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THE
SINNER'S INABILITY
IS
NO EXCUSE
FOR
HIS IMPENITENCY.

BY *Samuel* S. G. WINCHESTER.

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THE SINNER'S INABILITY, &c.

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THE doctrines of grace have all, in their turn, been more or less subjected, by their opposers, to perversion and caricature. Their tendency to foster pride, to encourage sin, and even to excuse the sinner, is often urged as an argument against their truth, by those who have laboured in vain to controvert them successfully by Scripture quotation. The doctrine of human inability has not escaped this unwarranted and ruthless censure. This doctrine is by no means inconsistent with that which declares the sinner's *unwillingness*, to be the reason why he does not repent and believe in Christ. Both these doctrines are distinctly taught in the Scriptures, as appears from John vi. 44. "No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him." Compared with John v, 40. "And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life." No language, it seems, could more clearly convey the idea, that sinners are both *unable* and *unwilling* to come to Christ, than that employed in the above quotations. Nor will it for a moment be alleged that He, whose language it is, was capable of teaching inconsistencies. It will hardly be contended that the inability spoken of in the first quotation, is nothing more or less than the unwillingness which is taught in the second; for this would be to confound things that are in themselves essentially different. Such an interpretation is trifling with Scripture, if there be any distinction at all between a man's *inability* to do a thing, and his *unwillingness* to do it. We are then, shut up to the conclusion, that the doctrine of *inability* is not inconsistent with that of *unwillingness*; that they are both true, and must be inculcated; and that the only question to be decided at present is, on which of these characteristics of a sinner, do the Scriptures charge his refusal to come to Christ? or, in other words, whether the sinner's choice to remain in his sins, is determined by a sense of his inability to forsake them, or by his unwillingness to do so? To an examination of this question the reader's attention is now invited.

It is no part of our present design, to argue at any length the subject of human inability, nor to enter into any metaphysical discussion of the nature of that inability, whether it be natural, or moral, or both. It may be proper, however, to remark that it is difficult to conceive how any form of expression could more satisfactorily teach the doctrine of some kind of inability,

than that used in John vi. 44, already quoted, and also in many other passages of Scripture; such, for example, as the following; "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." An inability of some kind is unquestionably taught here. And its reality and effectiveness cannot be diminished, nor affected at all, by any determination of the question, as to its nature. It is a maxim in philosophy that no more causes are to be admitted than are both true and sufficient to account for the effects; therefore, every text of Scripture which attributes the work of regeneration to the Holy Ghost, declares unequivocally the inability of the sinner to regenerate himself; for it is a contradiction to say that man can repent and believe in the exercise of his own power, and yet that he cannot do either, without divine assistance. Regeneration is compared in Scripture to the work of creation, and to the natural birth. "Ye must be born again." "Created anew in Christ Jesus," &c. The idea of self-regeneration, therefore, is as absurd as that of self-creation, or self-generation.

But we are met with another maxim, which is pressed with much zeal, but with little discretion. We are told that the obligation to obey any command, necessarily implies the existence of adequate ability in those commanded. This maxim we assent to, when properly applied. No man is under an obligation to create a world, or to annihilate what has been created. Nor is he morally bound to read a language he has never learned. This is common sense, and no one disputes the truth of the maxim, in itself considered. It is the application of the maxim to subjects beyond its reach that we object to. Those who apply it to the ability of repenting and loving God, entirely overlook the great change that has passed upon man, since the law was first given, and since the relation which the race sustains to God as the moral Governor was first constituted.

