

The Sovereignty of God

Part 4: In Salvation

Human Inability

As we examine these matters in the Bible, we will use relevant biblical terms as much as possible. The Bible is very clear about defining its terms. When we use **biblical terms** and their biblical definitions, we have God's true Word on the subjects we're studying. It helps us avoid man made labels that confuse the issues and it defines terms with biblical words that come out of the biblical context which hold their truest meaning.

TULIP is not the best: In seeking to use biblical terms to describe the issue at hand, we quickly discover that the acronym, ***TULIP***, is inadequate. The following terms describe much more accurately what the Bible teaches about the Five Points under discussion.

- Natural Ability or Natural Inability
- Prescient²⁴ Election or Sovereign Election
- Universal Redemption or Particular Redemption/Definite Atonement
- Human Resistance or Effectual Calling
- Falling from Grace or Eternal Security

The chart below clarifies these contrasting terms.

Five Important Biblical Doctrines Related to Predestination in Salvation			
Semi-Pelagian		Augustinian	
<u>Synergistic</u> Salvation is accomplished as man and God cooperate. Divine Grace and the human will work together for salvation to happen.		<u>Monergistic</u> Salvation is wholly the work of the Holy Spirit in regeneration. Mankind possesses no inclination toward the Gospel in his natural state and needs Divine Grace to be enabled to believe.	
Man is naturally able to understand and believe the Gospel apart from Divine enablement.	Natural Ability	Natural Inability	Man is naturally unable to understand and believe the Gospel apart from Divine enablement.
The condition for salvation is faith which man exercises of his own ability. God chooses those who choose Him.	Prescient Election	Sovereign Election	The condition for salvation is the Sovereign electing will of God alone.
Christ's redeeming work made it possible for everyone to be saved but did not actually secure the salvation of anyone.	Universal Redemption	Particular Redemption	Christ did in fact secure the salvation of His Church individually and definitely.
Man's will is free and he can successfully resist the Spirit's call.	Human Resistance	Effectual Calling	The calling of God to the elect does effect salvation infallibly.
Because faith is the necessary condition for Salvation, it can be lost when man discontinues his faith.	Falling from Grace	Eternal Security	The nature of saving faith is eternal and cannot be reversed.

²⁴ having foreknowledge or foresight

Question #116: Carefully consider the two immediately preceding charts. Then explain in your own words why the terms used in the chart immediately above are preferable. _____

Let us now look to the Bible for divine insight on these issues.

What Does the Bible Say About Human Inability?

The Bible clearly affirms *“there is no one who does good, not even one”* (Psalm 14:3). Jesus said, *“No one is good except God alone”* (Mark 10:18). We know from observation that people persistently sin against God from earliest childhood through old age. And the Word of God confirms this observation again and again. Psalm 51:5 says people are steeped in sin from birth. Romans 3:23 and 5:12 affirm that human beings in their natural state are sinners who fall far short of God’s required standard. Humanity fell into sin and darkness when Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit and transgressed God’s clear commandment (Original Sin). Their rebellion corrupted their entire being, body and soul (mind, will, emotions); and this corruption was passed to all their descendants (Romans 5:12). In fulfillment of God’s Word, Adam and Eve died, both spiritually and physically (the aging process began). Unfettered communion was broken between man and God; we no longer *naturally* understand the things of God nor do we desire to do so. Humanity is accurately described in Scripture as *“dead in . . . trespasses and sins”* and in need of new life (Ephesians 2:1-5, Colossians 2:13). ***The biblical truth is, mankind neither pleases God nor seeks after God. In our natural state, we do not possess the ability to savingly understand the things of God (that is the spiritual matters of the kingdom of God relating to man’s need to be saved and God’s provision to save Him).***

Natural Human Inability

What Does the Bible Say?

