

THE  
SPRUCE STREET LECTURES,

DELIVERED

BY SEVERAL CLERGYMEN, DURING THE AUTUMN AND  
WINTER OF 1831-32.

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TO WHICH IS ADDED,

A LECTURE

ON THE IMPORTANCE OF CREEDS AND CONFESSIONS : WITH  
AN APPENDIX,

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# SPRUCE STREET LECTURES.

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## LECTURE I.

*Delivered on the Evening of the 2d November, 1831, by the  
Rev. Ezra Fisk, D.D. of Goshen, N. Y.*

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### THE INABILITY OF SINNERS CONSIDERED.

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“No man can come unto me, except the Father, which hath sent me,  
draw him.”—*John vi. 44.*

It has pleased God to reveal, not only his existence but his personality, in Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. In the glorious economy of redemption, the Father sends the Son, and the Holy Ghost proceeds from both the Father and the Son. The agency of the Holy Spirit is ascribed to both, sometimes to one person and sometimes to the other. When Christ said, “I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me,” he ascribed the influence of the Spirit to the Son: in my text, he tells us, the Father draws by the same agency.

On this fundamental doctrine of the Holy Spirit’s official influence, executing the commission of the Father and the Son, rests the propriety of ascribing his agency to either or both. The recognition of this doctrine seemed necessary, to understand definitely the meaning of the exception in

my text. I consider it as referring to the agency of the Holy Ghost, in bringing men to Christ. With this influence, men can come and do come to him ; without it, they do not and cannot come. This is the plain and only meaning of the passage. With the agency intended in the exception, men are capable of doing all that God requires of them. Leave out the exception, and modify the declaration so as to include the agency, it would read thus, "every man can come unto me, if the Father, who hath sent me, draw him." This is a precious and encouraging truth to all who preach the gospel of Christ. The whole economy of grace illustrates this great fact; all Christian experience proves it; and the great day will reveal its glory in the redeemed millions, brought home to Christ in heaven. But leaving out this agency, the whole is reversed—man is only taught his helplessness and made to feel his misery. The declaration in our text, as it fell from the lips of Jesus Christ, expresses an important fact, which should be well understood.

Before I proceed to consider the *inability asserted*, which is the principal object of this discussion, there is an important inquiry to be answered:—*What is coming to Christ?*

I answer the *question*, and discuss the *assertion*.

I. The *question* is of great importance, and the illustration of its answer might profitably occupy the whole of this hour. But it admits of a brief solution, which is all that is necessary for my present discussion.

*Coming to Christ*, in these days, is altogether a mental process. In the days of our Saviour's pilgrimage in the flesh, some might have understood it otherwise. When he tra-

versed the regions of Palestine, the people flocked to the places of his instruction, and, doubtless, many thought of nothing else. On the mountain, in the plain, by the sea side, and in the wilderness, he stood before them in tangible human form. Their eyes saw him, and looked on his miracles; their ears heard the gracious words as they proceeded from his lips. But since his bodily presence is withdrawn and enthroned in glory, he is to be approached by us only in mind. Mind alone can now penetrate the heavens, and contemplate the Saviour where the beloved and exiled disciple saw him, exalted in purity and splendour, with the rainbow of Jehovah's merciful covenant reflecting his delightful radiance.

We recognize, it is true, the grand and glorious principle of his spiritual divine existence, one attribute of which is his omnipresence: and we know, that in reference to this attribute, "he is not far from every one of us." But we speak of a moral approach to Christ, as the Redeemer and Saviour.

A brief sketch of this mental process may be comprised in *spiritual apprehension, gracious feeling, and holy action*. Nothing is more certain than the fact, that the pure, spiritual, holy and gracious character of Jesus Christ, as the only and all-sufficient Saviour, is not apprehended at all, or misapprehended, by men who are "far from him." Coming to Christ, must include some apprehension of his character as found in the gospel, of his divine existence and glory, of his holiness and compassion, of his grace and loveliness, and of his suitedness to the case of lost sinners. In this spiritual apprehension is included faith in his offices of prophet, priest and king, in his atoning sacrifice and intercession; at least, so much of faith is included as belongs

to the exercise of intellect. I am aware that something more than a mere apprehension of character, or accrediting a matter of testimony, is included in that faith which the gospel demands. There is a reliance upon the merits of the Redeemer's sacrifice, an affection of the soul, resting on the loveliness which is spiritually apprehended; but in the intellectual exercise there is a spiritual discernment, which the unbeliever has not, and which fallen spirits, who tremble before the majesty of the Son of God, never possess. It is a discernment of the excellence, glory and loveliness of Christ, and an appropriation of his rich and gracious promises to the soul. There may be degrees of clearness and strength in this spiritual apprehension, but the characteristics are essential. They divide its nature, by which, rather than the degree, the estimation is to be made.

