

3. Repentance and faith are the free acts of men. Men, with their own mind, heart, and will, must renounce sin and receive Christ. God never repented and believed for anyone, and He never will. Turning from sin and reaching out in faith to Christ are the acts of man, and every man who so responds to the gospel call does so because he honestly desires to do so. He wants to be forgiven and he can only be forgiven by faith and repentance. No one (including God) can turn from sin for us; we must do it. No one can trust Christ in our place; we must personally, knowingly, and willingly trust Him in order to be saved.

Now someone may be thinking, “*But isn’t that what the Arminian teaches?*” My friend, that is clearly what the Bible teaches. “*But don’t Calvinists deny all three of these points?*” I’m not talking about or trying to defend Calvinists, since they come in a hundred different varieties. If you know anyone that denies the above facts, then that person, regardless of what he labels himself, is denying the clear message of the Bible.

“*But haven’t you established the doctrine of free will and disposed of election if you teach that man must repent and believe and that those are his own acts?*” No, we have neither proven “free will” nor disproved election since it is impossible to do either. We have merely stated exactly what the Bible says a man *must do* in order to be saved. Let us now look at what the Scripture says a sinner is *able* to do and what he is *not able* to do.

4. The same Bible that states man must repent and believe in order to be saved also emphatically states that *man, because of his sinful nature, is totally unable to repent and believe.* All of the three faculties of man’s soul: his mind, heart, and will (which must be receptive to gospel truth) have neither the ability to receive such truth nor even the desire to have such ability. In fact the exact opposite is true. Man’s total being is not only unable to either come, or want to come, to Christ, but every part of his nature is actively opposed to Christ and truth. Rejecting Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior

is not a passive *non-action*, but a deliberate choice of the will. It is deliberately choosing to say “No” to Christ and “Yes” to self and sin. No one is neutral in respect to God and His authority. *Unbelief* is just as much a deliberate act of the mind, heart, and will as is *faith*. This is what Jesus meant when He said, “You *will not* come to me” (*John 5:40*). You are deliberately making a choice! Yes, unbelief is an act of the will. In fact, unbelief is active *faith*, but unfortunately it is faith in *one’s self*.

To believe and preach points **1, 2, & 3** without also preaching number **4** is to grossly misrepresent the gospel of God’s grace. It is to give a totally false picture of the sinner and his true need. It shows only half of man’s sin. It misses the most crucial point of a lost man’s need, namely, his lack of power or ability to overcome his sinful nature and its effects.

The “gospel” which is concocted out of this view is only a *half gospel*. It is at this point that modern evangelism so miserably fails. It confuses man’s *responsibility* with his *ability*, and falsely assumes that a sinner has the moral ability to perform all that God has commanded. The “cannot” texts of Scripture are either totally ignored or badly twisted by this perversion of the true gospel of God’s saving grace.

Please note a few texts of Scripture that dogmatically state some things that a lost man *cannot* do:

- **Man cannot see**—until he first be born again (*John 3:3; 2 Cor 4:3-6*).
- **Man cannot understand**—until he first be given a new nature (*Rom 3:11; 1 Cor 2:14*).
- **Man cannot come**—until he first be effectually called by God’s Spirit (*John 6:44,65*).

We do not have space to go into all the “cannots,” but these three are sufficient to show that a sinner absolutely *cannot* come to Christ (notice it is not *will not*) until God *first* does something in that sinner’s nature. That something is what the Bible calls regeneration, or the new birth; and this is exclusively the work of the Holy Spirit. Man has no part whatever in regeneration (*see John 3:7-8*).

5. The new birth, or regeneration, is God giving us spiritual life that enables us to do what we must do (repent and believe), but CANNOT DO by nature because of our bondage to sin. When the Bible says man is “dead in sin” (*Eph 2:1*), it means that man’s mind, heart, *and will* are all spiritually dead in sin. When the Bible speaks of our being in bondage to sin, it means that our entire being, including *our will*, is under the bondage and power of sin.

We indeed need Christ to die and pay the penalty of our sin, but we just as desperately need the Holy Spirit to give us a new nature in regeneration. The Son of God frees us legally from the penalty of sin, but only the Holy Spirit can free us from the power and death of our depravity in sin. We need forgiveness in order to be saved, and Christ provides complete forgiveness and righteousness for us in His death. However, we also need spiritual life and ability, and the Holy Spirit provides it for us in regeneration. It is the Holy Spirit’s work of regeneration that enables us to savingly receive the atoning work of Christ in true faith.

