

TOTAL INABILITY - CAN NOBODY REACH GOD WITHOUT GOD'S HELP?

Salvation is from sin and if you are saved you are fit for eternal life with God in Heaven. God is good so sin excludes him so if you reject God you cannot go to him.

Some religions and philosophies argue that human nature never really intends to be purely good. It cannot do good unless it finds something dark in it so this amounts to using good to do and express a crafty underhand evil. Sometimes it is worse than that. Sometimes the evil is blatant. If those ideas are right then the argument: "nobody is always meaning to be bad but is somewhere between being a good person and a bad one" is irrelevant. Not being completely good or completely bad can be a way of being completely bad. True badness and the most powerful badness mixes itself with good so that it can be a slow poison like arsenic.

Total depravity is the biblical and Protestant doctrine that the unsaved person can do nothing really good or deserving of salvation. "The Bible teaches total depravity, and I believe in total depravity. But that simply means that there is nothing good in man to earn or deserve salvation" (page 4, Why I Disagree with all Five Points of Calvinism). One sin in your heart defiles all you do until you repent and are pardoned by God. The saved are those who ask Jesus to save them and they are saved regardless of what they do after. Only the saved can do real good. This is the point made in Job 14:4 that says someone clean cannot come from someone unclean and the same holds true for works.

Calvinists believe in more than just total depravity. They mean that the sinner is so hostile to God that he cannot accept God's salvation. Many get the wrong idea when they see cannot here. It is cannot in the sense that a stubborn person cannot give in. We can call this total inability.

Calvinists themselves often get confused about what it means and one comes away with the false impression that they do not believe in free will. When a person thinks only of doing bad for a while that person has become unable to be good because he or she cannot think of doing good for as long. In a way, that person has no free will anymore but is still responsible for her or his evil actions. Calvinists affirm that the unsaved are all the same way.

It is sad that total inability is called total depravity for they are two separate things. A person can be able to repent and be totally depraved or not able to repent and totally depraved. In other words, a wholly evil person can be unable to repent because of being too busy sinning to think of it and a wholly evil person can be able to repent because of being aware of the need to do it.

Calvinists seem to deny that we act voluntarily but if Calvinists used more illustrations or parables like I use their doctrine would be understood and accepted better.

"Calvinism teaches that men make choices according to their own desires. They are not "determined" by God like puppets on a string" (page 194, All One Body). Determinism is the doctrine that we have no free will but are programmed exactly like machines. Luther taught "that even the faith by which a man believes is God-given. Of course, man's will is involved in salvation, but it is God acting on the will that causes the man to seek God. Therefore a person is saved not because he had of himself the desire or ability to believe but because God chose him and acted on his will to bring him to faith. For Luther, salvation was wholly of the Lord" (page 168, All One Body – Why Don't We Agree?). Luther and Calvin agreed on predestination though Luther was a bit too extreme at times. But this is the same as what Calvin taught about how a man gets saving faith or faith that destines him for Heaven. "When the unregenerate man sins, he does so freely, as a free agent, and in accordance with his own wishes; and it is this which makes him responsible" (page 40, 41). The Calvinist book, The Grace of God in the Gospel says, "A sinful nature imposes a moral inability as inflexible as prison bars, yet the sinner is responsible to do that which his own fallen nature renders impossible" (page 40). While Calvinists say that we are not controlled by God like puppets on a string we are controlled by the manipulation of our free will. There is a huge difference.

The teaching that a sinner is totally against the Lord God is said to be contradicted by the notion that he or she can repent but won't and never does and won't until God attracts her or him with irresistible grace. It is assumed that if a person can turn to God then he or she is not totally unable even if she or he will never repent. This is wrong because evil is the wrong kind of good. They are depraved because they won't avail of the power they have. They make it a sin to have it and not use it.

In Romans 3 we read that all people are unrighteous and none seek after God. This does not prove total inability because they may just freely choose not to seek God. But it makes it very likely that they have total inability. If a class sits a maths

exam and all fail time and time again it is nearly absolute proof that they cannot do maths.

It is argued that since the Bible says we are dead in sin (Ephesians 2:1) and that since a dead person cannot do anything it follows that we are totally dependent on God. But that analogy may not be meant. Even the saved person is called dead (Romans 6:2; Colossians 3:3). A dead person does not have the life of God in him so a living person estranged from God can be said to be spiritually dead – without God's life. It is not said that he or she is like a dead person in all respects. But you could be dead in sin and useless in yourself and still be alive and useful because of the work Jesus did for you as if he were you so that you could earn salvation through him. You can be totally depraved and still saved at the same time but only if a substitute pays for your sins and your depravity in your place.