Dead in trespasses and sins – Eph 2:3, Col 2:13
Hostile to God – Rom 8:7
Cannot submit to God’s Law – Rom 8:7
Cannot Please God – Rom 8:8
Cannot understand the things of God - 1 Cor 2:14, Rom 3:11
Cannot accept the Holy Spirit – John 14:17
Cannot see the Kingdom of God – John 3:3
Cannot hear the Words of Christ – John 8:43
Cannot see the Light of the Gospel (Blinded minds) – 2 Cor 4:4
Thinks the Gospel foolishness – 1 Cor 1:18
Does not seek for God – Rom 3:11
Does not fear God – Rom 3:18
Heart is deceitful and desperately wicked – Jer 17:9
Without God given faith our deeds are sinful – Rom 14:23

Question #117: Examine the chart above very closely. Read the referenced Scriptures and pay close attention to the biblical words used to describe the condition of unredeemed people. Then write a **concise** description of natural human inability to respond to God in saving faith. _____

Unable to see, hear, or understand

The Bible speaks of humanity's fallen nature by using words like **cannot**. It is not that we **will not** but that we **cannot** understand the Gospel without the work of divine grace. The Bible plainly declares that **fallen humanity has a natural inability to see, hear, or understand, the things of God**. Jesus makes it clear that mankind has an **INABILITY TO SEE** the Kingdom apart from regeneration.

John 3:3: Jesus answered and said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, **unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.**"

The Apostle Paul affirms the same truth.

2 Corinthians 4:3-4: ³And even if **our gospel is veiled**, it is veiled to those who are perishing, ⁴in whose case the god of this world has **blinded the minds of the unbelieving**, that they might not **see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ**, who is the image of God.

By saying "our gospel is veiled . . . to those who are perishing," the Bible affirms that the unsaved are **unable to see** the gospel. Veils distort or obstruct our vision and keep us from seeing clearly. This evil work of veiling the gospel is attributed to Satan (the god of this world): ". . . the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving, that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ." The gospel is veiled to unbelievers because Satan has **blinded their minds**. Blinding the mind is a biblical idiom describing an inability to understand. The "**light of the gospel of the glory of Christ**" is incomprehensible to unbelievers because they cannot grasp who He is and why they need Him. Apart from God's enabling grace, the beautiful treasure of Christ, and all that He is and the essential truths about Him, are not seen and understood in their heart and mind.

Likewise, in the passage below, Jesus makes it clear that fallen humanity has an **INABILITY TO HEAR** God's Word.

John 8:43: Why do you not understand what I am saying? It is because **you cannot hear My word.**

Jesus said, "**you cannot hear My word,**" to ungodly Pharisees who claimed that Jesus' witness of Himself was not true (John 8:13). He affirmed that they could not understand the truth of His words because they were not of God but of their father, the devil (v. 44). The word "**cannot**" speaks of their inability. They "**do not understand**" because they "**cannot hear.**" And they "**cannot hear**" because they are not of God, but of the devil. This is a consistent theme in the teaching of Jesus. In the following passage, He tells His disciples that the reason they understand "the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven" and others do not is that they have been given understanding by God whereas others have not.

Matthew 13:10-13: ¹⁰And the disciples came and said to Him, "Why do You speak to them in parables?" ¹¹And He answered and said to them, "**To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been**

granted. ¹²For whoever has, to him shall more be given, and he shall have an abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has shall be taken away from him. ¹³Therefore I speak to them in parables; **because while seeing they do not see, and while hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand.**"

In the passage below, Paul also affirms that unredeemed people cannot understand the things of God because they have an **INABILITY TO UNDERSTAND**.

1 Corinthians 2:14: But a **natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God**; for they are foolishness to him, and **he cannot understand them**, because they are spiritually appraised.

Paul, writing inspired Scripture, explains that "a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him." The "natural man" Paul refers to is a person who is unredeemed and does not have the Holy Spirit living within him (this is in contrast to the spiritual man who has the Spirit, after regeneration, v-12, v-16). Such a person does not understand spiritual truth. All thoughts of God, sin, being saved, and reconciliation with God seem foolish to him so he will not accept nor understand that they are true. His thinking is so corrupted, "he **cannot** understand" God's truth. The word "**cannot**" speaks of man's ability, not his willingness, although because he is **unable** to understand he is therefore also unwilling, as it states, he "**does not accept**." Spiritual truth must be "**spiritually appraised**." The natural man "**does not accept**" spiritual truth because he has no natural ability to "**understand**" spiritual things. This is because he does not have the Spirit (given at regeneration) by which he can "**appraise**" spiritual things. Only those indwelt by God's Spirit can "**appraise**" spiritual things.

