⁴³ To the consternation of the religious Jews, Jesus went on to say: “Whoso eateth [*is eating*] my flesh, and drinketh [*is drinking*] my blood, hath [*is having*] eternal life [*aionios zoe*]; and I will raise him up at the last day” (John 6:54). What caused many of the Jews to cease following Him (*eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood*), He explained earlier through His parallel comment that *everlasting life* is held by *the one who is believing on Me*; what the Jews found offensive was His indication of the sacrifice that He would soon make for the sins of humanity. What we need to pay careful attention to is the correlation that He made between *eating* and *drinking*, which are clearly activities that everyone does, and *believing*; the comparable analogies help us to understand that everyone is capable of *believing* (just as he is of *eating* and *drinking*). In order to *believe on Him* we must be persuaded that He gave His body for us (*eat His flesh*) and that He shed His blood for us (*drink His blood*) – this persuasion will bring us into Christ: connected to the True Vine by faith (John 15:4), and grafted into the Olive Tree by faith (Romans 11:20-21). “Take heed, brethren [those of faith], lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief [faithless; no belief], in departing [becoming apostate] from the living God” (Hebrews 3:12);⁴⁴ faith is central to our relationship with the Lord! Jesus taught that **we are capable of believing** in His Word!

John 12:37-40 – “But though he had done so many miracles before them, yet they believed not on him: That the saying of Esaias the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spake, Lord, who hath believed our report? and to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed? Therefore they could not believe, because that Esaias said again He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart; that they should not see with *their* eyes, nor understand with *their* heart, and be converted, and I should heal them.” Consider the passage of Isaiah that the Lord quotes from: “And he said, Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. Make

³⁹ BDB.

⁴⁰ Stephanus 1550 NT.

⁴¹ Friberg Lexicon; Strong’s Online.

⁴² Strong’s Online; https://www.ntgreek.org/learn_nt_greek/verbs1.htm#AORIST.

⁴³ Strong’s Online; Stephanus 1550 NT.

⁴⁴ Friberg Lexicon.

the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed” (Isaiah 6:9-10). This follows Jehovah expressing His anger against His wayward people; Isaiah receives a vision of the glory of God, and then volunteers to go to this people with the Lord’s message. The people of Judah were facing the Lord’s righteous judgment because they had “cast away the law of the LORD of hosts, and despised the word of the Holy One of Israel” (Isaiah 5:24); in essence, they had turned away from the Lord, and He is going to hold them accountable for their choice. The Calvinist’s understanding of Jesus’ words is this: “... we also find here that this depravity of man is the **direct result of God’s judgment** upon man and does not just happen to be the case with him. His depravity is, then, the death with which God threatened him in the beginning” (emphasis added).⁴⁵ Their focus is on the words of Isaiah that Jesus quoted: *He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart*, from which their conclusion is that it is God Who has *blinded* and *hardened*, and so it is only God Who is able to open their vision and understanding so that they can *be converted*. In isolation, this may sound to be an appropriate understanding of Jesus’ words, but we must be careful to always consider the larger context of God’s Word.

To His disciples Jesus explained why He spoke to the people of Israel in parables, and His explanation provides illumination for the passages from John 12 and Isaiah. “Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand. And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive” (Matthew 13:13-15). Consider those to whom Jesus spoke the parables: *they who are seeing are not perceiving, and they who are hearing are not learning nor understanding* (Matthew 13:13b, literal).⁴⁶ The Jews of Jesus’ day had the Scriptures that foretold of His coming, yet, even though they saw what He did and heard what He said, they could not *understand* because they refused to believe Who He was; instead, the religious leaders plotted how they might remove Him: “If we let him thus alone, all *men* will believe on him: and the Romans shall come and take away both our place and nation” (John 11:48) – the religious Jews were content with their lot under Rome and did not see their need for a Savior from sin. After quoting from Isaiah, Jesus goes on: “*for the heart of this people is become insensitive, and their ears have heard with difficulty and their eyes they have closed, lest they should have seen with their eyes and their ears might have heard and with the heart they might have understood, and they may have turned and I might have healed them*” (Matthew 13:15, literal).⁴⁷ The *insensitivity* of the heart of this people is because of the choices that they had made prior to this moment in time (*insensitive* is in the passive voice) – they may not have set out to be so dull of heart (they actually considered themselves to be spiritually astute) but this was the product of their wrong decisions. As a result, they have a hard time hearing the truth of Jesus (and what they might hear, they do not understand, and seek to use it against Him), and they have actually closed their eyes so that they cannot see the Truth of God. In fulfillment of Isaiah, Jesus identifies the people of Israel as being closed to His Message of life; like Judah of old, they are destined for God’s judgment because they say, “We see,” and yet remain in their sin (John 9:41).

⁴⁵ <https://prts.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Canons-of-Dort-with-Intro.pdf>.

