

Neo-Calvinism vs. the Bible 018

John 5:40

February 2, 2025

Dr. Andy Woods

Let us take our Bibles and open them to Matthew 16:7. We are continuing our look at Neo-Calvinism versus the Bible, having come to the point in the study where we are looking at the Calvinistic acronym, or mnemonic device, TULIP, and comparing it to Scripture.

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 still on the "T" in TULIP: total depravity; which is the starting point of the Calvinistic system.

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" for the Calvinist and the Neo-Calvinist means that you are an inanimate object incapable of responding to God. So God has to give you the gift of faith, or regenerate you, first so that you can believe—which is a doctrine that makes sense if they are right about depravity. But what we have been trying to explain is that Calvinism has overstated the concept of total depravity.

A. Total Depravity

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

We have defined "total depravity" properly: that it does not mean that we are spiritually lifeless. It just means that we are separated from God. All of our being has been corrupted by sin. It does not mean that we have indulged every sin that could be committed. It does not mean that we are as evil as we can possibly be. But in that state of separation, as the Holy Spirit convicts us, we are capable of responding to God.

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**

Calvinism says, "No, you have an inability to respond to God as a lost person." We have been explaining how Calvinism has taken a biblical idea and placed a disproportionate emphasis on it. They confuse intensity versus extent, of evil. They do not take into consideration that man, even in his fallen state, bears God's image. So therefore he must have some choice with salvation. They define "death" as "nonexistence" spiritually, like a rock. But "death" biblically never means "nonexistence." It means "separation." We were on sub letter "D": Calvinism underestimates what a lost person can do.

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)**

Lost people, as we saw last time, can seek God; they can hear from God. The textbook example of that is Cornelius, who was hearing directly from the Holy Spirit and an angel while he was an unbeliever. Now we are at number three: lost people can reason. They can reason even when it comes to spiritual things. So when you explain to them the concept of Jesus: the blood of Jesus, the atoning death of Christ, God's love for them; even though they are not yet regenerated, they can actually reason and understand those concepts.

We have some examples in the Bible of lost people reasoning about spiritual things—which, obviously, a rock could not do. If you look at Matthew 16:7, Jesus is speaking to the disciples:

"They began to discuss this among themselves, saying, 'He said that because we did not bring any bread.'"

He is teaching them spiritual things. You know, *"An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign"* (Matthew 16:4). Earlier in the chapter: "You know how to understand weather patterns, but you do not know how to discern the Messianic time that you are living in" (Matthew 16:1-3, paraphrase) (speaking to these first-century Pharisees). If they had been like rocks as unbelievers, they would not have understood any of this. But Matthew 16:7 says that they did understand it: they were discussing it amongst themselves. In fact, in some English versions it says that they were reasoning amongst themselves.

This is the Pharisees, separated from God, unbelievers, reasoning about spiritual things. The Greek verb there is "dialogizomai" (διαλογίζομαι), which means "to reason." It is the same verb that Paul uses to tell the believer what to do in their growth in Christ. He says in Romans 6:11 to reason, or reckon (proving Paul was Texan) these things so. And he uses "logizomai" (λογίζομαι) there for "reason/reckon." It is an accounting term. The "dia-" prefix in Matthew 16:7 just adds intensity. It is very interesting that this verb is used for believers and also for unbelievers.

So there is an actual place for evidential apologetics. There is a branch of apologetics called presuppositional apologetics, which is the idea that an unsaved person cannot reason anyway, so that is a framework for the development of presuppositional apologetics. But I am seeing here a place for evidential apologetics, also, because unbelievers can factor in certain things and can even reason about spiritual things. To be frank with you, I understood a lot of spiritual things before I was saved, because I came from an Episcopalian background. To be an acolyte at that church I had to take a confirmation class, and things like that. And I remember in hindsight that I knew I was not regenerated. But even at that point, not having been born again, I could understand certain spiritual things.

So the Calvinist is saying that the unsaved person cannot even reason about spiritual things. Here I am showing you examples that they can reason about spiritual things. Let me give you one other example. Go to Matthew 21:25. It says,

"The baptism of John was from what source, from heaven or from men?"

