

THE DOCTRINE OF MAN'S IMPOTENCE

Chapter 8 ELUCIDATION

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Transcript

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Chapter 8

ELUCIDATION

Had we followed a strictly logical order, this branch of our subject would have immediately followed our discussion of the problem which is raised by this doctrine. But we considered it better to first build a broader foundation for our present remarks by considering its "complement." We showed (1) that there is a twofoldness of truth which characterizes the whole of divine revelation; (2) that parallel with the fact of man's spiritual impotence runs his full responsibility; (3) that the acid test of sound theology consists in preserving the balance of truth or presenting its component parts in their proper perspective; (4) that the servant of God must always strive to set forth each aspect of the gospel in its fair proportions, being impervious to the charge of inconsistency which is sure to be hurled at him by extremists. GOD'S REQUIREMENTS VERSUS MAN'S IMPOTENCE

Let us now restate the problem to which this and the following chapters endeavor to present a solution. How can fallen man be held responsible to glorify God when he is incapable of doing so? How can it conform with the mercy of God for Him to require the debt of obedience when we are unable to pay it? How can it consist with the justice of God to punish with eternal suffering for the neglect of what lies altogether beyond the sinner's power? If fallen man be bound fast with the cords of sin, with what propriety can God demand of him the performance of a perfect holiness? Since the sinner is the slave of sin, how can he be a free agent? Can he really be held accountable for not doing what it is impossible for him to do? If the fall has not annulled human responsibility, must it not to a considerable extent have modified it? It is not for the benefit of the carping critic or the objecting infidel that we take up such questions as these, but with the desire to help our fellow Christians. Though such problems do not to the least degree shake their confidence in the character of the Lord or the integrity of His Word, some believers are at a loss to see how His ways can be equal. On the one hand Scripture declares, "The carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be." Therefore it is incapable of doing anything else but sin: "So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God" (Rom. 8:7-8). Yet on the other we are informed that "the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men" (Rom. 1:18) and that "every transgression and disobedience" shall receive "a

just recompense of reward" (Heb. 2:2). Nor is any deliverance from God's wrath obtainable through the gospel except on such conditions as no natural man can comply with; nevertheless, noncompliance with those conditions brings additional condemnation. To those who give serious thought to this subject it almost seems to make out the Most High to be what the slothful servant said: "Reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strewed" (Matt. 25:24). That this is far from being the case every regenerate heart is fully assured, yet the removal of this God-dishonoring suspicion is earnestly desired by those who are perplexed by it. These points have engaged our mind for many years, and it is our desire to pass on to other members of the household of faith what has been a help to us. How fallen man can be morally impotent yet morally responsible is the matter we shall try to elucidate. In seeking the solution to our problem we shall first aim to cast upon it the light furnished by the relationship which exists between the Creator and the creature, between God and fallen man. When facing the difficulties raised by the truth of the moral impotence of fallen man, it is of vast importance that we clearly recognize and tenaciously hold the fact that God has not forfeited His right over the creature even though the creature has lost his power to meet God's requirements. At this point, especially, much of the difficulty is removed. Further light is thrown upon the nature of human responsibility when we obtain a right view of man's moral agency. By far the greater part of the difficulty vanishes when we correctly define and state the nature of man's impotence: what it is not, and what it does consist of. Finally, it will be found that man's own conscience and consciousness bear witness to the fact of his accountability. In seeking to show the relationship which exists between the Creator and the creature, between God and the fallen man, let us inquire, What is the foundation of moral obligation? What is the rule of human duty? It should be evident to any anointed eye that there can be only one answer to these questions: The will of God, the will of God as revealed to us. God is our Maker and as such He has the right to unlimited control over the creatures of His hands. That right of God is absolute, uncontrolled and without any limitation. It is the right of the potter over the clay. Moreover, the creature is entirely dependent upon the Creator: "In him we live, and move, and have our being" (Acts 17:28). He that "formeth the spirit of man within him" sustains that spirit and the body which it inhabits. In reference to our bodies we have no self-sustaining power; let God's hand be withdrawn, and we return to the dust. The soul of man is equally dependent upon the sustaining power of God. MAN'S OBLIGATION

