

"Depravity has produced a total spiritual inability in the sinner in the sense that he cannot by his own volition change his character and life so as to make them conformable to the law of God, not change his fundamental preference of self and sin to supreme love to God, yet he has a certain amount of freedom left. He can, for instance, choose not to sin against the Holy Spirit, decide to commit the lesser sin rather than the greater, resist certain forms of temptation altogether, do certain outwardly good acts, though with Improper and unspiritual motives, and even seek God from entirely selfish motives." (pp. 267-268)

Having affirmed his belief in total depravity in this strong statement, Thiessen mitigates it by the doctrine of prevenient grace. He states:

"With the fall, the creature lost the ability not to sin It is now free only in the sense that it is able to do as its fallen nature suggests We, therefore, ask, How can he help living in sin? How can he ever choose contrary to his evil nature?

"(b) Prevenient grace. The upshot of the matter is that God must take the initiative if man is to be saved Common grace is not sufficient for salvation, yet it reveals the goodness of God to all sinful creatures. This is true, but why stop there? We believe that the common grace of God also restores to the sinner the ability to make a favorable response to God. in other words, we hold that God, in His grace, makes it possible for all men to be saved. . . .

"But we should note exactly what this means and what it does not mean. it does not mean that prevenient grace enables a man to change the permanent bent of his will in the direction of God; nor that he can quit all sin and make himself acceptable to God. it does mean that he can make an initial response to God, as a result of which God can give him repentance and faith. He can say: 'Turn thou me, and I shall be turned.' . . . if he say this much, then he has had a measure of freedom restored to him; then he can in some measure act contrary to his fallen nature; and then he becomes doubly responsible, even in his present helpless state. And if he will say this much, then God will turn him, grant him repentance. . . and faith." (pp. 155-156)

"May we repeat: Since mankind is hopelessly dead in trespasses and sins and can do nothing to obtain salvation, God graciously restores to all men sufficient ability to make a choice in the matter of submission to Him. This is the salvation -- bringing grace of God that has appeared to all men." (pp. 344-345)

c. Universal Atonement

"1. Christ died for the Elect. The Scriptures teach that Christ died primarily for the elect He died for the elect, not only in the sense of making salvation possible for them, but also in the sense of actually saving them when they believe on Christ.

"2. Christ died for the whole world. The Scriptures also teach that Christ died for the whole world Although Christ died for all in the sense of reconciling God to the world, not all are saved, because their actual salvation is conditioned on their being reconciled to God." (pp. 329-330)