

Neo-Calvinism vs. the Bible 017

Acts 17:27

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Dr. Andy Woods

Let's take our Bibles and open them to Acts 10. We are continuing our study on "Neo-Calvinism vs. the Bible," having already looked at, in this series, a number of preliminary issues.

Neo-Calvinism vs. the Bible

- I. Calvinism's Mixed Blessing
- II. Why Critique Calvinism?
- III. The Source of Calvin's Theology
- IV. Calvin's Manner of Life
- V. TULIP Through the Grid of Scripture**
- VI. Conclusion

We are now focused on the Calvinistic grid TULIP and running that through the grid of Scripture.

V. Running TULIP Through the Grid of Scripture

- A. Total Depravity
- B. Unconditional Election
- C. Limited Atonement
- D. Irresistible Grace
- E. Perseverance of the Saints

The "T" in TULIP stands for Total Depravity, which is the starting point in the Calvinistic system.

A. Total Depravity

- 1. The starting point
- 2. Total Depravity properly defined
- 3. Calvinism: Total Depravity = inability
- 4. Calvinism's overstatement of Total Depravity**

Total Depravity meaning "inability"—that is how Calvinism today is defining total depravity: inability to believe, inability to seek God. Then if you believe what the Calvinists are saying about Total Depravity, the rest of their system falls into place. But I do not think that they have this initial assumption correct, as we are trying to expose here.

So what is total depravity? We have tried to define it correctly. It is the idea that all of my being has been contaminated by sin. That is what "total" means. It is also the idea that in my fallen state, I cannot do anything to merit God's favor. It does not mean that I cannot

respond to God, and it does not mean that I have indulged every sin that can be indulged.

But what we are seeing in Calvinism, particularly Neo-Calvinism, is that according to Total Depravity, you are like a rock in an insensate state. You cannot respond to God any more than an inanimate object could. So God does some kind of work on the front end. He regenerates people so that they can believe.

So Calvinists put regeneration before faith—God imparts to some the gift of faith because they cannot believe on their own. The only people that receive those things are the small fraction of humanity deemed the elect. That is essentially what Calvinists mean by "depravity." To understand it, just substitute the word "inability."

With number 4 we started to look at why Calvinism's Total Depravity is an overstatement of what the Bible teaches.

4. Calvinism's Overstatement of Total Depravity

- a) Confusion over intensity vs. extent (Gen. 3:22; Matt. 7:7-11; Rom. 2:14-15)
- b) Operates contrary to man's design
- c) Mis-defines "death" (Eph. 2:1) as non-existence rather than separation
- d) **Underestimates what lost man can do**

Last week we talked about death. Death does not mean what Calvinists say it means. It does not mean nonexistence. It means separation. A spiritual being that does not exist cannot respond to God, but a spiritual being separated from God can respond to God. That is why the discussion of the "death" in Ephesians 2:1 is a big deal.

We are moving down to letter "d," hopefully to finish it today, and to finish Total Depravity today. (So after today we will no longer be totally depraved, Lord willing.) Calvinism, in Total Depravity, grossly underestimates what a lost person can do. Let's see if we can unpack that.

d) Calvinism Underestimates What Lost Man Can Do

- 1) **Lost man can seek God (John 16:7-11; Acts 10-11)**
- 2) Lost man can hear from God (Acts 10:30-32, 44-48; 11:14)
- 3) Lost man can reason (Matt. 21:23-27)
- 4) Lost man can believe (exercise faith) in God (John 3:18)

Here are four things, amplifying that underestimation. Lost people, believe it or not, can seek God. Calvinism says "No." I will show you the verse they use in just a second. But this is just a matter of reading through the Bible. You know Matthew 2:1-2, the magi coming from Babylon, seeking the Christ-child at the birth of Jesus Christ. This was on all our Christmas cards in some way, shape, or form: *"We have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him"* (Matthew 2:2, NKJV).

These are lost people—the wise men. (I like what the card says at the bottom: "Wise Men

Still Seek Him.") If a lost person cannot seek God, what in the world do you do with the magi there in Matthew 2:1-2? It looks as though they are seeking God, following a star coming from a place of infamy: Babylon.

Probably the ultimate example you could use in the Bible of a lost person seeking God is the example we have been studying recently on Wednesday evenings: the example of Cornelius. Now, keep in mind that Cornelius in Acts 10 is unsaved, because when Peter recounts the story to the Jerusalem church in Acts 11:14, he says this (quoting God speaking to Cornelius about Peter coming):

""and he will speak words to you by which you [Cornelius] will be saved, you and all your household"" (Acts 11:14).

