CHAPTER 8

THE SINFUL NATURE AND SPIRITUAL INABILITY

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Previous chapters have dealt with the origin of sin, the biblical vocabulary of sin, and the nature of sin as both a state, or condition, of human nature and a series of actions that flow out of that sinful orientation. The present chapter will discuss the practical implications of sin on human nature and how the fallen nature affects views of salvation.

POLLUTION, DEPRAVITY, AND INABILITY

One of the undeniable facts of human existence is not only that human nature is polluted or corrupted but that that pollution is universal. That truth is captured by Paul's conclusion to his extensive treatment on sin, when he declares that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23).[1] John enunciates the same point when he writes that "if we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves" and "if we say we have not sinned, we make [God] a liar" (1 John 1:8, 10). Henri Blocher captures the truth of universal pollution when he notes that being sinners is "an

1. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are taken from the Revised Standard Version of the Bible, copyright © 1946, 1952, and 1971 the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

existential, spiritual, *fact* for human beings since Adam."[2] And William Horndern points out that "even theologians who have denied that Adam's fall corrupted later generations and who have denied the doctrine of original sin have been forced none the less to admit the strange fact that the line of least resistance for man never leads into the paths of righteousness."[3] The downward bent of human nature is captured by the concept of concupiscence, which "affirms the basic truth that each human being is born with a prejudice to sin."[4] Ellen White captures the idea when she writes that human nature has a "bent to evil."[5]

Both biblical testaments highlight the fact of human pollutedness. Thus Jeremiah points out that "the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately corrupt" (17:9). And Paul highlights the fact that those without God are "darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God," ignorant of spiritual realities, hard of heart, "have become callous and have given themselves up to licentiousness," and are "greedy to practice every kind of uncleanness" (Eph. 4:17–19).

The Bible is clear on the fact that pollution is not an end in itself but leads to what theologians call total depravity and spiritual inability. Many are tempted to avoid the phrase *total depravity* because they mistakenly think it means that people are as wicked as they could be and have no good in them. But the real implication is that sin has affected their entire being. That is the picture being described in Romans 3, in which Paul notes that sinners' *throats* are as open graves, their *tongues* practice deceit, their *lips* spread snakelike poison, their *mouths* utter bitter curses, and their *feet* don't merely pursue violence, but are swift to do so (vv. 13–16). The passage goes on to deal with the shortcoming of people's *eyes* (v. 18). Thus the depravity is total in the sense that it affects every part of a person. James Denney captures Paul's meaning when he writes that "the depravity which sin has produced in human nature extends to the whole

2. Henri Blocher, *Original Sin: Illuminating the Riddle* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1997), 129.

3. William Horndern, "Depravity," in *A Dictionary of Christian Theology,* ed. Alan Richardson (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1969), 92.

4. Bernard Ramm, *Offense to Reason: A Theology of Sin* (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1985), 88.

5. Ellen G. White, *Education* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1952), 29.

of it. There is no part of man's nature which is unaffected by it." As a result, "when the conscience is violated by disobedience to the will of God, the moral understanding is darkened, and the will is enfeebled. We are not constructed in water-tight compartments, one of which might be ruined while the others remain intact."[6]

In line with Denney's insight, the Bible moves beyond Paul's discussion of depravity being related to the totality of body parts by teaching that the *mind* is affected and darkened by sin (Rom. 1:28; Eph. 4:18; Tit. 1:15); the *conscience* is defiled (Tit. 1:15; Heb. 10:22; 1 Tim. 4:2); and the *heart* is deceitful (Jer. 17:9). Thus it is that Jesus roots depravity in the inner nature when He declares that "from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, fornication, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, foolishness" (Mark 7:21–22).