Because God is who He is and because man is the work of His hands, the will of God must be the foundation of moral obligation. "All things were created by him, and for him" (Col. 1:16). "Thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created" (Rev. 4:11). But God is not only our Creator. He is also our Ruler and Governor, and His rights over us are made known by His will, by His expressed will. Man is bound to do what God commands and to abstain from what He forbids, simply because He commands and forbids. Beyond that there is no reason. Direct reference to the divine will is essential to any moral virtue. When an action is done regardless of God's will, no honor is shown Him and no virtue pertains to it. Such is the clear and definite teaching of Holy Writ; it knows no foundation of right or wrong, no obligation, except the will of the Most High. It therefore follows that the will of God revealed is the rule of duty. It is self-evident that the will of God cannot direct and govern us except as it is made known to us, and in His Word it is made known. God's own rule of action is His will, for there can be no higher or holier rule. "He doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth" (Dan. 4:35); "He saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion" (Rom. 9:15). To the will of God our blessed Redeemer uniformly referred as both the obligation and rule of His own action. "I delight to do thy will, o my God: yea, thy law is within my heart" (Ps. 40:8); "I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me" (John 5:30). Even when the desire of His sinless humanity was for an escape from the awful cup, His

holy soul felt the binding obligation of the divine will: "Not as I will, but as thou wilt." Does not that settle the question once for all? If the incarnate Son looked no higher, no lower, no farther, why should we? Compliance with the will of God because it is the will of God is the perfection of moral virtue. It is a striking fact that whenever the heart of man is pierced by the arrows of the Almighty and his soul is bowed down before the Majesty of heaven, whenever he begins to feel the awful burden of his guilt and his conscience is agitated over his fearful accountabilities and how they are to be met, his inquiry always is "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" Everyone who has been taught of God knows this to be true. There is therefore a revealed testimony in every renewed heart to the righteousness of God's rule and the reality of its obligation. This is the basic principle of Christian fidelity and fortitude. Under its influence the regenerate soul has only one inquiry in reference to any proposed enterprise: Is it the will of God? Satisfied with this, his heart tells him it must be done. Difficulties, hardships, dangers, death present no obstacle; onward he presses in the path marked out for him by the will of his Father. Obedience to that is his only responsibility. The whole question of man's responsibility is resolved thus: Has God revealed, has God commanded? It must be grounded on the simple authority of the Most High. God neither reveals what is untrue nor commands what is unjust; therefore the first principle of our moral duty is to know, acknowledge and perform the divine will as the ultimate fact in the government of God over us. This question must be resolved altogether irrespective of the state into which the fall has brought man; otherwise God must cease to be God and the creature must sit in judgment on his Creator. But men in the enmity of their carnal mind and the pride of their heart dare to sit in judgment upon the rule God has given them, measuring it by how far they consider it suitable to their condition, how far it complies with their ability, how far it commends itself to their reason—which is the very essence of unbelief and rebellion, the opposite of faith and obedience. Responsibility rests not upon anything in the creature, but on the authority of God who has made known His will to us. Responsibility is our obligation to respond to God's will. We turn next to consider the moral agency of man. Since God supplied all other creatures with faculties suited to them and abilities to fill their several purposes and to attain their different ends (as fish to swim in water, and birds to fly in the air), so He was no less gracious to man. He who did not deny capacity to His lower creatures did not withhold it from the noblest of His earthly works. How could God have pronounced him "very good" (Gen. 1:31) if he lacked the natural capacity to fulfill the end of his creation? As he was to be subject to moral government, man was endowed with moral agency. Man then has been fitted to serve his Maker, because he has been invested with faculties suited to the substance of the divine commands; therefore it is our certain duty to obey whatever laws God gives us. In amplifying what has just been said, we must consider the question What is the essence of moral agency? The answer is rational intelligence. If man was incapable of comparing ideas, of marking their agreement or difference to draw conclusions and infer results of conduct, he would not be a moral agent. That is to say, he would not be under a law or revealed will and liable to punishment for its violation or reward for its obedience. We do not treat infants or idiots as subjects of moral government, nor do we regard brute beasts as responsible moral agents. The unhappy maniac is pitied, not blamed. But something more than a capacity to reason is included in the idea of moral agency; there are processes of reason, such as a mathematical demonstration, which contain no moral character. MAN'S POWER OF CHOICE

