Calvinism: Total Depravity

Total Depravity is the foundation of Calvinism. Without first buying into *their* definition of Total Depravity, the other four points make no sense. But if you buy in to Calvinism's definition of Total Depravity, the other four points logically flow out of that definition.
Scripture tells us to not depend on human logic or "unaided reason" (Prov 3:5-6; 14:12; Rom 3:5), beginning all the way back with Adam & Eve. God made this clear with Adam & Eve. In the Garden of Eden, there were two consequential trees: the Tree of Life, and the Tree of Knowledge of Good & Evil. Looking at them, you likely couldn't tell the difference between them. There was no sign hanging on either tree identifying them. They were just two trees.
In order to distinguish them, man needed God to come in with His Word to explain the difference between the two trees. This one is the good tree, it will give you life. This tree is the bad tree, it will kill you. And unless God, with His Word, came alongside and aided their reason, they would not know the difference between the two trees. Keep in mind that at that time, Adam & Eve were "unfallen" yet they still needed the Word of God to explain the general revelation of God all around them.
If this was true for Adam & Eve, how much more is it true for us today. You can't understand life or reality without God's Word. Someone may sound very logical, very intelligent, but the Bible warns us about unaided reason.
Calvinism is very logical, and the appeal of Calvinists is always based on logic. But because the Bible admonishes us against unaided reason, we need to put the theology of Calvinism through God's Word and not rely solely on our sense of logic.
We need to understand that God is very logical. The things God does make sense if you examine them. However, you can't get to the mind of God simply through human logic. The only way to confirm human logic is through God's Word.
Calvinism's Definition of Total Depravity
To a Calvinist, Total Depravity means that a lost sinner has *no ability* to put their faith/trust in a Savior, even with the conviction of the Holy Spirit of sin, righteousness, and judgment to come (John 14:7-11). While it is true that no man can come to Christ without divine enablement, that divine enablement has been provided through the convicting ministry of the Holy Spirit.
Even as the Holy Spirit convicts the lost world of sin, righteousness, and judgment, Calvinists say that man's depravity is so total and so complete that the Spirit's convicting ministry is not enough (if it's not enough, why does God do it? Seems like a waste of His time).

In the mind of a 5-point Calvinist, man is nothing more than an insensate rock. He has no more ability to trust in a Savior than a rock does. So then, how does one get saved? To a Calvinist, God has to impart the gift of faith (to some people [only the "elect", not any one else] because no one can believe on their own. Another way to say it is that God has to first "regenerate" a person before they can believe.
However, the order given to us in the Bible is the exact opposite: it teaches that you believe, then you are born again/regenerated. The Bible communicates an *ordo salutis* (order of salvation): you are convicted by the Holy Spirit, then you believe/put your faith in Christ, then you're regenerated. Calvinism's definition of Total Depravity inverts the *ordo salutis* that is repeated over and over again in the Bible.
Total Depravity (biblically speaking) **ISNOT**:

- Man is as evil as he can possibly be, or indulges in every possible sin
  - Even an atheist who hates God stops for kids in the crosswalk
- Man is incapable of doing good things
  - Gen 3:22 - man, in his fallen state, knows both good and evil
  - Matt 7:11 - even evil fathers give good gifts to their children
  - Acts 10:1-2 - unsaved Cornelius was a "devout man," "feared God," "gave alms," and "prayed to God continually"
  - Rom 2:14-15 - a "law" in the heart to all people (conscience) accuses unbelievers, but these same unbelievers do many other works that do not violate their conscience. Unsaved people can do a lot of good by keeping their conscience (although the good they do does not save them).
- Man, even when convicted by the Holy Spirit, has no ability to trust in a Savior

  The Scriptures speak of human nature as totally depraved. However, the doctrine of 'total depravity' is easily misunderstood and misinterpreted. From the negative standpoint, it is important to know both what it does not mean and what it does mean. This does not mean that every sinner is devoid of all qualities pleasing to men; that he commits, or is prone to every form of sin; or that he is bitterly opposed to God as it is possible for him to be. Jesus recognized the existence of pleasing qualities in some individuals (Mark 10:21); He sais that the scribes and Pharisees did some things God demanded (Matt 23:23); Paul asserted that some Gentiles 'do instinctively the things of the law' (Rom 2:24); God told Abraham that the iniquity of the Amorites would grow worse (Gen 15:16); and Paul says that 'evil men and imposters will proceed from bad to worse' (2 Tim 3:13). [Henry Clarence Thiessen, *Lectures in Systematic Theology*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 191.]

Total Depravity (biblically speaking) **IS**:

- Every area of man's being is touched by sin (this is what the "total" in total depravity means):
  - Intellect
    - Prov 3:5-6 - we are not to "lean onto our own understanding" because our understanding, our intellect, has been tainted by original sin
    - Prov 14:12 - the logic of man (unaided reason) leads to death; the reason why certain things seem right to man is because our minds have been impacted by original sin
    - 2 Cor 4:4 - the "god of this world" has blinded the minds of unbelievers so that they will not see the light of the gospel
    - Rom 3:11a - the reason why "no one understands" is because our minds are warped by original sin
  - Conscience - *con*, "with"; *science*, "knowledge"; so "conscience" means "with knowledge." Conscience is the barometer that God puts in every person, saved or not, that accuses or excuses them of their behavior. God has taken His Law and put it into the heart of every person, saved or unsaved, through conscience. The problem with conscience is that you can violate it so frequently that it loses its sensitizing power. Once a person, culture, or nation reaches that level ("maximum degeneracy"), they are ripe for God's judgment.
    - 1 Tim 4:2 - our conscience can become "seared...as with a branding iron" if we continually violate our conscience
  - Will
    - Rom 1:28 - people do not have a knowledge of God because they don't want to have a knowledge of God; it's by their own free will that they reject God or knowledge of Him
    - Rom 3:11b - no one seeks God; our default state, because of original sin, is to not seek God
  - Deeds
    - Rom 3:12 - man cannot do anything of eternal value if they are not connected (through belief) to Jesus Christ
  - Speech
    - Rom 3:13-14 - because man's heart is wicked, man's speech is wicked
    - Matt 12:34 - out of abundance of heart, the mouth speaks
  - Feet
    - Rom 3:15 - the human race has a tremendous propensity to shed blood

    - Heart
        - Jer 17:9 - our heart is deceitful and desperately sick
        - Gen 8:21 - the Flood fixed the external (rid the world of the pagans/Nephilim), but didn't fix the inside of man
        - Mark 7:21 - from *within* man flow evil thoughts, fornications, thefts...
        - John 2:25 - Jesus knows what is in mankind (what type of people we are)
        - Eph 4:18 - the hardness of our heart leads us to a darkened understanding
    - Body
        - Gen 3:19 - we were created from the dust of the ground, and because of original sin, our body will return to the ground
        - Rom 8:23 - we are waiting on the regeneration of our bodies
        - 2 Cor 4:16 - our body is decaying
    - Total being
        - Rom 1:18--3:20 - Paul's treatise on the sinfulness of mankind
- Man is incapable of earning merit favor from God (Is 64:6; Eph 2:8-9)
    - A lost person in depravity can do a lot of wonderful things, but they can't do a single thing to merit God's favor
    - The only thing they can do to merit God's favor toward them, in their fallen state, is to trust in the work Jesus did for them 2000 years ago on the cross
        - Is 64:6 - it's not our unrighteous deeds that are filthy rags, it is our "righteous" deeds
        - Eph 2:8-9 - the only thing I can do to secure God's favor is to put my trust in His Son (which is not a "work," Rom 4:4-5)

"Total" is a statement of the breadth of sin, not the depth (or intensity) of sin. It is also a general statement meaning that every single person, other than Jesus Christ, has been tainted by sin.

Calvinism has taken total depravity, a valid, truthful teaching in Scripture, and has made way too much out of it, to the point that they have distorted its biblical meaning.

Calvinism's definition of Total Depravity:

> *"T" stands for "Total Depravity." Man is completely and wholly depraved and has no ability whatsoever to respond (repent or believe) to God until he is first "regenerated" by God."* [Bob Kirkland, *Calvinism: None Dare Call It Heresy; Spotlight on the Life and Teachings of John Calvin* (Eureka, MT: Lighthouse Trails, 2018), 34.]

