

Neo-Calvinism vs. the Bible 016

Ephesians 2:1-5

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Let's go to Ephesians 2:1-5. We're continuing our look at "Neo-Calvinism versus the Bible." A lot of people out there are asking, "What is Neo-Calvinism?" It's basically just a name given to describe the current variety of Calvinism that's very popular today, particularly amongst the young. It's a combination of ideas, but draws very heavily from the teachings and writings of John Calvin and Calvin's followers.

So, as we have explained, an acronym that they use to describe their system is TULIP. "T" in TULIP stands for "total depravity," which is their starting point. If you believe what they say about total depravity, then everything else they say in the theological pneumatic device TULIP makes perfect sense. But if they're wrong on their starting point, then the rest of the system starts to deteriorate.

So we define what total depravity is biblically: it's the idea that every human being other than Jesus has been contaminated by a sin nature, and that sin nature has affected every area of our being. There is no area of us that hasn't been touched by original sin. And in that state we are incapable of doing anything to merit God's favor. It doesn't mean that we're as bad as we can possibly be. It doesn't mean that we've indulged every sin that can be indulged. And it doesn't mean that we can't do good things in the eyes of our fellow man. But I really can't do anything to merit God's favor by way of a work, other than to trust in the work Jesus did 2,000 years ago.

Now, Calvinism, if you look at bullet point number three there, takes that idea, which is a biblical idea, and they push it to the furthest degree it can be pushed. They develop from that, the doctrine of inability: man has no more ability to respond to the things of God than does a rock or any inanimate object—even when God puts people under the pressure of conviction, they don't have an ability to respond to the things of God because they are dead. So therefore, God has to do a work on the front end. He has to give some the gift of faith, and He has to regenerate first so that people can believe. And the only people that get that are the elect, the small fraction of the human race that God has chosen. Everyone else has no ability to respond to God. They'll go into hell in that condition, having never had an opportunity to respond to God's grace.

So from there we moved into number four: how Calvinism has taken total depravity and completely overstated it. They've confused intensity with the extent. Whereas we're dealing with extent, they're dealing with intensity or depth. They're not just saying that we're corrupted in all of our being, but that we're as bad as we can possibly be. And it's also a system that functions contrary to how God has designed man. God has given man a choice.

The reason God has given man and woman a choice is that we bear his image. That's why there had to be a tree of knowledge in Eden: there had to be an avenue for rebellion should man choose to rebel against God. Being made in God's image has with it one very powerful component: the component of choice. In other words, I can make a decision for God or against God. And whatever decision I make, God will respect that choice. If He doesn't respect that choice, He's not honoring how He's manufactured us as image bearers of God.

I have shown you a number of Scriptures. There are about three of them (one Old Testament, two New Testament) that clearly teach that we bear God's image even in our fallen state. The Fall of man did not erase our image bearing status. It effaced it, but it didn't erase it. So when somebody comes to faith, while it is true that the Holy Spirit is drawing them to the point of decision and convicting them, God is not going to believe for them. They have to exercise their own faith in the finished work of the Savior. Calvinism rejects what I just said. They don't want to give man any choice at all, and they are basically teaching that God is overriding man's will--if you happen to be one of the elect.

So they have a system at work that's operating outside of how God has made man as an image bearer. This takes us to what I've got underlined there (subletter C): what they're doing. Also in this whole rubric that they have, they're defining "death" by a twentieth or twenty-first century medical definition and reading it back into the Bible. So in their minds, "death" means "nonexistence," whereas in the Bible, "death" never means "nonexistence." It means "separation."

So one of the key verses that they use in this whole thing is Ephesians 2:1 and 5. Countless people fall into Calvinism through those two verses. So Ephesians 2:1 says, *"And you were dead in your trespasses and sins."* What the Calvinists say is that man is physically alive, but he is spiritually dead. Then they define "dead" by "nonexistence." In other words, man is just a rock. There's absolutely nothing within you that could respond to spiritual things because you're dead in that sense. And they define "death" as "nonexistence." And they get you to believe that, and then once you believe that, then they'll take you to Ephesians 2:5, in the same paragraph. It says, *"Even when we were dead in our transgressions He"*--that's Jesus, or God--*"made us alive together with Christ."* And *"made us"* they interpret as coercion. God overrode free will. He gave you the gift of faith, or He regenerated you so that you could believe--if you happen to be one of the elect. And God had to do that because Ephesians 2:1 says, "You're, in a spiritual sense, non-existent."