Man, during his probationary state in Adam, possessed the power of loving and obeying God; that is, we were viewed in Adam, as possessing this power, which we had not yet lost by our fall in him. But that we may not be embarrassed by the idea of non-existence as to the race, let us speak of Adam alone. His case will illustrate ours. For he acted in our behalf as well as his own, and whatever was his condition and character after the fall, are ours now. Adam before his fall had the power to love and obey God. By the fall he lost it. Was the command to love God revoked at the fall, or was it continued as a law, and subsequently repromulgated with great solemnity and awe? Now, rectitude is unchangeable. God is immutable. If

it were once Adam's duty to love and obey God, it will always be his duty, whatever change may have passed upon him. That change, unless made, or approved by God, can never affect His claims nor make that wrong which was once right. Adam lost his *ability*, but not his *obligation*, to love and obey. If a debtor squander his estate, he does not lose his obligation, though he does lose his ability to pay his creditor. We must learn to distinguish between the loss of obligation, and the loss of ability.

The maxim under consideration, teaches that obligation results from ability, where there is a command; and that ability is the measure of obligation. Will this maxim apply to the case before us? Whence arises our obligation to love and obey God? We apprehend that it flows from his perfections, and from the relation we sustain to him, as the subjects of his moral government. Now, as God is immutable, as his perfections are ever the same, and as our relation to him as the Moral Governor, remains unchanged, it follows that the source or ground of our obligation to love and obey him also remains unchanged; and the obligation itself is neither destroyed nor abridged. If this obligation were founded on any thing appertaining to us, as, for example, our ability to comply with it, it would be as liable to change as ourselves.

The command itself, to love God, does not originate our obligation to love him. It is a moral law, founded on the unchangeable fitness of things, and on the respective natures and relations of the two parties. The command embodies the obligation in a covenant form, with its conditions, making known to us the consequences of obedience and disobedience. It is utterly impossible that this obligation should ever be destroyed or weakened.

Again: what shall we say of the ability of those who are given up of God, to their own lusts; who are given over to believe a lie, and to work all uncleanness with greediness, or who have committed the unpardonable sin, so that they cannot be renewed again to repentance? Have such the requisite ability to change their own hearts, or to alter "their governing purpose?" If they have, it is not a hopeless case with those who are forsaken by God. They may repent, and change their hearts, and thus defeat the purpose of God to exclude them from heaven. This is shocking blasphemy. If, then, they have no such power, is their obligation cancelled, and their guilt removed? Certainly not. These are still bound by the law, although unable to obey it. The same remark will apply to devils. They are bound to love and obey God, else why are they kept in everlasting chains for disobedience? Are they

able to change their hearts and become saints? by no means; and yet their obligation and guilt remain undiminished. Yea, they possess as really as we do, what has been called "natural ability," that is, they have all the requisite physical powers, and are moral agents, and the subjects of moral law. Yet who will contend that they have the ability to love God, and thus to strip the law of its penal sanctions, which dooms them to eternal woe?

Let us take another view of this subject. It will be freely granted that a Christian has the same ability in kind and degree, as that which is claimed for the sinner. Yea, more, the sinner is unwilling to exercise his power, but the Christian has been made willing in the day of God's power. It is this willingness, according to the advocates of plenary ability, that distinguishes the Christian from the sinner. Now the command to Christians is "be ye holy," "be ye perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." If this command supposes adequate ability, and Christians be willing to exert it, why are they not perfectly holy? Preachers are exhorted to be "*examples* to the flock." Let those who denounce the sinner for not exerting his ability, and becoming a Christian by his own strength, set them the example by exerting their own, and becoming perfectly holy. With the preacher, the case is exceedingly aggravated, because he is supposed to be willing as well as able, and yet continues mournfully imperfect. Until the preacher of such doctrines sets this example to his hearers, he lays himself open to the keen retort, "physician heal thyself;" and is liable to the charge of "binding heavy burdens, and grievous to be borne, and laying them on men's shoulders; but he himself will not move them with one of his fingers." Matth. xxiii, 4. The apostle Paul was certainly willing to be entirely free from sin, and yet he complains of indwelling sin, and mourns over it as a body of death, from which he ardently desired deliverance. All the truly pious of every age, have lamented and bewailed the remains of inbred corruption; they have longed to be freed from its power, and cleansed from its pollution. It is with this conquered, but not eradicated enemy, that the inward conflict is carried on.