There Jesus asked unbelievers, who were challenging His authority, a spiritual question, which He would not have done if they did not have an ability to think about it. The rest of Matthew 21:25-26 says,

"And they began reasoning among themselves"—that is "dialogizomai"—saying, 'If we say, "From heaven," He will say to us, "Then why did you not believe in him?" But if we say, "From men," we fear the people; for they all regard John as a prophet.'"

Now, they had impure motives, and they were certainly taking a knowledge of God and suppressing it, but they had the capacity for thought. So this goes against the Calvinistic definition of "depravity," of "inability." And when you think about it for a minute, if man is unable to think about spiritual things, then why is Satan wasting his time blinding people? You do not put blindfolds over a rock. We know from 2 Corinthians 4:4 that the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unsaved. This is what makes evangelism difficult because it is a spiritual battle. And Satan is involved trying to further blind unsaved people. Well, why would Satan waste his time if they are rocks?

In Matthew 13:19 (the parable of the sower), you see Satan at work again:

"When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is the one on whom seed was sown beside the road."

So someone hears the word and Satan wants to come and snatch it away if they do not have the ability to get it or grasp it. Why would Satan waste his time? Over in 2 Timothy 2:26 is an activity of Satan. Paul, writing to Timothy, says,

"and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will" (2 Timothy 2:26).

You do not hold a rock captive. "Hey, we are going to take all these rocks and put them behind a barbed wire fence, because we are worried these rocks are going to escape"—does not make any sense because they are inanimate objects; they are not going anywhere.

These are all just common sense verses that demonstrate that this cadaver theology that lost people are inanimate objects just does not fit the biblical data. And beyond that, a lost person has the ability to exercise faith in the Messiah. This is what Calvinism denies; a lost person has no ability to exercise faith, so God has to impart the faith to the elect. But I can show you many verses that show that lost people clearly have an ability, particularly when they come under God's conviction, to exercise their own faith in Jesus Christ.

Passages Conditioning Salvation on Faith Alone (*Sola Fide*)

- Genesis 15:6
- John 3:16; 5:24; 6:28-29, 47; 16:8-9; 20:30-31
- Acts 16:30-31
- Romans 1:16; Ephesians 2:8-9
- Hebrews 11:6

One of the more prominent such verses is Genesis 15:6, Paul's favorite verse. When Paul defends the doctrine of justification by faith alone, he quotes, all the time, the story of Abraham and how Abraham got saved (Genesis 15:6). Notice that "he" in Genesis 15:6 is lowercase: this is not God doing it through Abraham; God presented the evidence. Remember that He took Abraham outside and He showed him the stars, and He said, *"So shall your descendants be"* (Genesis 15:5). And we know from Galatians 3:16 that Abraham was thinking about not just seed generically, but an individual seed coming through his generic seed, a Messiah. He had an awareness of the Messiah. There was an awareness that the Messiah was coming, as early as Genesis 3:15, the first reference to the gospel.

So God took Abraham aside, outside, showed him these things, the evidence, and Abraham trusted in the evidence. Genesis 15:6 says,

"Then he"—that is Abraham, that is why it is lowercase— "believed in the Lord; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness."

Now, Calvinism says that is impossible: it was not Abraham's faith; it was God giving Abraham the gift of faith, which the passage does not mention at all. There is absolutely nothing here about how God empowered, or gave, Abraham faith. It was Abraham's own faith. Notice Matthew 8:10. Jesus says this about the centurion:

"Now, when Jesus heard this, He marveled and said to those who were following, "Truly I say to you, I have not found such great faith with anyone in Israel"" (Matthew 8:10).

Now think about that for a minute: if God is the one that gives faith to the elect, why would Jesus commend this individual, this centurion? The centurion does not just have faith—he has great faith. If God imparts the faith, would not all faith be great? This becomes the rigid (I have seen it operate in some churches) judgmental nature within Calvinism in which if someone is doubting, or lapses, or apostatizes, or has an excursion out of fellowship with God, the Calvinists will immediately say, "That person is not one of the elect"; because God gives the elect faith, and faith cannot fail because it is from God. Well, if that is true, then why would Jesus commend a man for not just having faith, but for having great faith? If God is the one that imparts faith, all faith would be great, making Jesus' compliment unnecessary. So just by Jesus' saying that, a lost person clearly has the ability to exercise faith in the Messiah.