To will is an act of the mind directing its thoughts to the production of an action and thereby exerting its power to produce it. The faculty of the will is that power or principle of the mind by which it is capable of choosing. An act of the will is simply a choice. When the herdsmen of Abraham and his nephew quarreled, the patriarch proposed a separation and graciously offered the young man his choice of the whole land. "Then Lot chose him all the plain of Sodom." What does that choice signify? He took a view of the different localities, observed their relative features, balanced in his mind their respective advantages and

disadvantages; and that which pleased him best offered the most powerful motive or incentive, and so was his choice. Such power of choice is necessary to constitute moral agency. Anyone who is physically forced to perform an act contrary to his desires, be it good or bad, is not accountable for it. Conscience is a moral sense which discerns between moral good and evil, perceiving the difference between worthiness and blamableness, reward and punishment. A moral agent is one who has a capacity for being influenced in his actions by moral inducements or motives exhibited to the understanding or reason, so as to engage to a conduct agreeable to the moral faculties. That such a faculty exists within us is witnessed to by the consciousness of men the world over. There is an inward monitor from whose authority there is no escape, ever accusing or excusing. When its authority is defied, sooner or later conscience smites the transgressor with deep remorse and causes him to shrink from the anticipation of a reckoning to come. In a healthy state man recognizes the claims made by his moral faculty to supreme dominion over him. Thus the Creator has placed within our own beings His vice-regent, ever testifying to our responsibility to render obedience to Him. Man's responsibility does not rest on anything within himself, but is based solely upon God's rights over him—His right to command, His right to be obeyed. The faculties of intelligence, volition and conscience merely qualify man to discharge his responsibility. In addition to these faculties of his soul, man has also been given strength or power to meet the requirements of his Maker. God originally made him "upright" (Eccles. 7:29) and placed within him holy tendencies which perceived the glory of God, a heart which responded to His excellence. Man was made in the image of God, after His likeness (Gen. 1:27); in other words, he was "created in righteousness and true holiness" (Eph. 4:24). Man's understanding was spiritually enlightened, his will rightly inclined; therefore he was capacitated to love the Lord his God with all his faculties and to render Him sinless obedience. Thus was he fitted to discharge his responsibility. How was it possible for such a creature—so richly endowed by his Creator, so "very good" in his being, so capacitated to love and serve his Maker—to fall? It was possible because he was not constituted immutable, that is, incapable of any change. Creaturehood and mutability (liability to change) are correlated terms. Having been given everything necessary to constitute him a moral agent, everything which fitted him to meet the divine requirements, man was made the subject of moral government. A rule of action was set before him, a rule which was vested with sanctions: reward for obedience, punishment for disobedience. Man then was put on probation under a covenant of works. He was duly tried, his fealty to God being tested by Satan. Man deliberately cast off his allegiance to God, rejected His authority, preferred the creature to his Creator and thereby fell from his original estate. It needs to be pointed out—for in some circles of professing Christians it is quite unknown—that when God placed Adam under the covenant of works and put him on probation, he acted not simply as a private individual but as a public person, as the federal head, as the legal representative and father of all his posterity. Such was the constitution which it pleased the Lord to appoint to the human race at the beginning of its history; and whether we can or cannot perceive the propriety and righteousness of such an arrangement, no spiritual mind will doubt its wisdom or justice once he is satisfied it is definitely revealed in Holy Writ. Had Adam survived his testing and remained loyal to his Ruler, the whole of his posterity would have shared his reward. Instead, he rebelled and sinned; in consequence, "by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; . . . by one man's disobedience many were made sinners" (Rom. 5:18-19); "in Adam all die" (1 Cor. 15:22). As the result of our federal head's transgression, we are born into this world depraved creatures, unable to render acceptable obedience to the divine law. But the fall has neither changed man's relationship to God nor canceled his responsibility. He is still a subject of the divine government, still a moral agent, still accountable for his actions, still required to love and serve the Lord his God. God has not lost His right to enforce His just demands, though man has lost his power to meet them; depravity does not annul obligation. A human creditor may without the slightest injustice sue a

prodigal debtor who has squandered his substance in riotous living. How much more so the divine Creditor! The entrance of sin has neither weakened God's right to demand subjection from His creatures nor invalidated their obligation to discharge their duty. In seeking to supply solution to the problem of how one who is morally impotent can be justly held to be fully accountable to God, before we endeavor to point out more clearly the exact nature of that impotence (what it does not and what it does consist of), we feel it necessary to further amplify the fact that we must first throw upon this problem the light which is furnished by the relationship which exists between the Creator and the creature, between God and fallen man. Unless we follow this order we are certain to go wrong. It is only in God's light we can ever "see light." God inhabits eternity; man is but a thing of time. Since God is both before and above man, we must start with God in our thoughts and descend to man, and not start with the present condition of fallen man and then seek to think backward to God. RIGHTS OF GOD OVER MAN