Calvinism's definition of Total Depravity means "inability." Man is like an inanimate object, a rock. Preaching the gospel to a rock would be pointless because the object cannot understand or make a decision. This is how Calvinism views people who have not been "elected" and first regenerated by God.

In order for a rock to trust Christ, God has to first do a work on the front end. This work is not just the convicting work of the Holy Spirit of the need to trust in Christ, which is what God does for all of us (we can't come to Christ on our own unless we're first convicted by the Holy Spirit and drawn to Him). As we're drawn to Him, through volition, we have the power to make a decision to trust in Him, or not.

Calvinism denies this. Even with the Holy Spirit's convicting ministry, it would be like convicting an inanimate object, which has no volition or right to make a free will decision. In Calvinism, in order for a person to be saved, even with the conviction of the Spirit, God must also do a work of regeneration (give you the "gift of faith") beforehand in order for a person to have the ability to accept Christ.

So Calvinism teaches that regeneration precedes faith. They believe that God must first regenerate a person (give them the gift of faith) before they can make a decision to believe in Christ, because of Total Depravity. In Calvinism, a person must be "born again" before they are able to accept Christ.

But the Bible teaches the exact opposite. The Bible says you are convicted by the Holy Spirit, you believe (from your own free will/volition), and then you are born again/regenerated.

And it gets worse...not everyone receives the gift of faith from God. Only the "elect" who were specifically chosen by God, to the exclusion of all others, receive this "gift of faith" according to Calvinism (under their belief in Unconditional Election). Those who are not elected go to hell, with no choice in the matter whatsoever.

Calvinism makes a big deal about the first part of Eph 2...this is how they suck in new converts to their theology:

> Eph 2:1,5:
> 1 And you were **deadin your offenses and sins**,
> 5 **even whenwe were dead** in our wrongdoings, **made us alive** together with Christ (by grace you have been saved),

So they pull out these two verses, then they define "dead," not with the biblical definition, but with their own 21st century definition). The biblical definition of death is "separation" but Calvinism defines death as "inability" or "non-existence."

They will bring an unsuspecting believer to these verses, then ask them "what can a dead person do?" Of course the answer is "nothing." Once the person buys into that understanding of Total Depravity, then they lead them into their soteriology...since

unbelievers are "dead" (unable) to respond to the gospel on their own, the only way they are saved is by being "made alive" (gift of faith, regeneration) beforehand. "Made us alive" simply means that after we were convicted and we placed our faith in Christ, we were born again/regenerated. But notice that Paul doesn't tell us now God "made us alive" in v5...Calvinism reads gift of faith/regeneration into the passage to bolster their theology.

Here are some quotes from popular Calvinist teachers about their belief in Total Depravity:

> John Piper defines spiritual death as the state of being "*incapable of any life with God [before salvation]. Our hearts were like a a stone toward God (Eph 4:18; Ezek 36:26).*" [John Piper and Pastoral Staff, *TULIP: What We Believe About the FIve Points of Calvinism: Position Paper of the Pastoral Staff* (Minneapolis, MN: Desiring God Ministries, 1997), Desiring God website, March 1, 1998.]
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> The Westminster Confession 10:1 says: "...enlightening their minds spiritually and savingly to understand the things of God, ***taking away their heart of stone***, and giving unto them a heart of flesh...".
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> John Gerstner (a 5-Point Calvinist) doesn't like the normal/historical interpretation of John 3:16. Here he gives his opinion on the logical repercussions of that interpretation:
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> Gerstner argues that if John 3:16 "*is supposed to teach that God so loved everyone in the world that He gave His only Son to provide them an opportunity to be saved by faith...such love on God's part...would be a refinement of cruelty.... Offering a gift of life to a spiritual corpse, a brilliant sunset to a blind man, and a reward to a legless cripple if only he will come and get it, are horrible mockeries.* [John H. Gerstner, *Wrongly Dividing the Word of Truth: A Critique of Dispensationalism* (Brentwood, TN: Wolgemuth and Hyatt, Publishers, Inc., 1991), 124.]

His interpretation of Total Depravity is so clouded and misguided that he can't even see straight to interpret the most important verse in the Bible correctly.

Once you believe that Total Depravity means inability, you can then go in and begin re-writing all kinds of Bible verses to get them to mean what you want (need) them to mean.

> *In the Epistle to the Ephesians Paul declares that prior to the quickening of the Spirit of God each individual soul lies dead in trespasses and sins. Now it will surely be admitted that to be* ***dead****, and to be* ***dead in sin****, is clear and positive evidence that* ***there is neither aptitude nor power remaining for performance of any spiritual action****. If a man were dead, in a natural and physical sense, it would at once be readily granted that there is no further possibility of that man being able to perform any physical actions. A corpse cannot act in any what whatsoever, and that man*

> *would be reckoned to have taken leave of his senses who asserted that it could. If a man is dead spiritually, therefore, it us surely equally as evident that he is unable to perform any spiritual actions, and thus the doctrine of man's moral inability rests strongly on scriptural evidence.* [Lorrain Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination* (Philipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1932), 65-66; quoting Warburton, *Calvinism*, p48]

See how Calvinism gets to their belief in Total Depravity? They misinterpret "dead" in Eph 2:1, liken an unbeliever to a corpse as far as spiritual understanding and ability go, and then reason that God has to do something first to get them out of their totally depraved state before they can believe.

> *Because were were **dead to God**, we were **dead** to truth, righteousness, peace, happiness, and every other good thing, no more capable to respond to God than a **cadaver**" and are "**spiritual zombies, death-walkers, unable to even understand** the gravity of their situation. They are **lifeless**.* [John MacArthur, *Faith Works: The Gospel According to the Apostles* (Dallas: Word, 1993), 64-65]

Since ideas have consequences, what are the consequences of Calvinism's belief in Total Depravity (their definition)? Here it is, from Calvinist's themselves:

> *Unregenerate men who are enemies of God most assuredly respond to God in a universally negative fashion.* [James R. White, *The Potter's Freedom* (Amityville, NY: Calvary Press Publishing, 2000), 98]
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> *A corpse does not cry out for help.* [Arthur Custance, *The Sovereignty of Grace* (P&R Press; First Edition, 1979), p.18]
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> *A spiritually dead man...cannot exercise faith in Jesus Christ.* [Gordon H. Clark, *Predestination* (Philipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1987), p. 102]
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> *Faith is a spiritual grace, the fruit of the spiritual nature, and because the unregenerate are spiritually dead--'dead in trespasses and sins'--then it follows that faith from them is impossible, for a dead man cannot believe in anything.* [A.W. Pink, *Sovereignty of God*, p57]

Here is a very important quote to understand the mindset of Calvinism:

> *Because of the fall, man is unable of himself to savingly believe the gospel. The sinner is dead, blind, and deaf to the things of God; his heart is deceitful and desperately corrupt. His will is not free, it is in bondage to his evil nature, therefore, he will not--indeed he cannot--choose good over evil in the spiritual realm.* ***Consequently, it takes much more than the Spirit's assistance to bring a sinner to Christ****--it takes regeneration by which He makes the sinner alive and gives him a new nature.* ***Faith is not something man contributes to salvation****, but is itself a part of God's gift of salvation--****it is God's gift to the sinner, not the sinner's gift to God****.*

[David N. Steele, Curtis C. Thomas, and S. Lance Quinn, *The Five Points of Calvinism*, 2nd ed. (Philipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1963), 5-6.]