*Gracious affection* is an essential part of the mental process, in coming to Christ. Penitence, humility, gratitude, love, and faith, are connected with that spiritual apprehension just named. These are feelings of the heart, without which there can be no Christian grace. Sorrow for sin, hatred of its intrinsic loathsomeness and opposition to God, humility under a sense of unworthiness, and forsaking the servitude of Satan, are indispensable, in a sinner's approach to Christ. Gratitude for such a Saviour and such a privilege, must be called into exercise in this transaction. But *love* to Christ is the most direct and important exercise in the process. It is love by which faith works; in fact, it is an essential part of that faith which relies on the great atoning sacrifice, and unites the soul to Jesus Christ.

By *holy action*, I mean, not only a living exercise of gracious affections, but a subjection of the will to the obedience of Christ. I mean directing all the faculties of the



mind in the service of him “who gave himself for us, and called us with an holy calling:” I speak now of mental, not external action, profession, or observance of religious duties. These all have their importance in their proper place, but they are the result of coming to Christ, and necessary evidences of the fact. The man who spiritually apprehends, trusts, and loves Christ, comes to him, and none others come. All this is often expressed in the gospel by a single comprehensive term, *faith, love*. Sometimes faith expresses the whole transaction; it “is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” Sometimes love is used in the same comprehensive sense—“love is the fulfilling of the law.” The reasons why these graces are used for the whole process, are very obvious, because faith and love are so prominent and vital in the transaction; and because either of these graces implies the whole. It may, perhaps, be asked, whether the “coming to Christ,” mentioned in the text, intend union to him, or merely an approach, to ask some blessing? To this, I answer, the former, beyond peradventure. It is coming to him for salvation—into covenant union with him, perpetual in its glorious results. But while the text is thus interpreted, the exercise of these graces should be cultivated in all approaches to Jesus Christ.

II. The *assertion* of the text, that without the agency of the Holy Spirit no man can come to Christ, demands careful attention. Taking the obvious scriptural interpretation of this coming, and its form may be thus stated: without the Spirit’s agency, no man can *love* Christ, or *believe* on him.

I am aware that this doctrine is denied, and the whole agency of the Holy Ghost rejected. His divine existence is

also denied, and the doctrine is propagated that man needs no aid to his reason, except what instruction he gains from nature and some moral maxims found in what we call revelation, to love God and fulfil all the obligations of his being. But this doctrine I need not refute. It necessarily includes a denial of God's plain declarations, and sets aside the whole gospel of Christ. Few in this land, it is to be hoped, have the hardihood unequivocally to espouse an opinion so directly in the face of divine revelation.

But there is much speculation on the *inability* intended in this declaration of Jesus Christ; and there is certainly great importance attached to the inquiry into its meaning. The importance, however, arises not so much from any inherent difficulty in the investigation, or any liability of an honest mind to err, in the interpretation of the text, or in its practical application, but from the multiplied speculations and bad philosophy of the age. It is undeniably true that no man ever did come to Christ without the agency of the Holy Spirit; no believer of the gospel can suppose that any man ever will come without it; and the Saviour asserted that none *can* come, except by this agency. What more is necessary then, to admit that the inability is entire, a complete preventive?

Apart from the meddlesome philosophy which has intruded its blindness to obscure the light, I perceive only one reason for pursuing the inquiry another step. That is, to show the consistency of this announcement with God's commands, which bind us to love him and believe on Christ. On this subject, the facts, as stated in the Scriptures, are entirely satisfactory to my mind. There can be no doubt that God's commands are peremptory and binding on all individuals of the human family, to whom the word of his



revelation is sent. Nor can there be any doubt that men are unable to come without the agency of the Holy Ghost. Here are two facts, revealed with equal plainness, and each positively asserted. Are they consistent with each other? This is the question. If they are not, there is inconsistency and inequality with God, because he has asserted both, and applied them to the same persons. We come, therefore, to this examination, with the assurance of their entire consistency in fact; and if *we* cannot perceive it, we may be certain the defect is in us, and not in the divine administration. It is a case in which we are not at liberty to hold to one and reject the other. Both are facts, and must be consistent.

Whether such commands would have been given to us if there had been no mission of the Holy Spirit, perhaps we are not competent to say; but we know that they are not given without it. I speak not now of the providential agency which God exercises over and in his creatures, but of that mission of the Spirit whose object is, by an unseen influence, to "reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment," to take of the things of Christ, and show them unto his people. This influence constitutes an essential part of God's administration, and he is ever ready to "give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him."

The character and effect of this inability to come to Christ, is a proper subject of inquiry, and should, in these days, be well understood. The subject embraces much, and can only receive a brief examination at this time. Here let me say, that the circumstances under which I address you, and the occasion, together with the false philosophy so often mingled in the discussion of this subject, must be my apology for detaining you with a philosophical

investigation. Some apology seems necessary, for I have not forgotten the Apostle Paul's caution to "avoid oppositions of science falsely so called." But since this subject has been so involved, I may be permitted to recollect another caution by the same Apostle: "beware, lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit." I hope to regard these cautions, and show how philosophy has obscured this subject.