Now, I agree that God made us alive. But you'll notice that that passage there, particularly Ephesians 2:5, doesn't tell us how God made us alive. I believe that God made us alive because we trusted in Him and the Holy Spirit entered us. That's how He made us alive. But they don't want you to see that interpretation. They want you to see it as, God made us alive in the sense that He put into you--if you happen to be one of the elect--the gift of faith. And of course, God had to do it that way, because a dead person who is spiritually in a state of nonexistence has no capacity to believe.

So basically, what you have here is that Calvinism has come up with an anachronistic misunderstanding of death. Now, what do I mean by "anachronistic"? What I mean is, "outside of time." You recognize the word "chronos" in that word, as in "chronology." They've developed a definition of "death" from a twentieth to twenty-first century medical dictionary, and they've read it backwards, outside of time, back 2,000 years into the Bible, when that's not how to define Biblical terms.

When you start doing things like that, you're using the anachronistic fallacy, developing a word from the twentieth to the twenty-first century and then reading it backwards into the Bible. That's never how you define words in the Bible. It doesn't matter how people use the word in the twentieth to the twenty-first century; what matters is how did the biblical writers use the word "death"? When they use the word "death," did it ever mean "nonexistence"? And my answer to that is "No." "Death" in the Bible never refers to nonexistence. What it refers to is separation.

So just a couple of quotes from Calvinists, just to show you how their minds are working on this. Loraine Boettner, famous Calvinist (and Post Millennialist for that matter: he thought he was bringing in the kingdom; I don't know how people could think that if you just read the newspaper) says,

"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 the performance of any spiritual action."

He just defined "death" as "nonexistence," even though the Bible never uses the word "death" that way. What he has done here is read into Ephesians 2:1 his own theology, which is not how you're supposed to do theology. Theology is only as good as the biblical text it comes from. And when you fall in love with a theological system, you want to make sure that that system is rooted in the text. He's not doing that. He's read his theological text, his theological system, back into the biblical text, because he needs this first point, the "T," to develop the Calvinistic pneumatic device. He says,

"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 the performance of any spiritual action. If a man were dead, in a natural and physical sense,"

--now he's comparing it to human death--

"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"

--and here we go now with the corpse and cadaver theology--

"cannot act in any way whatever, and that man would be reckoned to have taken leave of his senses who asserted that it could."

So, someone saying that a corpse can respond to God is like a man who's insane, is what Boettner is saying here.

"If a man is dead spiritually, therefore, it is surely equally as evident that he is unable"—

See the word "unable." When they use the phrase "total depravity," they don't mean it the way we mean it. They mean it as inability, like a corpse.

—"to perform any spiritual actions, and thus the doctrine of man's moral inability rests upon strong Scriptural evidence."

It doesn't rest upon strong Scriptural evidence. It rests upon his interpretation of the Bible, which is anachronistic. Here's another example with a shorter quote. Arthur Custance, a Calvinist, says, "A corpse does not cry out for help."

So comparing the state of people before they come to Christ as spiritually dead, and comparing that to physical death, is to make an apples and oranges comparison. They're mixing two things that don't go together. Bob Kirkland, in his critique of Calvinism, properly says, "Calvinists say, 'Since he is dead, it is impossible for him to believe.'" I mean, he couldn't believe any more than a person lying in a casket could get up and say, "Get me a cup of hot chocolate." (Although maybe that happens in the movies or something.) "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."

So by comparing the state of the unsaved to a corpse, you are comparing two things that don't go together. A person that's a corpse: can they speak? No. Can they breathe? No. Can they laugh? No. Can they walk? No. Can they live a righteous life? No. Can they sin? No. But a person that's spiritually dead can do all those things. So taking the word "death" and saying that spiritual death is the same thing as a corpse, is comparing two things that don't go together. A person that is physically dead can't function at all, but a person that is spiritually dead can.

That's a clue right out of the gate that they're not defining the word "death" properly. They're going into an analogy to the physical world, and it's an apples and oranges type of comparison. So a person that's physically dead, a corpse, can't do anything, but a spiritually dead person can. Before I got saved, I could speak, right? I could breathe; I did a lot of laughing before I got saved; I did a lot of walking before I got saved; I tried to live a righteous life in some capacity before I got saved; and I sinned before I got saved. A person that's a corpse, or a cadaver, can do none of those things.