The defilement of the heart, or *kardia,* is a particularly rich concept in Scripture. The heart is not only the center of physical life as in modern thinking, but is variously described as "the seat of thought and will,"[7] "the centre and seat of spiritual life,"[88] and the "source of the whole inner life," including "its thinking, feeling, and volition."[9] A. Sand sums up the implications of heart nicely, writing that *kardia* "refers thus to the *inner person*, the seat of understanding, knowledge, and will, and takes on the meaning of *conscience*."[10]

Given that richness of meaning, the Bible teaching that humans have corrupted and sinful hearts has wide implications. With evil thoughts coming from the heart (Matt. 15:19), shameful desires dwelling in the heart (Rom. 1:24), and the heart being disobedient and impenitent (Rom. 2:5) and dull, darkened, and hardened (Eph. 4:18), it is little wonder that the Bible not only emphasizes the need of a new birth (John 3:3, 5), but

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6. James Denney, *Studies in Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1976), 83; cf. Ramm, *Offense to Reason,* 86.

7. R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark,* The New International Greek Testament Commentary Series (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 292.

8. Joseph H. Thayer, *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, n.d.), 325.

9. Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature,* 3rd ed., ed. and rev. Frederick William Danker (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 508.

10. Horst Balz and Gerhard Schneider, eds., *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 2:250.

also the need of a "new heart" (Ezek. 18:31) with God's principles infusing it (Heb. 8:10).

Previously it was mentioned that total depravity is a concept that is often misunderstood. As a result, before moving forward, depravity needs to be examined in order to see what it is and what it is not. Negatively, depravity does not mean (1) that unrenewed individuals cannot do actions that are socially good. It is outwardly obvious that Christians have no monopoly on such things as civic morality. Every community, for example, contains secular individuals of moral character who unselfishly give of their time and finances to those in need. (2) Total depravity does not mean people are devoid of conscience or some knowledge of God. Paul argues just the opposite in such passages as Romans 1:20 and 2:14–15. (3) Nor does it imply that every unregenerate person will indulge in every form of sin or sin to the greatest extent possible. (4) Finally, total depravity does not mean that sinful beings are incapable of recognizing virtuous character and actions in others.

Thus it is that the biblical understanding of total depravity represents the potential for complete evil but not the reality of total evil. In order to account for the evidence of residual goodness in all people, theologians have developed the concept of common grace. Thomas Oden writes that "that grace is called *common* which is shared by all humanity even amid all conceivable forms of fallenness." As a result, "we may be thankful that by common grace God 'upholds the universe by his word of power' (Heb. 1:3, RSV), 'causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good' (Matt. 5:45), restrains social sin from becoming ungovernable (Rom. 13:1–4), enables society to live together in a proximately just and orderly manner, and enables it to cultivate scientific, rational, and economic pursuits of civilization."[11] Without common grace, life would be impossible due to the effects of sin. Common grace came into effect at the very time that God chose not to let the results of sin take Adam's life on the very day he rebelled (Gen. 2:17). God upheld Adam in life in spite of his fallen condition. Thus it is that by common grace God curbs the ravages of sin in both individuals and societies and thereby provides all individuals with some knowledge of Himself and goodness. Closely linked with common grace is the fact that at the Fall the image of God in people was not

11. Balz and Schneider, *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, 2:250.

destroyed even though it has been fractured and grossly distorted (Gen. 9:6; 1 Cor. 11:7; Jas. 3:9). As John Calvin put it, a "residue" of the image continued to exist in humanity after the Fall, "some sparks still gleam" in the "degenerate nature."[12] Therefore, although people are twisted and lost as a result of the Fall, they are still human with humans potentials, albeit potentials limited by the effects of sin.

At this point it is important to discuss the positive meaning of total depravity. First, as noted previously, it means that inherent corruption extends to every part of an individual's nature. Second, total depravity reflects the fact that "corrupt motives also lie behind the good things we do."[13] That dynamic is reflected in the Pharisee's temple prayer, in which his self-righteous attitude, rather than genuine piety, motivated what outwardly appeared to be pious acts (Luke 18:9–14). Third, because depravity affects the entire being and all of its faculties, there is nothing a person can do to merit saving favor with God.