God is a triune God, and no person can understand “so great salvation” (*Heb 2:3*) until he sees each blessed Person of the Godhead playing a distinct and necessary part in that salvation. No man can declare the “glorious gospel of grace” and leave out the Father’s sovereign electing love and the Holy Spirit’s regenerating power as essential parts of God’s work in saving sinners. To speak of God’s part in salvation as being only that of providing forgiveness and man’s part as being willing to accept it is to ignore both the Father’s work of election and the Spirit’s work of regeneration. This not only makes man a full *partner* with God in the work of salvation, it credits man with having the *decisive roll* in the deal.

How dreadful, and ridiculous, to give Christ the glory for His work on the Cross, and then give sinners the credit for the Father’s work in eternity (election) and the Spirit’s work in our hearts (regeneration). It does great dishonor to the Sovereign Spirit

to say, “The Holy Spirit will perform His miraculous work of quickening you unto life as soon as you give Him permission.” That’s like standing in a graveyard saying to the dead people, “I will give you life and raise you up from the grave if you will only take the first step of faith and ask me to do it.” What a denial of the sinner’s total spiritual inability!

The root error of the Arminian’s gospel of “free will” is its failure to see that man’s part (repentance and faith) are the *fruits* and *effects* of *God’s work*, and not the essential ingredients supplied by the sinner as his part of the deal. Every man who turns to Christ does so willingly, but that willingness is a *direct result* of the Father’s election and the Holy Spirit’s effectual calling. To say, “If you will believe, God will answer your faith with the new birth,” is to misunderstand man’s true need and misrepresent God’s essential work.

6. The Scriptures clearly show that faith and repentance are the EVIDENCES and not the CAUSE of regeneration. Suppose a man who had been dead for twenty years greeted you on the street one day. Would you conclude that the man had gotten tired of being dead and *decided* to ask a great doctor to perform a miracle and give him life? You would see he was alive because he was walking and breathing, but you would know these were evidences of a miracle having been performed on him from without, and not the results of his own power or will. Just so, when a *spiritually* dead man begins to perform spiritual acts such as repentance and faith, these spiritual *fruits* show that the miracle of the new birth has taken place.

Let me illustrate this with a biblical example from **ACTS 16**, a clear proof of what we are saying. By the way, as far as I know, this is the only place in the New Testament that uses the phrase “opened heart,” and the Bible gives the whole credit for this opening to *God’s power* and not to *man’s will*. Modern evangelism does the exact opposite and credits the opening of the heart to the power of man’s “free will.” Remember that we are not discussing

whether man must be willing to open his heart. We settled that under points **1, 2, & 3**. We are now looking for the *source of power* that *enables* man to perform this spiritual act. Arminianism insists that man's "free will" must furnish the power or willingness, but the Bible says that the Holy Spirit of God furnishes that power or ability in the new birth.

Let us examine the one text in Scripture that uses the phrase "opened heart" and see if it agrees with our previous points:

And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us: *whose heart the Lord opened*, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul (*Acts 16:14*).

The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message (*NIV*).

First of all we note that Lydia did indeed attend or listen to the words of Paul. She gladly heard and willingly believed his message. As we have already shown, she had to do this in order to benefit from the gospel and be saved. Lydia's attending, or hearing and believing, illustrates points **1, 2, & 3** above, and refutes Hyper-Calvinism, which says the elect will be saved regardless of whether they hear and believe the gospel or not. Lydia did indeed choose to believe; and she did it only because she wholeheartedly wanted to. She did not do it unwillingly, nor did God hear and believe for her. It was her own response, and it was a most willing response.

Next we notice exactly *what God did*, and what *He must do* before Lydia can be saved. **(1)** He provided a salvation "by grace through faith" (*Eph 2:8-9*) that could be preached. Obviously "the things spoken" by Paul were the gospel facts concerning the death, burial, and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, and surely this Lamb is God's gracious provision. **(2)** God also brought the message of His provision to Lydia. He sent a preacher to tell her about this great plan of salvation. God went to a lot of trouble to provide such a gospel—"He gave His only begotten Son" (*John 3:16*). He went to great ends to provide such a preacher as Paul. Read about it in Paul's testimony in Acts 22.