From what has now been said, the reader will doubtless have observed that the doctrine of adequate human ability to comply with the commands of God, leads ultimately and inevitably to the denial of original sin; perfectly consists with the doctrine of sinless perfection in this life; and is at irreconcilable variance with the uniform experience of both saints and sinners, and with the infallible word of God.

Having premised thus much, we shall, in the prosecution of

the subject of this tract, take for granted, that "no man CAN come to Christ, except the Father which has sent him, draw him." Our object shall now be to inquire whether a sense of this inability be the real and operative reason why a sinner does not love God, and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. It is alleged that sinners often urge their inability as an excuse for their impenitency. This may be true, and yet the doctrine of inability be Scriptural notwithstanding. That no sinner ever sincerely and honestly believed himself excusable on that ground is abundantly manifest, from the nature of the case. If he disbelieved the doctrine of inability, he could not honestly plead it as an excuse. If he believed it to be a true doctrine, he could not persuade himself that God had revealed a truth which furnished a valid excuse for continuing in rebellion against him, and which disarmed the law of its penal sanctions. Sinners may, nevertheless, urge this excuse, but its fallacy is exposed by the consciousness of being influenced by a very different reason, in refusing to love God. One thing is certain; those who believe and preach the doctrine of plenary ability, are without this excuse at least, for not at once becoming perfectly holy. What other excuses they may urge, when pressed by this application of their own doctrine, to themselves, we leave them to say. It may be very properly asked, from whom have sinners learned that inability is an excuse for impenitency? Not from those who understandingly preach the doctrine; for by them it is declared to be man's sin; and the greater his inability, the greater his guilt. It is learned from those who argue against the doctrine, on the ground, that if it were true, it would release the sinner from all obligation to love and obey, &c. Such arguments have put into the minds and mouths of sinners, excuses, which their consciences would hinder them from deriving from the doctrine itself. But suppose it were true that the inculcation of this doctrine leads some men to rest in their sins with carnal security, is it a new thing that sinners should wrest the Scriptures to their own destruction? Is it an unheard of thing, that they should quote Scripture in justification of their own unchristian conduct? The use that sinners may make of any particular doctrine is no criterion by which to judge of its truth or falsity. This would indeed be erecting a new standard of truth and error. The doctrine of divine decrees, which many of the advocates of human ability strenuously maintain, is as liable to this perversion as the doctrine of human impotency; and has in fact, been as often and as pertinaciously thus perverted. But we apprehend that the teachers of both these doctrines are not justly chargeable with the sin so often laid at their door, of lulling the impenitent into awful se-

curity. With these convictions we are prepared to lay down the following proposition, as the burden of this discussion, and we shall attempt to demonstrate it by sundry considerations, namely :

A sinner who refuses to love God, repent of his sins, and believe in Christ for salvation, is WITHOUT EXCUSE, notwithstanding his inability.

I. The sinner's inability whatever be its character, whether natural or moral or both, is his depravity, or arises from it. And the one can no more be regarded as an excuse for disobedience than the other. If that which hinders the sinner from obeying, be in itself sinful and inexcusable, the disobedience which results from it, is equally so. Those, therefore, who argue against the doctrine of inability, on the ground that its existence would excuse the sinner, beg the whole question, and really take for granted the very point in dispute. Let it then be borne in mind by the reader that the inability of man to love God is his sin. The Scriptures teach no other inability in accountable agents, than what consists in, or arises from the depravity of the heart. And to deny the one is to deny the other. The doctrine of inability is but another form of presenting the doctrine of original sin. Hence it will invariably be found that those who teach that man has full ability to love and obey God, are those who entertain unscriptural views of man's fallen state. And as these two doctrines must stand or fall together, so the guilt of original sin and of human inability must exist inseparably together. It would be useless to argue the doctrine of human inability with one who either denies that of original sin, or asserts the innocence of that estate whereinto man fell, whatever he may judge that estate to be. Some preachers as well as writers, doubtless more honest than discreet, in labouring to fasten guilt upon the sinner, for his impenitency and delay, have unwittingly adopted principles which tend to subvert the whole doctrine of sin both as to its existence and nature. In endeavouring to convict the sinner of an unwillingness to come to Christ, they have felt themselves embarrassed by an imaginary difficulty, which they supposed would be urged by the sinner as an excuse for his impenitency, namely, the inability of man to repent and love God; and instead of answering the objections of those whom they had undertaken to instruct and exhort, they sought to remove them by denying the doctrine on which they were supposed to be founded. Others, following in their train, and pressed by the evidence which the Bible and experience have furnished in support of the doctrine, have attempted to modify and improve the method of answering the objection of the sinner, by making a distinction, between na-