So that's fishy that they're drawing this analogy, and it shows you that their definition of "death" can't be right. They want "death" to mean "nonexistence." And so they're going to the physical world, to the twentieth to twenty-first century medical definitions, which are

anachronistic, to make their point. So with all of that being said, what then, is the biblical definition of "death"? "Death" in the Bible never, never, never, never means "nonexistence." What it means is "separation."

So obviously a person that's separated from God when he comes under the conviction of the Holy Spirit can respond to God if you define "death" as "separation." Now, if you define "death" as "nonexistence," which is what they're doing here, everything is rising or falling in their system based on what they're doing with "T," total depravity. A person that's dead within their spiritual being is in nonexistence, and they couldn't respond to God at all, even if they came under the conviction of the Holy Spirit. That's why they have to be regenerated first, so that they can believe (according to Calvinism), or given the gift of faith, if they're one of the elect.

What they're saying makes sense if "death" means "inability" and "nonexistence." But the point I'm getting at here is that "death" does not mean "nonexistence" biblically. "Death" means "separation," and a person separated from God has a much better chance of responding to God than something that doesn't exist.

This comes from the "Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament," looking at the Hebrew word "death," which you can see there in italics. And notice how one of the standard Hebrew lexicons defines "death."

"Death is the consequences and the punishment of sin. It originated with sin. A grand theme of the Old Testament is God's holiness, which separates Him from all that is in harmony with His character. Death, then, in the Old Testament means ultimate separation from God due to sin."

That's what that Hebrew word "death" means. What it means is that a person is separated from God. It doesn't mean that they're unable to respond to God because they're a rock. And as you know, the Old Testament was written primarily in Hebrew; the New Testament was written in Greek.

So do you notice what I'm doing here? I'm not running off to some kind of modern medical dictionary to define "death," and reading it backwards into the Bible. I want to know what the biblical writers meant when they used the expression "death." And they never meant what the Calvinists say they think "death" means. They never meant "nonexistence." They always meant "separation."

Here's the Greek word for "death": "thanatos." And here, Thayer's, a standard Greek lexicon, defines "death" as "that separation (whether natural or violent) of the soul from the body by which life on the earth is ended." So again, they're defining "death" as a "separation." So even when somebody physically dies, they don't stop existing. They exist somewhere, right? In heaven or in hell. So therefore, even when you get to the ultimate death, physical death, where does the soul of a lost person go? Does it go into soul sleep or, as the Jehovah's Witnesses teach, is it the Death Star that has the laser beam that strikes the planet and the planet stops existing? No. The soul exists

somewhere: in Heaven for the believer, unseparated from God; or in hell for the unbeliever, separated from God.

And I'm just trying to show you that "death" biblically never means "nonexistence," because when people die, they still exist. Let's look at a few verses on that. Notice Genesis 35:18. This is Rachel's death. When Rachel died, did she quit existing? Genesis 35:18 says, *"It came about as her soul was departing (for she died), that she named him Ben-oni, but his father called him Benjamin."* So right there you have a clear example of someone dying. And she doesn't stop existing: her soul was departing.

Notice Ecclesiastes 12:7. I'm just trying to show you what "death" really means in the Bible by studying the Bible. I'm not doing what Boettner did, where he came up with a definition of "death" and read it backwards into the Bible, which is anachronistic--- outside of time. In other words, he's using a modern definition of "death" that the biblical writers knew nothing about. In fact, if you went up to the biblical writers and said, "Hey, when someone dies, that means that they stop existing, right?" they would have looked at you like, "What in the world are you talking about? That's not what 'death' means."

Notice Ecclesiastes 12:7. It says, *"then the dust will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it."* So upon death, the human spirit doesn't stop existing. It returns back to the Creator. Remember what is said in Matthew 27:50-51 when Jesus died. When Jesus died, did He stop existing? It says,

"And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice, and yielded up His spirit."

(As the King James Version says, "He gave up the ghost.")

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

So when Jesus died, He yielded up his spirit, which continued to exist.

