... The doctrine of total depravity is explained as total inability in the writings of some theologians. James Boice and Philip Ryken explained, "In this sad and pervasively sinful state we have no inclination to seek God, and therefore *cannot* seek him or even respond to the gospel when it is presented to us. In our unregenerate state, we do not have free will so far as 'believing on' or 'receiving' Jesus Christ as Savior is concerned."[130] They clarified that unbelievers "cannot" respond to the gospel by repenting and believing in Jesus when it is presented. Consistent with article 3 in the Canons of Dort, they taught that a person believes in Jesus *after* they are born again. Mark DeVine wrote, "Humanity's fall into sin results in a condition that must be described in terms of spiritual blindness and deadness and in which the will is enslaved, not free." DeVine continued, "We need to ask whether the Arminian insistence that the work of the Holy Spirit frees the will to either repent and believe or refuse to do so does not evidence a deeper misunderstanding of the nature of depravity itself."[131] John Piper wrote, "Faith is the evidence of new birth, not the cause of it."[132] "Regeneration precedes faith," R. C. Sproul explained. He added, "We do not believe in order to be born again; we are born again in order to believe."[133] R. Albert Mohler Jr. also affirmed that regeneration precedes faith:

> In the mystery of the sovereign purposes of God and by his sheer grace and mercy alone, the Word was brought near to us. As a result, we were called, made alive, and regenerated. We then believed what we otherwise would never have been able to believe, and we grasped hold of it, knowing that it is the sole provision of our need. We came to know of our need and of God's response and provision for us in Christ, and then we came to know of our necessary response of faith, repentance, confession, and belief.[134]

According to these views of total depravity, spiritual blindness and deadness results in the enslavement of the human will so that people do not have the ability to repent and believe the message of the gospel unless they are first regenerated, or born again.

The Implications of Total Depravity as the Inability to Repent and Believe

If total depravity as the inability to repent and believe is true, then two implications follow. First, people are able to exercise faith in Christ only if and after God gives them the gift of faith through the grace of regeneration. Second, all commands and invitations in the Bible to repent and believe can be obeyed only by people to whom God first gives faith and who are first born again by the Holy Spirit. These implications are supported by those who affirm the doctrine. Loraine Boettner wrote, "The regeneration of the soul is something which is wrought in us, and not an act performed by us. It is an instantaneous change from spiritual death to spiritual life. It is not even a thing of which we are conscious at the moment it occurs, but rather something which lies lower than consciousness. At the moment of its occurrence the soul is as passive as was Lazarus when he was called back to life by Jesus."[135] Boettner described salvation as something that occurs to a spiritually dead person. He compared the passive nature of the salvation of a spiritually dead

person as analogous to the physical resuscitation of a physically dead person. Thomas J. Nettles wrote, "Regeneration of sinners is like the birth of a baby, who is actually passive in the process and comes into life as a result of the work of outside forces. The child has nothing to do with being born. Being born again, according to Jesus, is like that."[136] Nettles compared being born again spiritually to being born physically; in both instances, he claimed, the person is passive in the process. Matthew Barrett clarified the reason why only some people are saved: "God promises that eternal life will be granted on the condition of faith. However, God never promises that He will bestow faith on everyone."[137] For Barrett, as well as others in this perspective, God saves only those people to whom he grants faith.

