

THE DOCTRINE OF MAN'S IMPOTENCE

Chapter 9 AFFIRMATION

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Transcript

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AFFIRMATION

Many able writers, in their efforts to solve the problem presented by the moral impotence and yet the moral responsibility of fallen man, have stressed the distinction between natural and moral ability and inability. They have not seen how a man could be held accountable for his actions unless he was, in some sense, capable of performing his duty. That capability they have ascribed to his being in possession of all the faculties requisite for the performance of obedience to the divine law. But it is now clear to us that these men employed the wrong term when they designated this possession of faculties a "natural ability," for the simple but sufficient reason that fallen man has lost the power or strength to use those faculties right; it is surely a misuse of terms to predicate "ability" in one who is without strength. To affirm that the natural man possesses ability of any sort is really a denial of his total depravity. In the second place, it should be pointed out that the moral inability of the natural man is not brought about by any external compulsion. It is an utterly erroneous idea to suppose that the natural man possesses or may possess a genuine desire and determination to do that which is pleasing to God and to abstain from what is displeasing to Him, but that a power outside himself thwarts him and obliges him to act contrary to his inclinations. Were such the case, man would be neither a moral agent nor a responsible creature. If some physical law operated upon man (like, that which regulates the planets), if some external violence (like the wind) carried men forward where they did not desire to go, they would be exempted from guilt. Those who are compelled to do what they are decidedly averse to cannot be justly held accountable for such actions.

INFLUENCE OF MOTIVES ON THE WILL

One of the essential elements of moral agency is that the agent acts without external compulsion, in accord with his own desires. The mind must be capable of considering the motives to action which are placed before it and of choosing its own course—by "motives" we mean those reasons or inducements which influence to choice and action. Thus that which would be a powerful motive in the view of one mind would be no motive at all in the view of another. The offer of a bribe would be sufficient inducement to move one judge to decide a case contrary to evidence and law; to another such an offer, far from being a motive for wrongdoing, would be highly repellent. The temptation presented by Potiphar's wife, which was

firmly resisted by Joseph, would have been an inducement sufficiently powerful to ruin many a youth of less purity of heart. It should be quite evident that no external motive (inducement or consideration) can have any influence over our choices and actions except so far as they make an appeal to inclinations already existing within us. The affections of the heart act freely and spontaneously: in the very nature of the case we cannot be compelled either to love or to hate any object. Neither an infant nor an idiot is capable of weighing motives or of discerning moral values; therefore they are not accountable creatures, amenable to law. But because man, though fallen and under the dominion of sin, is still a rational being, possessed of the power to ponder the motives set before his mind and to decide good and evil, he is fully accountable, for he freely chooses that which, on the whole, he most prefers. Moral agency can only be destroyed by a force from without obliging man to act contrary to his nature and inclinations. There is nothing outside of man which imposes on him any necessity of sinning or which prevents his turning from sin to holiness. There is no force brought to bear immediately on man's power of volition, or even on the connection between his volitions and his actions, which obliges him to follow the course he does. No, what man does ordinarily he does voluntarily or spontaneously in the uncontrolled exercise of his own faculties. No compulsion whatever is imposed on him. He does evil, nothing but evil, simply because he chooses to do so; the only immediate and direct cause of his doing evil is that he so wills it. Therefore since man is a responsible creature who, without any external power forcing him to act contrary to his desires, freely rejects the good and chooses the evil, he must be held accountable for his criminal conduct. What has been pointed out considerably relieves the difficulty presented by the impotence of fallen man to meet the just requirements of God. If the reader will carefully ponder the case it should be apparent to him that the problem of human inability and accountability is by no means so formidable as it appears at first sight. The case of the fallen creature is vastly altered once it is clear what his impotence does not consist of. It makes a tremendous difference that his inability to obey his Maker does not lie in the absence of those faculties by which obedience is performed. So too the complexion of the case is radically changed when we perceive that man is not the victim of a hostile power outside himself which forces him to act contrary to his own desires and inclinations. GROUND'S FOR MAN'S BLAME

It will thus be evident that far from fallen man being an object of pity because of his moral impotence, he is justly to be blamed for the course which he pursues. We do not condemn a legless man because he is unable to walk, but rightly commiserate with him. We do not censure a sightless man for not admiring the beauties of nature; rather our compassion goes out to him. But how different is the case of the natural man in connection with his firm obligations to serve and glorify his rightful Lord! He is in possession of all the requisite faculties, but he voluntarily misuses them, deliberately following a course of madness and wickedness; for that he is most certainly culpable. His guiltiness will appear yet more plainly in what follows, when we understand what his moral impotence does consist of, when we consider the several elements which comprise it. A further word needs to be added on the error of affirming that fallen man possesses a natural "ability" to obey God. Most of the writers who affirm this (Calvinists) take the ground that all the natural man lacks in order to perform that which is pleasing to God is a willingness to do so; that since his mental and moral endowments are admirably suited to the substance of the divine commandments, and since he is still possessed of every faculty which is required for the discharge of his duty, he could obey God if he would. But this is far from being the case. The condition of fallen man is much worse than that. He not only will not, but he cannot please God. Such is the emphatic and unequivocal teaching of Holy Writ, and it must be held fast by us at all costs, no matter what difficulties it may seem to involve. Yet we are fully convinced that this cannot, does not in the least, annul man's responsibility or make him any less blameworthy than was sinless Adam in committing his first offense. "Unto them that are defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure; but even their mind and conscience is defiled"