Let's go to Luke 23:46. *"And Jesus, crying out with a loud voice, said, 'Father, INTO YOUR HANDS I COMMIT MY SPIRIT.' Having said this, He breathed his last."* "Breathed His last" means that He died, and His spirit, the part of him that's immaterial, went back into the presence of the Father. So all of these passages are demonstrating that "death" never means "nonexistence." The same thing happened with Stephen. Notice Acts 7:59 about Stephen, the first martyr of the Church Age, who, by the way, was our first deacon. (So when Sugar Land Bible Church asks you to be a deacon, you might think twice about that. But anyway, we won't go there.) It says, *"They went on stoning Stephen as he called on the Lord and said, 'Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!'"* So they're stoning him to death, and there's no evidence that he stopped existing. It's just that the immaterial part of him, the soul, the "psyche," sometimes called the "spirit," that's designed to live forever, separated from his body.

So death is always separation. This is why we don't teach the concept of soul sleep: when a person dies, they go into some kind of unconscious state awaiting the future

resurrection. That's not what the Bible teaches at all. They are alert. They are alive. They're aware of what's going on. It's just that they've died, and the immaterial and the material have separated.

Daniel 12:2 says, *"Many of those who sleep in the dust of the ground will awake, these to everlasting ('olam') life, but the others to disgrace and everlasting ('olam') contempt."* You see, every single human being that's ever lived and will ever live, when they die, they remain alive and alert and awake somewhere. In the case of the believer, it's with the Lord. In the case of the unbeliever, it's eternally separated from the Lord.

But this is what this idea is, that "death" means "nonexistence." That's an idea that's completely foreign to the biblical writers. Jesus in Matthew 25:46 says, *"These will go away into eternal ('aiōnios') punishment, but the righteous into eternal ('aiōnios') life."* So dead people will exist somewhere. You remember the rich man that died in unbelief, Luke 16:19-31? Did he stop existing? Luke 16:24-26 says,

"'And he cried out, and said, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus so that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool off my tongue, for I am in agony in this flame.' But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that during your life you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus bad things; but now he is being comforted here, and you are in agony.'"

In other words, Lazarus and the rich man were both in existence somewhere.

"'And besides all this, between us and you there is a great chasm fixed, so that those who wish to come over here to you will not be able, and that none may cross over from there to us.'"

What did Paul say? *"To be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord."* That's another verse that you can use to show that "death" doesn't mean "nonexistence." That's in 2 Corinthians 5:8. Paul the Apostle, in Philippians 1:21-23, says, *"For to me to live is Christ and to die is gain."* So Paul never anticipated not existing after death. So "death" in the Bible doesn't mean "nonexistence."

So when the Calvinists come into Ephesians 2:1, and first of all, they make this analogy to a physical corpse, they're comparing two things that don't go together, because someone who is dead in their trespasses and sins can have a conversation. The person in a corpse can't. So something is wrong with their definition. And beyond that, "death" in the Bible never means "nonexistence," particularly in this area of physical death. It means separation from God. And the reason this is important is that a person that's separated from God can respond to God. Something that doesn't exist can't. That's why I'm going into this.

Those are all examples of physical death. What about spiritual death? Does spiritual "death" ever mean "nonexistence"? Well, remember Genesis 2:16-17.

"The Lord God commanded the man, saying, 'From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die.'"

So we know the story. Our forebears ate from the forbidden tree. And did they physically die that day? Did Adam just wither away and die the moment he ate from the forbidden tree? What do you think? No. He lived until the ripe old age of 930 (Genesis 5:4). So if he lived to the ripe old age of 930, what does it mean here when it says, "*in the day that you eat from it you will surely die*"? It can't mean, "You're going to physically die at that moment," because he lived long past this event. What it means is, "When you eat from the tree of knowledge, you will spiritually die—physically: down the road. But that day you'll die spiritually." Meaning what? He was separated from God. He was in a state of existence, but he was separated from God. And because he was separated from God, he had an opportunity to respond to the grace of God.

