

*Pastor's Papers* | Ronald H. Gann  
Theology/Doctrine

### **Total Depravity: Moral Inability**

Understanding Total Depravity (Part 4)

(Extracted From *The Scandal Of Sovereignty*; Ronald H. Gann [Aventine Press, 2012])

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The space race of the 1960s helped to define a generation. What started out in the 1940s as theoretical war games between the East and the West eventually evolved into an international contest to land the first human being on the moon. But the race to the moon proved to be more than just a matter of national defense. Also at stake were bragging rights for the winner.

As the 1960s got underway, the cultural, technological, and ideological rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union intensified. The two world powers volleyed for space superiority and military clout. Particularly disconcerting to the West were the pioneering efforts of the Soviet space program. Their advanced satellite technology, manned spaceflight, and heavy lift capability (essential for astral rocketry) dwarfed U.S. ingenuity by comparison. This grand display of Russian achievement openly embarrassed the United States government. It not only called into question the dominance and creativity of the American people but threatened the self-confidence of the country. Moved by passion and political savvy, then-presidential candidate John F. Kennedy made space exploration a staple issue of his campaign.

With the Cold War reaching a fever pitch by 1961, the newly-elected president took decisive action. On May 25, before a special joint-session of Congress, Kennedy expressed his growing concern over the United States failure to compete in aeronautics. As he had on the campaign stump, the President asserted that landing an American on the moon by the close of the decade was the only surefire way the United States could “catch up to and overtake” its Eastern nemesis. President Kennedy’s challenge extended beyond the halls of Congress and into the home of every American. It was a test of national resolve. He said:

First, I believe that this nation should commit itself to achieving the goal, before this decade is out, of landing a man on the moon and returning him safely to the earth. No single space project in this period will be more impressive to mankind, or more important for the long-range exploration of space; and none will be so difficult or expensive to accomplish ... But in a very real sense, it will not be one man going to the moon—if we make this judgment affirmatively, it will be an entire nation. For all of us must work to put him there.<sup>1</sup>

Tragically, President Kennedy did not live long enough to see his dream realized. He was assassinated only two years later on November 22, 1963, in Dallas, Texas while

riding in a presidential motorcade. Despite his premature death, the president's vision set in motion a chain of events that would guide mankind to his greatest technological achievement.

Six years later, on July 16, 1969, with President Richard M. Nixon in the White House, Apollo 11 launched from the Kennedy Space Center in Florida. It took only twelve minutes for the American spacecraft to enter orbit. Aboard Apollo 11 were cosmonauts Neil Armstrong, Command Module Pilot Michael Collins, and Lunar Module Pilot Edwin "Buzz" Aldrin.

Four days following the launch, July 20, 1969, the Apollo 11 crew landed safely on the moon. Their first act was to commemorate the historic landing by observing an even greater triumph in mankind's history—the atonement of Jesus Christ.<sup>2</sup> Aldrin writes in his memoirs:

In the radio blackout, I opened the little plastic packages which contained the bread and the wine. I poured the wine into the chalice our church had given me. In the one-sixth gravity of the moon, the wine slowly curled and gracefully came up the side of the cup. Then I read the Scripture, *'I am the vine, you are the branches. Whosoever abides in me will bring forth much fruit.'*... I ate the tiny Host and swallowed the wine. I gave thanks for the intelligence and spirit that had brought two young pilots to the Sea of Tranquility [on the moon]. It was interesting for me to think: the very first liquid ever poured on the moon, and the very first food eaten there, were the communion elements.<sup>3</sup>

Four days after liftoff, six hours after touchdown, and only minutes following an intergalactic Communion service, Aldrin and Armstrong disembarked the spacecraft for the first time. As Armstrong descended the ladder of the Lunar Module Eagle and touched ground on the moon's surface, he greeted a televised audience watching from earth with the soliloquy: "That's one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind."