Therefore, in Acts 10:1-2, Cornelius was unsaved. Yet what was the man doing? He was seeking God. It says in Acts 10:1,

"Now there was a man at Caesarea named Cornelius, a centurion of what was called the Italian cohort, a devout man"¹—

So you can be devout as an unsaved person.

—"and one who feared God with all his household,"²—

So you can be the spiritual leader of your home, fearing God as an unsaved person.

—"and gave many alms to the Jewish people"³—

You could be pro-Israel as an unsaved person!

"and prayed to God continually" (Acts 10:1-2).

You can actually be a person of prayer as an unsaved person. Cornelius here was unsaved. When you look at the example of Cornelius, you see him doing a lot of things here as an unsaved person that Calvinism is saying he has the inability to do.

Acts 10:22 says,

"They said, 'Cornelius, a centurion, a righteous man and God-fearing man well spoken of by the entire nation of the Jews, was divinely directed by a holy angel to send for you to come to his house and hear a message from you'" (Acts 10:22).

This is God speaking to an unsaved person. So unsaved people have the ability to hear from God, apparently. That does not mean they are saved yet.

¹ Acts 10:1-2.

² Acts 10:2.

³ Acts 10:2.

Notice Acts 10:30-32.

"Cornelius said, 'Four days ago to this hour, I was praying in my house during the ninth hour; and behold, a man stood before me in shining garments, and he said, "Cornelius, your prayer has been heard and your alms have been remembered before God'" (Acts 10:30-31).

Wow! God can actually answer the prayer of an unsaved person. To me, this is kind of revolutionary, because I was always taught that unsaved people cannot seek God, that God does not hear the prayers of unsaved people. But I am reading in my Bible the exact opposite. An unsaved person can receive instruction from God—

""Therefore send to Joppa and invite Simon, who is also called Peter, to come to you; he is staying at the house of Simon the tanner by the sea"" (Acts 10:32).

Drop down to Acts 10:34-35.

*"Opening his mouth, Peter said:
'I most certainly understand now that God is not one to show partiality, but in every nation the man who fears Him and does what is right is welcome to Him'" (Acts 10:34-35).*

These are all statements that are being said to or about a man who is not yet regenerated. Cornelius does not yet have the Holy Spirit inside him. So you can see with the Calvinistic doctrine of depravity, meaning inability when it comes to spiritual things, they are dramatically overstating the actual facts of the biblical text.

When you develop a theology, you do not want to read your theology into the Bible. A theology is only as good as the biblical text it comes from. If you find at points that your theology is contradicted by the biblical text, you do not ignore those texts, which is what most people do when they fall in love with the system. You do not rewrite those texts. The text says what it says. God cannot lie. You want to readjust your theology according to the facts of the biblical text.

I have used this example before: It is like dealing with someone who is really good in forensics and criminal investigative type of work. They will tell you that they try not to develop a theory on who the bad guy is until all of the evidence comes in. The problem with developing your theory on who the bad guy is too early is that there is a temptation to manipulate the facts to fit your pre-ordained conclusion. That is how innocent people suffer. That is not what you do in forensics work. You try to let the facts speak for themselves, and from those facts, then develop your position on who the bad guy is.

It is the same thing in Bible reading and theology, as you are going through the biblical text, and you are seeing things that contradict what your system of theology used to tell you. This was big for me in leaving four-point Calvinism. You do not hold onto your theology tenaciously and rewrite the Bible. You readjust your theology. So this is how the Lord took me from being a five-point Calvinist, to a four-point Calvinist, to a three-and-a-half-point Calvinist, etc., etc.

Notice Acts 17: Paul on Mars Hill. Notice what Paul says in Acts 17:22-23, of unsaved people trying to seek God.

"So Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, 'Men of Athens, I observe that you are very religious in all respects. For while I was passing through and examining the objects of your worship, I also found an altar with this inscription, "TO AN UNKNOWN God." Therefore what you worship in ignorance, this I proclaim to you'" (Acts 17:22-23).

So, in Athens, there was evidence of a culture that actually tried to seek God. In this case, their seeking led the wrong direction. They were trying to come up with some explanation as to who God is. Acts 17:28 says,

"for in Him we live and move and exist, as even some of your poets have said, "For we also are His children"" (Acts 17:28).

There was evidence in Athens of people trying to seek God. There was an altar, Paul pointed out, to an unknown God. There was evidence in their thinking that God existed—in their poets. The seeking process was on. But in this case they were moving in the wrong direction. And Paul says, "Let me tell you the truth of who God is, whom you are seeking."

Acts 17 shows you that lost people can do a lot more than just be an inanimate object. They can do an awful lot on the front end, in terms of trying to discover what the truth is. Sometimes their motives are pure; sometimes they are not. Paul says this in Acts 17:26-27, in Athens,

"and He made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation," (Acts 17:26).