There are so many unbiblical statements in this quote that it's hard to even fathom someone believes this stuff:

- "Consequently it takes much more than the Spirit's assistance to bring a sinner to Christ" - so what Jesus told the disciples about the convicting ministry of the Holy Spirit to the world (John 16:7-11), according to Calvinism, is not enough. In Calvinism, man is so depraved that they are like an rock (inanimate object), and even the Holy Spirit's ministry of conviction cannot get through to them.
  - Last time I checked, the Holy Spirit was omniscient, omnipotent God, the third member of the Trinity. Calvinism believes that God the Holy Spirit is "inadequate" to convince a sinner to believe the gospel. That's straight up heresy.
  - Another question...if the conviction ministry of God the Holy Spirit to unbelievers is inadequate, then why does He do it? Why does the God the Holy Spirit bother convicting unbelievers of their sin of unbelief if it doesn't work, and God the Father must regenerate that person before they are able to believe? It makes no sense.
- "Faith is not something man contributes to salvation" - it's not our faith that saves us, but Jesus asks *us* to exercise *our* faith in Him (about 160x in the NT). And we become aware of the need to exercise our faith in Christ as the Holy Spirit convicts/convinces us to do that. Calvinism comes along as says, 'No, it's not your faith it's God's faith that He gives to you. And secondly, to have your eyes opened as a dead man (Eph 2:1), you have to be regenerated first. And even before that, you have to be one of the elect.'
  - Faith is required by God on our part to be saved because faith is the one thing we have that is not a work (Rom 4:4-5; Cf. Heb 11:6).
- "[faith] is God's gift to the sinner, not the sinner's gift to God" - when you believe in Christ, you're not giving God a gift, you're acquiescing to His terms for salvation. Faith is the one thing we have that is non-meritorious, that can be pleasing to God.

We know from John 16:7-11 that the Holy Spirit is at work in the world, convicting the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment to come. If the Holy Spirit was not doing this in the world, *no one would be saved*. Clearly the Bible teaches that people do not get saved outside of the enablement of God. There is indeed enablement from God, ***but God's enablement does not go to the extent that God actually believes for that person***. The Holy Spirit's convicting ministry will bring you (convince you) to the point of decision, which is the point where we need to exercise our own faith.

Calvinism would call this heresy, because (from their incorrect definition of Total Depravity), a dead, inanimate object cannot believe.
Luckily, Jesus defines what He means by "sin," "righteousness," and "judgment to come" in John 16:8-11:

- Sin (singular) - a singular sin of unbelief (v9)
- Righteousness - the need for the imputed righteousness of Christ
- Judgment to come - the devil has been judged and the world is going down; if you aren't saved, you're going down too.

Some more quotes from prominent Calvinist scholars, which help to understand their view of Total Depravity:

> *A dead man cannot...exercise faith in Jesus Christ. Faith is an activity of spiritual life, and without the life there can be no activity. Furthermore, faith...does not come by any independent decision. The Scripture is explicitly, plain, and unmistakable: 'for by grace are you saved through faith, and that is not of yourselves, it is the gift of God' (Eph 2:8). Look at the words again, 'it is the gift of God.' If God does not give a man faith, no amount of willpower and decision can manufacture it for him.* [Gordon H. Clark, *Predestination* (Philipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1987), 102].

According to Boettner, if you're one of the elect, you're going to believe whether you like it or not...

> *The elect of God are chosen by Him to be His children, in order that they might be made to believe, not because He foresaw that they would believe.* [*The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination* (Philipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1932, 14th printing), page 101, citing Augustine]
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> Tom Wells compares spiritual deadness to *"an old dry [Christmas] tree with--no fruit or ornaments of his own (his faith). Then God comes along and hangs the bright jewel of faith on him.... There is no real connection between what he is and this gift of faith from God."* [*Faith: The Gift of God* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1983), 56-57]
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> *Faith is not the cause of the new birth, but the consequence of it. This ought not to need arguing. Faith (in God) is an exotic, something that is not native to the human heart.* [A.W. Pink, *Sovereignty of God*, p57]
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> *Personally, we have no more to do with our spiritual birth than we had with our natural birth...(man is) utterly incapable of willing anything...the sinner, of himself, cannot repent and believe.* [A.W. Pink, *Sovereignty of God*, p57, 113, 120]

Calvinism's Overstatement of Total Depravity

Calvinism overstates Total Depravity by confusing intensity with extent. They believe that man is as sinful and rotten as they can possibly be (intensity), however there are a number of verses that refute this belief:
Gen 3:22: Then the LORD God said, “Behold, the man has become like one of Us, knowing good and evil; and now, he might reach out with his hand, and take *fruit* also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever”—

- Right after the Fall, God says that man knows the difference between good and evil. He can't do anything to merit God's favor, but God clearly states here that he knows good from evil.
  - This doesn't communicate man's state anywhere near what Calvinism purports it to be (like a rock, unable to respond to God).
  - The reason man sins/does evil is not due to inability to do good, but because he takes truth and holds it down in unrighteousness (Rom 1:18ff).
  - This is more a problem with man and his volition/free will than it is with his ability.

Matt 7:11: So if you, *despite* being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!

- Jesus' point is that we should ask/pray that God would give us good gifts because we as fathers know how to give good gifts to our children.
  - If sinful fathers know how to give good gifts and bless their children, how much more does a good God know how to give good gifts to us?
  - This shows that man, even in his fallen state, knows how to bless his children.

Rom 2:14-15:
14 For when Gentiles who do not have the Law instinctively perform the *requirements* of the Law, these, though not having the Law, are a law to themselves,
15 in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience testifying and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them,

- Every single human being has the law of God written in their hearts in the form of their conscience, whether or not they are saved.
  - If I make a volitional decision to sin, my conscience will accuse me; but if I make a decision to do good, my conscience will defend/excuse me.

According to 2 Cor 4:4, Satan is NOT a Calvinist: in whose case the god of this world has **blinded the minds of the unbelieving** so that they will not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

- If the Calvinist definition of Total Depravity was accurate, why would Satan need to blind the minds of the unbelieving? Aren't the unbelieving, who have not yet been given the gift of faith (according to Calvinism), already as blinded and incapable of turning to the Lord as they can be? I thought they were already like "rocks" or "corpses," so why would the Bible say that Satan blinds their minds to the gospel? Why would he waste his time?
  - This is why evangelism is so difficult...because the gospel has to penetrate the depravity of man and his sin nature, in addition to overcoming the blinders that Satan is attempting to put on them.
  - There would be absolutely no point for Satan to blind the minds of unbelievers if the Calvinist view of Total Depravity was correct.

A parallel verse is Matt 13:19: 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 sown *with seed* beside the road.

- Same question as with 2 Cor 4:4...why would Satan need to come in and snatch away what was sown in the unbelievers heart if the unbeliever had the same ability to accept the gospel as a rock or a corpse?

2 Tim 2:26: 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.

- Why would Satan hold certain people captive to do his will if people were already as wicked as they possibly could be and have no capacity to respond to God?

The way Satan operates, according to numerous passages, does not follow or comport with Calvinistic assumptions about Total Depravity.

Calvinist View of Total Depravity Operates Contrary to Man's Design (in God's image)

God created mankind as image bearers of God. Being an image bearer of God means that every single person has intrinsic value, and it also means that we share in some of God's "communicable" attributes. We have some of the same attributes that God does. Now God has some "incommunicable" attributes (the omni's...omni-present, omniscient, and omnipotent). Human beings do not share in those attributes...they are possessed only by God (otherwise God wouldn't be God).

Some of the communicable attributes that we share with God (or rather, God shares with us) are:

- Intellect (we can think and reason for ourselves)
- Emotions (God was sorry He made man, etc.)
- Free will (volition) - we have the ability and the opportunity to make a choice against God. Now God will convict us of that choice, but we have the choice nonetheless and in the end God will respect that choice. If God didn't respect our free will choices, He would be operating outside of the way He designed me.

If you get into a theology where there is no free will, where people are automatically going to trust Christ or they are not, you have a theology where God is dealing with mankind in a way that He did not design mankind. You cannot truly love someone unless you have made a free will choice to love them.

This is why there is a Tree of Knowledge in the Garden of Eden. The moment God decided to create mankind in His image is the moment there had to be a Tree of Knowledge in the Garden because there had to be an avenue of rebellion if the human race chose that route (Gen 2:16-17). If the avenue of rebellion was not available, man would be nothing more than a robot.

Calvinism Confuses Omnipotence With Omni-Causality

Calvinism believes and teaches that man has absolutely no choice at all to either accept or reject Christ. They believe that if man were given any type of choice, in their minds, it subtracts from God's glory.