Not surprisingly, the mission was extensively covered by the global media. Over 53 million households in America, or over 93% of the population, tuned in to watch the launch of Apollo 11 on television, and over 125 million viewers watched the moon landing. Conservative estimates indicate that half a billion people worldwide saw Armstrong take his first lunar step. This easily broke all previous television viewing records at the time. While the citizens of earth watched from 235,000 miles away as two human beings explored the New Frontier, mankind collectively turned a page in human history.

Praising the astronauts by way of satellite telephone was President Nixon who spoke personally to Aldrin and Armstrong. In addition to a silicon disc containing goodwill messages from 73 world leaders, together with medals honoring American and Soviet spacemen who lost their lives in earlier space tests, an American flag was hoisted on the moon and left behind by the astronauts. Today, the plaque on the Lunar Module reads: "Here men from the planet Earth first set foot upon the Moon, July 1969 A.D. We came in peace for all mankind."

So momentous were the events that transpired on July 21, 1969 that the United States acknowledged the occasion with a national day of celebration. All but emergency

and essential employees were allowed a paid day off from work, in both the government and in the private sector. A decade later a replica of the footprint left by Neil Armstrong on the moon's surface was placed in Tranquility Park in Houston, Texas as tribute to the American space program and in memorial to John F. Kennedy.

For most, the idea of spaceships moving at the speed of light and humans living and traveling through space is incomprehensible. Throughout six millennia of recorded history, the idea of putting a man on the moon was thought impossible and a figment of overeager imaginations. But when the scientific ingenuity of America proved otherwise in 1969, critics became believers and a new dawn of self-reliance was born.

The successful mission of Neil Armstrong, Buzz Aldrin, and Michael Collins, coupled with the growing science of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), showed the world that man is capable of accomplishing virtually anything he sets his mind to. Far from a Neanderthal, man's impressive aptitude has defied its known limitations. If the mission of Apollo 11 proved anything it was that human beings can make even the seemingly impossible quite probable and the unimaginable a reality. The events of July 21, 1969 saw man at his finest hour. But with its achievement also came the rebirth of the age-old heresy known as *humanism*.

Humanism is a progressive philosophy that, without theism and other supernatural beliefs, affirms the ability and responsibility of men to lead ethical lives of personal fulfillment that aspires to the greater good of humanity. In elementary terms, humanism asks the question: *Who needs God if human beings possess the wherewithal to be happy and the skill to accomplish the improbable?* It is a philosophy that exchanges the biblical credo, "with God all things are possible" (Matt. 19:6 cf. Mark 10:27; Luke 18:27) with the blasphemous notion that "all things are possible with *men*." The triumph of the 1969 moon landing, in conjunction with the rise of liberal sciences, coagulated and spread this error like never before. Man had become his own god. He appeared capable of accomplishing *anything*.

While certainly an awe-inspiring achievement, the Apollo 11 mission brings to mind a form of humanism rivaled in the early pages of the Old Testament. According to the account in Genesis, the Tower of Babel was erected by the citizens of ancient Babylon as an attempt to build a structure so immense that its top could reach the netherworld. Similar in scope to the moon landing, such a grand accomplishment was thought impossible for primitive man.

Humanism is front and center in the Tower of Babel story. The early Babylonians were convinced that by building a man-made structure that reached the heavens their self-promotion was justified. Motivated by pride, they no longer chose to glorify and honor their Creator who endowed them with the resourcefulness to survive, build, and thrive. Instead, they sinfully heaped up recognition for themselves in effort to gain independence from God. Rather than bring their ingenuity and creativity under God's authority, the ancient Babylonians sought to "make a name for [themselves]" (Gen. 11:3). Moreover, by working as a cohesive unit in a centralized location, they defied God's command to "Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth" (Gen. 9:1).

The self-reliance and overconfidence of the citizens of Babylon, both technologically and entrepreneurially, usurped God's command and challenged His leadership. As each rung or step was completed in their impressive edifice, a new height of egotistical satisfaction was attained.

Not surprisingly, God took a dim view of the Tower of Babel. Displeased with their prideful rebellion and their failure to replenish the earth, He took decisive action against the Babylonians. God confused their language and scattered them throughout the earth, bringing an abrupt halt to the building project. Notwithstanding God's intervention, the early seeds of humanism had been effectively planted.