According to the Bible, we are in bondage to sin (eg. John 8:34). Sin has taken away our freedom. Arminians and Romanists contend that this just means that we are only free when we are good. That is mistaken because sin can be freedom and no two people agree on exactly what is sinful. It is how it makes us feel that determines if sin is freedom or not. The slave who wants to be a slave is not really a slave. The Bible must and can only mean that we are unable to repent when we are in sin. This means we are totally unable to repent and turn to God – he has to throw us the water wings to stop us from drowning.

The argument that since getting saved is becoming born again (see John 3) and you cannot help being born it follows that you cannot help being saved is dreadful. It denies the Calvinist teaching that God enables you to choose his salvation for there is no choice in this. In natural birth, a baby who knows nothing is born but it is need not be the same in the new birth which refers to adults.

In Mark 4 Jesus claims that God hid the understanding of the good news from some people to prevent them from being forgiven. This does not prove total inability for we could be talking about mere influence here and not God causing disbelief directly. Anti-Calvinists would say that when God needed to hide the understanding they must not have had total inability. They fail to understand that total inability does not deny free will but works with it.

1 Corinthians 2:13 says that Christians understand the message or the things of God.

1 Corinthians 2:14 says that the natural or unsaved or unspiritual person cannot receive or know the things of God, the gospel. Is this saying that we are unable to turn to Jesus in the Calvinistic sense in which you cannot turn to God unless he gives you the power to do it? (This would mean that you will not become a Christian except when God decrees it or predestines it and many are never predestined.) Or is it saying that the natural man has the grace to do it but resists it?

The verse before says that God so Paul is creating a contrast. There are only two groups so there are no natural men who do understand. Only the saved understand so Paul is indeed saying that only the predestined get the grace to repent and they cannot resist it. The unspiritual person cannot comprehend the things of the Lord because she or he is sinful. If she repents she will be able to receive the word but this is silly for that would mean she believed before she could believe. This makes it more likely that the Calvinistic understanding is correct. We are talking about the writings of a man who experienced salvation and would have known what he was talking about.

He doesn't say that the natural person sometimes understands the things of God but won't follow them. He says there is no light in them at all that comes from God. This is total depravity.

In John 6, Jesus says that no man can come to him unless God draws him. Nobody can come to God unless he helps them to. This certainly teaches that you cannot earn salvation or come to God without God making the first move. If God inspires you to believe it means you know that the gospel is true before you accept his gift of supernatural faith. The Christian faith says that if you have natural faith in God and in Christ it is no good. You need faith that is inspired by God and caused supernaturally to be able to go to Heaven. So the natural belief should be transmuted into supernatural faith. So God inspires you to accept supernatural faith. But your good works are no good. No matter how good you are, you will not be accepted into Heaven unless you turn to God in faith.

In Acts 13:48, we read that those who were destined to eternal life believed. Calvinists say that all who are destined or chosen for eternal life believe because of God's irresistible grace. Arminians say that you are not destined to salvation unless you receive Jesus into your heart so you do not believe because you are destined but are destined because you believe. The verse says you believe because you are destined.

Total inability implies that one is totally depraved and the other four points of Calvinism. God causes total inability for he is all-powerful and can get a person to act any given way by interfering with his or her thought patterns. Those who abhor the doctrines of total inability and inherent depravity should know that thoughts cause free will if they have got it and not vice versa. You can never make a decision without some thought causing it. We cannot help our thoughts and even changing them is caused by a thought we did not ask for or which we couldn't force to come for many thoughts won't come

to us though we try to get them. So if anybody sins it is God that ordained the sin and caused it.

Calvin reiterated the Bible teaching that you have to look into the face of God to see what God is and then look at yourself as an essential part of seeking God and God cannot be sought with sincerity unless you despair of yourself as a result of what you have learned about your sinful tendencies and their extent (Book 1, chapter 1, The Institutes of Christian Religion). This implies that Roman Catholics who do not believe in despair are heretics and dangerous to the gospel. It implies that there is no hope of a better way of living unless you believe in God and that attitude is totally out of line in these days of acceptance and pluralism.

The gospel of John 1:10-13 states that you are not saved by human will but by God's. This is thought to teach total inability. But some say it merely means that you cannot demand that God saves you for it is up to him. But that would amount to saying the text means that your human will can save you if God so chooses! The text teaches that human effort and will has nothing to do with salvation. One more try: "If man cannot reach God by himself then he can reach God if God helps him. It is co-operation." So if the sinner does not naturally connect to God that does not mean he cannot connect. But it does not change the fact that the text says the human will has nothing to do with it.

Catholicism in its own way teaches that you cannot get to God unless God helps you. God helps you to freely co-operate with him. Protestantism argues that even the co-operation is not from you but from God. It goes a step further. You are totally unable to connect to God on any level and if you do it is because of his work.