Ask a Calvinist why man fell if he has no free will and you will get all kinds of strange answers. Basically, they believe man fell because God orchestrated it that way. ***But if God decreed—that is, rendered certain—every event (Cf. Westminster Confession, 3.1), then evil isn't just permitted—it's God's intention and sovereign plan. What this means is that in Calvinism, evil is not a violation of God's will but rather it's an expression of it.***

Calvinism takes the omnipotence of God and overstates it to be omni-causality, meaning God is not just all-powerful, but He causes everything that happens to happen, and nothing happens without God causing it to happen.

How does this belief in Calvinism work during counseling sessions where a victim had something terrible happen to them (a crime, rape, loved one killed, etc.)? Can you really look them in the eye and tell them that God caused that event for His own glory? ***God is omnipotent but God certainly does not cause everything. Many of the bad things that happen to people are caused by man's own poor choices, our sin nature, the sinful world we live in, and the fact that Satan is the ruler of this world. The current situation in the world is far outside of the way God designed the world in the beginning.***

So regarding the Fall of Adam & Eve, Calvinism's belief in omni-causality means that Adam & Eve did not choose to sin, but rather God chose sin for them. If Adam & Eve did not choose to sin out of their own free will (because in Calvinism they do not have a free will), then God forced the Fall of man.

Here's what Calvinism teaches, including John Calvin himself, about free will:

> *The Fall of Adam was not by accident, nor by chance, but was ordained by the secret counsel of God."* He also said, *"The first man fell because the Lord deemed it meet that he should.* [John Calvin, *Calvin's Calvinism: God's Eternal Predestination and Secret Providence* (Reformed Free Publishing Association, Kindle Edition from the 2009 2nd edition), Kindle location: 3796; idem. *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, op., cit., Kindle location: 17793].
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> *God is in back of everything. He decides and causes all things to happen that do happen...even sin. ...God ordained sin and unbelief.* [Edwin H. Palmer, *The Five*

Points of Calvinism (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, Enlarged Edition, 1980, 24th printing, 2005), pp. 25, 102].

[God] desired that man would fall into sin...[God] created sin. [R.C. Sproul Jr., *Almighty Over All* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999, Second printing, July 1999), p 53-54].

*That God decreed sin should enter this world through the disobedience of our first parents was **a secret hid in His own breast**.* [A.W. Pink, *Sovereignty of God*, p 201].

By the way, "a secret hidden in God" is a common phrase used by Calvinists to explain the less acceptable beliefs of Calvinism. They use this term to avoid answering tough questions, to claim that God is God and can do what He wants and who are you to question Him.

Calvinism's entire defense of God's goodness on a deterministic worldview is this: God can determine all moral evil and still be perfectly good because He has sufficiently good moral reasons for doing so. We may not know those reasons, but as long as it's possible He has them, the objection that if God determines evil he is not good fails in their minds.

This may sound like it answers the objection to God's goodness, but it doesn't.

First, it treats determination as if it were permission. Not the same thing. Permission means God allows a creature to originate a choice God Himself did not produce or approve. Determination means God renders the evil desire *and* the evil act necessary. Once God is the one who selected the evil as the means to His ends, you are no longer talking about a God who "permits what He hates." You are talking about a God who intends what He forbids. Calling that "sufficient reasons" does not change the structure, it covers it up.

Second, the reasons are a blank check. Whatever evil occurs, God must have had good enough reasons to determine it. That doesn't justify anything. Child sacrifice. Betrayal. The rape of a child. The same sentence works every time: "God had morally sufficient reasons." At that point you haven't explained God's goodness. You've insulated the belief system from criticism. Calvinism admits that God *couldhave* determined the inner workings of the heart differently and produced less suffering. If that's true, then "necessary for a greater good" is not doing the work people think it is.

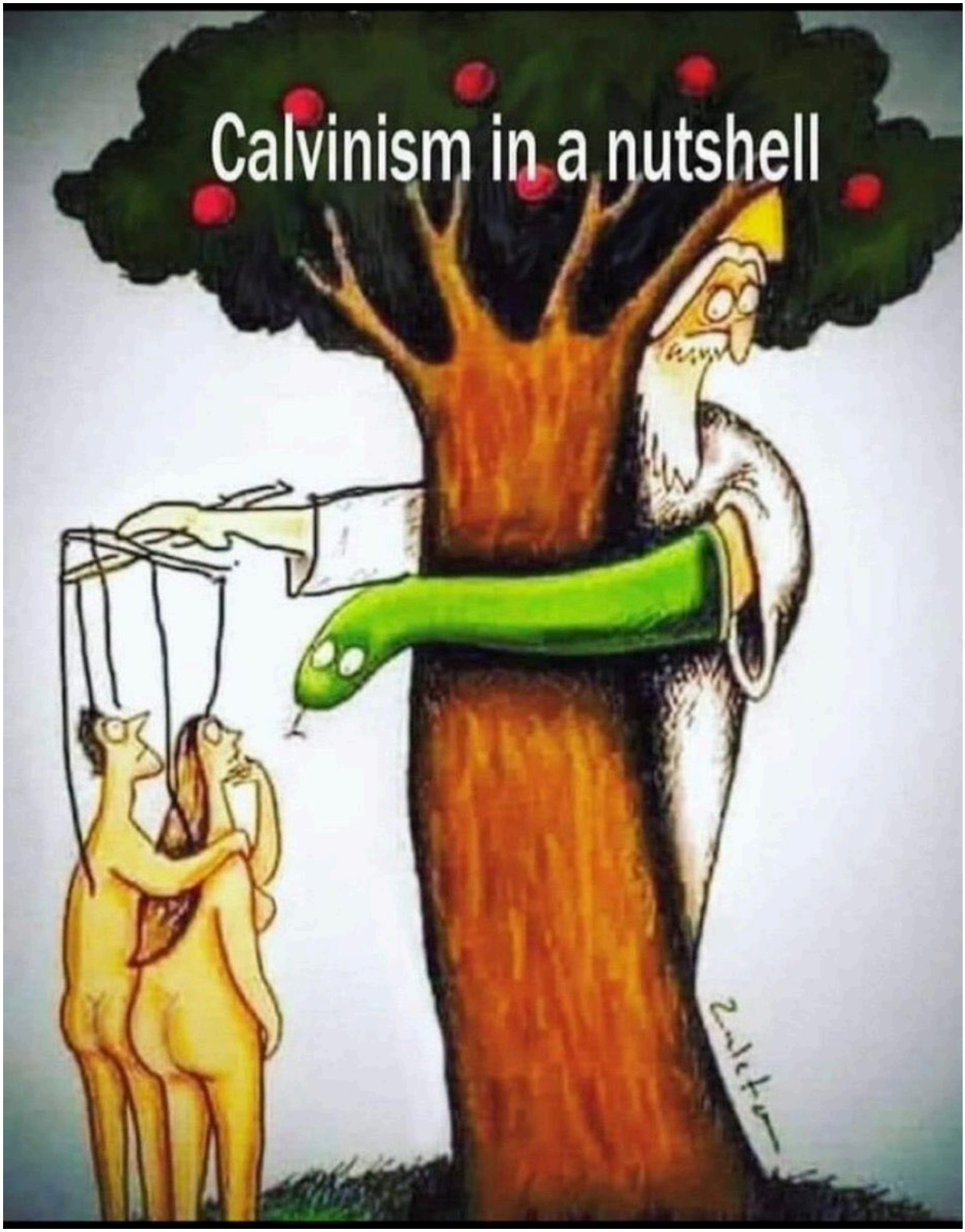
Third, it creates a dual will of God that is completely foreign to Scripture. God commands, "Do not worship another God." But God also determines the false worship? Calvinism will that makes sense because God as two separate wills...He can will one thing preceptively and another decretively if He has overriding reasons. But look at how God actually talks. "They have built the high places of Baal to burn their sons in the fire as offerings to Baal—something I did not command or mention, nor did it enter my mind" (Jer 19:5). That is not the language of a God who secretly decreed the very act He is

denouncing. James says God does not tempt anyone with evil. A decree that guarantees the evil desire is not temptation in the narrow sense—but it is still God ensuring the evil.