So what is the common denominator linking the success of Apollo 11 with the failure of the Tower of Babel? In brief, both events suggest that man can do virtually anything with a little sweat and determination. "If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this," God observed, "then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them" (Gen. 11:6). To that end, ironically, NASA achieved what the citizens of Babel could not. After countless centuries of wishful speculation, the ingenuity of man finally reached the heavens with the Lunar Module.

It is certainly not my aim to bring into disrepute the sacredness of the 1969 moon landing, or even to suggest that the motivation behind it was rooted in sinful pride, as with the Tower of Babel. The mission of Apollo 11 stands forever as a hallmark of man's strength of mind. My intent, rather, is to demonstrate that the sin of humanism seems to have an uncanny way of creeping back into the stream of human consciousness with each new success that man attains. Sinful man prides himself on his abilities.

This self-righteousness, which comes naturally to egotistical sinners, has infected almost every area of our way of life, to include our theology, religion, and spirituality. Not surprisingly, to suggest (as Calvinism does) that unregenerate man is too depraved to spiritually heal himself and morally incapable to seek after, respond to, or desire his Creator is an assault on his haughty self-image. If we can find a way to put a man on the moon, we reason, surely we have the ability to find God on our own.

The doctrine of Total Depravity rules this out altogether. Not only is man innately wicked, enslaved to sin, subjected to Satan, spiritually blind, and spiritually dead but he is helpless in and of himself to seek a remedy. To be clear, it is not as though the remedy eludes his grasp. Instead, he is simply incapable of conjuring up the will or the fortitude to put forth the reach. He is enslaved by his terminal disease. Since the corruption of sin extends to every part of man's nature (whereby his heart is hostile to God and he recoils from spiritual truth), the unregenerate person does not have the spiritual prowess or discernment to savingly embrace Christ or believe the gospel. Men are void of the means. Our lack of desire for the things of God in our fallen state renders our natural will effectively comatose.

Sin is a cruel tyrant. It corrupts the entire person—infesting the soul, polluting the mind, defiling the conscience, contaminating the affections, and poisoning the will. "It is the life-destroying, soul-condemning cancer," wrote one theologian, "that festers and grows in every unredeemed human heart like an incurable gangrene."<sup>4</sup>

While Arminians are quick to acknowledge the stain of sin on the human *spirit*, they tend to retreat concerning its effect on the human *will*. They would have us believe that a sinner's free agency basically retains its pre-Fall impeccability. In flowery terms, Arminian tradition seems to imply that the unregenerate will is an island of righteousness amid a tsunami of fallen flesh. The Calvinistic doctrine of moral inability, for that reason, undermines the very fabric of Arminian DNA. It removes man's freedom of will in the salvation equation altogether and pronounces a death sentence on his

body, mind, and soul. Thus, the dogma of inability, biblical though it may be, has caused much dissention throughout Church history and fractured many a relationship.

The bondage of the human will, as Martin Luther (1483-1546) later coined it during the Protestant Reformation, first gained considerable thrust in the fifth century. Augustine's counterassault on the free-will views of Pelagius (354-420/440) at the Council of Carthage in 418 led to the Council of Ephesus in 431 and the Council of Orange in 529. Each council decisively declared Augustine's doctrine of *inability* the victor. It also fueled the historic debates to follow between Luther and Erasmus in the sixteenth century; the followers of Calvin and the Arminian Remonstrants in the early seventeenth century; and George Whitefield and John Wesley in the eighteenth century.