The terms which indicate *power*, are used more vaguely and more variously than almost any others in the English language. The reason is obvious. We know not what is power. No man has ever defined it. We know how we get the idea, but the thing itself is beyond our cognizance. We perceive the relation between cause and effect, and call that power which constitutes this relation. What it is, we do not know, and it is useless to attempt its definition. But if we take that relation which suggests the idea of power, in the place of its definition, we shall not err in any of its important applications or uses. The relation between volition and the effect which follows, may be used for a definition of man's power. Yet the will is not power, nor is volition ability, nor is the effect power, nor is it true that the connexion is ability; but that on which the connexion rests is precisely what we call power. Nothing else can be properly so called, which belongs to man. Now if we substitute this connexion for that which constitutes it, I can see no error in any of its applications in argument or illustration.

Perhaps some may be disposed to ask here, why I would substitute any definition for ability, which, in itself, is undefinable? I answer, because it is desirable to divest it of the perplexity and vagueness to which usage and speculation

have subjected the term. This is reason sufficient. To illustrate my meaning, take the case before us, *coming to Christ*. Is there a connexion between volition and spiritual discernment—between volition and love—or between volition and the appropriate holy exercise of all the mind's faculties? If there be such a connexion as between cause and effect, a dependence of this discernment and love on volition, then, certainly, men have the power of coming to Christ, without the agency of the Holy Ghost; and there is no addition of ability in the conferring of divine grace. If there be no such connexion, men have not the power.

But here it will be said by some, that this description of ability is of that which is physical or natural. Be it so; it is asserted by many that men have natural power, but lack moral ability, to obey the command—"come to Christ." What is moral ability? Is it not that which connects moral effects with volition? Is volition a moral act?—whether it is so or not, love to God is a moral act. And if the latter be the effect of the former, that which so connects them is moral power. Call it physical, natural, or moral—let it be remembered—it is all the same; that which connects the event with volition, is ability, and nothing else can be properly so called. I know there are other notions of power, which will presently be examined; but let not this view be yet forgotten. Now, if men have this ability of any kind—I care not what it may be called—without the drawing of the Father, to come to Christ, or to love God, it must have been ascertained by the fact having, at some time, taken place. No other evidence can be admissible, in opposition to the positive declarations of Jesus Christ. Show me such a fact, and I will admit the ability in that case. But such a fact has never occurred, and is utterly impossible.

If Christ had said, it is impossible for any man to come unto me, except the Father who hath sent me draw him, it would not have varied the meaning of the text. What, then, becomes of the distinction between *natural* and *moral* ability and inability? It is set aside as useless, so far as its application to this case is concerned.

Ability always indicates a connexion between cause and effect; and if I have not greatly mistaken the meaning of those who contend for man's natural ability to love God, they consider it as something which is connected with volition, or that belongs to the will. They represent the whole process of coming to Christ as depending on a man's choice; and this is because men have natural power to come, if they choose.—Whenever they choose to exert that power, they come. All that is necessary, therefore, is, that they should be induced to *choose* to love God, and then they will actually love him. Now if all this were true, it would indeed be a fact, that men have natural power to love God. But is it so? Let us examine the case. The volition does not govern the understanding. It does not depend upon a man's will whether he discern spiritual things, or whether his intellect possess spiritual illumination. I think the mere statement of this fact, is sufficient. “The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.”

The volition moreover does not govern the heart. It does not depend upon a man's will, whether he love God or hate him; “because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.” The truth is, by an irreversible law of mental operations, the will is governed by the *affections*, and they

must be changed, before there can be any love to God. If it were so that the affections followed and depended on volition, every sinner, alarmed at the prospect of the everlasting wrath which awaits him, and accrediting the fact that love to Christ would deliver him from going down to the pit, would certainly love him. On this supposition, there could be no danger of self-deception; no need of so much anxiety among Christians to know their state; no need of a warfare with the lusts of the flesh; no danger of being brought into captivity to the law of sin which is in their members. It cannot be true, that the will governs the affections. I can just as easily conceive that a man's volitions may govern his appetite for food, as his taste for moral truth. A sick man might as well transform, by the influence of volition, his aversion to a medicine which he chooses to take, as the sinner change, by the same influence, his aversion to holiness:—both are impossible. If natural ability, therefore, be indicated by a connexion between volition, or will, as the cause, and loving God as the effect, men have not natural power to love God.

But some use the phrase natural ability, to indicate merely the possession of faculties, which, rightly employed, do love God, and perform Christian duty. That men have faculties which constitute them free, moral, and responsible agents, is true, and of great importance to be recollected. As I am not disposed to contend for words, I will examine this meaning of ability. The understanding perceives; it is proper, therefore, in this sense, to say, that it, or man, has ability to perceive. But has it the ability of spiritual discernment, without divine illumination? Certainly not. The heart loves; in the same sense it is proper to say, the heart has ability to love. But has it ability to love holi-



ness? Nay, it is enmity against God, and cannot be subject to the law of God, which enjoins holy love. The will chooses; it, therefore, has ability to choose. But here are two questions to be answered—has the will ability to choose independently?—and can the choice control the affections of the heart?