Fourth, the source of the evil decreed does not disappear because you distinguish primary and secondary causes. Yes, the creature wants what he wants. Yes, the act flows from his own will. That is exactly what a determined will looks like. The question is not whether the creature is the proximate cause. The question is whether a holy God can be the ultimate source of the wickedness that He condemns. If God determines the motives, the blindness, and the choice such that the sin must occur, then God is not merely “using” evil after the fact. He is authoring the story in which the evil is a planned chapter. Saying “God doesn’t sin” because sin is a creaturely lack doesn’t answer that. It just changes the vocabulary.

Fifth, the argument assumes what it needs to prove. Why is Calvinism so sure that God's reasons are sufficiently good? Because we (Calvinism) already believe God determined all evil and is still good. That’s the conclusion doing the work of a premise. You cannot start with “Calvinistic determinism is true and God is good” and then treat “therefore He must have sufficient reasons” as independent evidence. That’s circular.

If God is the type of God who would decree the molestation of a child, for instance, then on what basis do you think He has a sufficiently good character such that He would require morally sufficient reasons to decree it? That’s (one of) the problems with Calvinism. It doesn’t show that a good God would determine all moral evil. It tells us we must believe He did, and then asks us not to notice what that does to His character.



A Calvinist cannot find one verse that states that God caused the Fall of man. They can't find one because there isn't one, yet Calvinism holds to this belief as if it is confirmed throughout the Bible. ***If sin was part of God's eternal decree, then it was***

never truly a rebellion--it was just the script playing out. But if sin arose from man's free will, then God allowed it, not authored it.

There are many verses that refute this abhorrent and God-dishonoring Calvinist belief:

> Rom 5:12: Therefore, just as **through one man sin entered into the world**, and **death through sin**, and so **death spread to all mankind, because all sinned**—

This verse is clear that sin entered because of one man's decision, not God's decision. God simply created mankind with a free will, and unfortunately our forebears made the wrong choice, which then perpetuated the sin nature to every human being after them. When we have the chance to evangelize someone, we better have this concept clear in our minds because the unbeliever will ask you, 'If God is a God of love, why did my daughter get hit by a car in the crosswalk?' Or they will ask a similar question. It's called "the problem of evil." Unsaved man always wants to put God on trial, but what the Bible does is put sinful man on trial.

Luckily the Bible gives us a very clear and simple answer to the problem of evil. God created mankind with free will choice, and man has chosen the path of sin. On the other side, God has done many things to curtail the problem of evil, even going so far as to send His Son to die a cruel death in order to pave a way for man to restore his relationship with a holy God.

> Rom 8:19-22:
>
> > 19 For the eagerly awaiting creation waits for the revealing of the sons *and daughters* of God.
> > 20 For the **creation was subjected to futility**, not willingly, but because of **him** [Adam] **who subjected *it,*** in hope
> > 21 that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God.
> > 22 For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now.

Part of the answer to an unbeliever who is struggling with the problem of evil is that God didn't originally cause it--man did--but God has a solution to get rid of it. The world today is far, far away from what God designed because the creature rebelled against the Creator.

> James 1:13: No one is to say when he is tempted, “I am being tempted by God”; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and **He Himself does not tempt anyone**.

Temptation is a solicitation to sin that is designed to destroy us. To believe that God tempted, or even caused, man to sin is a direct violation of James 1:13 which clearly says that God does not tempt man (solicit him to sin).

> 1 Tim 6:16: who alone possesses immortality and **dwells in unapproachable light**, whom no one has seen or can see. To Him *be* honor and eternal dominion! Amen.

How could God orchestrate the Fall of man into sin if God is perfect? The One who dwells in unapproachable light caused the Fall of man? I don't think so.

> 1 John 1:5: This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is Light, and **in Him there is no darkness at all**.

If there is no darkness in God at all (1 John 1:5), and He is clothed in unapproachable light (1 Tim 6:16), and He cannot tempt man to sin (James 1:13)...then how on earth could God have caused the Fall?

Calvinism is so zealous for the sovereignty of God that they completely take away any choice for man. ***If I hold such a high view of God's sovereignty that man has no choice, then the only thing I'm left with is that God caused evil. Omni-causality is an attack on the character and holiness of God.***

The Bible clearly teaches that God is omnipotent, but there are also things that God, in His omnipotence, cannot do: one example is that God cannot lie (Heb 6:18; Num 23:19; Titus 1:2).

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✅ Supreme power or authority

🚫 Exhaustive theistic determinism

sovereign (n.)

late 13c. *soverain*, "superior, ruler, master, one who is superior to or has power over another," from Old French *soverain* "sovereign, lord, ruler," noun use of adjective meaning "highest, supreme, chief" (see **sovereign** (adj.)). Specifically by c. 1300 as "a king or queen, one who exercises dominion over people, a recognized supreme ruler of a realm." Also of Church authorities and heads of orders or houses as well as local civic officials.

Middle English had a tendency to add an unetymological *-t* to it, as in **pheasant**, **tyrant**. The spelling also was influenced by folk-etymology association with ***reign***. Middle English Compendium lists 38 spellings including *suffereignes*; Elizabeth I, who was one, spelled it seven different ways. Milton prints it *sovran*, as though from Italian *sovrano*.

The meaning "gold coin worth 22s 6d" is attested from late 15c.; the value of it changed 1817 to 1 pound. In the political writings of 17c.-18c. it often has a sense of "the populace as the source of political power, the community in its collective and legislative capacity" and can be opposed to *monarch*.

> Should it be argued, that a government like this, where the sovereignty resides in the whole body of the people, is a democracy ; it may be answered, that the right of sovereignty in all nations is unalienable and indivisible, and does and can reside nowhere else ; but, not to recur to a principle so general, the exercise, as well as the right of sovereignty, in Rome, resided in the people, but the government was not a democracy. In America, the right of sovereignty resides indisputably in the body of the people, and they have the whole property of land. [John Adams, "Defence of the Constitutions of Government of the United States of America," 1787-88]

also from **late 13c.**

sovereign (adj.)

early 14c. of persons, "great, superior, supreme;" mid-14c., "having supreme power;" from Old French *soverain* "highest, supreme, chief," from Vulgar Latin **superanus* "chief, principal" (source also of Spanish *soberano*, Italian *soprano*), from Latin *super* "over" (from PIE root ***uper** "over"). Of remedies or medicines, "potent in a high degree," from late 14c.

also from **early 14c.**

The Fall 'Effaced' Man's Status, Not 'Erase' It

God gave man free will before the Fall, and even after the Fall, man retains his free will because he remains as someone who is created in God's image. The Fall of man effaced (perverted, distorted, vandalized) man's image bearing status, but the Fall *did not* erase man's image bearing status. The same free will that God gave to Adam & Eve pre-Fall, He still gives to us today post-Fall.

Here are some passages that demonstrate that man, in his post-Fall state, continues as an image-bearer of God:

> Gen 1:26-28; 5:1: God created man in His image (pre-Fall)
>
> Gen 9:6: "Whoever sheds human blood, By man his blood shall be shed, **For in the image of God He made mankind**.

Post-Fall, and even post-Flood, God stated that man was still created in God's image.

> James 3:9: With it we bless *our* Lord and Father, and with it we curse people, who have been **made in the likeness of God**;

We should not verbally attack people because they were made in God's image.

> 1 Cor 11:7: For a man should not have his head covered, since **he istheimage and glory of God**; but the woman is the glory of man.

As image-bearers of God, we must have the same free will choice that God gave Adam & Eve in the Garden of Eden, before the Fall. These verses demonstrate that even well after the Fall of man, man is still an image bearer of God.

Calvinism Misinterprets "Dead" in Eph 2:1

If a Calvinist wants to explain Calvinism to you, they will take you immediately to Eph 2, especially verses 1 & 5. Unfortunately, countless people fall into Calvinism from misinterpreting these two verses.

> Eph 2:1: And you were dead in your trespasses and sins.