That upon which we must first concentrate is not the rights of man but the rights of God, the rights of God over man. The relation in which the Creator stands to His creatures makes them, in the strictest sense, His property. The Almighty has an absolute right to appropriate and control the products of His own omnipotence and will. Observe how the psalmist ascribes the supremacy of God to the dependence of all things upon Him for their original existence. "For the Lord is a great God, and a great King above all gods. In his hand are the deep places of the earth: the strength of the hills is his also. The sea is his, and he made it: and his hands formed the dry land. O come, let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before the Lord our maker. For he is our God; and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand" (Ps. 95:3-7). Since creation itself gives the Most High an absolute right to the disposal of His creatures, His constant preservation of them continually augments His title. To keep in being calls for the exercise of power no less than to create out of nothing. To God as Creator we owe our original existence; to God as Preserver we are indebted for our continued existence. Upon this sure foundation of creation and preservation God possesses an unquestionable and inalienable propriety in all His creatures, and consequently they are under a corresponding obligation to acknowledge His dominion. Their dependence upon Him for past, present and continued existence makes it a matter of imperative duty to submit to His authority. From the fact that we are His property it follows that His will is our law. "Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus?" (Rom. 9:20). God's right to govern us is the necessary consequence of the mutual relations existing between Creator and creatures. The dominion of God was not adjusted with reference to man, but man was constituted with reference to it. That is to say, it pleased the Lord to appoint and institute a system of moral government, and accordingly He constituted man a moral agent, fitted to His requirements. Man was endowed with understanding, conscience, affections and will, capable of bearing the image of his Maker's holiness, of appreciating the distinctions between right and wrong, of feeling the supremacy of moral law. To such beings God sustains the relation of Ruler, for a moral creature is necessarily the subject of obligation. It must seek the law of its being beyond itself; the ultimate standard of its conduct must be found in a superior will to which it is responsible. To all created intelligences the authority of their Creator is absolute, complete and final. Thus the will of God, now expressed, is to them the sole standard of moral obligation. To deny this would be to make the creature independent. The essential elements which constitute all true government were present when God placed man in Eden: there was competent authority, a rule of action proclaimed, and a suitable sanction to enforce that rule. As we have pointed out, the relationship obtaining between God and His creatures is such as to invest Him with an absolute right to exact obedience from them. As dependence is the very condition of his being, man possesses no authority to move, to exert a single faculty or to lose a single quality without evoking the divine displeasure. So absolutely is the creature the property of its Maker that it has no right to think its own thoughts or indulge its own inclinations. Moral agents must act,

but their actions must be determined and regulated by the will of their Maker. "And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat" (Gen. 2:16); without the grant, it would have been an act of theft for Adam to partake of any of them! J. H. Thornwell stated: A creature has no more right to act than it has power to be, without the consent of the Almighty. Dependence, absolute, complete, inalienable is the law of its existence. Whatever it performs must be in the way of obedience; there can be no obedience without an indication of the will of a ruler, and no such indication without a government. It is, therefore, undeniably necessary that to justify a creature in acting at all there must be some expression, more or less distinct, direct or indirect of the will of its Creator. As, then, the Almighty, from the very necessity of the case, must will to establish some rule, we are prepared to inquire what kind of government He was pleased to institute.