Aurelius Augustine of Hippo (354-430) was the first Church father to unmask man's overall depravity and his moral inability. He saw man's capacity to exercise his freedom as a burden of Original Sin, and was therefore forced to conclude it had been lost through the Fall. For him, as well as for the Reformers who followed in his train of thought, a sinner is both free and in bondage at the same time, *but not in the same sense*. A sinner is free to act according to his own inclinations, to be sure, yet "every inclination of the thoughts of his heart [is] only evil all the time" (Gen. 6:5). In other words, a sinner is free only insofar as his slavery to sin permits him. Since the Fall, our natural hearts are not captured to the will of God but are held captive to our taskmaster, Satan. Augustine wrote:

But whence comes this liberty to do right to the man who is in bondage and sold under sin, except he be redeemed by Him who has said, "If the Son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed" [John 8:36 KJV]? And before this redemption is wrought in a man, when he is not yet free to do what is right, how can he talk of the freedom of his will and his good works, except he be inflated by that foolish pride of boasting which the apostle restrains when he says, "By grace are ye saved, through faith" [Eph. 2:8, KJV].<sup>5</sup>

In effect, Augustine argued that when man committed spiritual suicide in Eden he became powerless to restore himself to life. He forfeited any ability to pursue his Creator. "It was by the evil use of his free-will," he wrote, "that man destroyed both it and himself."<sup>6</sup> Dr. J.I. Packer, one of the most influential evangelicals in North America and Western Europe, does us a favor on this point by offering a fitting analogy:

A prisoner has the freedom to pace up and down in his cell, but he is constrained by the walls of that cell and can go no further, no matter how much his will might desire it. So it is with man. Because of sin, man is imprisoned within a cell of corruption and wickedness which permeates to the very core of our being. Every part of man is in bondage to sin—our bodies, our minds, and our wills.<sup>7</sup>

Dr. Loraine Boettner (1901-1990), a dominant voice in Reformed circles in the early twentieth century, offered a pithy comparison. He wrote, "As the 'bird' with a

broken wing is ‘free’ to fly but not able, so the natural man is free to come to God but not able.” He concluded:

Man is a free agent but he cannot originate the love of God in his heart. His will is free in the sense that it is not controlled by any force outside of himself ... How can he repent of his sin when he loves it? How can he come to God when he hates Him? This is the inability of the will under which man labors.<sup>8</sup>

So how do Calvinists respond to well-meaning Christians who insist that an unregenerate sinner can indeed seek God? The answer boils down to etymology and the properties found in a single word. To better understand the Bible’s teaching concerning man’s moral inability it is imperative that we first have a proper understanding of the word “can.” This word plays an all-too-important role in the debate. As any language lexicon plainly states, the word “can” connotes *ability*. The translated verb *dunamai* in the Greek means “to be able, [to] have power whether by virtue of one’s own ability and resources, or of a state of mind.”<sup>9</sup> English synonyms for the word “can” include: (1) “be able to;” (2) “know how to;” and (3) “be capable of.” (On this point the Greek definition and English synonyms for “can” are crucial and must be kept in mind by the reader).

With the original language serving as our guidepost, Reformed Theology assumes that unregenerate sinners are neither “capable of” nor do they “know how to” seek after the living God. Man’s moral ability is naturally and severely retarded; he lacks any capacity to subject himself to God’s Law. Crystallizing Augustine’s thoughts, The Westminster Confession of Faith postulates the Reformed view as follows:

Man, by his fall into a state of sin, hath wholly lost all ability of will to any spiritual good accompanying salvation; so as a natural man, being altogether averse from good, and dead in sin, is not able, by his own strength, to convert himself, or to prepare himself thereunto.<sup>10</sup>

So how did Augustine, the Patristic Fathers, the Reformers, the Puritan Divines, and a myriad of Church confessions and creeds throughout the ages derive such an unpopular doctrine? The answer is found in sacred Scripture. The Bible expands upon man’s depravity to include his moral inability in no uncertain terms. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, for example, the prophet Jeremiah said:

“**Can** the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard its spots? *Neither can you do good who are accustomed to doing evil*” (Jer. 13:23, emphasis added).

Notice the negative sense in which the word “can” is used in the prophet’s statement. This vivid analogy assumes that sinners do not have the ability to change their sinful natures or do good, just as people of color are incapable of changing their skin pigmentation or an animal the composition of its fur. By asking and answering his own rhetorical question, Jeremiah asserts that sinners—particularly those in Judah to

whom he writes—are unable to repent and obey the Lord. At issue here in Jeremiah’s scathing statement is man’s lack of ability.