(Titus 1:15). In the unregenerate the mind and conscience are under an inherent and universal incapacity to form a right judgment or come to a right decision in regard to things pertaining to God, and as pertaining to Him. It is not merely that they are in the condition of one with a thick veil before his eyes, while the eyes themselves are sound and whole; rather they are like one whose eyes are diseased—weakened, decayed in their very internal organism. A diseased physical eye may be incapable of giving safe direction. But the eyes of fallen man's heart and understanding are so seriously affected that they cannot receive or even tolerate any spiritual light at all, until the great Physician heals them. The solemn and terrible fact is that the brighter and more glorious is the divine light shed on the unregenerate, the more offensive and unbearable it is to them. The eyes of our understanding are radically diseased, and it is the understanding—under false views and erroneous estimates of things—which misleads the affections and the will. How, then, can we with the slightest propriety affirm that man still possesses a "natural ability" to receive God's truth to the saving of his soul? In man as created there was a perfect adaptation of faculties and a capability of receiving the divine testimony. But in fallen man, though there is a suitableness in the essential nature of his faculties to receive the testimony of God—so that his case is far superior to that of the brute beast—yet his ability to use those faculties and actually to receive God's testimony for suitable ends is completely deranged and destroyed. DISORGANIZATION OF MAN'S BEING

The entrance of sin into man has done far more than upset his poise and disorder his affections. It has corrupted and disorganized his whole being. His intellectual faculties are so impaired and debased that his understanding is quite incapable of discerning spiritual things in a spiritual manner. His heart (including the will), which is the practical principle of operation, is "desperately wicked" and in a state of "blindness" (Eph. 4:18). The mind of fallen man is not only negatively ignorant, but positively opposed to light and convictions. To say that the natural man could please God if he would is false. His impotence is insurmountable, for he lacks the nature or disposition to will good. Therefore many men have greatly erred in supposing that the faculties of man are as capable now of receiving the testimony of God as they were before the fall. Unwillingness is not all that the Scriptures predicate of fallen man. They declare sin has so corrupted his being that he is completely incapable of holy perceptions; it has utterly disabled him to perform spiritual acts. Moses told the people of Israel, "Ye have seen all that the Lord did before your eyes in the land of Egypt unto Pharaoh, and unto all his servants, and unto all his land; the great temptations which thine eyes have seen, the signs, and those great miracles: yet the Lord hath not given you a heart to perceive, and eyes to see, and ears to hear, unto this day" (Deut. 29:2-4). The faculties were there, but the people had not obtained power from God to perceive. Earlier Moses had said, "And the Lord heard the voice of your words, when ye spake unto me; and the Lord said unto me, I have heard the voice of the words of this people, which they have spoken unto thee: they have well said all that they have spoken. O that there were such an heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments always, that it might be well with them, and with their children for ever" (Deut. 5:28-29). The faculties were there, but they lacked the spiritual power to use them. The unregenerate man is utterly disabled by indwelling sin in all the faculties of his spirit and soul and body from thinking, feeling or doing any spiritual good toward God. Yet these facts do not to the slightest degree destroy or even lessen man's responsibility to glorify his Maker. This will more fully appear as we now consider what man's inability actually consists of. First, it is a voluntary inability. It was so originally. Adam acted freely when he ate of the forbidden fruit, and in consequence he lost his native holiness and became in bondage to evil. Nor can his descendants justly murmur at their inheriting the depravity of their first parents and being made answerable for their inability to will or to do good, as part of the forfeiture penalty due the first transgression; their moral impotence consists of their own voluntary continuation of Adam's offense. The entire history of sin lies in inclination and self-determination. It must not be supposed for a moment that after the first sin of Adam all

self-determination ceased. W. G. Shedd stated: Original sin, as corruption of nature in each individual, is only the continuation of the first inclining away from God. The self-determination of the human will from God the creature, as an ultimate end, did not stop short with the act in Eden, but goes right onward to every individual of Adam's posterity, until regeneration reverses it. As progressive sanctification is the continuation of that holy self-determination of the human will which begins in its regeneration by the Holy Spirit, so the progressive depravation of the natural man is the continuation of that sinful self-determination of the human will which began in Adam's transgression.

The very origin and nature of man's inability for good demonstrates that it cannot annul his responsibility; it was self-induced and is now self-perpetuated. Far from human depravity being a calamity for which we are to be pitied, it is a crime for which we are rightly to be blamed. Far from sin being a weakness or innocent infirmity rising from some defect of creation, it is a hostile power, a vicious enmity against God. The endowments of the creature placed him under lasting obligation to his Creator, and that obligation cannot be canceled by any subsequent action of the creature. If man has deliberately destroyed his power, he has not destroyed his obligation. God does no man wrong in requiring from him what he cannot now perform, for by his own deliberate act of disobedience man deprived himself and his posterity of that power; and his posterity consent to Adam's act of disobedience by deliberately choosing and following a similar course of wickedness. But how can man be said to act voluntarily when he is impelled to do evil by his own lusts? Because he freely chooses the evil. This calls for a closer definition of freedom or voluntariness of action. A free agent is one who is at liberty to act according to his own choice, without compulsion or restraint. Has not fallen man this liberty? Does he, in any instance, break God's law by compulsion, against his inclinations? If it were true that the effect of human depravity is to destroy free agency and accountability, it would necessarily follow that the more depraved or vicious a man becomes the less capable he is of sinning, and that the most depraved of all commit the least sin of any. This is too absurd to need refutation. Though on the one hand it is a fact that fallen man is the slave of sin and the captive of the devil, yet on the other it is equally true that he is still a voluntary and accountable agent. Man has not lost the essential power of choice, or he would cease to be man. Though in one sense he is impelled hellward by the downward trend of his depravity, yet he elects to sin, consenting to it. Though the rectitude of our will is lost, nevertheless we still act spontaneously. "The soul of the wicked desireth evil" (Prov. 21:10), and for that he is to be blamed. If a man picked your pocket and, when arrested, said, "I could not help myself; I have a thieving disposition, and I am obliged to act according to my nature," his judge would reply, "All the more reason why you should be in prison." Because fallen man possesses the power of choice and is a rational creature, he is obligated to make a wise and good choice. The fault lies entirely at his own door that he does not do so, for he deliberately chooses the evil. "They have chosen their own ways, and their soul delighteth in their abominations. I also will choose their delusions, and will bring their fears upon them; because when I called, none did answer; when I spake, they did not hear: but they did evil before mine eyes, and chose that in which I delighted not" (Isa. 66:3-4). The bondage of the will to sinful inclinations neither destroys voluntariness nor responsibility, for the enslaved will is still a self-determining faculty and, therefore, under inescapable obligations to choose what man knows to be right. That very bondage is culpable, for it proceeds from self and not from God. Though man is the slave of sin it is a voluntary servitude, and therefore it is inexcusable. The will is biased by the disposition of the heart: as the heart is, so the will acts. A holy will has a holy bias and therefore is under a moral necessity of exerting holy volitions: "A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit." But a sinful will has a sinful bias because it has an evil disposition and therefore is under a moral necessity of exerting sinful volitions. But let it be pointed out once more that the evil disposition of man's will is not the effect of some original defect in the creature, for God made man "upright." No, his sinful disposition is the abiding self-determination of