As we mentioned previously, it was a moral government, of moral creatures, who were placed under revealed law. It was law to which was attached penal sanction, and this in the very nature of the case. In order to enforce His authority as Ruler, in order to make manifest the estimate He places upon His law, God determined that disobedience to that law must be visited with summary punishment. How else could God's hatred of sin be known? Since the moral conduct of a creature is to be regulated with a specific reference to God's authority, unless He allowed it to be a god—uncontrolled, independent—there must be a recognition of His right to command. The actions of a moral creature must proceed from a sense of obligation corresponding to the rights of the Ruler. But there could be no such sense of obligation unless the law was enforced by a penal sanction; for without such, the obedience of the creature would be merely the result of persuasion rather than authority. Precept without penalty is simply advice, or at most a request; and rewards without punishment are nothing but inducements. Had Adam and Eve been placed under such principles, the result would evidently have been but a system of persuasion and not of authoritative rule (which is precisely what most human government, in the home, the church and the state, has now degenerated into). In such a case their obedience would have been nothing more than pleasing themselves, following the impulse of their own desires, and not submitting to the rightful demands of their Creator; they would have been acting out their own wills and not the will of the Most High. It should be quite plain to the reader that such an (inconceivable) arrangement would have vested the creature with absolute sovereignty, making it a law unto itself, entirely independent of its Maker. The essence of all morality is compliance with the will of God, not because it commends itself to our reason or is agreeable to our disposition, but simply because it is His will. In order that the will of God may be felt as law and may produce in the creature a corresponding sense of obligation, it must be enforced by a penal sanction. Declared penalty for disobedience upholds the authority of the Creator and keeps prominently in view the responsibility of the creature. It makes clear the just supremacy of the One and the due subordination of the other. The moral sense in man, even in fallen man, bears witness to the rightness of this basic fact. Conscience is a prospective principle; its decisions are by no means final, but are only the prelude of a higher sentence to be pronounced in a higher court. Conscience derives its power from anticipations of the future. It brings before its possessor the dread tribunal of eternal justice and almighty power; it summons us into the awful presence of a right-loving and sin-hating God. It testifies to an ultimate reward for right doing and an ultimate punishment for wrongdoing. We again quote Thornwell: When a man of principle braves calumny, reproach and persecution, when he stands unshaken in the discharge of duty and public opposition and private treachery, when no machinations of malice or seductions of flattery can cause him to bend from the path of integrity,—that must be a powerful support through which he can bid defiance to the "storms of fate." He must feel that a strong arm is underneath him; and though the eye of sense can perceive nothing in his circumstances but terror, confusion, and dismay, he sees his mountain surrounded by "chariots of fire and horses of fire," which sustain his soul in unbroken tranquility. In the approbation of

his conscience there is lifted up the light of the Divine countenance upon him, and he feels the strongest assurance that all things shall work together for his ultimate good. Conscience anticipates the rewards of the just, and in the conviction which it inspires of Divine protection lays the foundation of heroic fortitude.

When, on the contrary, the remembrance of some fatal crime rankles in the breast, the sinner's dreams are disturbed by invisible ministers of vengeance and the fall of a leaf can strike him with horror; in every shadow he sees a ghost: in every tread he hears an avenger of blood; and in every sound the tramp of doom. What is it that invests his conscience with such terrible power to torment? Is there nothing here but the natural operation of a simple and original instinct? Who does not see that the alarm and agitation and fearful forebodings of the sinner arise from the terrors of an offended Judge and insulted Lawgiver. An approving conscience is the consciousness of right, of having done what has been commanded, and of being now entitled to the favour of the Judge. Remorse is the sense of ill-desert. The criminal does not feel that his present pangs are his punishment; it is the future, the unknown and portentous future, that fills him with consternation. He deserves ill, and the dread of receiving it makes him tremble.

Let there be no uncertainty on this point. Were it possible to remove the penalty from the divine law, we should be wresting the scepter from the hands of Deity, divesting Him of power to enforce His just demands, denuding Him of the essential dignity of His character, reducing Him to a mere suppliant at the feet of His creatures. Modern theology (if it deserves to be called theology) presents to men a parody of God, who commands the respect of none, who is disrobed of His august and glorious majesty, who, far from doing His will in the army of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth, is pictured as a kindly petitioner seeking favors at the hands of worms of the dust. Such a "god" has no powerful voice which shakes the earth and makes guilty rebels quail, but only offers entreaties which may be despised with impunity. Unless God is able to enforce His will He ceases to be God. If He speaks with authority, resistless power stands ready to support His command. "And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil thou shalt not eat of it" (Gen. 2:16-17). There was the original command given to man at the dawn of human history. It surely was uttered in a tone which carried the conviction that it must be obeyed. "For in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." There was the penal sanction enforcing the authority of the Lawgiver, the plainly announced penalty for transgression. Man was not left in ignorance or uncertainty of what would follow the forbidden act. The loss of God's favor, the incurring of His sore displeasure, certain and inescapable destruction would be the portion of the disobedient. And that awful threat was no isolated and exceptional one, but the enunciation of an abiding principle which God has constantly pressed upon men all through His Word: "The soul that sinneth, it shall die"; "The wages of sin is death." Even when the Saviour commissioned His servants to go forth and preach the gospel to every creature, He expressly told them to make known that "he that believeth not shall be damned." Such a God is not to be trifled with! Let us digress for a moment. In view of what has been said above, the discerning reader will hardly need for us to point out to him the unspeakable solemnity, the immeasurable awfulness, the consummate folly of the course followed in the vast majority of the pulpits for many years. Even where the requirements of the moral law have been insisted on, its fearful penal sanction scarcely ever has been pressed. It has either been flatly denied that God will consign to everlasting woe all who have trampled on His commandments and died impenitent of their rebellion, or else a guilty silence has been maintained and in its stead a one-sided portrayal of the divine character presented, all the emphasis being placed on His love and mercy. Disastrous indeed must be the consequence of such a course, and disastrous indeed has it proved. An insulted Deity is now allowing us to reap what we have sown. **PROBLEM OF LAWLESSNESS**