And God came looking for him. Notice Genesis 3:8. God came looking for Adam. And what does it say here? *"They heard the sound of the Lord God walking."* Does that sound like a rock that has no awareness of spiritual things? How does a rock hear God walking in the garden? See, the problem wasn't nonexistence: their problem was separation. *"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."*

How do you, as a rock, hide yourself from the presence of God? In their separated state, they had an awareness of God, an awareness of spiritual things, but they were now uncomfortable around God because He's a righteous being and they are now steeped in their trespasses and sins. So when you look at what happened to our forbearers, nonexistence is not part of the equation at all. It's separation. And in that separated state they could respond to God. Now, if Adam and Eve were just rocks, they couldn't respond to God at all. They certainly wouldn't be hiding from his presence. Right?

Let me give you one more verse on this: Isaiah 59:1-2. It's a tremendous verse on spiritual death—what it does. Isaiah 59:1-2 (as God is dealing with Israel):

"Behold, the Lord's hand is not so short That it cannot save; Nor is His ear so dull that it cannot hear. But your iniquities have made a separation"—that's death—"between you and your God, And your sins have hidden His face from you so that He does not hear."

So when you're dealing with Calvinism, what you have to understand is that you're dealing with people that use biblical words, but are pouring into those words completely foreign definitions. First of all, when they use the phrase "total depravity." We understand it the way we understand it. They understand it differently because they use it as a synonym for "inability."

Secondly, when they use the word "death," it's the exact same word, but they just poured into it a different definition from way outside of time. According to Calvinists, Ephesians

2:1 means that the spiritual man in people is non-existent. That is not what we teach. We teach that the spiritual man within people is separated from God. A person separated from God can respond to God's grace. A person, a spiritual man that doesn't exist, can't. So everything in their system rises or falls according to how they're understanding death and understanding total depravity.

So what does all of this mean? I've shown you what the biblical word "death" means from a Hebrew lexicon and from a Greek lexicon. I've shown you what it means, as we've tracked the concept of physical death and spiritual death. It never means "nonexistence." Your doctor might define "death" that way today, but that's not how the Bible uses the term. It means "separation from God." So what does all of this mean? Faith is preceded by absent regeneration. Faith absent, God so-called imparts the gift of faith.

What we teach is that faith is possible through the Spirit's conviction and the Word of God's proclamation. We teach that when we preach the gospel under the power of the Holy Spirit, a person can hear that. We teach that the Holy Spirit can convict a person of the truth of that, and that person in their totally depraved state—properly defined—that person in their dead state—properly defined—can hear that message and make a decision to respond by faith to the grace of God. That's what we believe. That's why we preach the gospel.

The Calvinist says, "No, it's impossible for them to respond. You could give the clearest presentation of the gospel you wanted, and the Holy Spirit could be working overtime on a person's heart, but they're like a rock. They can't respond because they're dead." And they define "death" the way they want to define it: the only way people get saved is that—if they're one of the elect—God has to impart to them the gift of faith.

So if what they mean by "depravity" and "death" is correct, I could understand where they're coming from. But the problem is that they're not defining "total depravity" correctly. They're not defining spiritual death correctly.

So, faith is possible through the Spirit's conviction and the Word's proclamation. Now, don't get me wrong: in our totally depraved state, the Holy Spirit has to do a lot of things to get our attention. People come to Christ and they come to Christ because the Spirit is enabling. I completely get that; God has to do that because of our depraved condition. So I'm not trying to paint such an optimistic view of human nature, such that somehow the pre-salvation grace of God doesn't work. It has to work, or none of us could get saved. But what I'm rejecting is this idea that, even when God does those things, it doesn't do any good, because people are rocks—that's what I'm rejecting.

So clearly in our depraved state, the Holy Spirit's doing a lot of things. He's trying to get our attention. Now He's not going to believe for you. That's your call. John 16:7-11 says,

"'But I tell you the truth' "—Jesus speaking to the disciples in the Upper Room—" 'it is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the

Helper' "—that's the Paraclete, the one who comes alongside to assist, the Holy Spirit—" 'will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you.' "

The disciples are hitting the panic button, every time Jesus says, "I'm leaving." and He says, "Don't hit the panic button, because what's about to happen is I'm going to go and the Holy Spirit is going to come in my place, and I will be through the Holy Spirit, not with you, but in you, forever. So I'll be able to have intimacy with all of my children, not just the eleven whom He's speaking to here (Judas having left the room)."