What the Calvinists will say is that you are physically alive, but you are spiritually dead. Then they will define "dead" as "non-existence." You (as an unbeliever) are like a rock...there is nothing inside you that can respond to spiritual truth.

Once you believe that, they will take you to v5:

> Eph 2:5: even when we were dead in our transgressions, [He] **made usalive** together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)

- "...made us" - Calvinists interpret this as coercion; God overrode our free will by giving us the "gift of faith" so that we were capable to believe, if you happen to be one of the elect
  - God had to do that because v1 says, in a spiritual sense, that we were non-existent

- It is accurate that God "made us alive" but this verse does not tell us *how* God made us alive. The way He made us alive is that we trusted in Him, then His Holy Spirit came and indwelt us. Calvinism doesn't want you to see that interpretation...they want you to believe that God made you alive because He gave you the gift of faith, if you're one of the elect. And He had to do it that way because you were "dead" (as a rock) in your trespasses and sins.

Calvinism takes the 21st century definition of "death" and reads it back 2000 years to ancient (*Koine*) Greek. It doesn't matter how we use the word "death" today...what matters is how the biblical writers (and the Bible as a whole) uses the term "death." When the biblical writers used the word "dead/death" did it ever mean non-existence? No! Death in the Bible never refers to non-existence; it always refers to "separation." Taking the state of people before they come to Christ, who are spiritually dead, and comparing that to physical death, is comparing apples and oranges. It's a foolish analogy. A person who is physically dead cannot receive Christ as his Savior, but neither can he speak, breathe, laugh, walk, live a righteous life, or sin. But a person who is spiritually dead can do all of those things (speak, breathe, laugh, walk, live a righteous life, and sin).

Calvinism analogizes the spiritual condition of a lost person to the physical world by using an anachronistic (and 21st century) definition of death to explain their belief in Total Depravity.

In the Bible, death never, never, never means non-existence...it always, always, always means separation. A person separated from God, when he comes under the conviction of the Holy Spirit, can respond to God if you define death as separation. But if you define death as non-existence, as Calvinists do, then a lost person cannot respond to God at all, even under the conviction of the Holy Spirit. This is why, according to Calvinism, a person has to be regenerated before they can believe. What they believe makes sense if death indeed means non-existence...but death in the Bible NEVER means that.

Death in the Bible

Death in the OT:

- *māwet* - death is the consequence and the punishment of sin. It originated with sin. A grand theme of the OT is God's holiness, which ***separates*** Him from all that is in harmony with His character. Death, then, in the OT means ultimate ***separation*** from God due to sin. [Theological Wordbook of the OT]

Death in the NT:

- *thanatos* - that ***separation*** (whether natural or violent) of the soul from the body by which the life on earth is ended [Greek-English Lexicon of the NT]

Some Scriptural examples...

Gen 35:18: And it came about, as her soul was departing (for she died), that she named him Ben-oni; but his father called him Benjamin.

- The death of Rachel...
- She died, but her soul "departed" (was separated from her body; it didn't cease to exist)

Eccl 12:7: then the dust will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it.

- Upon death, the human spirit does not stop existing...it returns back to the Creator

Matt 27:51: And behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth shook and the rocks were split.

- When Jesus died, did He stop existing? No! His soul (spirit) was temporarily separated from His physical body.

Luke 23:46: And Jesus, crying out with a loud voice, said, "Father, INTO YOUR HANDS **I ENTRUST MY SPIRIT**." And having said this, **He died**.

- When Jesus died, His spirit was separated from His body and went back into the hands of the Father

Acts 7:59: They *went on* stoning Stephen as he called on *the Lord* and said, "Lord Jesus, **receive my spirit**!"

- Stephen understood that upon the death of his physical body, his spirit would be *separated* from it and go to heaven

Dan 12:2: And many of those who sleep in the dust of the ground will awake, these to everlasting life, but the others to disgrace *and* everlasting contempt.

- Every single human being, when they die, remains alive and alert and will one day be resurrected to stand in judgment before God

Matt 25:46: These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

- Dead people will always exist somewhere...they will never not exist

2 Cor 5:8: but we are of good courage and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord.

- Believers who die to immediately into the presence of the Lord

Phil 1:21-23:

> 21 For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.
> 22 But if *I am* to live *on* in the flesh, this *will mean* fruitful labor for me; and I do not know which to choose.

23 But I am hard-pressed from both *directions,* having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for *that* is very much better;

- Paul never anticipated not existing after his death...he knew he would continue to exist in heaven

Gen 2:17: but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for **on the day** that you eat from it you will certainly **die**."

- Death in the context ("on the day") could not have meant physical death because Adam did not physically die that day...in fact he lived for centuries before he physically died (a total of 930 years)
- What death means is that "on that day" you will spiritually "die" (be separated from God). Physical death would come later (much later), but "on that day" when he ate the fruit, death was referring to spiritual separation from God.

Gen 3:8: Now they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden.

- After the Fall, Adam and Eve were still able to respond to God
- Their problem after they "died" was not non-existence or some kind of inability to respond to God or truth, it was separation from God

Is 59:1-2:

1 Behold, the LORD'S hand is not so short That it cannot save; Nor is His ear so dull That it cannot hear.

2 But your wrongdoings have caused a separation between you and your God, And your sins have hidden *His* face from you so that He does not hear.

Calvinism uses biblical words, but the problem is with their non-biblical definition of those words. The idea of Total Depravity is a biblical concept, but Calvinism uses it as a synonym for inability. Secondly, regarding "death" in the Bible, they give it the definition of non-existence rather than separation.

In Eph 2:1, Calvinism's definition of "dead" means a complete inability to respond to God. However, the proper interpretation is of a spiritual nature...unbelievers are spiritually "dead" meaning they are separated from God because of sin. But a person separated from God can respond to God by His grace and through the convicting of the Holy Spirit. A spiritual man who does not exist can't respond to God.

Faith Is Possible Through Spirit Conviction and the Gospel

Contrary to Calvinist teaching that man is so totally depraved and incapable of responding to God, and does not have any faith inside him whatsoever, the Bible teaches that faith is possible (without Calvinism's regeneration first) through the conviction of the Holy Spirit and the proclamation of the Gospel.
A spiritually dead unbeliever can hear the gospel...the Holy Spirit can convict (convince) them of the truth of the gospel, and that person, in their totally depraved state, can make a decision to respond in faith to the grace of God.
Calvinism says you can give the clearest, best presentation of the gospel ever given, and the Holy Spirit can be working overtime on a person's heart, but it's not enough...that person cannot respond because they are dead. In Calvinism, the only way a person can get saved is if they are one of the elect, and God gives them the gift of faith (regenerates them first so they can believe).
Even though the Bible teaches that faith is possible through the Spirit's conviction and the proclamation of the gospel, in our totally depraved state the Holy Spirit must do a lot of things in order to get our attention. People only come to Christ by the Spirit's enabling. So we can't paint such an optimistic view of human nature that the grace of God pre-salvation doesn't work. It has to work, otherwise no one would be saved. But what we must reject is the idea that if God does those things and it still doesn't work because people are like rocks (completely depraved to the point that they can't even respond to the conviction of the Spirit, the gospel, and God's grace).
Is 55:10-11:
10 “For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, And do not return there without watering the earth And making it produce and sprout, And providing seed to the sower and bread to the eater;
11 So will **My word** be which goes out of My mouth; It **will not return to Me empty**, **Without accomplishing what I desire**, **And without succeeding *in the purpose* for which I sent it**.

- There is power in the Word of God...in fact the Word of God has so much power that coupled with the convicting ministry of the Holy Spirit, it gives a person separated from God an opportunity to respond to the grace of God
- In the story if the Rich Man & Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31), the Rich Man pleaded with Abraham to send Lazarus to his five brothers to warn them about the torment he was experiencing, so they would not be sent there. Abraham told him, "They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them." Abraham later told the Rich Man, "If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead."

- This story demonstrates the power of Moses and the Prophets (the OT!) to convict the lost sinner, who is not in a state of non-existence, but in a spiritual state of separation from God

Rom 10:17: So **faith *comes* from hearing**, and **hearing by the word of Christ**.

