

The Sovereignty of God

In Salvation

Human Ability or Inability – What does the Bible say?

The bible makes it very clear that ***“no one is good, no not one.”*** Jesus said, ***“there is only one who is good, God.”*** It is no secret that from the earliest time in their lives people sin against God. An observant look at young children will tell us this. But the Word of God has confirmed it again and again. People are steeped in sin from birth (Ps 51:5). It is the natural state of mankind, that we are sinners, fallen short of God’s required standard (Rom 3:23, 5:12). Mankind fell into sin and darkness when Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit and transgressed against the Law of God (Original Sin). Because of this, Mankind’s rebellion corrupted his entire being, body and soul (mind, will, emotions). In fulfillment of God’s Word, they died, both spiritually and physically (the aging process began), they no longer had communion with God, no longer did we naturally understand the things of God or even have a desire to do so. Mankind is therefore described as ***“dead in transgressions and sins”*** (Eph 2:1, Col 2:13), in need of new life to be resurrected from the deadness of sin. ***The truth is, mankind neither pleases God nor seeks after God, and that in his natural state does not even 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

Examine the chart above very closely. Pay attention to the biblical words used to describe man’s condition.

Unable to See, Hear, or Understand

When the Bible speaks of man’s fallen nature, it speaks of man’s inability by using words like, ***“cannot.”*** It is not that man “will not”, but that he/she ***“cannot”*** see or hear or even understand

the Gospel. The Bible plainly declares that *mankind 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 - 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.**" NASB

A. unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God – Here Jesus states that unless one becomes “born again”, that is regenerated by God, he “cannot see the Kingdom of God.” The word “*cannot*” speaks of man’s ability, not his willingness.

2 Corinthians 4:3-4 - 3 And even if **our gospel is veiled**, it is veiled to those who are perishing, 4 in 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. NASB

This is also affirmed by Paul, in the passage above.

A. our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing – Here is a clear biblical statement about those who are not saved and their ability to see the Gospel. Paul clearly says the Gospel is veiled to them. The purpose of a veil is to keep one from seeing. This evil work is attributed to Satan(the god of this world in the next verse).

B. in 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 – Again he affirms his statement that the Gospel is veiled stating that their “*minds are blinded.*” This means that they cannot see(blinded) in the minds(understand), a typical biblical idiom to understanding. They cannot see with their minds because they are blinded by Satan. The “*light of the Gospel*” does not enlighten the mind of the unbeliever. Further, it is the Gospel of the “*glory of Christ*” to which they are blinded. They do not see the beauty and treasure of Christ, because they do not realize who He is or their need to be saved because they cannot see these things, they are without understanding apart from grace.

Likewise, in the passage below, Jesus makes it clear that mankind has an INABILITY TO HEAR His Word.

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

A. you cannot hear my word – Here Jesus makes a clear statement about the ability of the ungodly Pharisees to hear His words. He says they “cannot hear.” The word “*cannot*” speaks of man’s ability, not his willingness. He points out that they “*do not understand*”, because they “*cannot hear.*” This is a theme in the teaching of Jesus. In the passage below He tells His disciples that the reason they understand the Kingdom and others do not is because it only comes by divine enablement, saying they do not know because it has “*not been granted*” to them.

Matthew 13:10-13 - 10 And the disciples came and said to Him, "Why do You speak to them in parables?" 11 And 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.**" 12 "For 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. 13 "Therefore I speak to them in parables; **because while seeing they do not see, and while hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand.**" NASB

In the passage below, Paul makes it clear that mankind has an INABILITY TO UNDERSTAND.

1 Corinthians 2:14- 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. NAS

A. But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him - Here Paul makes it clear that in his natural state(this is in contrast to the spiritual man who has the Spirit, after regeneration, v-12, v-16), mankind “*does not accept the things of God*” because they are “*foolishness*” to him. His understanding is so corrupted that the idea of God, sin, being saved and reconciled are “*foolish*” ideas because his thinking is corrupted.

B. and he **cannot** understand them, because they are spiritually appraised – Here Paul describes why man’s thinking is corrupted, it is because he **“cannot understand the things of the Spirit of God.”** The word **“cannot”** speaks of man’s ability, not his willingness. Although because he is **unable** he is therefore also unwilling, as it states, he **“does not accept.”** This is because he does not have the Spirit (given at regeneration) by which he can **“appraise”** spiritual things.

Mankind is in rebellion against God and enslaved to sin

Paul makes it very clear that mankind is in a state of rebellion against God naturally. The Bible plainly declares that mankind is in **REBELLION AGAINST GOD**.

Romans 3:9-12, 18 - 9 What then? Are we better than they? Not at all; for we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin; 10 as it is written, **“There is none righteous, not even one; 11 There is none who understands, There is none who seeks for God; 12 All 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.”** NAS

A. There is none righteous, not even one; 11 There is none who understands, There is none who seeks for God; 12 All 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 several ways in relation to God....

- **None righteous**
- **None who understand**
- **None who seeks for God**
- **All have turned aside**
- **None who does good**
- **None who fear God**

He makes it very clear that this is not a general statement about most people, but twice he says, **“not even one.”** These are plain clear statements expressing mankind’s rebellion against God’s Sovereign authority, even going so far as to say that no one even seeks after God.

