



Eternal Security

A Biblical examination of man's salvation

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Christianity has long wrestled with the issue of man's nature. Questions about the inheritance of a sinful nature, the depravity of that nature, and the selection, and spiritual security of a man have been debated for centuries. Scripture addresses these questions with sound, eternal, and authoritative answers. Unfortunately, many in the religious world have "landed" on a non-biblical understanding of the texts that answer these issues.

It is my assertion that with a careful examination of the scriptures which address these issues, one may have a truly Biblical understanding of them.

As with all responsible topics of research, one must approach with no external influences to weigh their interpretation of scripture. This is difficult, since many already have concluded an answer based upon their religious upbringing or through the spiritual influence of another in their life. One must be cautious to allow the Bible to speak for itself by employing sound study tools. Texts must be taken in context of their greater message, considering the audience of the early centuries. It must be understood that the Bible (being truly God's inspired, delivered word for mankind) is authoritative, therefore, eternal & relevant... not tied to any single era or culture.

Conclusions from my research are as follows:

- Man is **not** born into a state of total depravity, rather, man's sinful nature is one that is acquired through actions of sinful living.
- Man **must** satisfy the conditions that God has established as necessary in order to receive salvation (be saved). These conditions are clearly revealed in Scripture, and are eternal, and universal.
- Man may **surrender** the benefits of salvation through a willful, non-repentant life of sinfulness & rebellion against God. In other words, man is **not** eternally secured in a state of salvation, rather, as with all covenant agreements, man must remain faithful to the boundaries of the covenant or surrender the covenant benefits.
- Salvation is a **volitional** choice which is directly linked to obedience, not an irresistible action of a saving grace. Salvation is not man's work, but God's work through man's faith & obedience.

The following is a brief overview of the findings of my personal studies. They reflect my firm belief that the Bible is the authoritative, eternal Word of God, sufficient to answer all questions of faith & practice. As you consider these followings, I would encourage you to seek the Scriptures that I have cited, and allow God's Word to speak for itself.

First, we must understand the premise of Augustinianism (Calvinism) and the influence it holds over the interpretation of Scripture. Calvinism is not a theological system invented by John (Jean) Calvin.

Consider the following:

- Most of "Calvinist" components can be found in Augustine. (d. A.D. 430)
- Most of the system was taught by earlier reformers like Luther, and Zwingli.
- Calvin adopted most of Zwingli's teachings (d. 1531) developing it into a consistent systematic theology, as set forth in his Institutes of the Christian Religion.
- The "five points" of Calvinism were not formulated as such until the Synod of Dort in the Neth-

erlands in 1618. The order they are usually found today is not reflective of their order from the synod.

- “Calvinism” usually refers to the specific doctrines of God, sin, and salvation as included within Reformed theology.

Historic, Classic, Main-Stream Calvinism is organized in the following five points:

Total Depravity. The idea that the entire human race is totally depraved as a result of Adam’s sin. This depravity is “inherited” by all mankind, under this concept God actually holds pre-born humans accountable for sin.

Unconditional Election. Also known as unconditional predestination, suggesting that only a predetermined number of humans will be saved.

Limited Atonement. Resulting from the concept of unconditional election, this concept teaches that God determined the exact number of those to be saved, and limited the suffering of Christ to the exact amount needed to redeem this amount alone.

Irresistible Grace. Since, (according to Calvinism) sinners are totally depraved, and are also predetermined for salvation, man must have salvation bestowed upon them through an irresistible action of God. Under this concept, man has no choice in faith and grace is impressed upon him.

Perseverance (or Preservation) of the Saint. This is better known as the doctrine of “once saved-always saved”. The idea of this teaching is that God will not allow the predetermined, saved to “fall from grace” or forfeit salvation, regardless of their personal life choices, or lack of obedience to God. There are no spiritually detrimental consequences to personal, sinful choices.

These tenants of Calvinism are known as **TULIP**. Every doctrine of Calvinism hinges upon the first of these five points... Total Depravity. It only stands to reason that if man is not totally depraved, there would be no need for any of the remaining tenants of the system.

The Bible exposes the teaching of Total Depravity as a false doctrine.

Mankind is not born in a state of **inherited** depravity. Mankind is not born into **total** depravity, though he does become depraved (in various degrees) through his own life choices and experiences. Man is not eternally secured, since salvation is not imposed upon man in some irresistible manner... it is a free gift of God in response to our faith & obedience.