- Doesn't say that faith is a gift...faith is generated in us as we take in the Word of God

Acts 2:37: Now when they heard this, **they were pierced to the heart**, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brothers, what are we to do?"

- The unbelieving Jews heard Peter's preaching and it "pierced their hearts" to the point of action

Rom 1:16: For I am not ashamed of **the gospel**, for it **is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes**, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

- The gospel, in and of itself, is a source of power (which is why Paul is not ashamed of it)

2 Tim 3:15: and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings **which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith** which is in Christ Jesus.
Heb 4:12: For the word of God is **living and active**, and **sharper than any two-edged sword**, even **penetrating as far as the division of soul and spirit**, of both joints and marrow, and able **to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart**.
1 Peter 1:23: for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable, but imperishable, *that is,***through the living and enduring word of God**.
James 1:18: In the exercise of His will **He gave us birth by the word of truth**, so that we would be a kind of first fruits among His creatures.
We understand the state of sinful man and their depraved state, but look at what God has done to make salvation opportunities available to people. Yes, mankind is separated from God, but you couple the convicting ministry of the Holy Spirit along with the proclamation of the Word of God, and the lost sinner separated from God can respond to that, through their own free will/volition, by exercising their own faith in Jesus Christ. If you take the Word of God (Is 55:10-11), the conviction of the Holy Spirit (John 16:7-11), and the power of the Gospel (Rom 1:16), these are all means of grace that God has given to lost people to put them in a place where they can trust in Jesus. God cannot and will not believe for us, but look at all the things God has given us to get us to place our faith and trust in His Son...something the Calvinist says is impossible due to our total depravity.

While I do agree that salvation comes through the workings of the Holy Spirit and the Word of God, I disagree with the idea that God must first predispose some to

> *believe and receive it, for the Word of God and Holy Spirit are sufficient in and of themselves in bringing about the new birth. Instead of forcing individuals to be saved through the irresistible prompting of the Holy Spirit, God uses His Word and the convicting work of the Holy Spirit to confirm its truth in order to bring individuals to the point of decision. It is certainly God's grace that offers it, but at this point they are free to accept or reject salvation. ...[Calvinism's] definition of total depravity negates the sufficiency of the power of the Word of God and the Holy Spirit to give life....* [Dr. Robert R. Congdon, *Oops! I Thought I Was a Four Point Calvinist* (Greer, SC: Congdon Ministries International, 2014), 48, 69-70]

Calvinism Underestimates What Lost Man Can Do

Lost Man Can Seek God

Surely the unsaved are enemies of God (Rom 5:10) and are apart from His salvation and imputed righteousness, but they are certainly able to seek God (contrary to Calvinism's belief in Total Depravity). In fact, there are many examples of lost people seeking God in the Bible:

- The Magi (Matt 2:1-2)
- Cornelius was not saved when Peter first met him (Acts 11:14). But he was...
  - "a devout man" who "feared God with all his household" and "gave many alms" and "prayed to God continually" (Acts 10:2)
    - So Cornelius was devout, he feared God along with his entire family, he gave, and he prayed "continually." Clearly Cornelius does not fit the description of total depravity as Calvinism thinks of it if he did these things while he was unsaved.
  - "a righteous and God-fearing man," "well spoken of by the entire nation of Jews," and was "divinely directed" to "send for you to come to his house and hear a message from you" (Acts 10:22)
    - God spoke to Cornelius while he was unsaved, so apparently God has the ability to speak to an unsaved person
  - In Acts 10:30-32, Cornelius recounted when he prayed in his house when an angel came before him and said that his prayers were heard by God.
    - Apparently God can hear and answer the prayers of an unsaved person
    - And there's no mention of God needing to first regenerate Cornelius or give him the gift of faith

In Acts 17:23, Paul tells the Athenians that he noticed an altar dedicated to an "unknown God." In v28, there is further evidence that the unbelievers in Athens were attempting to seek after God.

- If these people were stuck in Calvinism's definition of Total Depravity, with a complete inability to seek God, why did they appear to be groping for God (although in the wrong direction)?

Acts 17:26-27 explains why God setup nations and borders...so that they would seek God, or at least "grope for Him and find Him."

- If a lost person cannot seek God, why does v27 tell us that God gave us borders, nations, and peoples so that they would seek God...but according to Calvinism I thought they couldn't seek God?

Unfortunately what unsaved people typically do is not let their inherent knowledge of God take them to the logical conclusion: that there is a God, who created everything, that they are accountable to. Instead what they do is take their inherent knowledge of God (general revelation) and they suppress it. It's not because they don't have an ability to seek God, it's that they take their ability to seek God and their knowledge that there is in fact a God, and they suppress it so they can make themselves their own god and don't have to be accountable to a Higher Being (Rom 1:18-20).
Rom 1:18-20:
18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness **of people who suppress the truth in unrighteousness**,
19 because **that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them**.

- It's not that unsaved people cannot seek God or believe, it's that they suppress the truth in their hearts

20 For since the creation of the world His invisible *attributes, that is,* His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, being understood by what has been made, so that **they are without excuse**.

- Paul could not say that these unbelievers "were without excuse" if they do not have an ability to seek God. If a person has no ability to seek God, as Calvinists believe, then you can't say they don't have an excuse for not seeking God.
- The reason they don't have an excuse is because lost people do have an ability to seek God. But instead, they take the obvious revelation of God in creation and they suppress it.

Any discussion you have with a Calvinist will always end up at Rom 3:11.
Rom 3:11: THERE IS NO ONE WHO UNDERSTANDS, THERE IS NO ONE WHO SEEKS OUT GOD;

- This verse *appears* to be a problem for non-Calvinists who believe that a person has at least some ability to seek God, so how do I harmonize this verse with the many other verses, including Rom 1, that indicate that men *can* seek God?
  - Here's how you harmonize it: if man were left to his own devices, he would reject God 100% of the time. If you left man alone in his natural habitat, with no pressure applied to him at all, then no one would seek God because our sin nature is hostile toward God.
  - While this verse applies to man without pressure from God, God constantly applies "grace pressure" to lost people every day of their lives, giving them the grace necessary to seek God. This verse describes the state of man without the "grace pressure" applied by God.
  - How does God overcome the inherent sin nature of mankind that rejects God (Rom 3:11)? What exactly is this "grace pressure" that God is constantly applying to unsaved man?
    - God is drawing all men to Himself (John 12:32)
    - The Holy Spirit convicts the world (unbelievers) of sin (of unbelief), righteousness (that their righteousness is not enough), and judgment (the world is going to be judged) (John 16:7-11)
    - God sends His Word throughout the world (Is 55:10-11). The Word did a work in Timothy's life before he was saved (2 Tim 3:15).
    - The proclamation of the gospel, which is the power of God unto salvation (Rom 1:16)
    - Creation - general revelation (Rom 1:18-20; Cf. Ps 19:1-4)
    - Conscience (Rom 2:14-15)

Lost Man Can Reason

There are a number of examples in the Bible that demonstrate that lost people can reason about spiritual things:

Matt 16:7: They began to **discuss***this* [reason] among themselves, saying, "*He said that* because we did not bring *any* bread."

- "...discuss" - *dialogizomai*, to reason; same Greek word used by Paul when he tells believers to "reckon" (*logizonmai*) themselves dead (Rom 6:11)
  - The *dia* prefix in Matt 16:7 adds intensity
  - So the verb *logizomai* (to consider, reason) is used for both believers and unbelievers

Matt 21:25: The baptism of John was from what *source:* from heaven or from men?" And they *began* considering *the implications* among themselves, saying, "If we say, 'From heaven,' He will say to us, 'Then why did you not believe him?'

- "...considering" - *dialogizomai*

2 Cor 4:4: in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they will not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

- When you think about it, if man is unable to consider or reason about spiritual things, why does Satan waste his time blinding people? You don't put blinders over a rock.

Matt 13:19: 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 sown *with seed* beside the road.

- Again, if unsaved man was wholly unable to reason or consider spiritual things, why would Satan need to "snatch away" the gospel?

2 Tim 2:26: 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.

- Why would the devil need to hold an unbeliever captive if the unbeliever could not understand or reason about spiritual things?