In other words, God set up nations, and with nations come boundaries. We might translate that as "borders." That is one of the great debates going on right now in the United States of America: are we going to have enforceable borders as a country or not? I would say that it is biblical to have enforceable borders, because God, post Tower of Babel, set things up that way. It is an insulation against globalism, or one-world government, which, as we know from the Tower of Babel, leads in the direction of totalitarianism.

God wants humanity ordered, not according to global governance, but according to different nation states with enforceable borders. Why did God do it that way? The answer is in Acts 17:27—

"that they would seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us" (Acts 17:27).

So if a lost person cannot seek God, why does Acts 17:27 tell us that God gave us borders and nations and peoples, so that they could live within their habitat, and that they would seek God? It is so interesting to hear Calvinists, all the time, quote Romans 3:11, which we are going to handle in a minute. Calvinists insist that people do not seek God—people

do not seek God—people do not seek God—people are inanimate objects—they are rocks—they have an inability to respond to God—no one seeks God.

But there it is in Acts 17:27: God ordered the nations the way he did so that they, the great mass of unsaved humanity, would seek God. Acts 17:27 is just another verse that jumped out to me, moving me away from being a four-point Calvinist. Because I'd had Romans 3:11 rammed down my throat so frequently, I really did not even take note that Acts 17:27 was in the Scripture. Yet there it is, as plain as day.

So if I have a theology that says that no one can seek God, and I am reading Acts 17:27, which says that God ordered the nations so that people would seek Him, I have a choice. I could either pretend that verse is not there—rewrite the verse—marginalize the verse—or I can readjust my theology. I decided, in my case, to readjust my theology, because God's Word is true one hundred percent of the time. My interpretations of it are not perfect, but His plain Word is perfect one hundred percent of the time.

People are seeking God all the time, contrary to what you hear in Calvinism. Now, unfortunately, a lot of people take the obvious knowledge of God and do not let it take them to the next logical conclusion: that there is a force, or Being, higher than them that they are accountable to—a Being that created everything, that they are accountable to. People unfortunately take the plain knowledge of God and they suppress it. That is where they get into trouble.

It is not that they do not have an ability to seek God. It is that they make a decision to take the obvious knowledge of God and say to themselves, "You know, I like being God myself. So any knowledge of God that is out there, I am going to suppress." There is the problem. It has to do with the will to suppress. It has nothing to do with inability to seek God. And this is what Paul is saying in Romans 1:18 and following.

"For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness,"
(Romans 1:18).

Notice that Romans 1:18 does not say, "men who have an inability to comprehend righteousness." The verse does not say that at all. The problem with people is not inability. The problem with people is a decision that they have made to suppress the obvious: *"...men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness,"* (Romans 1:18).

Why is it a suppression?

"because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse" (Romans 1:19-20).

Paul could not say that men *"are without excuse"* (Romans 1:20) if they do not have an ability to seek God. If you do not have any ability to seek God, you cannot say that someone is without excuse. The reason men are without excuse is that they do have an

ability to seek God. They do have an ability to understand God, just as Cornelius did. But they take the obvious revelation of God in Creation and they make a decision to suppress it. There is nothing in Romans 1:18-20 about inability. It has to do with volition.

Now, in any Calvinistic discussion you get into with Calvinists, eventually they are going to quote Romans 3:11. It is practically their favorite verse. I mean, if you get a Calvinistic Christmas card, you do not get Matthew 2 on the card. You get Romans 3:11. It says,

*"THERE IS NONE WHO UNDERSTANDS,
THERE IS NONE WHO SEEKS FOR GOD"* (Romans 3:11).

So how in the world would my understanding that people can seek God be harmonized with Romans 3:11, that says that no one can seek God? Well, here is how I harmonize it:

Man, if left completely to his own devices, probably would make decisions against God all the time. If you leave fallen man alone in his natural state, in his natural habitat, and you do not put any pressure on him at all, then probably what would happen is that one hundred percent of the people would not seek God, because our nature is hostile to God—in the first Adam.

However, even though Romans 3:11 is talking about man in his natural state, without any (what I would call) grace pressures on him, God consistently applies grace pressure to people every single day of their lives—lost people—giving them the grace necessary to seek God. So Romans 3:11 is spoken, assuming what man is like without the grace pressure. But the truth of the matter is, we know that the grace pressure exists.

So I do not think that Paul is making a statement in Romans 3:11 of all people with the grace pressure on. Romans 3:11 is making a statement of what people are like without any prevenient grace that God gives. So what is God doing in the hearts and lives of unsaved people, constantly, to help compensate for man's basic inclination not to seek God? What is God doing? I have about four or five things.