That third point moves our discussion beyond sin's pollution of the human being and total depravity to the topic of spiritual inability. Or as Bernard Ramm puts it, "Total Depravity translated into the area of salvation means total inability."[14] The point Paul makes so effectively in Romans 1:17–3:20 is that universal human inability makes it impossible for people of their own accord and by any means to appear justified before God. That fact also undergirds Paul's presentation in Ephesians 2 and 4:17–24, in which he presents Christ and saving grace as absolutely necessary because human beings are sinners who live in darkness.

Spiritual inability or total spiritual inability is directly tied to the effect of sin upon the human will. The will, as Ellen White so nicely phrases it, "is the governing power in the nature of man."[15] Disorient the will and the entire life is out of kilter. That disorientation took place in Genesis 3 when the still free Eve chose "to dethrone love to God from its place of supremacy in the soul," and to place her own will there.[16] With

12. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, book 2, chap. 2:12.

13. Stanley J. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 240.

14. Ramm, *Offense to Reason*, 87.

15. Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, n.d.), 47.

16. James Orr, *God's Image in Man and Its Defacement in the Light of Modern*

that disorientation of the center of life, Ramm argues, "the whole psyche" became "like a ship whose rudder is fixed at a wrong angle or like an airplane whose wing adjustments are permanently set askew."[17] Stanley Grenz makes the same point when he writes that "sin affects a person's entire heart. It infects our personal 'control center.'"[18]

Thus at the very center of the human predicament is the perversion of the will leading to a perverted inclination of the will that is hostile to God. It is for that reason that the unaided human will loves darkness rather than light (John 3:19) and that people become "slaves to various passions and pleasures" (Tit. 3:3), even those that lead to their destruction.

The key word in the last sentence is "slaves." One of Paul's favorite metaphors for the effects of sin on humanity is enslavement. Thus he writes of those outside of Christ as being "slaves of sin" (Rom. 6:17). And Jesus teaches that even a person who proclaims that he or she is not in bondage may still be "a slave to sin" (John 8:33–34). Such is the deceptiveness of the sinful heart (Jer. 17:9).

From the biblical perspective sin "is a cosmic power that enslaves its prey. . . . Just as conquering armies enslaved subjected peoples, so also we find ourselves slaves of a hostile, foreign force called sin. No longer able to exercise choice, we discover that we must obey sin, for it exercises power over us."[19] It was that understanding of the power of sin that led to the Reformation idea of "the bondage of the will."

Here it is important to stop for a moment to explore the amount of freedom inherent in the unrenewed human will. On one level there is freedom of the will in what Luther and Calvin identified as the "things below." That is, individuals have freedom in social and moral matters. As a result, people are free to choose their path in terms of daily activities, such as selecting a spouse, job, or college. Likewise, an individual is free to either care for or abuse his or her children, to refuse or accept certain temptations, or to seek religion or God from motives of self-interest. Even those with a strong predestinarian

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Denials (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1905), 223, 216; cf. George R. Knight, *Sin and Salvation: God's Work for and in Us* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2008), 38–43.

17. Ramm, *Offense to Reason*, 149.

18. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, 239.

19. Ibid., 272.

belief system recognize that sinful humans still have "reason, conscience, and the freedom of choice in their daily affairs."[20]

On the other hand, given the disorientation of the human will in its relation to God, humans do not have free will in spiritual matters. Rather, as Ellen White points out, "there is in" every person's "nature a bent to evil, a force which, unaided, he cannot resist."[21] Grenz makes the same point when he writes that "the choosing individual faces moral choice already predisposed." Thus "freedom" of the will "means the release from the predisposition toward evil in order to be able [to] choose the good."[22] As a result, sinful humanity is never neutral. Its free actions are limited by the propensity or tendency to sin residing in the heart and will—a propensity lodged there when humans put themselves and their wills at the center of their lives rather than God and His will. In that event what looked like the path to freedom ended up as the road to enslavement and spiritual death and inability (Prov. 14:12).