Look at Matthew 8:13.

"And Jesus said to the centurion, 'Go; it shall be done for you as you have believed.' And the servant was healed that very moment."

Notice that Jesus says, *"Go; it shall be done for you as you have believed,"* not, "as God has believed for you, or through you." Go to John 7:37-39.

"Now, on the last day, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, 'If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, 'From his innermost being will flow rivers of living water.' But this He spoke of the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were to receive; for the Spirit had not yet been given, because Jesus was not glorified."

Again, it is another example of *"he who believes in Me"* (John 7:38). Apparently this is an offer to everyone, because it says in John 7:37 that "If anyone is thirsty. I will quench their thirst. What you have to do is believe in Me." Now, a statement like that makes no sense if people have an inability to believe in God, as Calvinism routinely asserts.

Notice John 9:35-38. This is about the man born blind who received the miraculous healing from Jesus; Jesus re-encountered him that same day. John 9:35-38 says,

"Jesus heard that they had put him out, and finding him, He said, 'Do you believe in the Son of Man?' He answered, 'Who is He, Lord, that I may believe in Him?' Jesus said to him, 'You have both seen Him, and He is the one who is talking with you.'"

"The one that healed you is the Messiah. And guess what? I am the Messiah." But John 9:36 is the key verse, as the man born blind, now healed, is speaking back to Jesus:

"Who is He, Lord, that I may believe in Him?" (John 9:36).

Notice that Jesus does not come back and say to him, "Well, you got it all mixed up. You need to take My theological seminar. Do you not know that you are totally depraved and are like a rock and have no ability to believe?" You can refute a lot of false teaching just through simple Bible reading.

Let us go to the last book of the Bible, Revelation 22:17. This is how John concludes the book of Revelation:

"The spirit and the bride say, 'Come.' And let the one who hears say, 'Come.' And let the one who is thirsty come;"—same thing Jesus was saying back in John 7—"let the one who wishes take the water of life without cost."* (Revelation 22:17).*

So who gets the water of life without cost? We know from John 7 that it is accessed by faith. Who gets that offer? Whoever wants it. Anybody that is responding to the light that God has given through general revelation, the preaching of the gospel, the Word of God, and the convicting ministry of the Holy Spirit, things that are happening all over planet Earth, even as I speak. Anyone who takes that light—and does not suppress it and hold it down because they want to be God themselves—but is responding properly to it, has the complete and total ability, although God is bringing them to the point of decision, to exercise their own faith in the Messiah for salvation.

So lost people have the ability to exercise faith. John 3:16—

"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life."

Nothing there about God believing for someone, or God imparting to him faith: it is their own faith. Hebrews 11:6 says, *"And without faith it is impossible to please Him . . ."* Our faith is very important to God. That is why He has conditioned our salvation on our exercising faith in Christ. Notice Acts 16:30-31, the Philippian jailer's question—life's most important question—*"Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"* Now, why would he even ask that? Because God loved the Philippian jailer so much that He showed the jailer evidence of who God is through the testimony of Paul and Silas in the Philippian jail, who were flogged and spent the whole night praising the Lord.

Boy, I would sure like to be more like that. I have a hard time praising the Lord when the air conditioning fails. But these guys were flogged and chained and they were praising the Lord. And the Philippian jailer had seen nothing like it. Then there was a giant earthquake and they had an opportunity to escape, but they did not. And the Philippian jailer was ready to commit suicide, because if a prisoner escaped on a jailer's watch, they would be in big trouble with Rome. But there the prisoners were, still in jail, when they could have gotten out.

So what has happened is that God took this Philippian jailer and brought him to the point of decision. God was not going to believe for the jailer, but God showed him enough evidence through the testimony of Paul and Silas that the gospel is true, because those two guys were not acting like normal people. No one praises the Lord when they get flogged, particularly not all night long. And everybody knows that when you get a chance to get out of jail, you take it. But these guys did not take it.

So the jailer asked this question, *"Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"* (Acts 16:30). And they said nothing about repenting of sins. There is no front loading of the gospel: "You had better repent of your sins." There is nothing here about that—"Yeah, you can believe, but you had better be corrected on the back end: we had better see a holy lifestyle." People preach the gospel that way: "Yeah, I believe in faith alone through Christ alone; but—" And every time they say "but" I say, "Get your 'but' out of the way because the 'but' does not belong there: it is, 'I am saved. Period.'"