⁴⁶ Stephanus 1550 NT; Friberg Lexicon.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

We read of the Lord hardening (to make firm or rigid) the heart of Pharaoh when he was presented with Moses' requests (Exodus 7:13), but we understand that this was the Lord orchestrating His judgment upon Egypt for their actions against Israel; His judgment of Egypt was not because Pharaoh rejected Moses' petitions, but because of generations of idolatry and the oppression of Israel. Pharaoh's heart is described as being *hardened* (literally, *heavy* or *dull*), not easily moved (Exodus 7:14); this was not from the Lord, but was the result of years of walking according to the pagan deities of Egypt. The time for God's judgment of Egypt was ripe, and so the Lord simply ensured that Pharaoh's already hardened heart remained so for Him to carry out His judgment. What we see from this is that the Lord was not the One Who hardened the hearts, dulled the hearing or closed the eyes of these people – all of this was done through their own personal choices (springing from a heart that was spiritually dead) long before the Lord began to orchestrate their judgment.

Indeed, God's judgment upon sinful man is that he is spiritually dead and will physically die; however, to deny that sinful man has a choice to make, strikes at the very heart of what it means to be created in the image of God. God's judgment upon Adam and Eve was immediately countered with the salvation that He had prepared before creation (1 Peter 1:18-21); in other words, man (beginning with Adam, the first sinner) has never been without a choice! Adam's fatal choice came from a sinless creation; from then on, the propensity to make bad choices is so much easier because of the sin-nature that now lives within everyone. Cain discovered just how easy it was to make a bad choice but, nevertheless, the choice was still his; he knew what God required yet chose to make an offering of his own works (Genesis 4:3-5) – his anger exposes his understanding of what the Lord had prescribed; if he had not known, then he would have been surprised, not angry. Man's depravity is his harvest from disobedience, but God has also prepared a Way so that His judgment of sin might be suspended for the individual who places his faith in the Lord Jesus, our Redeemer. Generations of living away from the Truth of God may well bury the choice under piles of traditions that do not lead to Him, but that does not remove the choice that was made – it only makes it more difficult for them to find that Narrow Way that leads to life. Jesus said: "Enter ye [a command given by the Lord!] in at the strait gate: for wide *is* the gate, and broad *is* the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait *is* the gate, and narrow *is* the way, which leadeth unto life, and **few there be that find it**" (Matthew 7:13-14).⁴⁸ The Calvinist contends that God has imposed depravity upon man, but he forgets that God also immediately opened the way to life because the Godhead had determined from eternity past that Jesus would come to remove the penalty of sin – a choice has always been there! God's judgement of sin was quick, but it was accompanied by a way for His mercy and grace to find a place in the individual's life. "And the LORD God said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know [knowing] good and evil ..." (Genesis 3:22);⁴⁹ this is the Lord's assessment of man as a sinner – **he knows both good and evil**; there is **always** a choice to be made!

Romans 1:28 – "And even as they did not like to retain God in *their* knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient" Although more of

⁴⁸ Strong's Online.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

this passage is quoted, this becomes the focus of their support for the *depravity* or *inability* of man: “Here the Word of God establishes the fact that man’s will is not at all inclined toward God (‘they did not like to retain God in their knowledge’), but toward evil.”⁵⁰ However, in their haste, they have missed the meaning of the very phrase that they point to for support. *Like* comes from the Greek root word *dokimazo*, which means to approve: after examination, a thing or concept is considered to be valuable.⁵¹ In other words, man weighed (however briefly) between his way and God’s way, and *chose* to consider God to be of no value to him; it is as a result of this that God gave them over to their *unapproved* (*reprobate*, *adokimos*) minds.⁵² Rather than exposing man’s inability, this expresses man’s responsibility for his godless (*unapproved*) mind and that a choice is still his – the image of God is still present!

However, they go on: “And the preceding context [in Romans 1] supports this fully by showing that the worship of the heathen is not a seeking after God, or longing for him, but a changing of the truth of God into a lie.”⁵³ Even when they endeavor to use the context, they fail to see the part of that context that discredits their agenda: “Because that, when they knew God, they glorified *him* not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened ... Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness ... Who changed the truth of God into a lie ...” (Romans 1:21-25). The context reveals that when they *knew God* (*having known God*) they *chose* not to acknowledge Him as such, and, as a result, God gave them over to what they had chosen (*uncleanness*) with the result that they distorted God’s truth into a lie. Therefore, it is clearly evident that, **before** God turned them loose to their uncleanness, they knew Him. After clarifying that God’s wrath (*orge*, His anger against sin) is evident against ungodliness and unrighteousness, Paul explains the situation of the ungodly this way: *because what can be known of God is clearly seen, being in them; for God has been revealed to them, indeed the invisible attributes of Him, from the creation of the world, the things made have been understood – they have clearly seen His eternal power and divine nature so that they are without excuse* (Romans 1:19-20, literal).⁵⁴ Before God *gave them up to uncleanness*, they turned away from the evidence that was both within and all around them, refused to acknowledge God as the Creator and Sustainer of all things, and became arrogant – *wise* in their own eyes but *fools* before God (Romans 1:21-24). It is after that initial rejection of God and His majesty that men become consumed with what is evil and against the Lord; as we have seen before, this can become a tradition of spiritual blindness that will perpetuate for generations (Exodus 20:5).

