

Direct Operation of the Holy Spirit?

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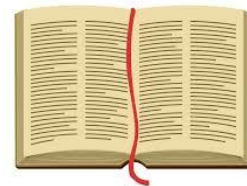
In the religious world, it is popular to claim that individuals cannot be saved unless the Holy Spirit personally operates on their hearts. This belief is a direct result of another popular doctrine--inherited depravity. The idea is that, because of the sin of Adam and Eve, our very nature was corrupted, and we are now hopelessly depraved. We cannot understand God, or even hope to do well, unless the Holy Spirit comes down and personally and directly "operates" on our hearts.

Let's think about this for a moment. If this is so, can my nature be any worse than Adam's was after he sinned? After Adam sinned, God spoke to him. If Adam was able to understand God after he sinned, even though his nature had become corrupt, and we inherit the same condition, then why can't we understand God just as Adam did? Adam and Eve were not so dead that they could not hear and understand when God spoke to them, and they were certainly not too dead to know good from evil.

Don't you find it interesting that Adam and Eve, as well as all other human beings with healthy minds, can understand each other while they are in this "depraved" state; yet, for some reason they cannot understand and hear God, who created them? If any one of us states a proposition to a sinner and backs it up with sufficient evidence, that sinner can believe us. Doesn't it seem just the least bit blasphemous to claim that God cannot do the same? We can place motives before sinners and induce them to act; yet some are willing to say that God cannot do the same. It certainly appears that this theory of total hereditary depravity reflects about as much on God as it does on us.

This theory would severely limit God's power. It would claim that a person is so depraved that God apparently was unable to prepare a gospel that could reach him. Yet, if God did prepare a gospel that can reach the sinner's heart (Romans 1:16-17), the sinner is not quite as depraved as the theory would suggest. If God could have prepared a gospel that would reach the sinner's heart, but simply chose not to, then the deficiency would certainly appear to be in God, not in the sinner. Once again we have a reflection on God.

If it were possible for God to make a gospel that could touch the sinner's heart, and He simply chose not to do it, then can someone please explain why on earth not? Would not the theory of total depravity begin to reflect on God's lack of benevolence at this point?



If we say that God was unable to create a gospel that could reach the sinner's heart, doesn't the theory begin to reflect on His power? Having said all this, regardless of the direction from which you approach it, doesn't it appear that this theory, which claims it is necessary for the Spirit to directly operate on the sinner, slanders God just as much as it does man?

In all of their preaching, the prophets, apostles, and inspired teachers proceeded with the understanding that their message was perfectly adapted to the people as they were when they heard it.

Jesus commanded the apostles to preach the gospel to all people. He didn't even hint that the people who heard would not be able to obey the gospel (Matthew 28:18-20). In Acts 8:4, we read that those who were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word. It is very telling that when they prayed for power and boldness, it was to enable them to preach with more courage and force. They did not pray for God to send His Spirit into the peoples' hearts to enable them to hear. When people refused to hear, they placed the blame on the people (Acts 13:45-46). They depended on gospel preaching to produce action (Romans 1:16; 1 Corinthians 2:1-2). They refused to deal in sensationalism and announced no foolish themes for their teaching. They were fully

persuaded that the gospel was God's power unto salvation. Believing that with all their souls, they made sure that they preached it with no uncertain sounds. When Paul and Barnabas traveled to Iconium, they "spoke in such a way that a great number of both Jews and Greeks believed." (Acts 14:1)

The Old Testament prophets confined their labor to the Jews. One notable exception was Jonah and his mission to Nineveh. Nineveh was a very corrupt heathen city. If they had inherited their depravity, they had certainly, through their own actions, added to it. Yet, Jonah's preaching brought the entire city to repentance. The Bible also records that "the people of Nineveh believed God." (Jonah 3:5) There is no mention at all of any other power at work save the preaching of God's word. Those who contend that the Holy Spirit directly operates on sinners' hearts make that the definitive work. Yet, in recording the conversion of an entire city, Jonah said not a single word about such a power. Would anyone contend that Jonah, perhaps wallowing in his disappointment over the matter, simply failed to include it in the account? When one considers that God is the ultimate Author of Scripture (2 Timothy 3:16), that would certainly appear unlikely.