A law which is not enforced by penalties will not be obeyed. True alike of God's law or man's, God's law will exert very little restraining influence upon the unregenerate if fear of the wrath to come is not definitely before their minds; and the multitude will have little respect for the statutes of the realm once they cease to regard the magistrate with "terror" (Rom. 13:2-4). For generations past there has been scarcely anything from the pulpit to inspire fear of God, and now there is practically no fear of magistracy left. Respect for the divine authority has not been faithfully proclaimed and enforced, and now there is only a mere pretense of respect for human authority. The terrible penalty for disobeying God's law—endless suffering in the lake of fire—has not been plainly and frequently held before those in the pew, and now we are witnessing a miserable parody, a mere formal pretense of enforcing the prescribed penalties for violations of human laws. During the course of the last century, churchgoers grew less and less afraid of the consequences of breaking God's precepts; now the masses, even children, are less and less afraid of transgressing the laws of our country. Witness not merely the leniency but the utter laxity of most of our magistrates in dismissing offenders either with a warning or a trifling fine; witness the many murderers sentenced to death "with strong recommendation for mercy" and the increasing number of those whose capital punishment is remitted; witness the pathetic spectacle of governments afraid to act firmly, making "appeals" and "requests," instead of using their authority. And what we are now seeing in the civil realm is the inevitable repercussion of what took place in the religious. We sowed the wind; a righteous God is now allowing us to reap the whirlwind. Nor can there be any hope of a return to law and order, either between the nations or in our civil life, until the law of God is again given its proper place in our homes and churches, until the authority of the Lawgiver is respected, until the penalty for breaking His law is proclaimed. Returning to our more immediate discussion, it should be pointed out that the fall did not to the slightest degree cancel man's responsibility. How could it? Man is just as much under the authority of God now as he was in Eden. He is still as truly the subject of divine command as he ever was, and therefore as much responsible to render perfect and ceaseless obedience to the divine law. The responsibility of man, be he unfallen or fallen, is that of a subject to his sovereign. They who imagine that man's own willful sin has canceled his obligation show how completely darkened is their judgment. Since God continues to be man's rightful Lord and man is His lawful subject, since He still possesses the right to command and we are still under obligation to obey, it should not be thought strange that God deals with man according to this relationship, and actually requires obedience to His law though man is no longer able to give it. No, the fall of man most certainly has neither annulled nor impaired man's responsibility. Why should it? It was not God who took from man his spiritual strength and deprived him of his ability. Man was originally endowed with power to meet the righteous requirements of his Maker; it was by his own madness and wickedness that he threw away that power. Does a human monarch forfeit his right to demand allegiance from his subjects as soon as they turn rebels? Certainly not. It is his prerogative to demand that they throw down the weapons of their warfare and return to their original loyalty. Has then the King of kings no such right to require that lawless rebels become loyal subjects? We repeat, it was not God who stripped man of original righteousness, for he had lost it before God passed sentence upon him, as his "I was naked" (Gen. 3:10) acknowledged. If inability canceled man's obligation, there would be no sin in the world, and consequently no judgment here or hereafter. For God to allow that fallen creatures be absolved from loving Him with all their hearts would be to abrogate His government. God's sovereignty and man's responsibility are never confounded in the Scriptures but, from the two trees in the midst of Eden's garden (the "tree of life" and "the tree of knowledge of good and evil" [Gen. 2:9]) onward, are placed in juxtaposition. Human responsibility is the necessary corollary of divine sovereignty. Since God is the Creator, since He is sovereign Ruler over all, and since man is simply a creature and a subject, there is no escape from his accountability to his Maker. For what is man responsible? Man is obligated to

answer to the relationship which exists between him and his Creator. He occupies the place of creaturehood, subordination, complete dependence; therefore he must acknowledge God's dominion, submit to His authority, and love Him with all his heart and strength. The discharge of human responsibility is simply to recognize God's rights and act accordingly, rendering His unquestionable due. MAN'S ACCOUNTABILITY TO GOD