Now, the repenting of sins and all these other things are for your growth. But they are not for your birth, which is a different issue. So there is no front or back loading of the gospel here. There are no three ABCs: Admit, Believe, Confess—nothing like that. *"Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"* And they said, "You had better hope you are one of the elect so God gives you the gift of faith." No, they do not say that here.

"Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" They said, 'Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household'" (Acts 16:30-31).

"You will be saved if you believe." So obviously, Paul and Silas did not hold to any theology that taught that the man was a rock and could not believe on his own. People can believe, because they are not in a spiritual state of nonexistence; they are in a spiritual state of separation, and God has provided multiple means to bring people to the point of decision. When they believe it is their faith, which is what God wants. Beyond that, how could God command the lost man to believe if he cannot? God, over and over again says, "Believe," "Believe," "Believe." Why would God say that if they do not have the ability to believe because they are like a rock?

So notice some of these commands. Go to John 1:12. This verse gets to the business of why John recorded his history, his eyewitness testimony of Jesus. John writes,

"But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name."

Who are "those"? They are the ones that want to become children of God. "Do you want to move away from being an enemy of God to a child of God? Do you want so much intimacy with the Lord that you can actually say to him, 'Abba, Father!'" ("Abba," in Galatians 4:6, means "daddy" [Romans 8:15].) "Yeah, that is a great offer. What do I have to do?" "You have to believe."

Then you have John 20:30-31, which is the purpose statement as to why John wrote his gospel featuring the seven signs of Jesus and the seven discourses of Jesus (and thrown into the mix is that Jesus rose from the dead). Why give us twenty-one chapters of this, John? And then if all that were not enough, John 21 is the miraculous catch of the fish as Jesus is ministering to the disciples in His resurrected state. So you get to the end of this whole thing, and you wonder why John wrote all of this. Well, John tells us why he wrote it in John 20:30-31. In fact, at the very end of John's Gospel, John 21:25, John says,

"And there are also many other things which Jesus did, which if they were written in detail, I suppose that even the world itself would not contain the books that would be written."

"There is a lot of other stuff that Jesus did, and I saw much of it as an eyewitness, but I am not even going to tell you all that stuff. I am just going to give you seven signs, seven discourses, plus the resurrection, plus the miraculous catch of fish." It is highly selective what John has chosen to give us. And when John wrote these words, he was probably the last living eyewitness to the things of Jesus, and in so doing he gives us the purpose statement of this book:

"Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written so that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name" (John 20:30-31).

So the first reason that John wrote is to convince us that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. So John wrote for a Christological reason: he is trying to convince his audience that Jesus is the guy—He is the Son of God—He is the Messiah (which is what "Christ" ["christos"] means; Christ is not his last name: when you get to heaven, do not call him Mr. Christ), the "Christos," the "Mashiach," the long awaited, the Messiah." So John wrote for a Christological reason.

And John does not then say, "Okay, everybody, fold your Bibles and go home now; you have got a notebook full of material." He wants people to take it a step further and do something with the information. Do what? Believe. Who is supposed to believe? You are not God. It is not God doing it. It is not God imparting the gift of faith to the elect. It is your faith. God brought you the evidence. Now you do something with it. John mentions believing here, and then he mentions you again. There is nothing here about God imparting belief—it is you exercising faith.

So John wrote (1) for a Christological reason to convince the reader who Jesus is, through a record of His signs and discourses, and (2) he wants us to actually trust in the work of the Messiah so we can have the gift of life. That is why John wrote. So that is why he kept recording these stories about Jesus doing things, where it will say that this group did not believe, but this group over here did believe; and then Jesus goes and does another miracle. This group over here did not believe, but this group over here believed. And the reason John keeps repeating this is that he is saying to the reader, "Get on the right side of the ledger."

So when you deal with people in your life and run into people who say, "I know you are a Christian and I am thinking about Christianity. What should I read?" The book you send them to is John's Gospel, because John's Gospel has an evangelistic purpose. I would not send them to the Book of Revelation right out of the gate. I am not saying that people do not get saved by reading the book of Revelation; I am just saying that John's Gospel is unique because it has an evangelistic purpose. So that is why, when I came to this church, I started teaching John's Gospel because I knew that was the quickest way to get rid of legalism.