1. Right now, as I speak, God is drawing all men to himself. This is how God is overcoming. Romans 3:11 is made in a vacuum, without factoring in all of these other grace pressures that I am about to show you. Because right now the Lord is drawing all people to Himself: John 12:32. *"And I, if I am lifted up from the earth," Jesus says, "will draw all men to Myself"* (John 12:32).

This is one of the problems that I am having with the church marketing movement. "Boy, we want to come into your church and we want to do a survey. How much of this demographic group is represented in your church? How much of this age group is represented in your church? How much of this ethnic group is represented in your church? I think that whole excursion is a total waste of time. All you have to do is hold up the Cross of Jesus Christ.

If the Cross of Jesus Christ is held up. Jesus will draw all people—regardless of demography, or ethnicity, or language-speaking background—to Himself. So rather than focus on how many racial groups you have in your church, why don't we just focus on lifting up the Cross of Christ? The Holy Spirit is already drawing all men to Himself.

John 12:32 does not say, "all Americans." It does not say "all white people," "all Hispanic people," or "all Asian people." It says, "all people." John 12:32 is a very important verse. When we get to John 6:44-45 in this discussion, I will bring John 12:32 up again. John 6:44, which the Calvinists quote constantly, says, "No man can come to Me unless he be drawn" (John 6:44, paraphrase). Calvinists love that verse.

But if you understand John 6(44) in light of John 12(32), "draw" is the same Greek word. By the way, the drawing is not for some. It is not just to the elect; it is to the whole world. This is how God, right now, in one way is overcoming the natural propensity in people to want to be Gods themselves, and not seek God. God is now overcoming that by drawing all men to Himself. Jesus Himself said that in John 12:32.

2. Now, that is not all. As we have mentioned in this course several times, the Spirit of God is at work in the unsaved world, convicting (which means persuading) people, of sin, because they do not believe; righteousness, because they do not have the transferred righteousness of Christ; and judgment, because Satan has already been judged and this world system is going down—don't go down with a sinking ship (John 16:7-11).

Already right now, whether people go to church, or do not go to church; read a Bible, or do not read a Bible; listen to Christian radio, or do not listen to Christian radio;—already the Holy Spirit is at work convicting—not just "the elect," but "the world" (John 16:8) of those three things (sin, righteousness, and judgment). So when you evangelize the lost, those are the three things to focus on, as we have mentioned, because that is what unsaved people are already under divine grace pressure to receive.

You focus on how they do not believe in Christ and that they need to believe in Christ. You focus on that they need the transferred righteousness of Christ, because their self-righteousness is not going to get them very far with God. And then you talk about how if they die in their condition, then they are going down with a sinking ship, because Satan is already going down: he has already been condemned.

We have gone over John 16:7-11 so many times—I will not belabor it, but just read it. It says,

"But I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you. And He, when He comes,"⁴

—the Helper, the Paraclete, the one who comes alongside to assist, the Holy Spirit—

⁴ John 16:7-8.

"will convict the" elect—no—"world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment; concerning sin, because they do not believe in Me; concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father and you no longer see Me; and concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world has been judged" (John 16:7-11).

So, this is something else that God is doing to compensate for the natural inclination of people not to seek God. God is applying grace pressure. He is doing it through the Holy Spirit—John 16:7-11. And He is doing it through the promise of Jesus that if the Cross of Christ is lifted up, He will draw all men to Himself (John 12:32).

3. Then God is doing a third thing through His Word. He is sending out His Word all over the world—through missionaries, evangelists, and even what we are doing here—our study in the Word of God is being heard by people that you will never meet. And the Word of God has power. The Word of God can overcome what is stated in Romans 3:11. The Word of God can overcome the natural inclination in people not to seek God.

The prophet Isaiah spoke of the power of the Word of God. He said,

*"For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven,
And do not return there without watering the earth
And making it bear and sprout,
And furnishing seed to the sower and bread to the eater;
So will My word be which goes forth from My mouth;
It will not return to Me empty,
Without accomplishing what I desire,
And without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it"* (Isaiah 55:10-11).

Look at that promise. If you are a preacher, a teacher of the Word of God, you have to stand on this, because a lot of times you will be doing your thing and you will not think anything is happening in people because you cannot see the heart. So you have to stand on the promise that when God's Word is faithfully proclaimed, He is using it some way, somehow, in people, even in unsaved people.

*"So will My word be which goes forth from My mouth;
It will not return to Me empty,
Without accomplishing what I desire,
And without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it"* (Isaiah 55:11).

That is the nature of the Word. So here at Sugar Land Bible Church, our teaching philosophy is not to get into the pulpit and be creative. It is not about jokes and stories and illustrations and emotions and the liver quiver of the day. It is about faithfulness to the Word of God when appropriate, applying what the Word says to the needs of the people—and then stepping back and letting God do what He wants to do.