The fundamental incapacity of natural man to know God is also brought to bear in the New Testament. The apostle Paul tells us that unregenerate sinners are adverse to the things of God. But man’s rejection of spiritual things, Paul says, is more than just willful rejection. Man does not have the *capacity* to accept them. In the words of the prophet Amos: “They do not know how to do right” (Amos 3:10). Unless he is spiritually regenerated, a sinner is both unwilling and unable to believe the gospel. The apostle’s words are biting:

The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, *and he cannot understand them*, because they are spiritually discerned ... no one **can** say, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ except by the Holy Spirit” (1 Cor. 2:14, 12:3b emphasis added).

A sinner may very well understand the proclamation of the gospel itself, but until spiritual life is given to him, the words remain void of any real meaning. He lacks the spiritual ability to appraise spiritual truths. The same apostle who wrote 1 Corinthians 2:14 echoes his own point in his epistle to the church in Rome. Paul explains further:

Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God’s law, *nor can it do so*. Those controlled by the sinful nature **cannot** please God (Rom. 8:5-8, emphasis added).

In 1 Corinthians 2:14 and Romans 8:5-8 Paul insists that unregenerate sinners “cannot understand” the gospel nor can they submit to the Word of God. Paul does not merely say that sinners *will not* understand or submit, although that is clearly inferred, but emphasizes the fact that sinners *cannot* do these things. An unsaved person *cannot* live a godly and righteous life because he has no godly and righteous motives or internal resources that propel him in that direction. He therefore *cannot* have genuine love for God nor can he fathom the things of God. Unbelievers are *incapable* of doing anything good, spiritually speaking, because they are not motivated or empowered by the Holy Spirit (cf. Isa. 64:6). It clearly follows, then, that if the fleshly mind does not and *cannot* subject itself to the Law of God, those who operate in the sinful flesh *cannot* please Him. Spiritual regeneration is required before a sinner can acquire the compulsory enablement.

Probably the most forceful words on this issue were submitted by the Lord Jesus. In John 6:25-70, Jesus preached a sermon that forever altered the course of his ministry and ultimately put him on the cross. In the *Bread of Life* discourse, the Lord stunned the crowd by implying that his origins were from old, and that he had come down from heaven to provide spiritual food to the Israelites that not even Moses was able to provide during their wilderness wanderings (vv. 32-37). Moved to indignation by the Lord’s

seemingly sacrilegious statement, the crowd became fierce and grumbled against him. But their fickleness was not lost on Jesus:

“Stop grumbling among yourselves,” Jesus answered. “No one **can** come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day ... no one **can** come to me unless the Father has enabled him” (John 6:43-44, 65).

The Lord’s words concerning man’s inability could not be more potent. Jesus made it clear that unbelievers *cannot* come to the Savior on their own initiative. If God did not irresistibly draw sinners to Christ pursuant to their regeneration, no one would ever come to him. (Likewise, no one can come to the Father except “those to whom the Son *chooses* to reveal him” [Matt. 11:27, emphasis added]). Not surprisingly, by emphasizing man’s helplessness and utter inability to respond to God apart from His sovereign enablement, the Lord’s prideful disciples responded in a way that is eerily similar to modern-day Arminians: “This is a hard teaching,” they balked. “Who can accept it?” (v. 60). To reject the doctrine of man’s spiritual and moral inability, therefore, is to ultimately sympathize with those whom our Lord chided in John 6.

Not long afterward, when this squabble reached a crescendo in John 8:42-47, the Lord delivered the final death knell on free-will and human ability. To the teachers of the Law and the Pharisees, he declared, “Why is my language not clear to you? Because you are **unable** to hear what I say ... The reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to God” (vv. 43, 48).

Again man’s inability leaps from the page and cuts the heart out of Arminian theology. The unregenerate Jews, to whom our Lord admonished, were “unable” to hear Christ’s words because their hearts were spiritually dead. They *wanted* only to do the desires of their father, the devil (v. 44). It is certainly true that our Lord’s enemies chose not to hear his words. But Jesus is more to the point: they *could not* hear his words because they “[did] not belong to God.” The point is that outside of the grace of God no one would ever respond to Christ and his teachings. One must first be regenerated by God’s Spirit and brought into His fold in order to hear His words and thereby believe.