tural and moral inability, and by denying the one and holding to the other. Others again, following in the same track, but perhaps more reckless of consequences, or less able to foresee them, have pushed the matter still farther; for being pressed with the same objections on the score of moral inability, and being met with the argument that inability, whatever be its qualifying name, consists in the depravity of our nature, they have been driven to such exhibitions and explanations of the doctrine of original sin as amount to a virtual rejection of it. The process by which this result has been reached, is the argument I would urge in maintaining the position that inability consists in depravity and is therefore inexcusable. When the sinner pleads his inability to repent, as his excuse for neglecting it, he pleads his depravity; and in endeavouring to obviate his objections, I would as soon think of denying the one doctrine as the other, and no sooner. Here we might safely leave the subject without embarrassment, and the sinner without excuse; but as our object is not merely the inculcation of doctrine, but the practical enforcement of it, on the consciences of men, we shall proceed to elucidate still farther this subject, by other considerations.

II. A man's sense of inability to do an act, is not necessarily and invariably the reason why he *does not* perform it. In order to maintain the contrary it must be first shown that he *would* do it, if he *could*. To illustrate this, suppose I bid my servant to bring me a certain book from my library; and he peremptorily refuses. Now suppose the door of my library be locked, and there be no means of opening it, and if there were, no such book could be found in it. It is manifestly impossible to comply with my order. But a sense of this inability is surely not the reason why my servant does not comply. He is influenced by unwillingness; and is as really guilty of wilful disobedience, as if it had been fully in his power to have complied. My servant was conscious of no inability, and could not, therefore, have urged it as an excuse for his disobedience. Had he been willing, he would immediately have attempted to execute my command. It is manifest, therefore, that a sense of the inability of which he was utterly ignorant, could have formed no part of the motive which induced him to disobey. This supposed case is adduced merely to illustrate the position, that a man's sense of inability to do an act, is not necessarily his reason for not doing it. If the position be a correct one, it will apply equally to the case of the sinner. And if the sinner be ignorant of his inability to repent and love God, a sense of it cannot possibly constitute any part of the motive which induces him to continue in impenitency, and at enmity with God. And

if he were sensible of his inability, it would not induce him to choose a life of impenitency, if he were willing and desirous to be reconciled to God in the appointed way. Although the inability of the servant, in the supposed case, is very different in kind, from that of the sinner, yet of the mass of careless and impenitent sinners, it may be affirmed that experimentally they are as ignorant of its existence. And of all unconvicted sinners it may be affirmed, that they are as little influenced to remain such, by a sense of inability, as the servant was to disobey the order. If sinners were fully aware of their impotency, they would either seek help of God, or despair of salvation. But instead of either, they defer the work of repentance to a more convenient season. If this delay be accompanied by a purpose to seek divine aid when that convenient season shall have arrived, it discovers an ignorance of their utter inability to seek that aid effectually by their own strength. So that the delay of repentance is founded in the supposed possession of adequate ability, either to seek aright, by their own strength, the needed assistance, or to do the work without such assistance. In either case the refusal to repent and love God *now*, is not attributable to a sense of inability, and cannot, therefore, be excused on the ground of inability.