Outside Sugar Land Bible Church, in every church, people are always adding things to the gospel. I figured that three years of teaching through John's Gospel would fix the problem—and I think it has. I spent three years in John's Gospel. I spent more time in John's Gospel than Jesus spent in His earthly ministry, teaching this over and over again. Because if you are running into legalism in a church or anywhere, John's Gospel is the best remedy for that. It says over and over again, "Believe," "Believe," "Believe," "Believe," "Believe." And believe in the right object: Jesus as demonstrated by His signs.

So this whole Book of John is impossible if man cannot believe. The whole book is unnecessary, if man cannot believe, because the whole purpose of the book is to bring the lost to saving faith.

Go to Acts 17:30-34—Paul on Mars Hill. Paul is dealing with unsaved people, with people that would sit around and they like nothing better than to talk about something new. There are people in Starbucks that are like that, by the way: you go there in the morning, you get a drink, you come back in the evening, you get a drink, and the same people are still in there talking. So that is what is going on at Mars Hill. It is all these philosophers and poets, and they just wanted to hear something new.

And Paul got the floor there in Acts 17, in Athens. And he gets down to the person of Jesus Christ in Acts 17:30, and he says,

"Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent."

It does not say, "repent of their sins." It just says, "repent." Repent, "metanoia," means to change your mind. Change your mind about who? Change your mind about who Jesus is. He is really the Son of God. He is coming back to judge the living and the dead. And you need to get on the right side of Him. And you can get on the right side of Him by repenting, meaning changing your mind.

Notice that it is "metanoia" and not "metamelomai." Do you recognize the word "mellow"? Have you ever told someone to mellow out? "Hey, dude, just mellow out." It is an emotional term: "metamelomai" is to change your emotions. Paul did not tell people to change their emotions. He told them to change their mind.

Many people think that when they come to Christ, they have to exhibit a lot of sorrow. And after all, on TV, when the evangelist gives the altar call (which is not found in the Bible) you have people walking down to the front, and they are crying. And my perspective on that is, if you want to cry when you accept Christ, go for it. But it is not required. You can cry a river, but sorrow is not going to get someone saved. Salvation is not repent plus sorrow. It is not "metanoia" plus "metamelomai." It is repent—"meta-," to change, as in metamorphosis, or as in one's cancer has metastasized—it has changed from one part of the body to another.

"Metanoia" is a compound word connected with "noeo," which is where we get the word "notion," or "idea," which comes out of the mind. And what Paul is saying when he finally gets to his punchline is to change your mind about who Jesus is. Now, how exactly do you do that? Well, if you go down to Acts 17:34, it tells you exactly how to do that:

"But some men joined him and believed, among whom also were Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris and others with them."

So if you look at the word "believed," Acts 17:34, and the word "repent," Acts 17:30; it is very obvious that Paul is using those synonymously. To believe is to repent. You cannot believe without repenting: it is impossible, because to believe means to trust. In other words, you are no longer trusting in yourself; you are no longer trusting in your own good works; you are no longer trusting in your own religiosity; but you are trusting exclusively in the God-Man, Jesus Christ, for your salvation. And the moment you place your faith in Christ for salvation is the moment your mind about who Jesus is has changed: Jesus is not a great guy, He is the one that could help me with the problem that I cannot fix, which is my separation from God because I am dead in my trespasses and sins.

And so you hear that message, and you decide to believe, which means to trust. And automatically your mind has changed. So God commands that "*people everywhere*"—not just the elect—"*should repent*" (Acts 17:30). And that is defined by Luke (in Acts) as believing. That is a command that does not make any sense if people are like rocks and have no ability to repent and believe. Why tell a rock to do something it cannot do?

So the fact that Paul is doing this illustrates, or demonstrates, that lost man can believe; God will bring him to the point of decision clearly. The Holy Spirit was at work here in Paul's presentation, but the Holy Spirit is not going to believe for anybody. They have to exercise their own faith, because lost people have the ability to do that. Once you become sensitive to this, you will see that the command to believe as the sole condition for justification is found in the Bible in upwards of 150 passages.