In the passage below, Paul describes mankind as prone to evil. Indeed unregenerate persons have an inability to submit to God and are therefore in rebellion against Him and have their minds set on the sinful nature.

Romans 8:5-8 - 5 For **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. 6 **For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, 7 because 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; 8 and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.** NASB

A. because 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 - The natural state of all men is in the **“flesh.”** This speaks of man’s “sinful nature” or his natural state of sin. Here it is clear that mankind is in rebellion against God by the words **“hostile toward God.”** Man has hostility toward God, this is rebellion against God’s Sovereign authority. Paul makes this even clearer when he states that the flesh **“does not subject itself to the Law of God.”** Instead of submission it is rebellion. Further this is because of his inability, stating plainly that the flesh is **“not even able to do so.”** **“Able”** speaks of ability not willingness.

B. and those who are in the flesh cannot please God – Paul further clarifies this rebellion by stating that the flesh has an inability to please God. He states, that “those in the flesh”, that is (“not born again”), **“cannot please God.”** The word **“cannot”** speaks of ability not willingness.

The Bible plainly declares that mankind is **ENSLAVED TO SIN**, their hearts being deceitful and desperately wicked(Jer 17:9). This is to say that Man’s will is **“bound to sin”** and naturally

prone to evil because he is in the flesh. Sin is a willful transgression of the Law, therefore when man sins, he does so willingly. This speaks of man's will, his choices about his moral conduct.

In the passages below it is clear that man's will is not free but instead in "bondage to sin."

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

Romans 6:6 - 6 knowing 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;** NASB

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

Titus 3:3-5 - 3 For 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. 4 But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, 5 He 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.** NASB

This idea is further clarified in passages that state that **"no one does good"** of his own. Until one is cleansed by the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit, they are simply **unable** to please God in any sense, being slaves to sin.

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

Isaiah 64:6 - 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. NASB

Romans 14:23 says, **"Whatever is not from faith is sin."**

It is clear therefore that the natural person, apart from the regeneration of the Holy Spirit (being born again), abides in a sinful and rebellious state in relation to the Holy God, and is therefore **"by nature, an object of God's wrath."**

Ephesians 2:3 - 3 Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and **were by nature children of wrath,** even as the rest. NASB

Having pointed these things out, consider the chart below. Does it seem true that man is "naturally able" to understand the Gospel apart from divine grace? And if man "cannot understand" the Gospel, how then can he believe it?

Semi-Pelagian		Augustinian	
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 fact remains that divine grace is necessary for man to understand and believe the Gospel. This is called regeneration. We will discuss this at length below.

A couple of supporting statements clarifies for us an Augustinian view of Salvation.

Westminster Confession of Faith - Of Free Will

3. Man, by his Fall into a state of sin, hath wholly lost all ability of will to any spiritual good accompanying salvation; so as a natural man, being altogether averse from that good, and dead in sin, is not able, by his own strength, to convert himself, or to prepare himself thereunto.

Synod of Dort - ARTICLE 3

Therefore all men are conceived in sin, and are 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

Not sick, but Dead

Consider how the Bible describes the radical corruption of sin in mankind. It clearly describes he/she as corrupted in their whole being. Mankind is not good, cannot do good, hates the light of God's truth, drinks in sin like water, has both a defiled conscience and mind, and cannot please God or subject himself to the law of God.

Romans 7:18 - 18 For I know **that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh**; for the wishing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not. NASB

Isaiah 64:6 - 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. NASB

Job 15:14-16 - 14 "What is man, that he should be pure, Or he who is born of a woman, that he should be righteous? 15 "Behold, He puts no trust in His holy ones, And the heavens are not pure in His sight;

16 **How much less one who is detestable and corrupt, Man, who drinks iniquity like water!** NASB

John 3:19-20 - 19 "And this is the judgment, that the light is come into the world, and **men loved the darkness rather than the light; for their deeds were evil. 20 "For everyone who does evil hates the light**, and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. NASB

Titus 1:15 - 15 To the pure, all things are pure; but to **those who are defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure, but both their mind and their conscience are defiled.** NASB

Romans 8:7-8 - 7 because **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; 8 and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.**

Sin has so corrupted the nature of mankind that he has a **"natural inability"** as we have pointed out. It is not that he has been seriously hurt in the battle with sin, but has been slain by it, mortally wounded, killed. When the Bible describes the state of man's natural condition, it uses imagery that shows man's complete inability to respond to anything apart from a divine working of new life. The **Bible plainly declares** that mankind is **"dead in transgressions and sins"** and wholly unable to respond to spiritual things.

Colossians 2:13 - 13 And when **you were dead in your transgressions** and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, NASB

Ephesians 2:1-2 - 1 And **you were dead in your trespasses and sins**, 2 in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. NASB

A. you were dead in your trespasses and sins – Here is the former state of the Christian believer – DEAD! And that, in **"transgression and sins!"** This is a theme in the teaching of the Lord Jesus who frequently refers to unbelievers as "dead" and in desperate need of regeneration. This is the reason for the great need of REGENERATION, without which **"no one can SEE the kingdom of God."** (John 3:3-6, John 6:65) Here is seen the consequence of sin and transgression, DEATH! Not that they were physically dead, but in that wretched state of spiritual death which rendered them helpless to hear or understand the things of God and His kingdom (1 Cor 2:14, Rom 8:5-8). Here is the definitive statement in the bible on depravity or natural inability.