Lost Man Can Exercise Faith in God

The Bible gives us many examples of lost men, under the conviction of the Holy Spirit, coming to faith in Christ:

Gen 15:6: Then he believed in the LORD; and He credited it to him as righteousness.

- Abraham believed God. The passage does not mention anything about God giving Abraham the gift of faith, or regenerating him before he came to the conclusion to believe God.

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

- If God gives the gift of faith to the elect, why would Jesus commend this centurion for his "great faith"? If God imparts faith to every one of the elect, wouldn't everyone's faith be "great"?
  - If God were the one to impart faith, every person's faith would be great and Jesus would have no need to compliment this centurion

    - Jesus demonstrates by His compliment to the centurion that a lost person has the ability to exercise faith in the Messiah

Matt 8:13: And Jesus said to the centurion, “Go; it shall be done for you as you have believed.” And the servant was healed at that *very* moment.

- Notice the person who believed...it was the centurion "as *you* have believed." Does not say that God believed for or through him...he believed on his own volition.

John 3:16: “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him will not perish, but have eternal life.

- "...whoever believes in Him" - no mention of God believing for them or God imparting their faith before they can believe. It is their own faith that is used to believe in God.

John 7:37-38:

> 37 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.
> 38 The one who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, ‘From his innermost being will flow rivers of living **water**.’”

- "The one who believes in Me" - this statement, in fact this passage, makes no sense if unsaved man has no ability to believe in God, as Calvinism routinely asserts

John 9:35-38:

> **35** Jesus heard that they had put him out, and upon finding him, He said, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?”
> 36 He answered by saying, “And who is He, Sir, that I may believe in Him?”
> 37 Jesus said to him, “You have both seen Him, and He is the one who is talking with you.”
> 38 And he said, “I believe, Lord.” And he worshiped Him.

- Verse 36: the formerly blind man desired to believe in Jesus
    - There's no mention in this passage of the man's inability believe in Jesus, and no mention that he must first be regenerated or given the gift of faith before he was able to believe.

John 20:30-31:

> **30** So then, many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book;
> 31 but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that by believing you may have life in His name.

- Throughout John's Gospel, the only Gospel written to unbelievers, he consistently puts the onus or responsibility for believing on "you" (us), and that it is our faith that must be used to believe
- God brought us the evidence for belief, and the Holy Spirit has convicted (convinced) us to believe, now it's up to the reader, of their own volition, to believe
- There is not a single verse in all of John's Gospel, written to unbelievers, that says (or even hints) that God must first give an unbeliever the gift of faith before they can believe

Acts 16:30-31:

> 30 and after he brought them out, he said, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”
> 31 They said, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.”

- Paul told the Philippian jailer, "you will be saved if you believe"
  - Based on Paul's response, it's obvious that Paul and Silas did not hold to any theology that this man was like a rock and could not believe on his own
  - But unbelievers are able to believe because their spiritual state is not one of non-existence, it's one of separation, and God has provided multiple means to bring people to the point of decision
  - Why would God, over and over again, command man to believe if man did not have the ability to capacity to believe?

Acts 17:30-34:

> 30 So having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now proclaiming to mankind that all people everywhere are to repent,

- "...all people everywhere" - not just the elect
- "...repent" - *metanoeō*, to change your mind; Paul tells these Greeks how to do this in v34 (believe)
- The fact that Paul is preaching to unsaved people, instructing them to change their minds about who Jesus is, and put their faith and trust in Him (believe) demonstrates that people are not "dead" as in non-existence...they have the ability to reason and believe on their own
  - If unsaved men are like rocks and can't believe on their own, why does Paul command these unsaved Greeks on Mars Hill to change their mind and believe?

31 because He has set a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all people by raising Him from the dead."
32 Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some *began* to scoff, but others said, "We shall hear from you again concerning this."
33 So Paul went out from among them.
34 But some men joined him and believed, among whom also were Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris, and others with them.

Rev 22:17: The Spirit and the bride say, "Come." And let the one who hears say, "Come." And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires, take the water of life without cost.

- "...let the one who desires" - puts the entire decision on the person who is to believe

When you read the Bible carefully, you see that over 150x in the NT lost man is commanded to believe. It is the sole condition for salvation. If mankind was unable to believe on their own, without having God either believe for us or God give us the gift of faith and regenerate us before we can be saved (believe), why does God command us 150x+ to believe? Seems like that would be a command that we are incapable of following, according to Calvinism.
On top of that, how could God hold man accountable for something that man does not have the ability to do? What sense does that make? What kind of God would do that? Over and over in the Bible God tells mankind that if they do not believe, it is their own fault. God has given mankind the ability to believe, what is called "prevenient grace," which is defined as the grace of God that prepares the heart and mind of an unbeliever to hear and receive the gospel and respond in faith. It convinces them of being sinners who need God for forgiveness.
Some verses that teach prevenient grace: Deut 30:15-19; Joshua 24:14-15; John 1:9; 6:44; 12:32; Rom 2:4; Titus 2:11
Verses that demonstrate that God puts the responsibility to believe on mankind:

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

- A person in unbelief does not need to look forward to future judgment...they are under judgment right now, while in their unbelief

John 3:36: The one who believes in the Son has eternal life; but the one who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God **remains** on him."

- "remains" - present tense verb, meaning the wrath of God is hanging over the heads of unbelievers right now
    - The only way to fix the problem of judgment is to obey the command to believe
    - Nothing here referring only to the elect, or that an unbeliever is completely unable to believe, and nothing here about God needing to regenerate the unbeliever first before they can believe

John 5:40: and *yet***you are unwilling** to come to Me so that you may have life.

- "...you are unwilling" - *thelō*, wish or desire (not *adynatos*, without power, impossible); the Pharisees who Jesus was talking to were not *unable* to believe in Him...they were *unwilling* to believe in Him
    - If John (and the Holy Spirit) wanted to communicate the impossibility of believing in Christ unless/until something happened first, there is a Greek word for that (*adynatos*), but that word is not used in this passage or anywhere else in John's Gospel.

Acts 28:25-28:

> 25 And when they disagreed with one another, they *began* leaving after Paul said one *parting* statement: “The Holy Spirit rightly spoke through Isaiah the prophet to your fathers,
> 26 saying, ‘GO TO THIS PEOPLE AND SAY, “YOU WILL KEEP ON HEARING, AND WILL NOT UNDERSTAND; AND YOU WILL KEEP ON SEEING, AND WILL NOT PERCEIVE;
> 27 FOR THE HEARTS OF THIS PEOPLE HAVE BECOME INSENSITIVE, AND WITH THEIR EARS THEY HARDLY 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.”’
> 28 Therefore, let it be known to you that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will also listen.”

- The problem with these unbelieving Jews was not their inability to recognize and believe in the Messiah...the problem was they weren't interested in believing
    - The responsibility of belief for these Jews was not God's fault...it was their own fault

Rom 1:18-20:

18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of people who **suppress** the truth in unrighteousness,

- "...suppress" - *katechō*, to hold down; to not acknowledge; this is what mankind does to the drawing of God in order to not believe

19 because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them.
20 For since the creation of the world His invisible *attributes, that is,* His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, being understood by what has been made, so that they are **without excuse**.

- "...without excuse" - man is accountable to God for unbelief; through general revelation, God has made Himself evident to all mankind

Rev 20:12-13:

12 And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and 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.
13 And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them; and they were judged, each one *of them* according to their deeds.

- Those who do not place their faith in Christ will be judged by their works (the books). The people present at the Great White Throne judgment are all unbelievers.
  - What kind of God would make a determination of the level of eternal torment of unbelievers, who never had the opportunity to believe in the first place? How unloving, how un-God-like, how unfair would it be to sequester people in the Lake of Fire for all eternity who never had an opportunity to believe. This is what Calvinism teaches.

If Calvinism is the gospel, as most Calvinists believe, and it requires a miraculous work of regeneration to believe the gospel, then wouldn't that suggest all regenerate people believe Calvinism? Wouldn't it also suggest that no one becomes a Christian until they adopt Calvinistic theology?