the human will. Its origin is due to the misuse Adam made of his freedom, and its continuation results from the unceasing self-determination of every one of his posterity. Each man perpetuates and prolongs the evil started by his first parents. Because man must act according to the state of his heart, does this destroy his freedom? Certainly not, for acting according to his heart simply means doing as he pleases. And doing as we please is the very thing in which all free agency consists. The pulse can beat and the limbs can act in bodily disorders, whether we will or no. We would, with good reason, consider ourselves unfairly dealt with if we were blamed for such actions; nor does God hold us accountable for them. A good man's pulse may beat as irregularly in sickness as the worst villain's in the world; his hands may strike convulsively those who seek to hold him still. For such actions as these we are not accountable because they have no moral value. No evil inclination of ours nor the lack of a good one is necessary in order to do them; they are independent of us. If all our actions were involuntary and out of our power, in no way necessarily connected with our disposition, our temper of mind, our choice, then we should not be accountable creatures or the subjects of moral government. If a good tree could bring forth evil fruit and a corrupt tree good fruit, if a good man out of the good treasure of his heart could bring forth evil things, and an evil man out of his evil treasure good things, the tree could never be known by its fruit. In such a case, all moral distinctions would be at an end and moral government would cease to be, for men could no longer be dealt with according to their works—rewarded for the good and punished for the evil. The only man who is justly held accountable, rewardable or punishable is one whose actions are properly his own, dictated by himself and impossible without his consent. Here, then, is the answer to the objection that if fallen man is obliged to act according to the evil bias of his heart, he cannot rightly be termed a free agent. Necessity and choice are incompatible. Any inability to act otherwise than agreeably to our own minds would be an inability to act other than as free agents. But that necessity which arises from, or rather consists in, the temper and choice of the agent himself is the very opposite of acting against his nature and freedom. The sinner acts freely because he consents, even when irresistibly influenced by his evil lusts. Of Christ we read, "The spirit driveth him into the wilderness" (Mark 1:12), which indicates a forcible motion and powerful influence; yet of this same action we are also told, "Then was Jesus led up of the spirit into the wilderness" (Matt. 4:1), which plainly signifies His freedom of action. So too the Christian is both drawn and taught of God (John 6:44-45). Liberty of will and the victorious efficacy of divine grace are united together. Second, fallen man's inability is moral, not physical or constitutional. Unless this is clearly perceived we shall be inclined to turn our impotence into an excuse or ground of self-extenuation. Man will be ready to say, "Even though I possess the requisite faculties for the discharge of my duty, if I am powerless I cannot be blamed for not doing it." A person who is paralyzed possesses all the members of his body, but he lacks the physical power to use them; and no one condemns him for his helplessness. It needs to be made plain that when the sinner is said to be morally and spiritually "without strength," his case is entirely different from that of one who is paralyzed physically. The normal or ordinary natural man is not without either mental or physical strength to use his talents. What he lacks is a good heart, a disposition to love and serve God, a desire to please Him; and for that lack he is justly blamable. The mental and moral faculties with which man is endowed, despite their impaired condition, place him under moral obligation to love and serve his Creator. The illustrious character and perfections of God make it unmistakably clear that He is infinitely worthy of being loved and served; therefore we are bound to love Him, which is what a good heart essentially does. There is no way of evading the plain teaching of Christ on this subject in the parable of the talents: "Thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury" (Matt. 25:27). In the light of the immediate context, this clearly means that man ought to have had a heart to invest to the best advantage (use right) the talents which were committed to him. The inability of the natural man to meet the