It is at this point that Arminianism departs from the Bible and proceeds to apply human logic to the above truths. They tragically fail to look at the rest of the biblical text and see that God must do something else. **(3)** God must *open Lydia's heart* (or give her spiritual life) so that she will be *able to believe*. Her natural mind is blind (*John 3:3; 2 Cor 4:3-4*), her natural heart is averse to God (*Jer 17:9; Rom 8:7-8*), and her will is in bondage to sin and spiritual death (*John 6:44, 65; 8:36; Rom 3:10-12; 1 Cor 2:14; Eph 2:1*). Only the "power" of God can free her from this graveyard of spiritual depravity (*1 Thess 1:4-5*). The giving of this life and power is solely the work of God. Notice that the Bible explicitly gives *God alone* the credit for Lydia's heart being opened. If you do not see that in this text then you simply cannot read—**"WHOSE HEART THE LORD OPENED."**

Notice also how clearly the Holy Spirit teaches us the relationship between the cause and the effect in the conversion of Lydia. God was the One who opened Lydia's heart, that is the *cause*; and He did so in order that she might be able to attend to the truths that Paul preached, that is the *effect*. Now that is what the Word of God says! Do not bluster about dead theology or throw Calvin's name around in derision, just read the words themselves in the Bible. If you try to deny that the one single reason that Lydia understood and believed the gospel was solely because God *deliberately opened her heart* and enabled her to believe, you are fighting against God's Word. If you try to get man's "free will" into this text as the one determining factor, you are consciously corrupting the Word of God (*2 Cor 2:17*).

God's grace not only provides salvation, but His power also gives us the ability to both desire and receive it. He works in us both to will and to do (*Phil 2:13*). His working in us to will is the new birth, and, I say again, this work of regeneration is totally the work of the Holy Spirit.

The moment we lose sight of this distinction between being saved by faith (the act of man) and being born again by the Holy Spirit (the act of God), we are headed for confusion and trouble. We will be

convinced that man is *able* to do what the Bible emphatically states he is *unable* to do. With the necessity of the Holy Spirit's work being thus theologically denied, it will not be long before it's ignored in actual practice. This is the plight of modern-day evangelism. Since they are convinced that the new birth is within the power and ability of man's will, their man-made methodology—the altar call, repeating the sinner's prayer, etc.—has become far more important than the *theology* of the Bible.

However, the sinner's state of death and bondage to sin cannot be changed by man *making a decision* or *walking an aisle*. Only the Spirit of God can create a new man in Christ Jesus. God in His grace must open the sinner's heart. Only then will he willingly repent and truly receive the Lord Jesus Christ. Otherwise, our so-called "converts" will have nothing but an *empty* religious profession.

The greatness of God's mercy, grace and power in saving sinners can only be seen in the light of man's desperate condition. What a glorious doctrine the new birth is to a helpless sinner! "The things that are impossible with men are possible with God!" (*Luke 18:27*). Let us return to Biblical preaching and apostolic methods as seen throughout the book of Acts, that our evangelizing might be to the praise, honor and glory of God. ☐

—by John Reisinger

*How helpless guilty nature lies, unconscious of its load!
The heart, unchanged can never rise, to happiness and God.*

*The will perverse, the passions blind, in paths of ruin stray;
Reason, debased, can never find, the safe, the narrow way.*

*Can aught, beneath a power divine, the stubborn will subdue?
Tis Thine, almighty Saviour, Thine, to form the heart anew.*

*O change these wretched hearts of ours, and give them life divine!
Then shall our passions and our powers, Almighty Lord, be Thine!*

—Isaac Watts

GOD'S PART AND MAN'S PART IN SALVATION

God and man must both do something before a man can be saved. Hyper-Calvinism denies the necessity of human action, and Arminianism denies the true nature of the Divine action. The Bible clearly sets forth both the Divine and human actions as essential in God's plan of salvation. This is not to say, as Arminianism does, "*God's part is to freely provide salvation for all men, and man's part is to become willing to accept it.*" This is not what we are saying nor is it what God's Word really teaches. To try to answer some "straw-man" objections, we will establish the subject one point at a time.

1. A man must repent and believe the gospel in order to be saved. No one was ever forgiven and made a child of God who did not willingly turn from sin to Christ. Nowhere does the Bible even hint that men can be saved without faith and repentance; but to the contrary, the Word always states these things are essential before a person can be saved. The one and only Bible answer to the question, "What must I do to be saved?" is, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved" (*Acts 16:30-31*).

2. Every one who repents and believes the gospel will be saved. Every soul, without any exception, who answers the gospel command to come to Christ will be received and forgiven by God. If we can be absolutely certain about anything, we can be sure that Christ will never break His promise to receive "all who come to Him" (*John 6:37; 7:37*). As John Bunyan said, "Come and welcome" is the Saviour's eternal word to all sinners.