J. B. Hixson, on his website (notbyworks.org) and in his dissertation, shows every verse in the Bible that gives one condition for justification, which one condition is to believe. Lewis Sperry Chafer in his "Systematic Theology," does not list all the verses, but he gives the total: he says that it is upwards of 150, and Hixson says the number is probably about 160. Chafer says that "... upwards of 150 passages of Scripture condition salvation upon believing only (cf. John 3:16; Acts 16:31)."¹ Some of them we have already looked at this morning: Genesis 15:6, Acts 16:30-31, and John 3:16.

So you are telling me that God tells lost man to believe 150 times when they are unable to do so and they have to be imparted the gift of faith? I was born in the morning, but it was not yesterday morning. And beyond that, how could God hold man accountable for something that he does not have the ability to do? What God is that? What you will discover over and over again in the Bible is that God says, "If you do not believe it is your fault, do not blame Me for it. You have the ability to do it. I have given you what some call prevenient grace to bring you to the point of decision. But if you will not believe you have got no one to blame but yourself." I will show you the verses where God says that. But my point is, that would be a ridiculous statement if people are like rocks and cannot believe.

Notice John 3:18. Notice how God is always putting the onus back on people who are in unbelief. It is most likely Jesus speaking here. He says,

¹ Lewis Sperry Chafer, vol. 7, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1993), 265-66.

"He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God" (John 3:18).

In other words, if a person is in unbelief, it is not as if the judgment of God is coming; they are already under the judgment of God, it just has not fallen yet. It is like the proverbial sword of Damocles over one's head, waiting to fall at any minute. And Jesus is very clear here when He talks to people that are in this state, that they have got no one but themselves to blame.

"He who believes"—not God believing for him— "in Him is not judged; he who does not believe"—

Why has someone not believed? They do not want to.

— "has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God."

You have got no one to blame but yourself. Notice John 3:36. I believe that this is John the Baptist now speaking. John 3:36 says,

"He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey"—

Now why does he say "obey"? Because they are disobedient to the 150 commands to believe. If you do not believe, you are disobedient to the command which gives you a single condition for entering into a relationship with God.

—"the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him." (John 3:36).

I believe it has been a while since I have looked at this, but I think "abides" ("meno") is in the present tense. You are already under the wrath of God if you are not a believer. It is just that the sword of Damocles has not fallen yet, but you are already under it. In fact, the wrath of God is abiding on you, which is a very frightening thing when you think about it.

So who would want to be in that condition? I certainly would not. So what can I do to fix it? I have to obey the command to believe. There is nothing here about God believing for me. There is nothing here about God imparting the gift of faith. There is nothing here about God having to regenerate me first so that I can believe. Second, all of that stuff is a bunch of theological, presuppositional baggage that people read into passages like this. It is just the simple idea that God wants people to believe, and if they are not in a state of faith, then they have got no one to blame but themselves.

You cannot blame people for something they cannot do. How cruel would God be to blame unbelief on people that have an inability to believe, as Calvinism teaches? Do you go home and look at your rocks and your garden and start to discipline the rocks? "Bad rock!" No—you do not discipline inanimate objects. And here God is judging people not because they cannot believe but because they do not want to believe.

Look at John 5:40 (Jesus speaking again). If you back up in the passage to verses John 5:18-19, you see that He is dealing with the Pharisees who are upset at His breaking their traditions on the Sabbath. In the process of this long conversation, in John 5:40 Jesus says to the Pharisees,

"and you are unwilling to come to Me so that you may have life."

The problem is not inability. The problem is an unwillingness. There are lots of reasons that people reject Christ. They might think that He is going to mess up their lives, or take away their power—or whatever it is. But Jesus really gets to the heart of the problem, and He says that the problem is not inability: the problem is an unwillingness. In fact, the word that is used in John 5:40 is "thelo," which means "wish" or "desire." It is not the word "adynatos."

In "adynatos," you recognize "dynamai": dynamic, power. In Greek, putting an alpha in front of a word is called an alpha privative. It is like in English when you put an A in front of something to negate it. An atheist is someone who denies God. An amillennialist is someone who denies the Millennium. An agnostic ("a" in front of "gnosis") is someone that is denying knowledge—where we get the word ignorant or ignoramus. I have had people say, "I am an agnostic," breaking their arm patting themselves on the back, like it is some great thing—"I am an agnostic." Well, do you know what "agnostic" means? It means "ignoramus"—that is what it means.