holy and just requirements of God consists in the opposition of his heart to Him because of the presence and prevalence of a vicious and corrupt disposition. Men know that God does not desire from them a selfish and wicked heart, and they also know that He has the right to require from them a good and obedient heart. To deny that God has the right to require a holy and good heart from fallen man would be tantamount to saying He had no right to require anything from them; then it would follow that they were incapable of sinning against Him. For if God had no right to require anything from man, he would not be guilty of disobedience against Him. If God has no right to require a good heart from man, then He has no right to require him to do anything which he is unwilling to do, which would render him completely innocent. A child has no right to complain against a parent for requiring him to do that which he has faculties to perform, but for which he has no heart. A servant has no right to murmur against a master for reasonably requiring him to do that which his endowments fit him to perform, but for which he is unwilling. A subject has no right to find fault with a ruler for requiring him to perform that which the good of his country demands, and which he is capacitated to render, merely because he lacks the disposition to do it. All human authority presupposes a right to require that of men which they are qualified to perform, even though they may have no heart for it. How much less reason, then, have those who are the subjects of divine authority to complain of being required to do that which their faculties fit them for but which their hearts hate. God has the same supreme right to command cordial and universal obedience from Adam's posterity as He has from the holy angels in heaven. For the sake of those who desire additional insight on the relation of man's inability to his responsibility, we feel we must further consider this difficult but important (perhaps to some, abstruse and dry) aspect of our subject. Light on it has come to us "here a little, there a little"; but it is our duty to share with others the measure of understanding vouchsafed us. We have sought to show that the problem we are wrestling with appears much less formidable when once the precise nature of man's impotence is properly defined. It is due neither to the absence of requisite faculties for the performance of duty nor to any force from without which compels him to act contrary to his nature and inclinations. Instead, his bondage to sin is voluntary; he freely chooses the evil. Second, it is a moral inability, and not physical or constitutional. In saying that the spiritual impotence of fallen man is a moral one, we mean that it consists of an evil heart, of enmity against God. The man has no affection for his Maker, no will to please Him, but instead an inveterate desire and determination to please himself and have his own way, at all costs. It is therefore a complete misrepresentation of the facts to picture fallen man as a being who wishes to serve God but who is prevented from doing so by his depraved nature; to infer that he genuinely endeavors to keep His law but is hindered by indwelling sin. The fact is that he always acts from his evil heart and not against it. Man is not well disposed toward his Creator, but ill disposed. No matter what change occurs in his circumstances, be it from poverty to wealth, sickness to health, or vice versa, man remains a rebel—perverse, stubborn, wicked—with no desire to be any better, hating the light and loving the darkness. It therefore follows that man's voluntary and moral inability to serve and glorify God is, third, a criminal one. As we have pointed out, a wicked heart is a thing of an entirely different order from weak eyesight, a bad memory or paralyzed limbs. No man is to blame for physical infirmities, providing they have not been self-induced by sinful conduct. But a wicked heart is a moral evil, indeed the sum of all evil, for it hates God and is opposed to our neighbors, instead of loving them as we are required. To say that a sinner cannot change or improve his heart is only to say he cannot help being a most vile and inexcusable wretch. To be unalterably in love with sin, far from rendering it less sinful, makes it more so. Surely it is self-evident that the more wicked a man's heart is, the more evil and blameworthy he is. The only other possible alternative would be to affirm that sin itself is not sinful. It is because the natural man loves sin and hates God that he has no inclination and will to keep His law. But far from excusing him, that constitutes the very essence of his guilt. We are told that Joseph's brothers

"hated him, and could not speak peaceably unto him" (Gen. 37:4). Why was it that they were unable to speak peaceably to him? Not because they lacked vocal organs, but because they hated him so much. Was such inability excusable? No, in that consisted the greatness of their guilt. An apostle makes mention of men "having eyes full of adultery, and that cannot cease from sin" (2 Pet. 2:14). But was not their impotence culpable? Surely it was; the reason they could not cease from sin was that their eyes were "full of adultery." Far from such an inability being an innocent one, it constituted the enormity of their crime; far from excusing them, it made their sin greater. Men must indeed be blind when they fail to see it is their moral impotence, their voluntary slavery to sin, which makes them obnoxious in the sight of the holy One. A man's heart being fully set in him to do evil does not render his sinful actions the less criminal, but the more so. Consider the opposite: Does the strength of a virtuous disposition render a good action less or more praiseworthy? God is no less glorious because He is so infinitely and unchangeably holy in His nature that He "cannot be tempted with evil" (Jam. 1:13) nor act otherwise than in the most righteous and perfect manner. Holiness constitutes the very excellence of the divine character. Is Satan any less sinful and criminal because he is of such a devilish disposition, so full of unreasonable malice against God and men, as to be incapable of anything but the most horrible wickedness? So of humanity. No one supposes that the want of a will to work excuses a man from work, as physical incapacity does. No one imagines that the covetous miser, with his useless hoard of gold, with no heart to give a penny to the poor, is for that reason excused from deeds of charity as though he had nothing to give. GOD'S JUST RIGHTS

How justly, then, may God still enforce His rights and demand loyal allegiance from men. God will not relinquish His claims because the creature has sinned nor lower His requirements because he has ruined himself. Were God to command that which we ardently desired and truly endeavored to do, but for which we lacked the requisite faculties, we should not be to blame. But when He commands us to love Him with all our hearts and we refuse to do so, we are most certainly to blame, notwithstanding our moral impotence, because we still possess the necessary faculties for the exercise of such love. This is precisely what sin consists of: the want of affection for God with its suitable expression in obedient acts, the presence of an inveterate enmity against Him with its works of disobedience. Were God to grant rebels against His government the license to freely indulge their evil proclivities, that would be to abandon the platform of His holiness and to condone if not endorse their wickedness. William Cunningham said: There is no difficulty in seeing the reasons why God might address such commands to fallen and depraved men. The moral law is a transcript of God's moral perfections, and must ever continue unchangeable. It must always be binding, in all its extent, upon all rational and responsible creatures, from the very condition of their existence, from their necessary relation to God. It constitutes the only accurate representation of the duty universally and at all times incumbent upon rational beings,—the duty which God must of necessity impose upon and require of them. Man was able to obey this law, to discharge this whole duty, in the condition in which he was created. If he is now in a different condition—one in which he is no longer able to discharge this duty—this does not remove or invalidate his obligation to perform it; it does not affect the reasonableness and propriety of God, on the ground of His own perfections, and of the relation in which He stands to His creatures, proclaiming and imposing this obligation—requiring of men to do what is still as much as ever incumbent upon them.