Now, being on the internet and getting emails from people, which are very, very encouraging (most of them: ninety-nine percent of them are very encouraging)—"This happened through that sermon because you taught 'x,' etc.,"—you can clearly see in this electronic world, evidence of how God is using His Word through this church all over the world.

This church does not have some kind of corner on God. This could be for any church. It is just that sometimes the messenger gets in the way of the message. You know, it is about the person's style or the person's hairdo or, "Oh, the pastor got a new suit. And look at that tie!"—and, you know, things like that. And who cares? That is not what it is about. It is about the word letting the Word do its work.

The Word of God had a huge effect on Timothy pre-salvation. Did you know that? It was fed to him from infancy by his grandmother and his mother. Paul talks about how the Word did its work in his life and how he eventually became saved. The work of the Word in terms of bringing people to salvation can happen in anybody, if people do not suppress what is obvious. If you want to make a decision to suppress the obvious, now you have a problem. But if a person is sincere and open, responding to grace pressure, salvation can occur in any heart.

It says in 2 Timothy 3:15, *"and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings"*—Now what writings would those be? They are the Bible, probably not the New Testament, because the New Testament was just being compiled at this point. And certainly Timothy, as an infant, did not have the New Testament.

There are people like Andy Stanley, the son of the legendary preacher Charles Stanley whom I always appreciated and liked (not in every little area, but I generally liked him). But his son has completely gone off the deep end. He says things like, "We need to unhitch ourselves as Christians from the Old Testament." Now what Testament were Lois and Eunice using to lead Timothy to Christ? It was the Old Testament.

Acts 17:6 says,

"These men who have upset the world have come here also;" (Acts 17:6).

"These men, the apostles, have turned the world upside down" (Acts 17:6, paraphrase) in the Book of Acts, which we are studying on Wednesday evenings. Let me just ask you a question. When the apostles turned the world upside down, what Testament were they using? They were obviously using what we today call Old Testament. They called it Hebrew Bible.

So this is not a time in church history to unhitch ourselves from the Old Testament. It is a time to study the whole Bible: the Bible, the whole Bible, and nothing but the Bible. Can I get an amen on that? My wife was raised in a really good Christian denomination, the Grace Brethren movement. That was their slogan: the Bible, the whole Bible, and nothing but the Bible. And I think we ought to just adopt that here.

Second Timothy 3:15 says,

"and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus" (2 Timothy 3:15).

That is the power of the Word. That is what Peter was bringing to Cornelius, who wanted the truth because he was a God-seeker. Why was Cornelius a God-seeker? Because God was applying on his fallen heart grace pressure, constantly: grace pressure through drawing all men to Himself; grace pressure through the Holy Spirit's conviction; grace pressure through the constant proclamation of the Word of God.

Did you know that the devil himself can teach the Bible? (And apparently he knows the Bible.) And if he does it accurately, people can get saved. Now, that may not be his intention, but that could happen, because it is not about the messenger, right? It is about the Word—the work of the Word—the power of the Word. Second Timothy 3:16-17 says,

"All Scripture is inspired by God [theopneustos (θεόπνευστος)]..." (2 Timothy 3:16).

The Greek for "inspired by God" is a hapax legomenon, meaning that it is a word used only once in the whole Greek New Testament. "Theopneustos" [θεόπνευστος] means "God-breathed"—"God's breath."

"All Scripture is inspired by God [theopneustos (θεόπνευστος)]..." (2 Timothy 3:16).

"You mean, Lord, even Genesis 49:13-18, which I am going to try to lead people through to today? Even that verse? Because I am trying to prepare for this study coming later. And I am saying to myself, "How are people going to enjoy this—appreciate it—see it as relevant—because Genesis 49:13-18 is so foreign?"

So I have to stand as a Bible teacher on these verses and just trust the Lord, that He knows what He is doing: "Just be faithful to what it says and I will apply it as it needs to be applied."

"All Scripture is inspired by God [theopneustos (θεόπνευστος)] and profitable"—even Genesis 49—"for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

That would be grace pressure number 3.

4. Grace pressure number 4 on the Romans 3:11 heart is the gospel itself. The gospel itself has power. When you hear the gospel, you are hearing something that is obviously completely out of this world's way of thinking. You are not hearing about self-righteousness—trying harder—you are hearing about how Jesus did the whole thing 2,000 years ago, and He offers it to you as a gift.

When people hear that message, it has incredible potency and power, because they

cannot get that kind of message anywhere else. It only can come from God and His Word. So Paul was not ashamed of the gospel. He says in Romans 1:16,

"I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power"⁵—

"Power" is the Greek word "dunamis" [δύναμις], where we get the words "dynamite" and "dynamic."