A Biblical Case for the Ability of Sinners to Repent and Believe for Salvation

A Biblical Theology of Repentance

In the Old Testament the primary word for repentance means "to turn back" (*šûb*).[138] Jeremiah used the term when he declared that Jerusalem "refused to repent" (Jer 5:3). God's people refused to turn away from their sinful actions and return to him. One resource described the Hebrew word this way: "The basic meaning of return or change in direction is used metaphorically to express repentance as a change in direction away from sinful actions toward obedience to God."[139] In the New Testament the key words are the noun " repentance" (*metanoia*) and the verb "to repent" (*metanoeō*). John the Baptist and Jesus began their public ministries by declaring that people should repent (Matt 3:2; 4:17). They used the imperative form of the word, which means they were issuing a command. Jesus denounced the cities that did not repent (Matt 11:20), which implies that they could repent but refused to do so. In his sermon at Pentecost, Peter identified Jesus as the crucified and risen Christ and commanded that people repent (Acts 2:38). In his sermon at Mars Hill, Paul declared that God "commands all people everywhere to repent" (Acts 17:30b). Repentance has been defined as "the acknowledgement and condemnation of one's own sins, coupled with a turning to God."[140] Kenneth Keathley identified genuine repentance of the whole person—mind, body, and will—in the story of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11–24). The younger son evidenced a change in his thinking (v. 17), his emotions (v. 19), and his will (v. 18).[141] Godly sorrow leads to repentance, which results in salvation (2 Cor 7:10). In the Old and New Testaments, people who repent of their sin and turn to God receive healing, restoration, and salvation.

A Biblical Theology of Faith/Believing

The word *faith* rarely appears in the Old Testament as a noun.[142] The primary word used is a verb translated "to believe" (*'mn*). For example, Abram *believed* the Lord, and the Lord considered Abram's response as righteousness (Gen 15:6). Also, when Judah was threatened with invasion, King Jehoshaphat led his people to seek the Lord and his help. The prophet Jahaziel declared they

would see the salvation of the Lord. Before the victory, the king told the people, "*Believe* in the LORD your God, and you will be established; *believe* in his prophets, and you will succeed" (2 Chron 20:20 CSB; emphasis added).[143] The people believed the Lord and the Lord delivered them. As a final example, upon hearing the prophet's warning that their great city would be overthrown in forty days, "the Ninevites *believed* God" (Jonah 3:5; emphasis added). Rather than referring to faith as a concept, Old Testament authors referred to people who believed, or trusted, God.

Believing in Jesus is a foundational concept in the New Testament. The concept of faith appears 243 times as a noun (*pistis*, "faith") and 241 times as a verb (*pistueō*, "to believe"). To have faith is to believe. In the New Testament, the Old Testament concept of believing God incorporates believing his Son. Jesus marveled at the faith of the centurion (Matt 8:10), saw the faith of the paralytic's friends (Matt 9:2; Mark 2:5), and told the bleeding woman that her faith made her well (Matt 9:22; Mark 5:34). Paul described the message he preached to both Jews and Greeks, "They must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus" (Acts 20:21). In John's Gospel, faith is never a noun (*pistis*, "faith") but always a verb (*pistueō*, "to believe"). The emphasis is striking because other biblical authors use both terms. John's exclusive use in his Gospel of the verb reveals a point that the author intended to make to his audience. John had no interest in mentioning faith or belief as a concept. However, John uses the verb "to believe" ninety-six times to emphasize the need for people to believe in Jesus.

The terms for belief can refer to knowledge or trust. Some people believe only in the sense that they know something to be true (knowledge). But mental assent *only* to theological truth will not save a person. Consider, as examples, that demons believe (*pisteuein*, "to believe") that there is one God (Jas 2:19), and demons addressed Jesus as Son of the Most High God (Mark 5:7). Those statements of theological truth were uttered by demons who were not and never will be saved. Salvation requires repenting of sin and believing Christ in the sense that one is personally entrusting themselves to Christ. Paul wrote that we are saved by grace through faith (Eph 2:8). Salvation is a gift of God that is received by faith or trusting in Christ. Keathley rightly stated, "Faith is the instrument by which we accept salvation."[144]

A Biblical Theology of Spiritual Death

Scripture reveals various metaphors for sinners who have not yet repented of their sin and trusted in Jesus for their salvation. They are referred to as sick (Matt 9:12), blind (Matt 15:14; 2 Cor 4:4), lovers of darkness (John 3:19), and dead (Luke 15:24; John 5:24; Eph 2:1). Some Christians misinterpret spiritual deadness to mean a person *cannot* repent of sin and believe in Jesus unless God first grants them faith. However, Scripture does not require that view.[145] Rather, such an interpretation says more than Scripture and is contrary to the plain meaning of several texts. Faith is the means of salvation.[146] To assert that God grants faith to only some people is to wrongly affirm that God desires only some people to believe in Jesus.[147]