The sinner's ignorance of his helplessness and dependence, is the result of that blindness of mind, and darkening of the understanding which sin has brought upon him. He is blinded by the God of this world, and is ignorant of himself. It is the office of the Holy Ghost to convince men of sin, and to teach them their true character as impotent and dependent. Man's inability is his sin, and a conviction of sin, is a conviction of inability. Till thus enlightened and convicted, he presumes upon a supposed ability, and defers repentance to a future day. When a sinner is made sensible of his awful condition, as helpless and ruined and guilty, he is not disposed to throw himself, with calm indifference, upon the plea of inability as a justification of his impenitency. On the contrary, he is distressed and alarmed, and cries "Lord save, or I perish;" and he no more regards his helplessness as a release from obligation, than the pennyless debtor supposes his bond to be cancelled by his bankruptcy. We may, therefore, lay it down as an axiom, that no sinner will rely upon his inability as an excuse for impenitency, when he is brought by the Holy Spirit to be deeply sensible of that inability. And unless he be thus sensible of it, the excuse is hypocritical and insincere, and is condemned by his conscience as of no avail.

III. In support of our main proposition, it may be stated as incontrovertible, that every man can do more good and less evil

than he does. If this were not so, there could be no room for praise or dispraise among men: nor any for the exercise of justice, in the authority of the civil magistrate. Human laws would become a nullity, and rewards and punishments be ineffectual and without meaning. No man feels himself compelled to commit this or that particular sin, or to omit this or that particular duty. He is fully sensible of acting in the one case, and of neglecting to act in the other, with the most perfect freedom of choice. If this be true, nothing hinders men from doing more good and less evil than they do, but their own *will*. In the discharge of all duties men must do what they can, before they can be excused for not doing what they can not. This is so, even in cases where their inability is not sinful, and would be a just ground for acquittal before any court in heaven or on earth; much less can they be excused where their inability itself is sinful and inexcusable, as is the case with the sinner. For if men will not do what they can, it is *unwillingness*, and not a sense of *inability*, that hinders them from attempting it. A sinner is fully sensible that he can do many things that he ought to do, and leave undone much that he does. He can reform his external character. He can cease to profane the Lord's day, by business or amusement. He can regularly attend the sanctuary, and the social prayer meeting, when health and opportunity permit. He can dash from his lips the intoxicating bowl, and sign the pledge of total abstinence. He can order his words in truth and sincerity, and no longer deceive his neighbour by falsehood and prevarication. He can deal honestly and uprightly with his fellow men, and no longer extort from the widow and orphan their last, hard-earned pittance, and wring from their eyes the bitter tears of conscious and hopeless penury. He can aid in relieving the wants of the poor, and contribute to the funds of benevolent institutions. Yea, more, he can read and study the Scriptures diligently and habitually. He can retire at stated and frequent seasons, from the business and pleasures of the world, to meditate on the truths of revelation. He can avoid and break off from evil company, and abandon the haunts of vice and dissipation. He can consider his ways and reflect on his character, condition, hopes, and prospects beyond the grave. He can bend his knees in secret, and say "God be merciful to me, a miserable sinner!" Unless he does what he can, he must perish in his sins. Unless he does what he can, with what reason may he expect divine strength to enable him to do what he cannot by his own? If, then, he will not do what he can, he voluntarily hinders that from being done for him, which he cannot do himself. Let not the sinner, however, for a moment suppose that

by doing what he can, he merits divine assistance, or that his own exertions are the moving or meritorious cause of God's doing for him what he cannot do himself. For even after we have done all, we are still unprofitable servants. Our best works are not only destitute of merit, but have mingled with them so much sin, as justly to expose us to the divine displeasure. Hence, our services as well as our hearts, need to be cleansed in atoning blood.

If a sinner will not do what he can, it is a matter of indifference to him whether he be able to do more or not. He that will not do what he can, would not do what he can not, even if he could. He that will not give a penny when he can, would not give two if he could. Such an one, therefore, can find no refuge from the pursuit of conscience and justice, in his inability to love and obey God. He will be condemned out of his own mouth for not doing what he professed and felt himself able to do.