To the first question, I answer, that man's will has no self-determining power, but is always governed by the pleasure of the heart; that is, by the prevailing affection. This is a principle so well settled in mental philosophy, that I consider it unnecessary, at this time, to investigate the proof.

Although the will cannot act independently, it may choose subordinately, and ultimately. The *ultimate* choice always terminates on the object most agreeable to the heart. A *subordinate* choice terminates on some object, not always for its own sake, or because it is in itself agreeable, but for the sake of something with which it is connected that is agreeable. Now, I conceive that an awakened sinner may have such a sense of his danger, and be so fully convinced that away from the Saviour he must perish, that he may really choose to come to Christ for the sake of escaping hell; not because he discerns any beauty in Christ, or has any love to him. He may choose subordinately, as the sick man chooses medicine, for the sake of his health. This is not only conceivable, but is matter of frequent occurrence. It is, obviously, the usual course with sinners, when they begin to seek the Lord. You cannot convince them that they do not choose to come to Christ; you may convince them that their choice is of no avail while the heart does not love him; but their own consciousness of choice is paramount to all argument. Tell them that it



depends on their choice, and that if they chose to come, they certainly would do it; they will say, as in such cases many have said, it seems to us we do choose to come, but we know that we have not come; and we suppose therefore we do not choose it, because those who have a right to know tell us it depends on our choice. Such is generally the case with not a few, who are taught to believe that coming to Christ depends on their own will. Man's own consciousness, in such a case, is more likely to accord with fact, than are the inferences from speculative theories.

If the will can thus choose subordinately, the second question—can the choice control the affection?—is easily answered in the negative. It is perfectly evident that the highest affection is placed on the ultimate object, which, in the case just now mentioned, is safety from impending wrath; coming to Christ is, therefore, chosen subordinately, and has no tendency to change the affection. It should here be observed, that the Spirit of God often convinces men of their sin and danger, and the necessity of loving Christ, long before they do love him. With these thoughts distinctly before his mind, the awakened sinner tries the process of subjecting his heart to his will, for days, or even weeks, before he learns that he must despair of accomplishing the object, and must rely on the Spirit's influence. The more he tries to love God in this way, the more hard his heart seems, and the farther he goes from the object which he seeks. The truth must be realized, "it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy."

Let me here state, briefly, the doctrine of the will's government and freedom, in accordance, as I conceive, with the Scriptures and with fact. The will always obeys the

pleasure of the heart, and in this consists both its government and freedom. To present the whole operation in its philosophical form, it is thus—the heart, or faculty which feels, is the spring or source of action—the ultimate object is the excitement to action—and pleasure is the motive which the will always obeys. Thus, the choice of the will is entirely governed by the pleasure of the heart; and this is the highest kind of freedom conceivable. Can the will be more free than to choose as is most agreeable? Can any man desire any other liberty of will than to choose just as he pleases? If he had liberty to choose what is disagreeable, he never would use it. Such choosing could not be freedom, except in cases already referred to, where disagreeable objects are chosen subordinately for the sake of the ultimate, which is always agreeable.

We have heard of a dogma which teaches, that men may choose to be damned for the glory of God, from which, although it be most lovely in itself, they expect no enjoyment, nor to see any loveliness. This, verily, looks like another kind of freedom—choosing without any motive except pain. But this figment of the last century is generally laid aside, and disowned by those who are willing to bear the name of its author. It is well that so monstrous an absurdity should die; and it would be still better, if the two remaining absurdities, which constituted the peculiarities of the system to which it belonged, were as generally exploded. One of these dogmas I have occasion to examine in a single aspect, viz. that all holiness and sin consist, *exclusively*, in free voluntary exercises. The other, which is, God's *efficiency* in producing sin, although it belongs to the same philosophical speculation, falls not immediately within the range of my subject.

Since, according to this dogma, all holiness and sin consist *exclusively* in voluntary exercise, all the moral excellence included in coming to Christ is volition only: and since the will is not governed by any good or evil principle, it is just as easy to choose right as wrong; men, therefore, have as much power to love God as to hate him. It is furthermore inferred, that regeneration is only a new and right choice, which all men are naturally able to exercise. This, I believe, is a fair representation of the doctrine. Now, if this were true, I would think it a waste of time and breath to pray for the Holy Spirit's influence to renew and sanctify men. But is it true? I admit that volitions are sinful; but I maintain that feelings are sinful, and that the principle or propensity from which they proceed is also sinful. "Out of the heart (not volition) proceed evil thoughts." I am aware, however, that some use, though inaccurately, voluntary exercises to include all the feelings of the heart. On that principle, I ask, what feels—what chooses—has it no character? I ask for the appositeness of many of our Lord's parables, such as of the tree, leaven, and mustard seed. What connects the exercises with the man? What is punishable? But I cannot pursue the many absurdities to which the principle leads.