Question #118: Explain in your own words the *significance* of the Bible's teaching that fallen people **cannot** accept the Gospel by an act of their own will. In other words, what does this clear biblical teaching reveal about the desperate state of unredeemed people? _____

Mankind is in rebellion against God and enslaved to sin

The **Bible plainly declares** that mankind is naturally in a state of rebellion against God.

Romans 3:9-12, 18: ⁹What then? Are we better than they? Not at all; for we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin; ¹⁰as it is written, "**There is none righteous, not even one;** ¹¹**There is none who understands, There is none who seeks for God;** ¹²All have turned aside, together they have become useless; **There is none who does good, There is not even one.** . . . ¹⁸**There is no fear of God before their eyes.**"

Here Paul describes mankind in relation to God. There are **none** righteous, **none** who understand, and **none** who seek for God. **All** have turned aside. There are **none** who do good, and **none** who fear God. We know these are not general statements about most people, because Paul twice uses the phrase "**not even one**." In doing so, he emphasizes the **universality** of mankind's rebellion against God's sovereign authority, his doing of good before God, and his seeking and understanding of God.

Later in Romans, Paul affirms the thoroughness of mankind's bent toward evil. He affirms that unregenerate people have neither desire nor ability to submit to God. Their minds are set on the flesh and they are by nature hostile toward God.

Romans 8:5-8: ⁵For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. ⁶For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, ⁷because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so; ⁸and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

Paul says the natural state of all men is “according to the flesh” and that they naturally “set their minds on the things of the flesh.” Given man’s sinful nature, it makes sense that “the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so.” People who live *in the flesh* are ruled by their sinful nature. Their fallen minds are *“hostile toward God.”* They do not *“subject” themselves “to the Law of God”* because they are *“not even able to do so.”* Note well that Paul is describing *inability* here, not unwillingness. He is not saying they simply *don’t desire* to obey God; he is saying they *cannot* obey God—and that *the reason* they cannot obey God is that they are *in the flesh*.

The Bible consistently declares that mankind is *enslaved to sin*. God declares through the prophet Jeremiah that the fallen human “heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick” (17:9). In other words, unredeemed people are *bound to sin* and naturally prone to evil *because* they are in the flesh. *The following passages reveal that unredeemed people are not free to obey God.* Rather they are in *“bondage to sin”* and thus *unable* to obey God with right motives. **Man’s will is not free** to obey God, but rather in bondage to sin.

John 8:34: Jesus answered them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, **everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin.**”

Romans 6:5-7: ⁵For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection, ⁶knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, **that our body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin;** ⁷for he who has died is freed from sin.

Romans 7:14: For we know that the Law is spiritual; but I am of flesh, **sold into bondage to sin.**

Titus 3:3-7: ³For we also once were foolish ourselves, **disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures,** spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another. ⁴But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, ⁵He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, **by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit,** ⁶whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, ⁷that being justified by His grace we might be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

This idea is further clarified in passages that state *no one who is unregenerate (and therefore a slave of sin) does good (by God’s standard).* Only those who have been cleansed by the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit are *able* to please God in any sense.

Romans 3:12: All have turned aside, together they have become useless; **There is none who does good, There is not even one.**

Isaiah 64:6: For all of us have become like one who is unclean, And **all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment;** And all of us wither like a leaf, And our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.

Romans 14:23: . . . and whatever is not from faith is sin.

The Bible clearly affirms that the natural person, apart from the regeneration of the Holy Spirit (being born again), abides in a state of sin and rebellion in relation to God and is therefore *by nature, an object of God’s wrath.*