—"of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek" (Romans 1:16).

That is grace pressure number 4.

The Grace Pressures:

1. Christ's pressure to the Romans 3:11 heart: God is drawing all men to Himself (John 12:32).
2. The Holy Spirit is convicting the world (John 16:7-11).
3. The Word of God, which does not return empty (Isaiah 55:10-11; Acts 17:6; 2 Timothy 3:15-17).
4. The proclamation of the gospel, which is the power of God unto salvation (Romans 1:16).
5. Creation itself (Romans 1:18-20).

"For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them" (Romans 1:18-19).

It is obvious that God exists. He "made it evident to them" (Romans 1:19).

"For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that men are without excuse" (Romans 1:20).

So the fifth grace pressure that people have is Creation itself. It is obvious God exists—look at Creation. Romans 1 says that.

Psalms 19 is a great verse on the grace pressure of Creation. Psalm 19:1-4 says,

*"The heavens are telling of the glory of God;
And their expanse is declaring the work of His hands.
Day to day pours forth what speech,
And night to night reveals knowledge.
There is no speech, nor are there words;
Their voice is not heard.
Their line has gone out" to the elect—no—"through all the earth,
And their utterances to the end of the world.*

⁵ Romans 1:16.

In them He has placed a tent for the sun," (Psalm 19:1-4).

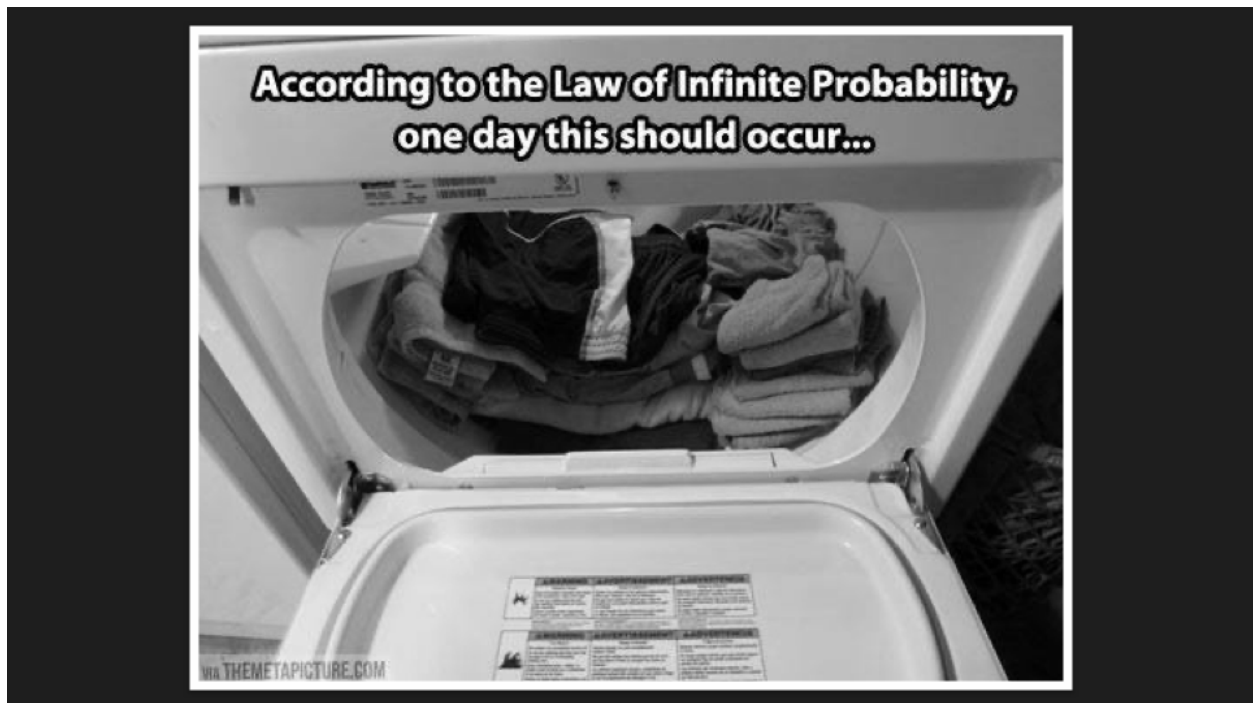
So every single day of people's lives, with their Romans 3:11 verse heart not seeking God, God is preaching sermons to them. Did you know that? "Yeah, but pastor, they do not come to church." Who cares? "Yeah, but pastor, they do not read their Bible." Who cares? "Yeah, but pastor, they have not gone through the Bible Memory program." "They do not know this verse or that verse." "They would not know Genesis from Revelation." Who cares? Every single day is a sermon where God is talking to them through what He has made.