So how do Arminians respond to this Calvinistic assertion of inability? When faced with the weight of biblical argumentation stacked against them, most tend to retreat to logic rather than Scripture: *God wouldn’t give us a command that we are unable to fulfill*, they argue vehemently. *If He commands us to seek after Him, then it only stands to reason that sinners have the freedom to do so! God does not set us up for failure by telling us to do that which He knows we cannot!*

Although this is an honest response that deserves a respectful answer, this type of logic is the identical trap that ensnared Pelagius fifteen hundred years ago. His pretentious motto was plain enough: “If I ought, then I can.” In other words, if God commands it, then it’s only commonsensical that human beings must be capable of doing it. To suggest otherwise, Pelagius claimed, is to paint God as unrighteous and cruel. The British monk elaborated:

We ascribe to the God of knowledge the guilt of twofold ignorance; ignorance of his own creation and of his commands. As if, forgetting the

weakness of men, his own creation, he had laid upon men commands which they were unable to bear. [...] we ascribe to the Just One unrighteousness and cruelty to the Holy One; the first, by complaining that he has commanded the impossible, the second, by imagining that a man will be condemned by him for what he could not help ...<sup>11</sup>

For Pelagius, the command to obey implied the ability to comply. And many Arminians, it seems, would agree. But overlooked in such logic is the judgment of Scripture. From Genesis to Revelation, the Bible is replete with divine commands that human beings are expected to keep but are instinctively incapable of obeying. Therefore, it doesn't necessarily follow logically that unregenerate sinners have the ability to seek after salvation simply because God puts forth the command in Scripture.

For example, all men are commanded to "Love the Lord your God *with all your heart* and *with all your soul* and *with all your strength*" (Deut. 6:5 cf. Matt. 22:37; Mark 12:30; Luke 10:27, emphasis added). This is a nonnegotiable imperative. Yet there is not a human being on record, apart from Christ, who has been, or ever will be, capable of loving God with such absolute commitment. In the end, we all fall short of the mandate because we all fall short on ability.

Moreover, as Christ-followers we are commanded to "Be holy because I, the Lord your God, am holy" (Lev. 10:3 cf. 1 Pet. 1:15-16). In New Testament jargon, we are to "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matt. 5:48). These commands are fundamentally one in the same and are binding on every believer. Yet once again, despite his best efforts, it is painfully obvious that no sinner can meet such impossible standards.

While God commands all sinners to love and to emulate Him, and to be holy and perfect like Him, it is a biblical verity that man can do neither to God's satisfaction. In the same way, relative to salvation, it does not prove that a sinner can seek after God on his own simply because the Bible contains marching orders to that effect. We stand with the Patristic Fathers, therefore, who unanimously deposed Pelagius as a heretic, and we reject as felonious his motto "If I ought, then I can." It is theological humanism in its slickest form, the likes of which we must be on guard against.

Here, then, stands the final verdict: Total Depravity, we read in Holy Writ, ravages like a deadly cancer the nature, heart, intellect, and the self-will of man from conception to death. No faculty of man is left unmarred by Original Sin. As a consequence, King David lamented its debilitating effects on the unredeemed will:

The Lord looks down from heaven on the sons of men *to see if there are any who understand, any who seek God*. All have turned aside, they have together become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one (Psa. 14:2-3, emphasis added).

The apostle Paul echoes, and then expands upon, the Davidic psalm in Romans 3:11-12 and concludes outright: "no one ... seeks God" but "All have turned away." What is more, owing to mankind's wickedness, the author of Psalm 10:4 chimes in: "In his pride the wicked does not seek him; in all his thoughts there is no room for God." It

appears that David, Paul, and the psalmist understood clearly the bondage of the human will and its unwillingness to seek after the things of God.