Responsibility is entirely a matter of relationship and the discharge of those obligations which that relationship entails. When a man takes a wife he enters into a new relationship and incurs new obligations, and his marital responsibility lies in the fulfillment of those obligations. If a child is given to him a further relationship is involved with added obligations (to both his wife and child), and his parental responsibility consists of the faithful meeting of those obligations. Once it is known who God is and what is man's relationship to Him, the question of his responsibility is settled once for all. God is our Owner and Governor, possessed of absolute authority over us, and this must be acknowledged by us in deed as well as word. Thus we are responsible to be in complete subjection to the will of our Maker and Lord, to employ in His service the faculties He has given us, to use the means He has appointed, and to improve the opportunities and advantages He had provided us. Our whole duty is to glorify God. From the above definition it should be crystal clear that the fall did not and could not to the slightest degree cancel or impair human responsibility. The fall has not altered the fundamental relationship subsisting between Creator and creature. God is the Owner of sinful man as truly and as fully as He was of sinless man. God is still our Sovereign and we are still His subjects. God's absolute dominion over us pertains as strictly now as it did in Eden. Though man has lost his power to obey, God has not lost His right to demand. To argue that inability cancels responsibility is the height of absurdity. Because an intoxicated employee is incapable of performing his duties, is his master deprived of the right to demand their accomplishment? Man cannot blame God for the wretched condition in which he now finds himself. The entire onus rests on the creature, for his moral impotence is the immediate effect of his own wrongdoing. God's right to command and man's obligation to give perfect and perpetual obedience remain unshaken. God gave man his "substance" (Luke 15), but he spent it in riotous living; nevertheless God may justly challenge His own. If an earthly master gives a servant money and sends him to purchase supplies, may he not lawfully demand those supplies even if that servant spends the money in debauchery and gambling? God supplied Adam with a suitable stock, but he trifled it away. Surely then God is not to suffer because of the creature's folly; He should not be deprived of His right because of man's crime. The fact that man is a spiritual embezzler cannot destroy God's authority to require what the creature cannot be excused from. A debtor who cannot pay the debts which he has incurred remains under the obligation of paying. God not only possesses the right to demand from man the debt of obedience; from Genesis 3 to the last chapter of the New Testament He exercises and enforces that right and will yet make it publicly manifest before the assembled universe. Though it be true that man himself is entirely to blame for the wretched spiritual condition in which he now finds himself, that the guilt of his depravity and powerlessness lies at his own door, yet we must not lose sight of the fact that his very impotence is a penal infliction, a divine judgment upon his original rebellion. Moral inability is the necessary effect of disobedience, for sin is essentially destructive, being opposed to all that is holy. God has so ordered it that the effects which sin has produced in man furnish a powerful witness to and an unmistakable demonstration of the exceeding sinfulness of sin and the dreadfulness of the malady which it produces. Sin not only defiles but enervates. It not only makes man obnoxious in the pure eyes of his Maker, but it saps man of his original strength to use his faculties right; and the more he now indulges in sin the more he increases his inability to walk uprightly. Further light is cast on the problem of fallen man's responsibility by obtaining a right view of the precise nature of his inability. Let us begin by pointing out what it does not consist of. First, the moral