The way is now prepared to examine the real character of that inability which keeps the sinner away from Christ. *It is sin.* It is not want of faculties, which are capable, under the Holy Spirit's influence, of all that is implied in coming to Christ, but without that influence, men cannot so employ them. The inability is recognized in three aspects—*blindness* of the understanding—*hardness* of the heart—and *perversion* of the will. These qualities are again expressed, by *ignorance*, *deadness*, and *obstinacy*. Is it

right to call this sin, moral inability? Or shall it be called natural inability? The truth is, the whole use of this distinctive phraseology is out of place, and worse than useless, in the explanation of this subject. Men are depraved in the heart, that seat of the affection and source of action; and this is evinced by blindness and perverseness. However we may describe this depravity, and whatever we may call it, this is the only impediment in the way of sinners coming to Christ. In order that any man should love God, repent of sin, believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, or what includes them all, come to Christ, his heart must be regenerated. There must be a new propensity or preparation of heart to love holiness and hate sin, and the understanding must be enlightened to discern the spiritual excellence and loveliness of Christ. The impenitent man has neither of these; and without them, coming to Christ is impossible. Should it here be said that the development and propensity is coming to Christ, and that the inquiry respects the fact, whether he has or has not the ability for their production and exercise; and what is the nature of that ability or inability—I answer in several particulars. It is admitted on all hands, that the impenitent sinner has not this discernment or propensity; he cannot, therefore, develope what he has not. That he has not power to enlighten his own understanding, or to originate a propensity to love holiness, I have already shown. As to the character of that inability, I have already said it consists in a *principle of sin*, affecting all the mental faculties, and having its primary seat in the heart.

Now, what the *nature* of that inability is which renders man incapable of regenerating his own heart—for the whole inquiry may concentrate here—it matters very little

to define. Let us examine more carefully the philosophical definitions of the day. If we call it *physical*, it is philosophically true; but is an improper use of the term, therefore calculated to mislead. Physical ability, though ever so great, could not produce the moral change called regeneration. If a sinner had ten times as much physical power as a fallen angel, it would be just as impossible as it is now for him to renew his heart. Physical power never originates moral results in responsible agents. All their physical ability is employed for physical purposes, except as it is used instrumentally, by the governing principle of the heart. The principle which moves and controls all physical action, is to be the subject of change. It cannot be changed by that which only acts under its direction and control. Thus, the truth of the assertion is evident; but such are the associations and uses of the term *physical*, that it is improper to employ it here, and is calculated to mislead. The more common and familiar uses of the phraseology, connects it with volition and external action. Thus, a man chooses to walk, and the effect follows; but his limbs become palsied, and then he is physically unable to walk. A child cannot perform the operations of a man. But illustrations need not be multiplied; they are familiar to all. Such want of power is evidently excusable; and from this fixed and warrantable use of the phrase, if we say sinners are physically unable to love God, it is liable to mislead them to the inference that they are excusable. If we call any thing else, except that which connects the effect with volition, physical power, it makes confusion, and obscures the subject to which it is applied.

If we call it *natural* inability, the terms are liable to a similar abuse. It is nevertheless true, that man's inability



is by nature, because it is his depravity which the Scriptures represent to be natural to him. But if we use *natural*, in distinction from *moral*, it means the same as physical, and ought not to be employed in theological discussions of this kind. If, however, natural inability mean a want of the requisite faculties to constitute man a responsible agent, it is not true that men are naturally unable to love God. They do possess all the requisite faculties; but very few men have so disciplined their minds to technical distinctions and theorising, as to carry along with the terms and their use this meaning. It ought not, for these reasons, to be used. In its technical and differently explained meanings, it is true, or it is false; but in its common appropriate meaning and use, it is altogether inapplicable to this case.

Now, if we say it is *moral* inability, the terms are quite as objectionable as the former. If I understand the term *moral*, it indicates something which is either holy or sinful, right or wrong. The inquiry should, therefore, be made in this place, what belongs to man of a moral nature, and why is it moral? Any thing which belongs to man, that is either sinful or holy, is moral, and nothing else, whether it be faculty, principle, or conduct. I would say the primary seat and source of all that is moral belonging to man, is in his heart. What, then, is moral power to love God? Several answers are given to this inquiry, besides the one which I have before given. Take one that some use, it is a heart prepared to love God and holiness; sinners have not this. But take another meaning, the possession of a faculty or faculties which are moral; and sinners surely have moral power to love God. I am unable to perceive why it is not just as proper to say that they



have moral, as natural ability, to change their hearts. It is said, in one case, if men have not natural faculties or power, they cannot be obliged to keep God's law—so it may, with equal propriety, be said, if men have not a moral faculty or power, they cannot be obliged to obey the moral statute. But I am aware, that moral ability is often understood to mean willingness; and great wisdom is affected in using the distinctive terms in question. On this supposition, I ask, why that, which, in the estimation of those who use the distinction, is considered the essence of obedience, should be called power of any kind, and in any sense? No good reason can be given. The truth seems to me, that those men who use the distinction of natural and moral in explaining the inability of sinners, are deceived, by transferring an association which belongs to external actions, and is true where it belongs, to mental affections, where it is not true; a transfer which will, therefore, always mislead.