Consider the metaphor of spiritual deadness. In the garden, Adam and Eve, who died spiritually when they ate the fruit, were able to hear from and respond to God (Gen 3:10–13). In the parable of the prodigal son, the spiritually dead person (the son) was able to return to his father (Luke 15:24). Like the two previous parables (vv. 7, 10), the son returning to the father depicts a sinner's repentance. The spiritually dead son was able to repent of his sin and return to his father. In John 5:24, a spiritually dead person is able to hear and believe in Jesus. In the story of the raising of Lazarus, Jesus raised his friend from *physical* death (John 11). As already noted, some Christians conflate the metaphor of being raised from *spiritual* death (Eph 2:1) with the story of Lazarus being raised from *literal* death. Ronnie W. Rogers noted, "I disaffirm that the technical meaning of being spiritually dead is adequately illustrated by using Lazarus or dead people in a cemetery, etc., in order to show that like them, the lost who are dead in sin cannot believe until they have been given life—regenerated. This picture is contrary to the panoply of Scripture. For example, Rom 10:9 says, 'If you confess . . . and believe in your heart' which no physically dead graveyard man can do, but a spiritually dead man, by the grace of God, can do."[148] Affirming that people are spiritually dead does not require a denial that sinners can repent and believe in Jesus.[149] In Scripture, spiritually dead people can and do respond to God.

Paul's remark in Acts 17:30 indicates who God commands to repent of sin. Paul declared, "In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent." The preaching of the apostles included the call to repent of sin and believe in Jesus to be saved (see Acts 2:38; 3:19; 8:22; 20:21; 26:20). The command to repent implies that people are *able* to repent. It would be unjust for God to command a task then judge people who could not comply for failing to do that which he commanded.[150] God, who desires the salvation of every person and commands every person to repent and believe in Jesus, draws every person to himself (John 12:32).

Baptist confessions affirm both the sinfulness of humanity as well as the ability of sinners to repent and believe in Jesus. Article 6 of the New Hampshire Confession (1833), titled "Of the Freeness of Salvation," stated, "Nothing prevents the salvation of the greatest sinner on earth except his own voluntary refusal to submit to the Lord Jesus Christ, which refusal will subject him to an aggravated condemnation."[151] Rather than describing people as unable to respond to God, the confession claimed that "nothing prevents" a sinner's salvation except the sinner's "voluntary refusal." According to "The Faith of Free Will Baptists" (2013), "the call of the Gospel is co-extensive with the atonement to all men, both by the word and strivings of the Spirit, so that salvation is rendered equally possible to all; and if any fail of eternal life, the fault is wholly his own."[152]

All Christians should affirm that sin separates them from the God whom Scripture declares to be "holy, holy, holy" (Rev 4:8). It was our sin combined with his love for us, the world, which resulted

in God giving his Son to die on the cross so that whoever believes in him will be saved (John 3:16; Rom 5:8). All Christians must also affirm that people are saved by God's grace through faith, not by their works (Eph 2:8–9). The doctrine of total depravity, however, affirms much more than the sinfulness of humanity and the grace of God. The doctrine of total depravity, when defined as total inability, insists that people respond to God in repentance and faith only *after* they are born again. In other words, people repent and believe *because* they are born again. A better interpretation of the Bible, however, is that people are saved from sin and reconciled to God when and *because* they repent of their sin and believe in Jesus (see Mark 1:15; Acts 3:19; 20:21; 16:31).

《 《 《 《 *FOOT NOTES* 》 》 》 》

[130] James Montgomery Boice and Philip Graham Ryken, *The Doctrines of Grace: Rediscovering the Evangelical Gospel* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2009), 30; italics in the original.