" 'And He, when He comes, will convict the world' "—

What does " *the world* " mean? Newsflash: it means the whole world. So this is something that the Holy Spirit is doing right now, constantly, in the lives of unbelievers: three things. And this is how you tailor your evangelism. You focus on the three things that the Holy Spirit is focused on. Don't get into a big discussion about Noah's Ark and how the animals fit on the ark. You can talk about stuff like that, but those are not your big ticket items when you're evangelizing. I think Noah's Ark is very important. But you want to talk about the things that the Holy Spirit is already convicting an unsaved person of, in your evangelism, because the Holy Spirit is already doing a work in that person. And Jesus tells us what that work is:

" 'And He, when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin' "—
"Conviction" means "persuading."—" 'and righteousness, and judgment.' "

Every single unsaved person that you'll ever come in contact with, (it doesn't matter how cool they act) is already under conviction of those three things, because God says that He's already doing that: sin, righteousness, and judgment. Now, fortunately, Christ goes on and defines each of those terms: " '...concerning sin because they do not believe in me.' " "Sin" there is a singular noun, "hamartia."

"Trust Christ, trust Christ, trust Christ." That's what the Holy Spirit is doing in unsaved people—He's not convicting them of sins: "Boy, you need to stop gambling and using profanity. You need to quit spousal abuse." The Holy Spirit is not trying to morally reform unsaved people; they've got a much bigger problem than gambling, spousal abuse, or profanity. The big issue with them is that they're not believers. Because presumably when the Holy Spirit comes into a person, He'll start dealing with them with profanity and gambling and things like that, on the other side of salvation. But I'm talking about someone that is unsaved. There is no attempt by the Holy Spirit to morally reform that person.

" 'And He, when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment; concerning sin, because they do not believe in Me; and concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father and you no longer see Me;' "—

"So since I'm not going to be here, you need My righteousness coming from heaven to you: transferred righteousness."

—'and concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world has been judged.' "

In other words, "If you stay in your same state of unbelief and you don't have the transferred righteousness of Jesus, you're going down with the ship. This ship is going down, because Satan has already been condemned at the cross. (He's on the losing side of history.) And if you continue in your current state and you die in that state, you're essentially aligning yourself with a satanically energized, losing cause."

So when you evangelize people, that's what you talk about. You talk about how they need to trust Christ. You talk about how their own righteousness is not enough to get them into heaven. They need righteousness, sometimes called alien righteousness or transferred righteousness, coming from another source. And then you talk about how if they continue on in your current state, then they're going to go right into hell (which is the ultimate destiny of Satan one day)—into the lake of fire. So as the Holy Spirit is doing this, a person who is separated from God can respond to that, even though God didn't give that unsaved person the gift of faith so that they could respond if they were one of the elect. You see that?

Now, if I believed people were rocks, I would say, "This here is a waste of time." But people are not rocks. "Death" does not mean "nonexistence." "Death" means "separation." And so a lost person can respond to this. Beyond that (and this is a tag-team thing that God does), a lost person can respond to God's Word, because the Word of God has power. Isaiah 55:10-11 says,

"For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, And do not return there without watering the earth And making it bear and sprout, And furnishing seed to the sower and bread to the eater; So will My word be which goes forth from My mouth; It will not return to Me empty, Without accomplishing what I desire, And without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it."

The Word of God has power. In fact, the Word of God has so much power, coupled with the convicting ministry of the Holy Spirit, that it gives a person separated from God an opportunity to respond to the grace of God. Remember the rich man that died and went into Hades, and wanted to get somebody to go preach to his brothers? Remember the final verse in that paragraph, that very frightening paragraph? " "Well, your brothers have Moses and the prophets. Let them read them. If they won't believe Moses and the prophets, they won't even believe someone who rises from the dead." " "

It shows you the power of Moses and the prophets to convict the lost sinner, who is not in a spiritual state of nonexistence, but in a state of spiritual separation from God. *"So faith comes by hearing,"* Romans 10:17, *"and hearing by the word of Christ."* In Acts 2:37, when the lost Jews heard Peter preach on the day of Pentecost, they were cut to the quick. See, these are all accommodations God is making, because he understands that people are spiritually in a state of separation from him. In Second Timothy 3:15,

Paul, writing to Timothy, says, *"and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings"*—the Scripture—*"which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus."* Hebrews 4:12 analogizes the word of God to a double-edged sword capable of piercing and of separating soul from spirit.