It has generally been lost sight of that the moral law is not only the rule of our works but also of our strength. Inasmuch as well-being is the ground of well doing—the tree must be good before the fruit can be—we are obliged to conclude that the law is the rule of our nature as truly as it is of our deeds. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might" (Deut. 6:5). That was said not only to unfallen Adam but also to his fallen descendants. The Saviour repeated it: "Thou

shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength" (Luke 10:27). The law not only requires us to love, but to have minds equipped with all strength to love God, so that there may be life and vigor in our love and obedience to Him. The law requires no more love than it does strength; if it did not require strength to love, it would require no love either. Thus it is plain that God not only enforces His rightful demands upon fallen man, but also has not abated one iota of His requirements because of the fall. If the divine law said nothing more to the natural man today than "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with what strength thou now hast"—rather than with the strength He requires him to have and which He first gave to him, so that both strength and faculty, love and its manifestation, came under the command—it would amount to "Thou needest not love the Lord thy God at all, for thou art now without strength and therefore incapable of loving and serving Him, and art not to be blamed for having none." But as we have shown, man is culpable for his impotence. The only reason why he does not love God is because his heart holds enmity against Him. Did a murderer ever plead at the bar of justice that he hated his victim so intensely that he could not go near him without killing him? If such were his acknowledgment, it would only aggravate his crime; he would stand condemned by his own word. Hell, then, must be the only final place for inalienable rebels against God. We should also call attention to the propriety of the divine law being pressed upon fallen man, in all the length and breadth of its requirements, both as a means of knowledge and a means of conviction, even though no longer available as a standard which he is able to measure up to. In spite of man's inability to obey it, the law serves to inform him of the holy character of God, the relation in which he stands to Him, and the duty which He still requires of him. Also it serves as an essential means of convicting men of their depravity. Since they are sinners, it is most important that they should be made aware of the fact. If their duty is made clear, if they are told to do that which is incumbent upon them, they are more likely to perceive how far short they come. If they are stirred up to compliance with God's requirements, to a discharge of their obligations, they will discover their moral helplessness in a way more forcible than any sermons can convey. In the next place let us point out that fallen man is responsible to use means both for the avoidance of sin and the performance of holiness. Though the unregenerate are destitute of spiritual life, they are not therefore mere machines. The natural man has a rational faculty and a moral sense which distinguish between right and wrong, and he is called upon to exert those faculties. Far from being under an inevitable necessity of living in known and gross sins, it is only because of deliberate perversity that any do so. The most profane swearer is able to refrain from his oaths when in the presence of someone whom he fears and to whom he knows it would be displeasing. Let a drunkard see poison put into his liquor, and it would stand by him untasted from morning until night. Criminals are deterred from many offenses by the sight of a policeman, though they have no fear of God in their hearts. Thus self-control is not utterly outside man's power. "Enter not into the path of the wicked, and go not in the way of evil men. Avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it, and pass away" (Prov. 4:14-15). Is not the natural man capable of heeding such warnings? It is the duty of the sinner to shun everything which has a tendency to lead to wrongdoing, to turn his back on every approach to evil and every custom which leads to wickedness. If we deliberately play with fire and are burned, the blame rests wholly on ourselves. There is still in the nature of fallen man some power to resist temptation, and the more it is asserted the stronger it becomes; otherwise there would be no more sin in yielding to an evil solicitation than there is sin in a tree being blown down by a hurricane. Moreover, God does not deny grace to those who humbly and earnestly seek it from Him in His appointed ways. When men are influenced to passion, to allurements, to vice, they are blamable and must justly give account to God. No rational creature acts without some motive. The planets move as they are driven, and if a counter-influence supervenes, they have no choice but to leave their course and follow it. But man has a power of resistance which they do not have, and he may strengthen by indulgence or weaken by

resistance the motives which induce him to commit wrong. How often we hear of athletes voluntarily submitting to the most rigorous discipline and self-denial; does not that evince that the natural man has power to refrain from self-indulgence when he is pleased to use it. Highly paid vocalists, abstaining from all forms of intemperance in order to keep themselves physically fit, illustrate the same principle. Abimelech, a heathen king, took Sarah for himself; but when God warned him that she was another man's wife, he did not touch her. Observe carefully what the Lord said to him: "I know that thou didst this in the integrity of thine heart; for I also withheld thee from sinning against me: therefore suffered I thee not to touch her" (Gen. 20:6). Abimelech had a natural "integrity" which God acknowledged to be in him, though He also affirmed His own power in restraining him. If men would nourish their integrity, God would concur with them to preserve them from many sins. Not only is man responsible to use means for the avoidance of evil, but he is under binding obligation to employ the appointed means for the furtherance of good. It is true that the efficacy of means lies in the sovereign power of God and not in the industry of man; nevertheless He has established a definite connection between the means and the end desired. God has appointed that bodily life shall be sustained by bodily food, and if a man deliberately starves himself to death he is guilty of self-destruction. Men still have power to utilize the outward means, the principal ones of which are hearing the Word and practicing prayer. They have the same feet to take them to church as conduct them to the theater, the same ability to pray to God as the heathen have to cry to idols. Slothfulness will be reproved in the day of judgment (Matt. 25:26). The sinner's plea that he had no heart for these duties will mean nothing. He will have to answer for his contempt of God. Because he is a rational creature, man has the power to exercise consideration. He does so about many things; why not about his soul? God Himself testifies to this power even in a sinful nation. To His prophet He said, "Thou shalt remove from thy place to another place in their sight: it may be they will consider, though they be a rebellious house" (Ezek. 12:3). Christ condemned men for their failure at this very point: "Ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky and of the earth; but how is it that ye do not discern this time? Yea, and why even of yourselves judge ye not what is right?" (Luke 12:56-57). If men have the ability to take an inventory of their business, why not of their eternal concerns? Refusal to do so is criminal negligence. "All the ends of the world shall remember and turn unto the Lord" (Ps. 22:27). The natural man possesses the faculty of memory and is obligated to put it to the best use. "Let us search and try our ways, and turn again to the Lord" (Lam. 3:40). Failure to do so is willful negligence. Man has not only physical organs but affections, or passions. If Esau could weep for the loss of his blessing, why not for his sins? Observe the charge which God brought against Ephraim: "They will not frame their doings to turn unto their God" (Hosea 5:4). They would entertain no thoughts nor perform any actions that had the least prospect toward reformation. The unregenerate are capable of considering their ways. They know they shall not continue in this life forever, and most of them are persuaded in their conscience that after death there is an appointed judgment. True, the sinner cannot save himself, but he can obstruct his own mercies. Not only do men refuse to employ the means which God has appointed but they scorn His help by fighting against illumination and conviction. Remember Joseph's brothers: "We are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul, when he besought us, and we would not hear" (Gen. 42:21). "Ye do always resist the Holy Ghost" (Acts 7:51). SUMMARY OF MAN'S LIABILITY TO GOD