It is very obvious that God exists because of the intricately designed world that we are living in. The fact that no two snowflakes are exactly the same when examined under a microscope testifies to God's existence. The fact that no two fingerprints of all of the billions of people that have lived in human history are exactly the same testifies to God's existence.

The fact that right now we are hurtling through the through space at some astronomical speed as we are rotating around the sun in our heliocentric solar system, and we are not so close to the sun that we burn up, and we are not so far from the sun that we freeze to death, testifies to God's existence. Even this last week, we did not freeze to death. Did you notice? We are orbiting at exactly the right distance to sustain life.

And you have the audacity to tell me that all of these things came about coincidentally? I mean, there is an obvious order and design to the universe, meaning that God exists. And every single day when people wake up in the middle of the night and look at their stomach as it is going up and down as they are breathing—every single activity that you do: you hear something, or you see something—the details of the human eye, the details of the human ear—what is God doing in all of that? He is putting pressure on the Romans 3:11 heart through sermons that He is giving just through Creation.

So you go to get your clothes out of the dryer, and it looks just like that.



You open your dryer and your clothes are all arranged, and you do not say, "Well, that is really neat how everything worked its way out." You would obviously think that someone got in there before you and folded your clothes. So if we can come to that obvious conclusion of a designer, how in the world can people look at what is all around us and deny the existence of God? Well, because they have made a decision to suppress it: to suppress the obvious.

It is not that they do not have an ability to see it. They do, but they do not want to take it to its logical conclusion. Because if you take everything to its logical conclusion, that means there is something bigger than me out there. I am not God, and I have an obligation now as a created being to seek truth. And I have this incentive now to seek truth, not because I really want to, but because God, over and over and over and over again, is putting my Romans 3:11 heart under pressure.

1. He is drawing all men to Himself (John 12:32).
2. He is convicting through the ministry of the Holy Spirit (John 16:7-11).
3. He is sending out His Word, which has the power to save the soul (Isaiah 55:10-11; Acts 17:6; 2 Timothy 3:15-17).
4. He is sending out the gospel, which is the "dunamis" [δύναμις] power of God unto salvation (Romans 1:16).
5. And the fifth grace pressure that is being applied is Creation itself (Romans 1:18-20; Psalm 19:1-4).

| GENERAL VS. SPECIAL REVELATION | | |
|--------------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| | GENERAL | SPECIAL |
| EXAMPLES | Nature, conscience (Rom 1–2) | Incarnation, Scripture, miracles |
| AVAILABILITY | All | Some |
| ACCOMPLISHMENT | Accountability (Rom 1) | Salvation (Acts 4:12; 2 Tim 3:15) |
| FORM | Non-written or non-verbal | Written |
| QUALITY | Natural | Supernatural, miraculous |

The chart above is the distinction between general revelation, which we are talking about here, and special revelation. This is a chart that shows you the difference. general revelation: examples of it would be nature and conscience.

We have not even thrown into the mix conscience, a basic barometer or standard of right and wrong that is inside every single person. So people by nature feel guilty. Do you know why they feel guilty? Because they are guilty. They make decisions, sometimes in harmony with conscience, or other times in violation of their conscience. And God put that guilt in people through conscience (Romans 2:14-15) as another grace to the Romans 3:11 heart.

So, examples of general revelation would be nature and conscience. Examples of special revelation would be the Word of God—the Scripture, miracles, and the incarnate Son of God. general revelation is available to everyone. Special revelation is available to some. The people that get the special revelation are the ones that are responding properly to the five-fold grace pressure that I have tried to explain.

The people that will take the obvious and hold it down in unrighteousness have nothing to do with inability. It is a decision that they are making that they do not want God. Those are the people that are in a lot of trouble. And God knows that if they received, in that state, special revelation, they would just pervert that, just like they are already perverting general revelation.

What can general revelation do? It can make you accountable to search for God. It cannot save you. Cornelius was not saved till he heard special revelation, but he knew he had to seek God. There is a God out there, and there is evidence of people in all cultures seeking God.

What can special revelation do? It can give you the specific information that you need to become a child of God. So Cornelius had the general revelation and he was responding to it, but he was not saved yet, until God sent Peter with a special revelation, leading to the salvation of him and his household (Acts 10-11). That is how this whole thing works.

What kind of form does general revelation take? It is usually non-verbal and non-written. It is what you see all the time in nature and in Creation.

What kind of form does special revelation take? It is usually written. It is written down in words. And even Jesus Christ and His incarnation is called the Word. Why is Jesus called the Word, the "logos" [λόγος]? Have you ever asked yourself that? He is called the Word of God in John 1:14, because his purpose is to explain the Father. In John 1:18, you will see Him using that word "explained" ("exegeomai" [ἐξηγέομαι]). I think "exegeomai" [ἐξηγέομαι] is where we get the word "exegete."