So "adynatos" is "without power." It is translated in Hebrews 6:6 as "impossible": *"and then have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance, ..."* (I dislike quoting Hebrews 6:6 because if you quote it, you have to give three months of explanation, which we have already done in our soteriology study.) I am just trying to show you that if the biblical writers wanted to say "impossible," there is a word for that: "adynatos."

John, when he records this conversation (John 5:40), does not use the word "adynatos." He uses the word "thelo," "wish," meaning that they do not want to come to Christ, not that they cannot come to Christ. They do not want to come to Christ. The problem is not inability: "adynatos." It is a "thelo" issue: a "wish" or "desire" issue. The problem with people is suppression. Romans 1:18-20—

"For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth and unrighteousness, 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."

Why are they without excuse? Because they suppress. They "thelo" – "wish" – "desire." They do not want it. Not "adynatos": it is impossible for them to come to Christ. So the Calvinistic system is basically teaching that men cannot come to Christ. To them it is an "adynatos" issue; but that is not what the Bible says. It is a "thelo" issue: a "wish" or "desire" issue. You see, if you were going to communicate Calvinistic theology in biblical languages, there are a lot of Greek words that could have been used, that are not being used here.

Let us look at Acts 28:25-27. This is how the Book of Acts ends, about people visiting Paul in prison:

"And when they did not agree with one another, they began leaving after Paul had spoken one parting word, 'The Holy Spirit rightly spoke through Isaiah the prophet to your fathers, saying, "Go to this people and say, 'You will keep on hearing, but will not understand; And you will keep on seeing, but will not perceive; For the heart of this people has become dull, And with their ears they scarcely hear, And they have closed their eyes; Otherwise they might see with their eyes, And hear with their ears, And understand with their heart and return, And I would heal them'" (Acts 28:25-27).

The problem is not that these unbelieving Jews do not have an ability to enter into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ. The problem is that they are not interested in it. And as long as they are not interested in it, they are going to just continue in that state of separation from God, even though God has basically moved heaven and earth to bring them as image bearers of Him to an opportunity to believe. It is a very, very sad state that people find themselves in. But if I am understanding my Bible correctly, it is their own fault. It is not God's fault.

Robert Congdon, in his very good book "Oops! I Thought I Was a Four-Point Calvinist!" (I love that title: it drew me in because I thought I was at one point, too) says,

"Furthermore, why would God admonish and warn unbelievers for being spiritually blind and deaf if it were not in their power to respond?...Is this not a mockery? It would be like chiding a legless man for being unable to walk."²