It will now be asked, how can a sinner be blamed for not loving God? The answer to this question, will lead to a more definite view of the inability under discussion. Men are to blame for nothing except *sin*, and for that always. Now, whether sin be in action or principle, in the temper of the heart or in volition, it is the object of God's displeasure, and for it men are criminal. It is a specimen of the bad philosophy which is becoming prevalent in this age, that no being can act wrong unless he has ability to do right; and none can act right, unless he has ability to do wrong; all this is applied to mental operations as well as to external actions. But is not God always right and good, although he cannot err? Is not Satan sinful and blameable, although he cannot love holiness? Certainly. But if this principle may not

be applied to men, will not the guilt of the damned be greatly diminished, the moment they are placed beyond the impassable gulf? Are those of whom the prophet speaks, less criminal than others, because their habits of sin are as difficult to change as the Ethiopian's skin, and fixed as the leopard's spot? Are those comparatively innocent of whom the Apostle declares, "it is impossible to renew them again to repentance?"

The true account of the case is, the source of all human agency and ability is sinful, and must be changed by divine grace, or God will forever hate it, and punish men for its character and agency. Is it asked, how man can be blamed for sin, if he has not power to change that principle from which all his criminal agency proceeds? If I understand this question, it is precisely of the character of one proposed to Paul, "why doth he [God] yet find fault? for who hath resisted his will?" Although connected with the subject in a different aspect, it is the same inquiry. I might give the Apostle's rebuke with great propriety, "nay, but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God?" Here it would be proper to leave the inquiry, were it not that modern philosophy laughs at all authority, though it be divine, by which a question is settled without explanation. Let it be remembered then, that it is not the province of philosophy to explain *how* God's law reaches the heart and binds, but every man's conscience can testify the fact, and reproach him for his malice. If the question be, how man became thus sinful? let those who ask it, read the history of man's fall, in the third chapter of the book of Genesis, and Paul's account of the covenant relation and imputation, in his epistles to the Romans and Corinthians, for a solution of this question; and there we leave the inquirers.

Take another method of solving the difficulty. God has constituted his own perfections, which are holy, the standard of right and moral obligation. Every intelligent, free, responsible agent, tried by this standard, and found opposed to it, is an enemy of God. The rule shows him to be such, no matter what his power. His power is not estimated by this standard, but simply his moral character. Ability is not the basis or measure of responsibility in this case, but the faculties which constitute man a free, moral agent. I repeat again, to prevent all mistake, that I am now speaking of obligation to love God, not of external actions, where physical or natural power is employed, and for which a man is responsible, according to that which he has, and not according to that he has not. Man does not love God with his physical ability. He is responsible to God for the exercise of all his faculties; if they are wrongly employed, it proves the source of action is wrong; and the more depraved is that source of human agency, the worse is the character—the more criminal.

I recur now to the question, whether this doctrine is consistent with God's commands—or, in more explicit terms, has God a right to command men to love him, if they have not the ability to obey? I answer yes, most undoubtedly. Be it remembered that this refers not to external conduct, where physical power is employed, and concerning which it would not be true. A man who has no hand or foot cannot be rightfully commanded to use them. An idiot cannot be rightfully ordered to solve a mathematical problem, or an infant to calculate an eclipse. But what has all such ability to do with loving God? I speak now of God's command over the heart, and man's inability by nature to turn the affections to God. Let me here repeat, that

God does command men to love him, and at the same time says they cannot love him. Moreover it is right; because the only impediment in the way of their obedience is that sinful principle, which God condemns, and for which he will punish men. This fact and this reason of the righteousness in the command, show the character of the inability to be sin. Further we need not speculate.

The great question now recurs, what saith the Holy Ghost? After all the speculations on this subject, to explain its philosophy, the simple and very plain language of the Holy Scriptures is incomparably more satisfactory than all that philosophy ever can teach. Love to God is a fruit of the Spirit, so are all the Christian graces. "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance." Salvation is all of grace, in its plan, developement and completion, "not of works—for we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works." Regeneration is by the agency of the Holy Spirit—"according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost—born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God—born from above—transformed by renewing of the mind." Christians are thus challenged—"who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive?" Christ said to his disciples, "without me ye can do nothing." Said the Apostle, "not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God." What language, plain or figurative, could more explicitly declare man's inability without the Holy Spirit, than the Scriptures use again and again? It is twice stated in the chapter of my text—Elsewhere sinners are repre-