The New Testament teaching is that sinners are slaves to sin and are unable of themselves to turn to God and true righteousness. Spiritual freedom is the great lack among those under bondage to sin. Their essential need is to be enlightened by the Holy Spirit so that they will not remain in darkness (1 Cor. 2:14), to be born from above by the Spirit (John 3:3, 5), and to become new creatures in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). Human beings cannot regenerate themselves, but must be born of God (John 1:12–13). Even their choices toward morality find their righteousness as nothing but "filthy rags" (Isa. 64:6, KJV).

James Denney sums up the problem of spiritual inability nicely when he writes that "there is *one* thing which man cannot do *alone*. . . . He cannot fulfil the destiny for which he was created." Denney then offers the ultimate challenge to those who deny spiritual inability: "When a man has been discovered, who has been able, *without Christ*, to reconcile himself to God, and to obtain dominion over the world and over sin, *then* the doctrine of inability, or of the bondage due to sin, may be denied; *then*, but *not till then*."[23]

Thus far this chapter has discussed the effects of sin on human nature in terms of pollution, total depravity, and the resulting spiritual inability. In that discussion the role of the will proved to be a central feature. The next

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20. L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 4th ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1941), 248.

21. White, *Education*, 29.

22. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, 273.

23. Denney, *Studies in Theology*, 85.

section of the chapter will focus on the four major ways of relating to human inability and the bondage of the will in church history. That will be followed by a Seventh-day Adventist approach to the topic.

THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES RELATED TO TOTAL DEPRAVITY AND SPIRITUAL INABILITY

The topics of depravity, inability, and the freedom of the will have played a central role across the history of the church in its discussion of salvation. Four quite distinct orientations developed across time. The first perspective on these topics is Pelagianism. Pelagianism arose about the year 400 when Pelagius, a British monk based in Rome, became alarmed at the moral laxity of the Roman Church. He argued forcefully for the need for human moral responsibility and insisted on the need for constant self-improvement in the light of Christ's example and Old Testament law. He affirmed freedom of the will and that all humans have the power not to sin. The choice is theirs to follow Adam's evil example or Christ's good one. Pelagius not only denied original sin and its results (inherited depravity and inability), but also assertively taught that humans have a natural ability to live sinless lives apart from empowering grace. Sin was viewed as an act willfully committed against God. Grace for Pelagius was external enlightenment provided for humanity by God through such things as the Ten Commandments and the example of Christ. Thus grace informs people regarding their moral duties but does not assist them in performing them. People are able to avoid sin through following the example of Jesus. In short, humans are morally neutral rather than depraved and they have the free will to choose good and evil. Thus sin is a problem of the human will rather than being rooted in human nature.[24] Following that line of thought, Hans LaRondelle points out that according to the Pelagian soteriology, "sinless perfection after baptism was not merely possible but a duty to

24. For helpful overviews of the Pelagian/Augustinian controversy, see Alister E. McGrath, *Historical Theology* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1998), 35–37, 79–85; Geoffrey W. Bromiley, *Historical Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1978), 117–123; Edwin Harry Zackrison, "Seventh-day Adventists and Original Sin: A Study of the Early Development of the Seventh-day Adventist Understanding of the Effect of Adam's Sin on His Posterity" (PhD diss., Andrews University, 1984), 108–113.

achieve."[25] Success is a matter of choice and will power. While Pelagianism had its birth in the fifth century, it has had a vigorous existence ever since.

The second perspective on depravity, inability, and the freedom of the will was set forth by Pelagius's adversary, Augustine of Hippo (354–430), and passed on to the modern world largely through Luther and Calvin. Augustine's understanding can be viewed as the polar opposite to that of Pelagius. Pelagius held that after the Fall the human will was neutral and thus individuals were able to make in their own power a decision for God once the evidence was in, while Augustine held that the Fall had biased the will toward evil to the extent that it was enslaved to sin and could not unaided make a decision for God. While Pelagius viewed sin as an act performed by each individual on the basis of free choice which in itself frees people from a life of sin, Augustine argued that sin was a hereditary disease and that the effects of sin on the human will had enslaved it to the extent that unaided humans could not break free from its power. While Pelagius viewed grace as God's mercy in revealing the true way of life to people so that they could then choose to walk a sinless life, Augustine viewed grace as the saving act of God rather than mere moral guidance. Thus for Augustine humanity is justified by God as an act of grace, while for Pelagius people are justified on the basis of their merits in imitating the example of Christ.