The incarnate Son of God exegetes the Father, because what we have in the incarnate Son of God is a human manifestation of God: God made flesh—humanity added to eternally existent deity, at the point of the virgin conception.

And Jesus did walk this Earth. We have a record of the whole thing in the Gospels. You can read about it, even though we were not there 2,000 years ago. But as Jesus was walking this Earth, it was God in human form, meaning that we as humans can understand God because we see a human representation of it. That is why Jesus is called the "logos" [λόγος], or the Word. Words explain. Words describe.

In John 14, Philip says, "Hey, Jesus, show us the Father and that will be enough for us" (John 14:8, paraphrase). Jesus replies, "Oh my goodness, have I been with you so long, Philip, and yet you do not understand that when you have seen Me, you have seen the Father, because My human manifestation describes the Father?" (John 14:9-10, paraphrase).

Without Christ's human manifestation, we would have no comprehension of what God is like. That is why John 1:18 says, "*No one has seen God at any time;...*" (John 1:18). That is why God said to Moses, "No one can see My face and live" (Exodus 33:20, paraphrase).

God to us is just some kind of removed foreign concept. But once God became incarnated in the Son. Now you have a description that a human being can relate to of what God is like. That is why Jesus is called the "logos" [λόγος], or the Word. Words explain. Words describe.

So, the incarnate Son of God is the ultimate form of special revelation. The Bible is a form of special revelation in written form.

What is the quality of general revelation? It is natural. It is what all people see every day.

What is the quality of special revelation? It is supernatural. It is miraculous. It represents

a miracle that God had to do to get it here, as He did with His Son, as He did with the Word.

So when someone quotes to you Romans 3:11—no one seeks God,— game set—match—debate over. They are leaving out a lot of stuff. They are leaving out what I like to call the five-fold grace pressure that God is doing on a heart that is rebellious against him. And that five-fold grace pressure is sufficient to cause people to seek God, Acts 17:27—"that they might seek God" (paraphrase) through this five-fold grace pressure.

If they suppress it, you have a problem. But if they are looking, God moves heaven and earth to see that special revelation shows up, so that a person can be made right with God, just as He did with Cornelius. Cornelius wanted to know the truth.

It is obvious that Cornelius was responding to the five-fold grace pressure that is out there, even though if left to his natural devices, he would have had a Romans 3:11 heart like the rest of us. But God put grace into motion to compensate for his Romans 3:11 wicked heart. And he responded to it. So God sent Peter to Caesarea to give Cornelius the special revelation he needed to come to Christ.

That is why Peter, who was sent to Cornelius in Acts 10, says in 2 Peter 3:9, in his own little book that he wrote about 30 years later,

"God is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come unto repentance" (2 Peter 3:9, paraphrase).

Now why would Peter say that? Peter says that because he was there when God showed him the vision of the sheep and the animals in the sheet, and all the things that we have been studying on Wednesday night, and how God moved things around through angelic manifestations and divine communication, to get Peter with the special revelation into Cornelius's household (Acts 10)—which was a work of God in itself, because a Jew was entering the home of a Gentile, which they were not supposed to do.

That is why Peter has to go back to Jerusalem and explain this whole thing to the Jewish leadership (Acts 11). But Peter says, "This is why God did it: because here is a man that was responding to the five-fold grace pressure, and God sent me to give him the additional information he needed to be saved."

Because, as you can see from the chart, general revelation cannot save you. It can make you accountable to search for God, but it does not have the data within it to save the soul. So God had to send Peter into the household of Cornelius for this man's salvation.

So, Romans 3:11 needs to be understood against the background of the totality of God's Word. Lost people, Romans 3:11 notwithstanding, can seek God. Calvinism says they cannot because they are like a rock and they do not have the ability to seek God.

Number 2 under "d": lost men can hear from God.

d) Calvinism Underestimates What Lost Man Can Do

- 1) Lost man can seek God (John 16:7-11; Acts 10–11)

- 2) **Lost man can hear from God (Acts 10:30-32, 44-48; 11:14)**
- 3) Lost man can reason (Matt. 21:23-27)
- 4) Lost man can believe (exercise faith) in God (John 3:18)

Cornelius in Acts 10 was not saved yet. Yet God, through an angel was speaking to him. We have already read a lot of the verses: Acts 10:30-32, 40-48.

We will pick it up there next time with number 3: that a lost person can reason. Lost people can do math problems. They have a logical process and they can even reason about spiritual matters. Calvinism says they cannot: they are like a rock. We will pick that up next time.