sented as "alienated from the life of God"—having a "carnal mind," which "is enmity against God, for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be"—under the power of Satan—and of sin—dead in trespasses and sins—their hearts fully set in them to do evil." Man's deliverance from this spiritual death and servitude to sin and Satan, "is not of him that willeth nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy." But quotations need not be further continued. Take all those very numerous passages of Scripture which ascribe to the Holy Spirit, as his fruits, the graces of piety—all those which ascribe regeneration to the same agency—all those which represent this change as a new creation—all those which represent the character and state of fallen men as dead in sin, under its dominion, lost, blind, enemies to God and helpless—all those prophecies, in which the figures of dry bones, sterility and the curse, are found—all those records of history, which describe the progress of the gospel and the conversion of men to God—and all those supplications, directions, facts, and promises, which indicate a reliance on Christ and the Holy Spirit for sanctification and salvation: then tell me if there can remain a doubt of man's inability and crime.

What now are the *uses* to be made of this doctrine?

One very important use is to *humble* man before God. If men are so sinful that they cannot deliver themselves, either from its curse or from its dominion, they have reason to be humble. They have reason to be humbled under a sense of their sinfulness and their impotence. There are few things of which men are more inclined to be proud than of power. Children early discover a disposition to glory in their strength, or their capacity to accomplish what they

consider important. Men are naturally fond of power in all its relations and influence, and are prone to become vain in their imaginations, forgetting their sin and weakness before God. But when once they are taught this doctrine by the Holy Spirit, they are prostrated in the dust, and feel themselves at the disposal of sovereign mercy. The pride of man needs to be humbled for his own benefit; and God will have sinners humbled, that his own power may be manifested in them. "Whoso exalteth himself shall be abased."

2 Another *use* of the doctrine is to *convince men of sin*. So long as sinners perceive no danger, and feel confident in their ability to turn themselves to God at any time, they will not listen to the invitations of mercy, or care for the representations of their danger. No sinner will be likely to feel much anxiety for the salvation of his soul, while he considers it as depending on his own choice or ability. There is no truth, which the Holy Ghost more frequently and efficiently uses, to convince men of their sin and danger, than their lost, helpless condition by nature. The publican felt this when he cried, "God be merciful to me a sinner." So fully does the Spirit convince men of their helplessness, when he draws them to Christ, that their cry is, "Lord save, or we perish;" and ever after they live and walk by faith, looking to Christ, in whom is their strength, and depending on the Holy Spirit for guidance.

The Spirit often teaches sinners their danger before he teaches them their helplessness; they look more at the sin of their conduct than the sin of their hearts. In such cases they commence an effort to make themselves better. They try expedient after expedient, confident that they can turn themselves to God. But under the teaching of the Spirit



they learn that they make themselves worse instead of better. Let a sinner perceive that he deserves endless misery and is in imminent danger of his soul—if he has, or think he has power, he will make exertion for his safety. But let him perceive that he is ready to sink into everlasting perdition, and feel that his sin renders him helpless, an agony of distress will fill his soul; and if Christ had not sent the Holy Spirit, despair would drink up his own spirit. Then he trusts in Christ, and is thus drawn by the blessed agency of the Holy Ghost.

But here it may possibly be asked, if this doctrine be not calculated to discourage sinners from seeking the Lord? I suppose it is possible for cavillers to pervert the truth, and even wrest it to their own destruction; but that it is calculated to discourage men from trusting in Christ and accepting salvation, as it is freely offered to them, I cannot admit. I know that some have said the doctrine is calculated to lead men to sit down quietly and wait God's time to save them, alleging, that if he do not save them, the fault will be in the Saviour, and not in themselves. This cavil never came from a sinner, deeply anxious for his soul's salvation. But if the objection were founded in fact, the influence would not be to quiet the feelings. Suppose a case, which, I think, may illustrate the influence of the sentiments intended in the objection. Were it announced to us, that the flames are encroaching upon this house, and that if we remain in it a few moments longer we must inevitably be consumed, and that we are unable to get out of the house: would we lie down and sleep? No, every bosom would be filled with wakeful agony. But to make the case somewhat parallel to the real situation of the sinner, we must suppose two things more—that our sinfulness alone disables

us from escaping, and that God is entreating us to accept his efficient and certain relief. Then if we should perish in the flame to night, would there not be crime as well as helplessness in our case? Would there not be a striking analogy in the feeling, likely to be excited in such a case, to the conviction of sinners taught of God? To my mind the analogy is easily traced.

2. It is again objected that this doctrine sets aside the use of means with impenitent sinners. To this I reply, in unqualified terms, that exactly the reverse is true. If the excellency of the power were of men, every thing would be confused, uncertain, and discouraging. But since it is of God, and not of men, we may hope for success, relying on his ability, which is constant and efficient to connect the means with the end. This is too plain to need further illustration.