If, then, as we have seen throughout Scripture, every inclination in the heart of man is wicked whereby no person can or will seek God, it stands to reason that Arminianism is built upon a faulty premise. If there truly exists in this fallen world enemies of God who seek after Him on their own accord—in contradiction to their spiritual blindness and deadness, enslaved wills, innate wickedness, moral inability, and bondage to Satan—then neither David, Jeremiah, the psalmist, Jesus, nor Paul knew anything about them. To suggest that unredeemed man has the means, let alone the interest, to seek a holy God is simply a theological fiction that flies in the face of Scripture’s clear exposé on universal depravity.

So what are unbelievers and so-called seekers searching for when they go to church? Are they not fulfilling the commands of Scripture that Calvinism maintains are undoable? What they are seeking, the Calvinist responds, is happiness and contentment, not holiness and conversion. They seek the benefits and blessings of God rather than the Benefactor of those blessings. They covet material gifts reminiscent of children on Christmas morning but are uninterested in the Gift-giver. They seek to fulfill their quest for eternity that God has purposely placed in their hearts “yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end” (Eccl. 3:11). They long for the emotional comfort and security that often comes from participating in religious ceremonies but flee from God whenever the word “surrender” is mentioned.

The notion that fallen men have the ability to facilitate or thwart God’s sovereign work of salvation by exercising free-will does not find its origin in the exegesis of inspired Scripture. It is quite simply a tradition of men (cf. Matt. 15:1-6). But there is good news. Despite the fact that the prize of redemption is beyond man’s reach, there is a God in heaven who has the power to save. He overcomes the impossible with His impossible grace. And how exactly does He do this? I close this section on Total Depravity with the words of Charles Spurgeon:

Christ is not only *‘mighty to save’* those who repent, but He is able to make men repent. He will carry those to heaven who believe; but He is, moreover, mighty to give men new hearts and to work faith in them. He is mighty to make the man who hates holiness love it, and to constrain the despiser of His name to bend the knee before Him ... Believer, here is encouragement. Art thou praying for some beloved one? Oh, give not up thy prayers, for Christ is *‘mighty to save.’* You are powerless to reclaim the rebel, but your Lord is Almighty. Lay hold on that mighty arm and rouse it to put forth its strength ... Whether to begin with others, or to carry on the work in you, Jesus is *‘mighty to save;’* the best proof of which lies in the fact that He has saved *you*.<sup>12</sup>

—Ronald H. Gann

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<sup>1</sup> John F. Kennedy; speech delivered in person before a joint session of Congress on May 25, 1961.

<sup>2</sup> NASA was already embroiled in a legal battle with Madelyn Murray O'Hare, the celebrated opponent of religion, over the Apollo 8 crew reading from Genesis while orbiting the moon at Christmas. NASA kept the Communion of Apollo 11 secret for two decades. The memoirs of Buzz Aldrin and the Tom Hanks' Emmy-winning HBO mini-series, *From the Earth to the Moon* (1998), brought awareness to this act of Christian worship.

<sup>3</sup> As cited at [www.liturgy.co.nz/blog/first-communion-moon/1203](http://www.liturgy.co.nz/blog/first-communion-moon/1203)

<sup>4</sup> John MacArthur, *Slave*; (Thomas Nelson, 2010); pp. 120-21

<sup>5</sup> R.C. Sproul, *Willing to Believe*; (Baker Books, 1997); p. 64

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* p. 47

<sup>7</sup> J.I. Packer, *Evangelism & The Sovereignty of God*; (Inter-varsity Press; 1991)

<sup>8</sup> Loraine Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*; (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1932); pp. 61-62

<sup>9</sup> [www.studydrive.org/isb/view.cgi?number=1410](http://www.studydrive.org/isb/view.cgi?number=1410)

<sup>10</sup> The Westminster Confession of Faith (1646); 9:3

<sup>11</sup> [atheism.about.com/library/FAQs/christian/blfaq\\_hist\\_pelagius.htm](http://atheism.about.com/library/FAQs/christian/blfaq_hist_pelagius.htm)

<sup>12</sup> As cited at [www.spurgeon.org/sermons/0111.htm](http://www.spurgeon.org/sermons/0111.htm)