Romans 3:9-19 – Although they quote the whole passage noted, the core of their attention is on this: “There is none righteous, no, not one: There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God” (Romans 3:10-11). From this they state that “the apostle Paul is quoting here from *eight* different Old Testament passages to prove the depravity of man.”⁵⁵ There is no doubt that humanity is depraved and unable to do anything to save themselves, but the Calvinist is caught

⁵⁰ <https://prts.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Canons-of-Dort-with-Intro.pdf>.

⁵¹ Strong’s Online; Friberg Lexicon.

⁵² Strong’s Online.

⁵³ <https://prts.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Canons-of-Dort-with-Intro.pdf>.

⁵⁴ Stephanus 1550 NT; Friberg Lexicon.

⁵⁵ <https://prts.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Canons-of-Dort-with-Intro.pdf>.

trying to overstate the condition of the ungodly as being one of **inability** to even **choose** to believe the Lord! Their basis for this fallacy is due to their misunderstanding of what it means for man to have been created in the *image of God* (Genesis 1:27). They quote Genesis 5:3 – “And Adam lived an hundred and thirty years, and begat a son in his own likeness, after his image; and called his name Seth”; their comment is this: “What a testimony this is against man who was created in the image of God but who now begets children, **not in God’s image**, but in his own!” (emphasis added).⁵⁶ Within this thinking, all of the children of Adam have lost the image of God and only bear Adam’s sin-stained image.⁵⁷ Yet, just a little later we read: “Whoso sheddeth man’s blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for **in the image of God** made he man” (Genesis 9:6). After the flood, God prescribed the death penalty through Noah because sinful man was made in *His image!* This fits with Paul’s instruction in Romans 1 that we just looked at – God has revealed His eternal power and divinity to sinful men through their own bodies and the created world (Romans 1:19-20). Yes, all of the children of Adam are born with a sin-nature (his image), but what is equally evident is that they also bear the *image of God* – the ability to think, to reason, and to choose! Man’s condition, when left to his own devices, is not *inability*, but, too frequently, it is simply *independence* – an arrogant desire to follow his own determination. And so, “professing themselves to be wise, they became fools [*foolish*] ...” (Romans 1:22).⁵⁸

Ephesians 2:1, 5 – “And you *hath he quickened*, who were dead in trespasses and sins.... Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved).” Their analysis of this is: “This time our depravity is described as a spiritual death to help us understand that **no more than a dead man can think, will, understand, speak, or act can we think, will, understand, speak, or act** in a way that is pleasing to God – not without grace and salvation. **This passage is proof**, therefore also that total depravity and spiritual death are one and the same” (emphasis added).⁵⁹ It seems that this is where they will rest their case – this is the evidence that “irrefutably” proves their point: **depravity is total inability!** This is the past condition of those who are presently saints (Paul included), yet just a little earlier Paul’s teaching clarified the situation. “In whom ye also *trusted*, after that ye heard [with understanding] the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed [the active voice makes this the action of those who *heard*], ye were sealed [marked for identification; passive voice – this is God’s work in the one who *believed*] with that holy Spirit of promise, Which is the earnest [first installment or down payment] of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory” (Ephesians 1:13-14).⁶⁰ Clearly, the unregenerate can *hear* the truth of God’s Word and they can evaluate it, ponder its message, and then *believe* it or reject it. One of the difficulties that Calvinists have is that they remove God’s image from the sinner, and this is a problem because

⁵⁶ <https://prts.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Canons-of-Dort-with-Intro.pdf>.

⁵⁷ That this is not the opinion of all Calvinists is evident; John MacArthur says: “God’s image was placed in humanity at creation, not redemption. Although the image of God was seriously marred by Adam’s fall, it was not utterly obliterated” (<https://www.gty.org/library/articles/A200/loving-gods-image-in-our-neighbors>).

⁵⁸ Friberg Lexicon.

⁵⁹ <https://prts.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Canons-of-Dort-with-Intro.pdf>.

⁶⁰ Friberg Lexicon; Strong’s Online; neither *believed* nor *sealed* is in the past tense – Paul is not looking back in order to affirm his salvation – this is a reminder of something that takes place only once and needs to be held onto firmly (Hebrews 3:6).

God does not do so! It is because they have declared the sinner to be without the image of God (only Adam's fallen image) that they have defined depravity to be *total inability*.

As we have seen, there are varying degrees to the extent that Calvinists carry their understanding of *depravity*, but it has also become clear that even the moderates still hold to the *inability* of anyone to choose to believe in the Lord. However, it should also be evident by now, that the Scriptures do **not** support this interpretation. All Calvinists are intent on protecting their historical theology, and even men like MacArthur will seek those Scriptures that might appear to support their well-defined doctrines, while turning a blind eye to the context and other Scriptures that would place their teachings in jeopardy. Nevertheless, this is an important doctrine for them because it the cornerstone of their theology; we will come to see just how important as we consider the other parts of the TULIP acronym.