John 5:21-24 - 21 "For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so **the Son also gives life to whom He wishes.** 22 "For not even the Father judges anyone, but He has given all judgment to the Son, 23 in order that all may honor the Son, even as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him. 24 "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but **has passed out of death into life.** NASB

Matt 8:22 - 22 But Jesus said to him, "Follow Me; and **allow the dead to bury their own dead.**" NASB

Luke 15:24 - 24 for **this son of mine was dead**, and has come to life again; , 32'But we had to be merry and rejoice, for **this brother of yours was dead and has begun to live**, and was lost and has been found.' "

1 John 3:14 - 14 We know that we have **passed out of death into life**, because we love the brethren. He who does not love abides in death. NASB

Consider how this image of a dead person corresponds to our sinful state apart from regeneration by the Holy Spirit. A dead person cannot see, hear, move, talk, think, understand, or respond to any kind of stimulus in any way. They are wholly unresponsive and unable to change.

John 11:43-44 - 43 And when He had said these things, **He cried out with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come forth."** 44 **He who had died came forth**, bound hand and foot with wrappings; and his face was wrapped around with a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go." NASB
Romans 5:6 - 6 For **while we were still helpless**, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. NASB
Jeremiah 13:23 - 3 **"Can the Ethiopian change his skin Or the leopard his spots?"** Then you also can do good, Who are accustomed to doing evil. NASB

Consider the statement of Albert Barnes on man's dead condition....

"A corpse is insensible. It sees not, and hears not, and feels not. The sound of music, and the voice of friendship and of alarm, do not arouse it. The rose and the lily breath forth their fragrance around it, but the corpse perceives it not. The world is busy and active around it, but it is unconscious of it all. It sees no beauty in the landscape; hears not the voice of a friend; looks not upon the glorious sun and stars; and is unaffected by the running stream and the rolling ocean. So with the sinner in regard to the spiritual and eternal world, he sees no beauty in religion; he hears not the call of God; he is unaffected by the dying love of the Saviour; and he has no interest in eternal realities. In all these he feels no more concern, and sees no more beauty, than a dead man does in the world around him. Such is, in fact, the condition of a sinful world. There is, indeed, life and energy and motion. There are vast plans and projects, and the world is intensely active. But, in regard to religion, all is dead. The sinner sees no beauty there; and no human power can arouse him to act for God, any more than human power can rouse the sleeping dead, or open the sightless eye-balls on the light of day. The same power is needed in the conversion of a sinner which is needed in raising the dead; and one and the other alike demonstrate the omnipotence of him who can do it."

Plainly stated mankind is dead and in need of new life. Therefore in order for our sinful state to be corrected, we must resurrected from the dead, something which is obviously attributed only to God. The **Bible plainly declares** that salvation is a resurrecting work, accomplished wholly by the **"monergistic"** work of God, whereby God infuses life into the dead and regenerates them granting them spiritual life.

Ephesians 2:5 - 5 even when we were dead in our transgressions, **made us alive together with Christ** (by grace you have been saved), NASB

John 5:21 - 21 "For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so **the Son also gives life to whom He wishes**." NASB

Therefore, when the Bible describes our salvation, it attributes the saving process wholly to the work of God, and speaks about the inability of man to even come to Christ apart from divine grace, and the impossibility of mankind being saved apart from God's saving work of regeneration.

John 6:44,65 - 44 **"No one can come to Me, unless the Father who sent Me draws him;** and I will raise him up on the last day, 65 And He was saying, "For this reason I have said to you, **that no one can come to Me, unless it has been granted him from the Father."** NASB

Matthew 19:23-26 - 23 And Jesus said to His disciples, "Truly I say to you, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. 24 "And again I say to you, **it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."** 25 And when the disciples heard this, they were very astonished and said, "Then who can be saved?" 26 And looking upon them Jesus said to them, **"With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."** NASB

Titus 3:5 - 5 He 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**, NASB

Furthermore, when the Bible describes our salvation, it attributes the saving process wholly to the work of God, and speaks about God's divine enablement as a **"monergistic"** work.

Deuteronomy 30:6 - 6 Moreover the **LORD your God will circumcise your heart** and the heart of your descendants, to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, in order that you may live. NASB

Ezekiel 36:26-27 - 26 "Moreover, **I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you;** and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. 27 "And I will put My Spirit within you and **cause you to walk in My statutes**, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances. NASB

1 Peter 1:3 - 3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy **has caused us to be born again** to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,

Matthew 11:27 - 27 "All things have been handed over to Me by My Father; and no one knows the Son, except the Father; **nor does anyone know the Father, except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him.**

John 3:27 - 27 John answered and said, **"A man can receive nothing, unless it has been given him from heaven."** NASB