How can the natural man be held responsible to glorify God when he is incapable of doing so? Let us summarize our answers. First, sin has not produced any change in the essential relation between the creature and the Creator; nothing can alter God's right to command and to be obeyed. Second, sin has not taken away the moral agency of man, consequently he is as much a subject of God's moral government as he ever was. Third, since man still possesses faculties which are suited to the substance of God's commands, he is under binding obligations to serve his Maker. Fourth, the moral inability of man is not

brought about by any external compulsion, for nothing outside of man can impose upon him any necessity of sinning; because all sin issues out of his own heart, he must be held accountable for it. Fifth, man's servitude to sin was self-induced and is self-perpetuated, and since he freely chooses to do evil he is inexcusable. Sixth, man's inability is moral and not constitutional, consisting of enmity against and opposition to God; therefore it is punishable. Seventh, because man refuses to use those means which are suited to lead to his recovery and scorns the help which is proffered him, he deliberately destroys himself. It should be pointed out that, in spite of all the excuses offered by the sinner in defense of his moral impotence, in spite of the outcries he makes against the justice of being required to render to God that which lies altogether beyond his power, the sentence of his condemnation is articulated within his own being. Man's very consciousness testifies to his responsibility, and his conscience witnesses to the criminality of his wrongdoing. The common language of man under the lashings of conscience is "I might have done otherwise; O what a fool I have been! I was faithfully warned by those who sought my good, but I was self-willed. I had convictions against wrongdoing, but I stifled them. My present wretchedness is the result of my own madness. No one is to blame but myself." The very fact that men universally blame themselves for their folly establishes their accountability and evinces their guilt. If we are to attain anything approaching completeness of this aspect of our subject it is necessary to consider the particular and special case of the Christian's inability. This is a real yet distinct branch of our theme, though all the writers we have consulted appear to have studiously avoided it. This is in some respects admittedly the most difficult part of our problem, yet that is no reason why it should be evaded. If Holy Writ has nothing to say on the subject, then we must be silent too; but if it makes pronouncement, it is our duty to believe and try to understand what that pronouncement signifies. As we have seen, the Word of God plainly and positively affirms the moral impotence of the natural man to do good, yet at the same time teaches throughout that his depravity does not supply the slightest extenuation for his transgression against the divine law. But the question we now desire to look squarely in the face is How is it with the one who has been born again? Wherein does his case and condition differ from what it was previously, both with respect to his ability to do those things which are pleasing to God and with respect to the extent of his responsibility? Are we justified in employing the expression "the Christian's spiritual impotence?" Is it not a contradiction in terms? Scripture does warrant the use of it. "Without me ye can do nothing" (John 15:5) connotes that the believer has no power of his own to bring forth any fruit to the glory of God. "For to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not" (Rom. 7:18). Such an acknowledgment from the most eminent of the apostles makes it plain that no saint has strength of his own to meet the divine requirements. "Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves" (2 Cor. 3:5). If insufficient of ourselves to even think a good thought, how much less can we perform a good deed. "For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would" (Gal. 5:17). That "cannot" clearly authorizes us to speak of the Christian's inability. Every prayer for divine succor and strength is a tacit confirmation of the same truth. Then if such be the case of the Christian, is he in this regard any better off than the non-Christian? Does not this evacuate regeneration of its miraculous and most blessed element? We must indeed be careful not to disparage the gracious work of the Spirit in the new birth, nevertheless we must not lose sight of the fact that regeneration is only the beginning of His good work in the elect (Phil. 1:6), the best of whom are but imperfectly sanctified in this life (Phil. 3:12). That there is a real, radical difference between the unregenerate and the regenerate is gloriously true. The former are dead in trespasses and sins; the latter have passed from death to life. The former are the subjects and slaves of the devil; the latter have been delivered from the power of darkness and translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son (Col. 1:13). The former are completely and helplessly under the dominion of sin; the latter