3. It is further objected, that it is inconsistent and useless to exhort sinners to repent or perform any Christian duty, if this doctrine be true. I know it sounds very singular to some ears to hear such addresses to sinners as "look ye blind—hear ye deaf—awake thou that sleepest and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light." I doubt not many think such exhortations useless. But so it is, men are thus described and thus exhorted in the gospel of Christ; and who will undertake to say they are inconsistent? God has ordered us in the gospel commission to announce most distinctly the guilt, helplessness, and misery of sinners; and at the same time to exhort, entreat, and command them to repent. Our warrant is plain, and our prospect of success, in these announcements, rests on the mission of the Holy Spirit. When the voice of the Spirit accompanies the exhortation, sinners hear and come to

Christ. I have already shown the consistency of the doctrine with God's commands, and this rests on the same principle. But I must not longer dwell on this topic: let me say once for all, the human heart and human ingenuity have employed their utmost efforts to multiply and propagate objections and cavils against this doctrine. Here let a very strong fact be distinctly marked—one fixed and intelligent look within, upon the character of the heart as disclosed by the light and teaching of the Holy Ghost, disarms every objection, and prostrates the sinner in deep self-abasement, and covers him with shame, crying, “wo is me, for I am undone.” No cavil or objection can stand before a conscience enlightened by the Spirit of God.

A very important *use* of this doctrine is to lead Christians and ministers of the gospel to cultivate a sense of dependence on the special influence of the Holy Spirit, and pray for his agency. No matter how great man's physical power may be considered by others, Christians must feel their entire dependence on the Spirit's blessed agency, which alone can bring men to Christ, enlighten their minds and sanctify them for his service and glory. The more sensible men are of their helplessness and real necessity, the more they will pray for the grace of God. The doctrine tends to induce in Christians a more constant sense of responsibility under the gospel administration, where the Holy Ghost is sent to humble, enlighten, sanctify, and guide them in the knowledge of his will, and discharge of Christian duty. Dependence on the Spirit and responsibility go together. The whole gospel urges upon us this sense of dependence on the Holy Ghost. He takes of the things of Christ, and shows them unto us; and we cannot be too thoroughly impressed with the importance of relying

on this influence. Christians do not pray enough for this blessed agency; and too often they attempt the performance of duty with little or no sense of their dependence. This explains their frequent failure and the meagreness of their graces. While Paul recognized, fully, the truth of Christ's declaration, "without me ye can do nothing," his humble and confident reliance on the influence of the Holy Ghost, enabled him to say, "I can do all things through Christ, who strengthens me." It is not a sense of inability, which prevents Christians from growing in grace and fulfilling their obligations, but leaning upon their own understanding, and relying on their own strength.

Under the influence of this sentiment of dependence, and a view of the helpless condition of sinners, ministers of the gospel will be more likely to rely on the Spirit's influence, and pray for his agency to accompany their ministrations. They will keep the doctrine of the Holy Spirit's agency distinctly in their own and the view of others. It was a judicious remark of a sensible elder in the Church, "if ministers of the gospel would honour the Holy Ghost more in their preaching, the Holy Ghost would honour them."

One direct object of preaching the gospel is, to convince men of sin—of their lost, disabled, perilous condition under its influence—of the direct and certain consequence of sin, everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his power. Another important object is, to convince or teach them of the righteousness, not only of the law which condemns them, but of Christ, by which alone they can be justified—to explain the scheme of salvation by Christ, and the principles of the administration

under which they are planned. This is to be done, "not in the words which man's wisdom teaches, but which the Holy Ghost teaches." O how necessary that ministers of Christ should be deeply impressed with the sense of their dependence on this heavenly instruction and influence! They should go from their closet to the pulpit, to the family, and every parochial service. They should carry the case of sinners before the mercy seat, unite the conviction and conversion of their souls to the intercession of Jesus Christ, which alone can prevail, to send down the answer of peace.

One important practical question must close this protracted discussion. I propose it to every individual in this assembly. Is the agency of the Holy Spirit drawing you? If you feel inclined to seek the Lord, be sure the Spirit is striving with you. That some such inclinations are awakened here, I doubt not. Be cautious that you resist not the Holy Ghost. Recollect that you live under an administration in which this is the last agency employed for your salvation; resist this, and you must perish forever. Recollect that you live in a time greatly distinguished for the outpouring of this blessed influence. You take upon yourselves a fearful responsibility, if you resist the gracious influence. You may, for aught I know, have come very near to that point, when it shall be said of you as of Ephraim, "let him alone." How tremendous the prospect! How urgently should this caution be pressed upon your excited attention! And ye careless ones, remember that your carelessness costs you no small efforts to resist the Holy Spirit; and woe be to you, when you shall have succeeded effectually in quenching the Spirit.



Christian brethren! take heed that you grieve not the Holy Spirit of promise. Cherish his influence; live under his guidance; pray for his agency to convince and convert perishing sinners. May the Lord hear, answer, forgive bless, and save us all in Christ Jesus. Amen.