[131] Mark DeVine, "Total Depravity," in Barrett and Nettles, *Whomever* He *Wills*, 35 (see intro., n. 22).

[132] John Piper, *Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 1986), 50.

[133] Robert C. Sproul, *Chosen by God* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1986), 72.

[134] R. Albert Mohler Jr., "The Power of the Articulated Gospel," in *The Underestimated Gospel*, ed. Jonathan Leeman (Nashville: B&H, 2014), 19.

[135] Loraine Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination* (1932; repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960), 165.

[136] Thomas J. Nettles, *By His Grace and For His Glory: A Historical, Theological, and Practical Study of the Doctrines of Grace in Baptist Life* (Lake Charles, LA: Cor Meum Tibi, 2002), 289.

[137] Matthew Barrett, "The Scriptural Affirmation of Monergism," in Barrett and Nettles, *Whomever* He *Wills*, "Monergism," 124 (see intro., n. 22).

[138] For a comprehensive biblical theology of repentance, see Mark J. Boda, *"Return to Me": A Biblical Theology of Repentance*, New Studies in Biblical Theology, ed. D. A. Carson (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2015).

[139] Lesley DiFransico, "Repentance," in *Lexham Theological Wordbook*.

[140] Frank L. Cross and Elizabeth A. Livingstone, eds., *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 3rd ed. rev. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 1393.

[141] Kenneth Keathley, "The Work of God in Salvation," in *A Theology for the Church*, rev. ed., ed. Daniel L. Akin (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2014), 575–76.

[142] The word *faith* appears only four times in the Old Testament in the NASB (Deut 32:51; Job 39:12; Ps 146:6; Hab 2:4).

[143] In a clever wordplay in the Hebrew, the verb forms *haaminu* ("trust") and *theamenu* ("you will be safe") come from the same root verb, ʾ*mn* ("to believe"). *The NET Bible First Edition Notes* (n.p.: Biblical Studies, 2006), 2 Chron 20:20.

[144] Keathley, "God in Salvation," 577.

[145] See David L. Allen, "Does Regeneration Precede Faith?" *Journal for Baptist Theology & Ministry* 11, no. 2 (Fall 2014): 34–52.

[146] People are saved by grace *through* faith (Eph 2:8).

[147] For the case that God desires every person to be saved through faith in Jesus, see Allen, Hankins, and Harwood, *Anyone Can Be Saved*.

[148] Ronnie W. Rogers, *Reflections of a Disenchanted Calvinist: The Disquieting Realities of Calvinism* (Bloomington, IN: CrossBooks, 2012), 22.

[149] Rogers, 21; see also Rogers, *Does God Love All or Some? Comparing Biblical Extensivism and Calvinism's Exclusivism* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2019), 160–65.

[150] "If someone is going to be condemned because they personally failed to do something (in this case, to believe), then they must have been capable of doing it in the first place. Otherwise no guilt could attach to their action, and their condemnation would be unjust." John C. Lennox, *Determined to Believe? The Sovereignty of God, Freedom, Faith, and Human Responsibility* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018), 145.

[151] In 1853, J. Newton Brown added or changed the italicized portions: "Nothing prevents the salvation of the greatest sinner on earth *but* his own *inherent depravity and* voluntary *rejection of the gospel*, which *rejection involves him in* an aggravated condemnation." Though the 1853 edition mentions depravity, both editions indict the individual sinner for rejecting the gospel. See the New Hampshire Confession, art. 6, "Of the Freeness of Salvation," in Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, 363.

[152] "The Gospel Call," chap. 8 in "The Faith of Free Will Baptists," pt. 2 in *A Treatise of the Faith and Practices of the National Association of Free Will Baptists, Inc.* (Antioch, TN: National Association of Free Will Baptists, 2013), 10.

David L. Allen (Editor), Steve W Lemke (Editor), *Calvinism: A Biblical and Theological Critique* (Nashville, TN: B & H Academic, 2022), 41-47.