inability of fallen man does not lie in the absence of any of those faculties which are necessary to constitute him a moral agent. By his transgression man lost both his spiritual purity and power, but he lost none of his original faculties. Fallen man possesses every faculty with which unfallen man was endowed. He is still a rational creature. He has an understanding to think with, affections capable of being exercised, a conscience to discern between right and wrong, a will to make choice with. Because man is in possession of such capacities he has faculties suited to the substance of the divine commands. Because he is a moral agent he is under moral government, and must yet render an account to the supreme Governor. At this point notice must be taken of an error which obtains in the minds of some, tending to obscure and undermine the truth of fallen man's unimpaired responsibility. God declared that in the day Adam ate of the forbidden fruit he should "surely die," which has been wrongly understood to mean that his spirit would be extinguished and that, consequently, while the natural man possesses a soul he has no spirit, and cannot have one until he is born again. This is quite wrong. In Scripture "death" signifies separation and never annihilation. At physical death the soul is not exterminated but separated from the body. The spiritual death of Adam was not the extinction of any part of his being, but the severance of his fellowship with a holy God. In consequence Adam's descendants are born into this world "dead in trespasses and sins," which is defined as "being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart" (Eph. 4:18). When the prodigal's father said, "This my son was dead, and is alive again" (Luke 15:24), he most certainly did not mean that the son had ceased to exist, but simply that the prodigal had been "in the far country" and had now returned. The lake of fire into which the wicked are cast is termed the second death (Rev. 20:14) because they are "punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power" (2 Thess. 1:9). That the natural man is possessed of a spirit is clear from "the Lord which . . . formeth the spirit of man within him" (Zech. 12:1); "What man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him?" (1 Cor. 2:11); "The spirit shall return unto God who gave it" (Eccles. 12:7). It is a serious mistake to say that when Adam died in Eden any portion of his tripartite nature ceased to exist. Fallen man, we repeat, possesses all the faculties which unfallen man had. When the Scriptures affirm "They that are in the flesh cannot please God" (Rom. 8:8) it is not because these lack the necessary faculties. That "cannot" must be understood in a way which comports fully with fallen man's responsibility, otherwise we should be guilty of making one verse contradict another. The "cannot" of Romans 8:8 (and similar passages) is in no way analogous to the "cannot walk" of a man who has lost his legs, or the "cannot see" of one who is deprived of his eyes. In such cases the individuals "cannot" because they do not have the requisite faculties or organs. A person who was devoid of such members at his birth could not possibly be held accountable for the non-exercise of them. But the moral impotence of the sinner is far otherwise. He does possess moral faculties, and the reason he fails to use them for the glory of God is solely because of his hatred of Him, because of the corruption of his nature, the enmity of his mind, the perversity of his will; and for these he is responsible. For a man to be so enslaved by strong drink that he cannot help getting inebriated, far from excusing him, adds to his condemnation. For a man to give way to speaking what is untrue, forming the habit of telling falsehoods until he becomes such a confirmed liar that he is incapable of uttering the truth, only evidences the awful depths of his depravity. But ponder carefully the nature of his incapability. It is not because he has lost any faculty, for he still possesses the organs of speech, but because he has sunk so low that he can no longer use those organs to good purpose. Thus it is with the natural man and his incapability of pleasing his Maker. Man is endowed with moral faculties but he perverts them, puts them to wrong use. He has the same heart for loving God as for hating Him, the same members for serving Him as for disobeying Him. Stephen Charnock said: It is strange if God should invite the trees or beasts to repent, because they have no foundation in their nature to entertain commandments and invitations to obedience

and repentance; for trees have no sense and beasts have no reason to discern the difference between good and evil. But God addresseth Himself to men that have senses open to objects, understanding to know, wills to move, affections to embrace objects. These understandings are open to anything but that which God doth command, their wills can will anything but that which God doth propose. The commandment is proportioned to their rational faculty and the faculty is proportioned to the excellency of the command.

We have affections, as love and desire. In the commands of loving God and loving our neighbour there is only a change of the object of our affections required; the faculties are not weakly but by viciousness of nature, which is of our own introduction. It is strange, therefore, that we should excuse ourselves and pretend we are not to be blamed because God's command is impossible to be observed, when the defect lies not in the want of a rational foundation, but in our own giving up ourselves to the flesh and the love of it, and in willful refusal of applying our faculties to their proper objects, when we can employ those faculties with all vehemence about those things which have no commerce with the Gospel.

This is a suitable place for us to mention and correct a mistake which occurs in some of our earlier writings. Lacking the light which God has now vouchsafed us, we then taught (1) that fallen man still possessed a natural ability to render to God the obedience which He requires, though he lacks the necessary moral ability; and (2) that because man is possessed of such natural ability he is a responsible creature. The first mistake was really more a matter of terms than anything else, for all that we meant to signify by "natural ability" was the possession of faculties which capacitated man to act as a moral agent; nevertheless, as wrong terms conduce to wrong ideas we must correct them. The second was an error in doctrine, due to our ignorance. In this present work we have shown that the basis of human responsibility consists not in anything in man, but rather in his relationship to God, and that the faculties which make him a moral agent merely equip him to discharge his responsibility.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/aw-pink/the-doctrine-of-mans-impotence-chapter-8-elucidation/>

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