have been made free from sin's dominion and have become the servants of righteousness (Rom. 6:14, 18). The former despise and reject Christ; the latter love and desire to serve Him. In seeking to grapple with the problem of the Christian's spiritual inability and the nature and extent of his responsibility, there are two dangers to be avoided, two extremes to guard against: (1) practically reducing the Christian to the level of the unregenerate, which is virtually a denial of the reality and blessedness of regeneration; (2) making out the Christian to be very nearly independent and self-sufficient. We must aim at preserving the balance between "Without me ye can do nothing" (John 15:5) and "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" (Phil. 4:13). What we are now discussing is part of the Christian paradox, for the believer is often a mystery to himself and a puzzle to others because of the strange and perplexing contrarieties meeting in him. He is the Lord's free man, yet declares, "I am carnal, sold under sin" (Rom. 7:14). He rejoices in the law of the Lord, yet cries, "O wretched man that I am!" (Rom. 7:24). He acknowledges to the Lord "I believe," yet in the same breath prays, "Help Thou my unbelief." He declares, "When I am weak then am I strong." One moment he is praising his Saviour and the next groaning before Him. Wherein does the regenerate differ from the unregenerate? First, the regenerate has been given an understanding that he may know Him who is true (1 John 5:20). His mind has been supernaturally illumined; the spiritual light which shines in his heart (2 Cor. 4:6) capacitates him to discern spiritual things in a spiritual and transforming manner (2 Cor. 3:18); nevertheless its development may be hindered by neglect and sloth. Second, the regenerate has a liberated will, so that he is capacitated to consent to and embrace spiritual things. His will has been freed from that total bondage and dominion of sin under which he lay by nature; nevertheless he is still dependent upon God's working in him both to will and to do of His good pleasure. Third, his affections are changed so that he is capacitated to relish and delight in the things of God; therefore he exclaims, "O how love I Thy law." Before, he saw no beauty in Christ, but now He is "altogether lovely." Sin which was formerly a spring of pleasure is now a fountain of sorrow. Fourth, his conscience is renewed, so that it reproves him for sins of which he was not previously aware and discloses corruptions which he never suspected. But if on the one hand there is a radical difference between the regenerate and the unregenerate, it is equally true that there is a vast difference between the Christian in this life and the Christian in the life to come. While we must be careful not to belittle the Spirit's work in regeneration, we must be equally on our guard lest we lose sight of the believer's entire dependence on God. Although a new nature is imparted at regeneration, the believer is still a creature (2 Cor. 5:17); the new nature is not to be looked to, rested in or made an idol. Though the believer has had the principle of grace communicated to him, yet he has no store of grace within himself from which he may now draw. He is but a "babe" (1 Pet. 2:2), completely dependent on Another for everything. The new nature does not of itself empower or enable the soul for a life of obedience and the performance of duty; it simply fits and makes it compatible to these. The principle of spiritual life requires its Bestower to call it into operation. The believer is, in that respect, like a becalmed ship—waiting for a heavenly breeze to set it in motion. Yet in another sense the believer resembles the crew of the ship rather than the vessel itself, and in this he differs from those who are unregenerated. Before regeneration we are wholly passive, incapable of any cooperation; but after regeneration we have a renewed mind to judge aright and a will to choose the things of God when moved by Him; nevertheless we are dependent on His moving us. We are daily dependent on God's strengthening, exciting and directing the new nature, so that we need to pray "Incline my heart unto thy testimonies . . . and quicken thou me in thy way" (Ps. 119:36-37). The new birth is a vastly different thing from the winding of a clock so that it will run of itself; rather the strongest believer is like a glass without a base, which cannot stand one moment longer than it is held. The believer has to wait upon the Lord for his strength to be renewed (Isa. 40:31). The Christian's strength is sustained solely by the constant operations and communications of the Holy Spirit, and he lives spiritually only as he clings

close to Christ and draws virtue from Him. There is a suitableness or answerableness between the new nature and the requirements of God so that His commands "are not grievous" to it (1 John 5:3), so that Wisdom's ways are found to be "pleasant" and all her paths "peace" (Prov. 3:17). Nevertheless the believer stands in constant need of the help of the Spirit, working in him both to will and to do, granting fresh supplies of grace to enable him to perform his spiritual desires. A simple delight in the divine law is not of itself sufficient to produce obedience. We have to pray, "Make me to go in the path of thy commandments" (Ps. 119:35). Regeneration conveys to us an inclination and tendency for that which is good, thereby fitting us for the Master's use; nevertheless we have to look outside ourselves for enabling grace: "Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 2:1). Thereby God removes all ground for boasting. He would have all the glory given to His grace: "By the grace of God I am what I am" (1 Cor. 15:10). If enough rain fell in one day to suffice for several years we would not so clearly discern the mercies of God in His providence nor be kept looking to Him for continued supplies. So it is in connection with our spiritual lives: we are daily made to feel that "our sufficiency is of God." The believer is entirely dependent on God for the exercise of his faith and for the right use of his knowledge. Said the apostle: "I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me" (Gal. 2:20), which gives the true emphasis and places the glory where it belongs. But he at once added, "And the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God [by the faith of which He is its Object], who loved me, and gave himself for me." That preserves the true balance. Though it was Christ who lived in and empowered him, yet he was not passive and idle. He put forth acts of faith in Him and thereby drew virtue from Him; thus he could do all things through Christ strengthening him. RESPONSIBILITY OF THE CHRISTIAN

It is at that very point the responsibility of the Christian appears. As a creature his responsibility is the same as pertains to the unregenerate, but as a new creature in Christ Jesus (2 Cor. 5:17) he has incurred increased obligations: "Unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required" (Luke 12:48). The Christian is responsible to walk in newness of life, to bring forth fruit for God as one who is alive from the dead, to grow in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord, to use his spiritual endowments and to improve or employ his talents. The call comes to him "Stir up the gift of God, which is in thee" (2 Tim. 1:6). Isaiah the prophet complained of God's people, "There is none that stirreth up himself to lay hold of thee" (64:7), which condemns slothfulness and spiritual lethargy. The Christian is responsible to use all the means of grace which God has provided for his wellbeing, looking to Him for His blessing upon them. When the Scripture says, "The Spirit also helpeth our infirmities" (Rom. 8:26), the Greek verb is "helpeth together"—He cooperates with our diligence not our idleness. The Christian has received spiritual life, and all life is a power to act by. Inasmuch as that spiritual life is a principle of grace animating all the faculties of the soul, he is capacitated to use all means of grace which God has provided for his growth and to avoid everything which would hinder or retard his growth. He is required to keep the heart with all diligence (Prov. 4:23), for if the fountain is kept clean, the springs which issue from it will be pure. He is required to "make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof" (Rom. 13:14), not allowing his mind and affections to fix themselves on sinful or unlawful objects. He is required to deny himself, take up his cross and follow the example which Christ has left him. He is commanded to "love not the world, neither the things that are in the world" (1 John 2:15), and therefore he must conduct himself as a stranger and pilgrim in this scene of action, abstaining from fleshly lusts which war against the soul (1 Pet. 2:11) if he would not lose the heavenly inheritance (1 Cor. 9:27). And for the performance of these difficult duties he must diligently and earnestly seek supplies of grace counting on God to bless the means to him. No small part of the Christian's burden and grief is the inward opposition he meets, thwarting his aspirations and bringing him into captivity to that which he hates. The believer's "life" is a hidden one (Col. 3:3), and so also is his conflict. He longs to love and serve God with all his heart and to be holy in every detail of his