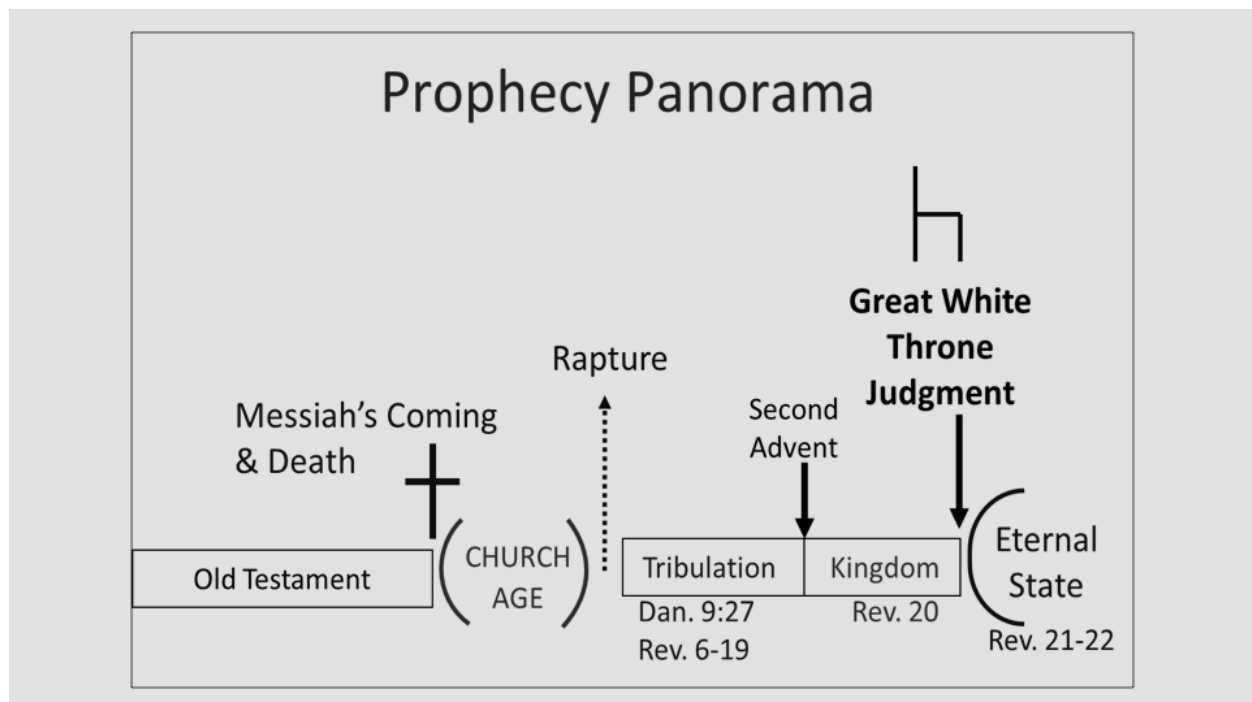
Who would do something like that—telling someone to do something that they cannot do? So all of these commands in the Bible to believe, believe, believe, are irrelevant if the Calvinistic understanding is right and people have an inability to believe.

Let us go to Revelation 20:12-13. This is the end: this is the great White Throne judgment, subsequent to the millennial reign of Christ. It is when all unbelievers are judged—the final judgment against all unbelievers of all time is entered. It is described in Revelation 20:11-15. Just look at Revelation 20:12-13.

² Robert Congdon, *Oops! I Thought I Was a Four - Pt Calvinist* (Greer, SC: Congdon Ministries International, 2014), 51.

"And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and the books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one of them according to their deeds."

What are these? What is in the book? Well, it is called the Book of Life. It is, as I would understand, a record of everyone in human history that has placed their personal faith in Jesus. So here come all these unbelievers through this horrific resurrection, as Hades is emptied out and they are reconnected with their bodies now in their resurrected state—not to spend eternity with God in, but to experience His wrath throughout all eternity in that body, in a place called the lake of fire, that Satan was just thrown into (Revelation 20:10), that the false prophet and the beast were already in a thousand years earlier (Revelation 19:20-21). And now the issue is "You guys are going into the lake of fire." It is a terrible scene.



People ask these questions, "Are we going to be there to see this?" I do not want to be there. This thing just scares the daylights out of me. I hope I do not have to see it. But there is a determination made that "Look, your name is not in the book. You never trusted in Christ. So you are going into the lake of fire." "All right, well, let us go then." "Well, not so fast. We have to determine the degree of torment you will experience in the lake of fire forever." That is what the books determine. The books are a record of sins. Hell is bad, but it is more hell for some people than others. I would expect someone like Adolf Hitler to be punished much more severely than just an average unbeliever.

But why in the world would God be making this determination to a group of people that never had the ability to believe in the first place? Can you not hear the protests? "You did not give me a chance! I am just a rock!" But they had a chance. They had opportunities. So this type of judgment, I think, puts God in a very bad light, if He is sending people into this situation that never had an opportunity.

This is the whole problem with John Calvin saying "doom from the womb." What John Calvin is saying is that there are certain people—most people—that are predestined. It is called double predestination: some are predestined to life, some are predestined not to life, but to damnation; and they have no choice in the matter whatsoever. And Calvin says, "doom from the womb." Dave Hunt wrote a book on Calvinism called "What Love Is This?" What God would do something like this? But this is the direction Calvinism leads if you buy into their depravity doctrine.

On that very happy note, we have finished Total Depravity. Are you not glad to be done with depravity? So that is the critique of the first bullet point in Calvinism, Total Depravity. Next time we are going to start Unconditional Election. Here is what we covered this week and last week: the Calvinistic system underestimates what lost people can do. Next week we will be moving into unconditional election.