I understand that people naturally are the way that they are in total depravity, but look at what God has done to make salvation opportunities available to people. Yes, people are separated from God, but you put into existence the convicting ministry of the Holy Spirit, coupled with the proclamation of the Word of God, and the lost sinner who is separated from God can respond to that through their own volition by exercising their own faith in the Messiah, regardless of some scenario where they've got to be given the gift of faith on the front end. See James 1:18.

First Peter 1:23 says, *"for you have been born again...through the living and enduring word of God."* So the Spirit convicts, the Word does its work, and then the gospel goes out. What is the gospel? It's the power of God unto salvation. Paul says, *"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."* Now the word "power" there is the Greek word "dunamis," where we get the words "dynamite" and "dynamic." The gospel in and of itself is a source of power. That's why Paul is not ashamed of it.

So if a person is spiritually separated from God, not in some kind of inanimate state, then you throw the following together: conviction by the Holy Spirit, John 16:7-11; the Word of God, Isaiah 55:10-11; and the gospel, Romans 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 the Savior. God will not believe for you. And I understand that people are separated from God. But look at all these things that God has done so that the lost sinner can understand the gospel, something that the Calvinists say is impossible because they've got the wrong definition of "death." They're defining "death" as "nonexistence" rather than mere "separation."

Robert Congdon summarizes this in his very good book, "Oops! I Thought I Was a Four-Pt Calvinist." The title intrigued me, because I thought I was a four-point Calvinist too, at one point. He says,

"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 the Holy Spirit are sufficient in and of themselves in bringing about the new birth. Instead of forcing individuals to be saved through the irresistible promptings of the Holy Spirit,"—

Regeneration precedes faith, in other words.

—"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."

God does all this so that they can get it and understand it as totally depraved, separated people from God. Now, as to exercising faith in the Savior, God's not going to do that for them, but He's going to use these means of grace (three of them we've talked about: conviction, Word, gospel) to bring the lost sinner to the point of salvation.

Congdon elsewhere says, "...their [Calvinism's] definition of total depravity negates the sufficiency of the power of the Word of God and the Holy Spirit to give life...." They say that what God is doing with all these other things is irrelevant, in which case I would say, "Well, why does God do them then if they're irrelevant?" They say, "The only thing that matters is you got to be given the gift of faith." And I'm saying, "That isn't true."

This is a very helpful chart from Robert Congdon's book. (I tweaked it at a few places.) It compares Calvinism's definition of "death" with what I think is an accurate biblical definition of "death." How does Calvinism define "spiritual death"? You're like a corpse. You're like a cadaver. Well, how does our view define "death"? It doesn't define it as a corpse or a cadaver. It says that we're separated from God. How does Calvinism define "consciousness" in an unsaved person? "Lifeless." How do we define "consciousness" in an unsaved person? "Awareness." Adam and Eve were aware, but they were in a place of suppressing. They heard God walking in the garden and they didn't like it. A rock can't do that.

What are the results of the Calvinistic definition of "death" and "total depravity"? It means "inability." When you hear them use the expression "total depravity," you just say, "Well, what you mean by that is inability." And yet what are we saying is the result? A lost person can hear and believe. Can they believe on their own, totally devoid of the prevenient grace of God? No. God is doing things; without those things, no one could be saved. But as God does them in people, they have a capacity to believe.

What is the spiritual response? In Calvinism, you have to be regenerated first so that you can believe. What's our definition of the proper order? God's Word, the Spirit's convicting power, and the gospel's power. Those aren't regeneration. When a lost person is under the conviction of God's Word, spiritual conviction, and the gospel's power, they are not regenerated. They are being led to faith so that they can be regenerated. See the difference?

What is regeneration in Calvinism? Regeneration, of course, is being born again. It's the impartation of divine life. Regeneration in Calvinism takes place before faith, if you happen to be one of the elect. What is our understanding of regeneration? Regeneration doesn't occur—a person doesn't become born again—until they trust in the Savior. So what's happening to them before they get saved? Conviction, which is not to be confused with regeneration.

So I hope that you're seeing that this missed definition that they have furnishes the philosophical basis for their system. And the next time we're together on this, I'll also be

showing you that Calvinism completely underestimates what lost people can do. They can do an awful lot: they can even believe, when they're convicted, because their spiritual being is not non-existent. They're separated from God.