In further illustration of this point, it may be observed that sinners sometimes do what is commanded by human authority, while they refuse to do the same thing at the command of God. For example : Suppose it were made by law, the duty of every man to pray to God three times a day in secret, and twice in his family, if he have one ; and suppose the penalty of this law were death. Under a severe and faithful administration, would many be found to neglect this duty ? Now God commands men to pray without ceasing ; not that they are to do nothing else, but the import of the injunction is to pray regularly and habitually, without omitting or neglecting the duty. No particular time or place is designated, but both are left to be regulated by convenience and opportunity, and a prayerful frame of mind. With these advantages which might not be afforded by the supposed human law, why do men habitually neglect this duty, and violate the divine command ? It cannot be the want of ability to render it at least an external obedience, but a want of will ; for in the supposed case of a human law, such obedience would be rendered. It may be objected that prayer and all other religious duties which are performed through fear of human punishment, are not acceptable to God. That is true, and for this reason, among others, we trust that no such duties will ever be enjoined by civil enactments. Nevertheless, the supposed case clearly shows that the fear of man has more influence over sinners than the fear of God. God threatens with an awful and eternal death of the soul all prayerless and graceless sinners, yet they heed and fear it not. Here is a wilful, and not a constrained disregard of divine authority, and a practical defiance of divine power and wrath. I say a wilful disre-

gard, because no man is compelled to neglect prayer, or to violate God's commands.

As to the objection already noticed, that the performance of a duty thus extorted by the fear of punishment, would not be acceptable to God, it may be observed that if this be reason why it is not performed, it is an admission that unwillingness and not a sense of inability, is the real difficulty.

The fear of God is the beginning of wisdom, and if a sinner will not perform duty through fear how does he know that he would do it from love? The fear of man hinders a sinner from committing many iniquities publicly, as in the market place, and why does not the fear of God hinder him from committing the same sins in secret? The eye of God is as really upon him in the privacy of retirement, or in the secrecy of darkness, as the eye of man in the market place or in the street. Why then has not the fear of God at least as much influence as the fear of man? It is because he *will not* regard it, and be influenced by it. When sinners are exposed to danger, or about to die, they are often sensibly influenced by the fear of God's wrath, and are sometimes awfully alarmed at the apprehension of his vengeance. At such times they will pray and cry for mercy, and inquire what they must do to be saved. Perhaps some who read this tract, will, upon their death beds, give evidence that they *can* fear the Almighty, and tremble in the view of his displeasure, and cry to him for mercy. Why do they not *now* dread his anger, and pray to him with strong cries for mercy, even though it be through fear of his power? Is it because they *will not*, or *can not*? Let conscience answer the question. It must, therefore, be acknowledged that sinners *can* do more good, and avoid more evil than they are *willing* to do.

But it may be further objected, that, although a sinner should be influenced through fear of God, to pray to him and seek his mercy, yet that prayer is not repentance, nor is meditation faith. Grant it: Yet prayer and hearing the Gospel, are the ordained means of repentance and faith; without the use of which no man may expect to be blessed with either.

IV. This, however, leads us in the next place to remark, in support of our main proposition, that sinners are unwilling to use the external means of grace, to the extent of their acknowledged ability. God is pleased to establish these means, not from necessity, as is evident from his sometimes accomplishing the end without them; but it is in condescension to human weakness, and in order to make more manifest to mankind, the glory of his grace and power. In the use of these means, on the part of the sinner, God proposes to accomplish certain ends