Augustinian tradition held a firm belief in the pollution of humanity, total deprivation, and spiritual inability, while those in the Pelagian tradition rejected those beliefs—but how do those teachings relate to salvation in the real world? For Pelagius it was quite simple. A person had only to choose God and then choose to follow the example of Christ in daily life. But for those believing in total depravity, the bondage of the will, and spiritual inability, the problem was more complex. One possible solution was highlighted by the followers of John Calvin. Their response to total depravity was total grace to the extent that human choice did not even enter the picture. How could it, since the will was fallen and under the power of sin? Instead, God in His sovereignty made the choice by predetermining some individuals to be saved eternally while others were

25. H. K. LaRondelle, *Perfection and Perfectionism: A Dogmatic-Ethical Study of Biblical Perfection and Phenomenal Perfectionism* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1971), 290–291.

predetermined to eternal damnation. In the process the extreme Calvinists "simply annihilated human freedom."[26]

A third theological perspective on salvation in relation to depravity and inability is semi-Pelagianism, which is basically a compromise between Pelagianism and Augustinianism. On the one hand, the name semi-Pelagianism is misleading in the sense that its proponents do not accept the extreme position of Pelagius on human ability and grace as being merely informative toward the moral life. But, on the other hand, it has a major Pelagian element. Roger Olson highlights the essence of the semi-Pelagian contribution to the debate over salvation when he writes that the movement "embraces a modified version of original sin but believes that humans have the ability, even in their natural or fallen state, to initiate salvation by exercising a good will toward God."[27] However, after that free will decision has been made, saving grace in the Augustinian sense takes over.[28] Olson suggests that a large number of modern religions are semi-Pelagian by "default" due to the fact that many pastors and lay people have not fully thought through their understanding of free will in relationship to their understanding of the effects of sin on human nature.[29]

A fourth theological perspective on depravity, the fallen will, and human inability is Arminianism. Arminianism developed from within Dutch Calvinism, but it spread widely in the English world through the Wesleyan/Methodist movement. Both Arminians and Calvinists agreed that post-Fall humans in their natural state do not have free wills in the sense that they can choose to follow God. Yet the two theological traditions differ on their solution to that inability. Calvinists have God overriding the will through the unconditional predestination of individuals to salvation, while Arminians, who hold that "the human will ultimately determines whether the divine grace proffered to man is accepted or

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26. Denney, *Studies in Theology,* 84. For an overview of the main positions of Calvinism, see Edwin H. Palmer, *The Five Points of Calvinism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1972).

27. Roger E. Olson, *Arminian Theology: Myths and Realities* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), 17–18.

28. "Semipelagianism," in *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church,* 3rd ed., ed. F. L. Cross and E. A. Livingstone (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 1481.

29. Roger E. Olson, *The Mosaic of Christian Belief: Twenty Centuries of Unity and Diversity* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002), 274.

rejected," believe that God predestined Christ to become the potential Savior for every human being who would believe and repent.[30]

But that is where the problem comes in. Given the facts of the effects of original sin on human nature, including depravity and bondage of the will, there is no way that individuals can choose for God. Something has to wake them up to spiritual realities and enable them to choose. That something the Arminians called prevenient grace, the grace that works in a person's life before he or she accepts saving grace. The result of prevenient grace's enabling power through the Holy Spirit is a "freed will"—"one which, though initially bound by sin, has been brought by the prevenient grace of the Spirit of Christ to a point where it can respond freely to the divine call."[31] Thomas Oden refers to this concept as "grace-enabled freedom."[32] The end result is that Arminianism stands firmly in the grace-oriented Augustinian tradition and objects to Pelagianism with its denial of depravity, bondage of the will, and spiritual inability, while at the same time rejecting semi-Pelagianism.

SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST PERSPECTIVES ON DEPRAVITY AND SPIRITUAL ABILITY

Various Adventists have been tempted to embrace all the positions discussed up until now, except the Calvinistic option. The Adventist belief in free will is strong, even though the concept is largely misunderstood. With the denomination's traditional emphasis on the Ten Commandments, obedience, and sanctification, some of its adherents have been drawn to the Pelagian perspective, especially those with a theological orientation focused on sinless perfectionism.[33]

But more central to Adventism, with its clearer understanding of the centrality of grace since its 1888 General Conference session, is the divide

30. H. Orton Wiley and Paul T. Culbertson, *Introduction to Christian Theology* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1946), 263.

31. Olson, *Arminian Theology*, 164.

32. Ibid., 95.

33. For a fuller discussion, see George R. Knight, "Seventh-day Adventism, Semi-Pelagianism, and Overlooked Topics in Adventist Soteriology: Moving Beyond Missing Links and Toward a More Explicit Understanding," *Andrews University Seminary Studies*, vol. 51, no. 1 (2013): 3–24.

between semi-Pelagian and Arminian understandings. Having said that, it is important to realize that Adventists have by and large neglected a discussion of those aspects of the plan of salvation that have divided the Arminians and semi-Pelagians. The reason for that neglect is not difficult to discover. Namely, while much of the discussion among Arminians, semi-Pelagians, and Calvinists has been focused primarily on the beginning of salvation for individuals, Adventists, with their concern with the law and end-time events, largely neglected beginnings while focusing on how people ought to live and what they had to do to be ready for the coming of Christ.

While that is true, many twentieth century Adventist authors explicitly stated their belief in total depravity and spiritual inability, but then inconsistently went on to provide a semi-Pelagian solution to the sin problem by stating that by free will one could choose to accept the grace of Christ and become a Christian.[34]

There were exceptions to that rule, including Hans LaRondelle and Edward Vick.[35] But perhaps the most important exception was Ellen White. In the 1890s she made several points to clarify the issue. She not only explicitly stated her perspective on human depravity and spiritual inability, but she explicitly denied that free will could initiate the plan of salvation for an individual.[36] Even more to the point is her statement that "many are confused as to what constitutes the first steps in the work of salvation. Repentance is thought to be a work the sinner must do for himself in order that he may come to Christ. . . . Yet the sinner cannot bring himself to repentance, or prepare himself to come to Christ. . . . The very first step to Christ is taken through the drawing of the Spirit of God; as man responds to this drawing, he advances toward Christ in

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34. William Henry Branson, *How Men Are Saved: The Certainty, Plan, and Time for Man's Salvation* (Nashville, TN: Southern Publishing Assn., 1941), 8, 10, 18, 19, 23, 27, 29; Edward Heppenstall, *Salvation Unlimited: Perspectives in Righteousness by Faith* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1974), 14–15, 17–18, 23–25; see also the discussion of these authors in Knight, "Seventh-day Adventism."

35. Hans K. LaRondelle, *Christ Our Salvation: What God Does for Us and in Us* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1980), 12–20; Edward W. H. Vick, *Let Me Assure You: Of Grace, of Faith, of Forgiveness, of Freedom, of Fellowship, of Hope* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1968), 1, 12. See also, Knight, *Sin and Salvation*, 73–74, 87.

36. White, *Steps*, 18. We will return to this passage in my other chapter—"The Grace That Comes Before Saving Grace"—in its discussion of prevenient grace.

order that he may repent. . . . Repentance is no less the gift of God than are pardon and justification, and it cannot be experienced except as it is given to the soul by Christ."[37]

With such statements Ellen White placed herself firmly in the Arminian camp, while rejecting the semi-Pelagianism of many of her fellow believers. In the process she took into full account the biblical teachings on total depravity, the bondage of the will, spiritual inability, and the absolute need of grace in every step of the Christian journey. Above all, she highlighted what those in the Arminian/Wesleyan sector of Protestantism called prevenient grace—the grace that comes before saving grace and frees the will so that an individual can make the grace-inspired choice to accept the saving grace of God in Christ.

37. Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1958), 1:390–391.