Those who embrace Total Depravity point out many Biblical texts which (in their estimation) teach that man has a depraved heart, and is spiritually dead. (Jer. 17:9, Eph. 2:1,5) Although we do agree that man is depraved, he is not **totally** depraved, as Calvin taught. There are many degrees of depravity, and recognizing depravity (as the Bible does) does not embrace the idea of total depravity. In fact, Scripture teaches in many points that spiritually dead men can understand & respond to the Gospel of Christ. Consider Colossians 2:12-13.

Calvinists teach that it is impossible for man, since he is totally depraved, to do anything good, often quoting Matthew 7:18:

“A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit.”
Matthew 7:18, NASB’95

However, Jesus clarified this teaching in Matthew 12:33:

“Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or make the tree bad and its fruit bad; for the tree is known by its fruit.” Matthew 12:33, NASB’95

Since this is an exhortation addressed to men, it implies that the decision to be either good or bad is within the power of the sinner’s choice.

Romans 8:7-8 is another scripture used by Calvinists to impose the idea of total depravity. However,

careful study of the text clearly shows that the context of this scripture is in reference to the law, not the Gospel. As long as a person is controlled by the flesh, and in an unbelieving, unrepentant, disobedient condition, he is unable to obey the command of the law, and, therefore, unable to please God. This text says nothing about a sinner's inability to respond to the Gospel of Christ.

Passages like Matthew 23:37, John 3:16, Romans 1:17, Revelation 22:17 teach clearly that sinful men are **able** and **expected** to respond to the Gospel in faith and repentance.

Another significant point to consider is that Jesus always addressed salvation as a faith response of obedience by the sinner. John 6:44 says that the Father "draws men to Christ", and Jesus taught that (unlike the teaching of Calvin) the drawing is **universal & resistible** (not selective & irresistible). All are drawn to Jesus by the power of the Gospel (Rom. 1:16, 10:17; 2 Thes. 2:14; Heb. 4:12) but only some respond to this drawing (John 12:32).

Jesus, in reference to the universal calling (or drawing) said: "And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself." The Gospel is the good news of salvation to sinners, clearly able to be understood by sinners, and able to be responded to by sinners for salvation. Denying that the Word of God has the power to draw sinners to Christ disregards the very purpose and character of the written Word as addressed to sinners. John writes: but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.

If man is totally depraved, mission efforts, preaching, teaching & the writing of God's Word is in vain.

Clearly, God's Word has not been written in vain, and was given in order to bring mankind into a saving relationship with Christ. **Romans 10:1-17** discusses the purpose of preaching, teaching, and the written word... it is to lead sinful men to Christ.

Since total depravity is not supported in Scripture, each of the remaining teachings of Calvinism (unconditional election, limited atonement, irresistible grace, and preservation or eternal security of the saints) are **false** since they rely upon the initial premise of total depravity. Scripture speaks clearly that man is responsible to respond to the Gospel in faith & obedience through repentance, confession, baptism and continued faithful Christian living.

If salvation is **conditional**, mankind must choose & remain to be obedient to the conditions set by God if he is to remain in a saving covenant with God. Since salvation is conditional, every tenant of unconditionality taught by Calvin is false.

Hebrews addresses the issue of eternal security:

Therefore leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ, let us press on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, of instruction about washings and laying on of hands, and the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment. And this we will do, if God permits. For in the case of those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame.

Hebrews 6:1-6, NASB'95

Here, the writer of Hebrews speaks of a **formerly** redeemed person (enlightened, tasted the heavenly gift, made partaker of the Holy Spirit) who remains in a willful, fallen, **unrepentant** state. The writer, by inspiration & approval of the Holy Spirit, writes that it is impossible for such an individual to be brought back to repentance as long as they remain in a fallen, unrepentant condition. In other words... salvation and it's benefits is surrendered when a Christian willingly continues in sin. In fact, in

Hebrews 10:26, the writer adds: For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins. (NASB'95)

Clearly, as shown in this passage from Hebrews, when a person continues in an unrepentant condition of sinful behavior, they are acting in unbelief. Scripture consistently reveals that sin is against God and that continued unrepentant sinful living is a condition of rebellious disbelief.

The Scripture is clear: man can fall from (or abandon) God's grace. The good news of the Gospel is this: man can be forgiven & restored if he repents & remains faithful. If a Christian, even one considered to be less than genuine in his conversion, cannot fall or be brought back to repentance... why did Peter (under inspiration of the Holy Spirit) tell Simon to do something he was unable to do? Consider Acts 8.

The true thrust of the Gospel is summed up in this: *"This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth."*

1 Timothy 2:3-4, NASB'95