of mercy towards him. God honours these means, and makes them of unspeakable importance, by making them the ordinary channels of his gracious communications. To a proper, diligent, and faithful use of them, he is pleased to annex the promise of ultimate success. Now, if the sinner be unwilling thus to employ the means of repentance and faith, he cannot, with any face, plead his inability as an excuse for impenitency and unbelief. A mean is that which comes between any two or more things, and by which they are connected. It is that which is used in order to an end. The means of grace come between the sinner's ability and his inability, and so connect them, when made efficacious, as to enable him to do what otherwise he could not. He must do what he can in the use of these means, in order to be enabled to do what he cannot of himself. To illustrate this: the husband man *cannot*, by merely willing or desiring it, nor by the exercise of any power he possesses, cause his fields to wave with the ripened grain. God alone can do this. But there are certain established means which come between and connect the husbandman's inability to store his garner with an abundant crop, and his realization of a luxuriant harvest; and in the proper use of which means, he obtains, what without them, he could never have secured. He must plough the soil, sow his seed, &c. and do all at the proper season and in the right manner. Annexed to the use of these means, there is the promise of success. "While the earth remaineth, seed time and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease." Gen. viii. 22. "He which soweth sparingly shall reap sparingly, but he which soweth abundantly shall reap abundantly." 2 Cor. ix. 6. 8. "For whatsoever a man soweth that shall he reap." Gal. vi. 7. "He that goeth forth and weepeth bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him." Ps. cxxvi. 6.

Although the latter passages are used figuratively, for the purpose of teaching spiritual truths, yet the whole force of the figure depends upon its answering to the literal fact in nature, from which it is derived. They are designed to show the connexion between the means and the end, in spiritual things, by a comparison with that connexion which obtains in the natural world. The husbandman is as unable to give efficiency to the means when used, as he is to accomplish the end without the use of them. But suppose one who had neglected these means should be reproved for his poverty and indolence, and exhorted, as a matter of duty, to raise a crop for the comfort and support of his family, and instead of doing what he could, should fold his arms and say, "*I cannot cause the earth to*

bring forth grain ; I have no control over the process of vegetation ; could this be regarded as a valid apology for his poverty and indolence, although his declared inability be confessedly real ? No ; he is guilty of a wilful neglect of the appropriate means, and justly merits the wretchedness in which his voluntary negligence has involved him. Suppose, again, that this husbandman should contract and bind himself to raise a certain amount of grain within a given time, and neglecting to plough his ground and sow his seed, he should plead his inability to cause the earth to bring forth grain, as an excuse for his violation of the contract, before what court, in heaven or on earth, could his excuse be sustained ? How, then, shall the sinner be excused on the ground of inability, who neglects to use the appointed and stated means of grace ? It is written, "ask and ye shall receive, seek and ye shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you," "If thou seek Him he will be found of thee." 1 Chron. xxviii. 9. 2 Chron. xv. 2. "Those that seek me early shall find me." Prov. viii. 17. "I said not unto the seed of Jacob seek ye me in vain." Isa. xlv. 19. See also Ps. ix. 10. lix. 32. If the sinner neglect to ask shall he be excused for not receiving ? If he neglect to seek shall he be excused for not finding ?

Reason and equity require that those who "plough iniquity and sow wickedness, should reap the same." Job iv. 8. "If any man work not, neither should he eat." 2 Thes. iii. 10. "They that sow the wind shall reap the whirlwind." Hosea viii. 7. "Sow in righteousness and ye shall reap in mercy." Heb. x. 12. "For he that soweth to the Spirit, shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting, but he that soweth to the flesh, shall of the flesh, reap corruption." Gal. vi. 8. Hence we infer, that he who is unwilling to use the means in order to repentance would not repent, even if he could ; and is therefore inexcusable on the ground of inability.

Again : the Christian labours under an inability as well as the sinner ; but it is not always the same as to its object. For example : the Christian is enabled by divine grace, to pray and hear the gospel in the exercise of faith, but he is unable to make himself perfect, although commanded to be so. But the sinner, while he remains impenitent, is unable thus to pray and hear the gospel in faith. Now, the sinner is as really required, and as much expected to do what he can towards praying and hearing in faith, as the Christian is to do what he can towards being perfect. The sinner must pray and hear the gospel, in order that he may be enabled to pray and hear it in faith : "For faith cometh by hearing." The Christian must pray and hear in faith, in order to become more and more conformed