life, but the flesh resists the spirit. Worldliness, unbelief, coldness, slothfulness exert their power. The believer struggles against their influence and groans under their bondage. He desires to be clothed with humility, but pride is constantly breaking forth in some form or other. He finds that he cannot attain to that which he desires and approves. He discovers a wide disparity between what he knows and does, between what he believes and practices, between his aims and realizations. Truly he is "an unprofitable servant." He is so often defeated in the conflict that he is frequently faint and weary in the use of means and in performance of duty; he may question the genuineness of his profession and be tempted to give up the fight. In seeking to help distressed saints concerning this acute problem, the servant of God needs to be very careful lest he foster a false peace in those who have a historical faith in the gospel but are total strangers to its saving power. God's servant must be especially watchful not to bolster the false hopes of those who delight in the mercy of God but hate His holiness, who misappropriate the doctrine of His grace and make it subservient to their lusts. He must therefore call upon his hearers to honestly and diligently examine themselves before God, that they may discover whence the inward oppositions arise and what are their reactions to them. They must determine whether these inconsistencies spring from an unwillingness to wear the yoke of Christ, their whole hearts accompanying and consenting to such resistances to God's righteous requirements, or whether these oppositions to God's laws have their rise in corruptions which they sincerely endeavor to oppose, which they hate, which they mourn over, which they confess to God and long to be released from. When describing the conflict in himself between the flesh and the spirit—between indwelling sin and the principle of grace he had received at the new birth—the Apostle Paul declared, "For that which I do [which is contrary to the holy requirements of God] I allow not [I do not approve of it; it is foreign to my real inclinations and purpose of heart]: but what I hate, that do I" (Rom. 7:15). Paul detested and yearned to be delivered from the evil which rose up within him. Far from affording him any satisfaction, it was his great burden and grief. And thus it is with every truly regenerated soul when he is in his right mind. He may be, yes is, frequently overcome by his carnal and worldly lusts; but instead of being pleased at such experience and contentedly lying down in his sins, as a sow delights to wallow in the mire, he cries in distress, confesses such failures as grievous sins, and prays to be cleansed from them. "If I were truly regenerate, how could sin rage so fiercely within and so often obtain the mastery over me?" This question deeply exercises many of God's people. Yet the Scripture declares, "A just man falleth seven times" (Prov. 24:16); but it at once adds "and riseth up again." Did not David lament, "Iniquities prevail against me" (Ps. 65:3)? Yet if you are striving to mortify your lusts, looking daily to the blood of Christ to pardon, and begging the Spirit to more perfectly sanctify you, you may add with the psalmist, "As for our transgressions, thou shalt purge them away." Indeed, did not the highly favored apostle declare, "For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold [not 'unto' but] under sin" (Rom. 7:14). There is a vast difference between Paul and Ahab, of whom we read that he "did sell himself to work wickedness in the sight of the Lord" (I Kings 21:25). It is the difference between one who is taken captive in war, becoming a slave unwillingly and longing for deliverance, and one who voluntarily abandons himself to a course of open defiance of the Almighty and who so loves evil that he would refuse release. We must distinguish between sin's dominion over the unregenerate and sin's tyranny and usurpation over the regenerate. Dominion follows upon right of conquest or subjection. Sin's great design in all of us is to obtain undisputed dominion; it has it in unbelievers and contends for it in believers. But every evidence the Christian has that he is under the rule of grace is that much evidence he is not under the dominion of sin. "For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members" (Rom. 7:22-23). That does not mean that sin always triumphs in the act, but that it is a hostile power which the renewed soul cannot evict. It wars against us in spite of all we can do. The general

makeup of believers is that, notwithstanding sin being a "law" (governing force) not "to" but "in" them, they "would [desire and resolve to] do good," but "evil is present" with them. Their habitual inclination is to good, and they are brought into captivity against their will. It is the "flesh" which prevents the full realization of their holy aspirations in this life. But if the Son has "made us free" (John 8:36), how can Christians be in bondage? The answer is that Christ has already freed them from the guilt and penalty, love and dominion of sin, but not yet from its presence. As the believer hungers and thirsts after righteousness, pants for communion with the living God, and yearns to be perfectly conformed to the image of Christ, he is "free from sin"; but as such longings are more or less thwarted by indwelling corruptions, he is still "sold under sin." Then let prevailing lusts humble you, cause you to be more watchful and to look more diligently to Christ for deliverance; then those very exercises will evidence a principle of grace in you which desires and seeks after the destruction of inborn sin. Those who have hearts set on pleasing God are earnest in seeking enabling grace from Him, yet they must remember He works in them both to will and to do of His good pleasure, maintaining His sovereignty in this as in everything else. Bear in mind that it is allowed sin which paralyzes the new nature. Thus God has not yet uprooted sin from the soul of the believer, but allows him to groan under its uprisings, that his pride may be stained and his heart made to constantly feel he is not worthy of the least of God's mercies. To produce in him that feeling of dependence on divine power and grace. To exalt the infinite condescension and patience of God in the apprehension of the humbled saint. To place the crown of glory on the only head worthy to wear it: "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory, for thy mercy, and for thy truth's sake" (Ps. 115:1).

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