to the divine image ; for he is sanctified by the truth, and in answer to the prayer of faith. The sinner need not expect to pray and hear in faith, if he will not pray and hear at all. And the Christian should not expect to grow in the divine life, if he will not use the means according to the grace that is given to him. God not only wisely adapts the means of grace to the proposed end, but he mercifully adapts them to our circumstances and nature. If the sinner be deaf, then hearing is not the means he is required to use ; but a diligent reading of the Scriptures, accompanied with prayer and meditation. If he be blind, or otherwise unable to read, and not deaf, then hearing and not reading is his appropriate means. They are adapted to our nature as weak, but rational creatures ; as ignorant, but intelligent beings. The Lord "draws us with the cords of a man," Hosea xi. 4., that is with such cords as men are drawn with. He employs such means as are suited to men. He does not draw us with such cords as beasts are drawn with, nor seek to influence us by such means and with such power as he employs to move inanimate objects. The means of grace are within our reach, and adapted to our helplessness and dependence. And if the sinner will not use them, he deserves to perish, and can charge his destruction on none but himself. "O Israel thou hast destroyed thyself, but in me is thy help." It is great presumption in the sinner, if he expects God to deviate from his established and accustomed mode of saving men, in order to accommodate his perverseness and wilful negligence. God will be inquired of by sinners, to do for them what they can not do for themselves.

Everlasting life is an end to be gained, and the means of grace are the way to that end. We can not reach an end without passing over and thus employing the intermediate way that leads to it. If a man now in one place should be required, agreeably to his own engagement, to be in another, at an appointed time ; and if he should fail to be there, merely because he refused to employ the means of locomotion, and to pass over the intermediate space, his want of fidelity surely cannot be excused on the ground of his inability to be transplanted to the appointed place, while seated in his parlour. Neither can the sinner be excused on the ground of inability, who neglects to use the appointed means of obtaining eternal life. When Paul was about to be shipwrecked, the sailors meditated an escape from the vessel, but he said to the centurion and to the soldiers "except these abide in the ship ye cannot be saved." And yet a little before this, he had assured them on the authority of an angel of God, on whose testimony he declared his confident reliance, that "there should be no loss of any man's

life among them but only of the ship." It was thus made certain that they should not be lost, and yet Paul rested their preservation upon the use of the means which, by divine direction, he appointed, namely, their all abiding in the ship. The means were in order to the end. According to the theory of some, the sailors might have replied that "as it is fixed and certain that we shall not be lost, we shall be preserved let us do what we may." But though their safety were certain, Paul made the use of the means essential to it. And such is the case in regard to sinners. Unless they will abide in the faithful use of the means of grace, their souls will be shipwrecked and lost forever. We, therefore, conclude that unless the sinner will do what he can in the matter of his salvation, he cannot be excused for failing to do whatever is required of him, though he be unable to do it of himself.

V. It is a reasonable requirement of every man that he should at least *try* to do his duty. The plea of inability comes with a very ill grace from those who have not attempted to do what they neglect on the ground of inability. It is a common saying that "no man knows how much he can do till he tries." Honest endeavours will test the extent of ability in all cases: and without such endeavours the plea of inability is founded in ignorance, and cannot be sincere. For it should ever be borne in mind, that only those would excuse themselves on this plea, who have neglected to do what all admit they can do; and it may be laid down as an axiom, that no man who has done and is still doing *all that he can* in the matter of his salvation, will ever regard his impenitence and unbelief as excusable on *any* grounds, although fully persuaded of his inability to repent and believe in his own strength. Hence, every sinner who would take refuge in this excuse, even were it a valid one, is still exposed to condemnation on the ground of having failed to do all that he could. The sinner, therefore, who, without endeavouring to do his duty, contents himself by saying "I can not do it," is obviously influenced by unwillingness and not by a sense of inability. If a shipwrecked voyager should refuse to make the necessary exertions to save himself, or to avail himself of the proffered assistance of others, we should say he was unwilling to be saved. It certainly could not be said that he perished because it was impossible to be saved, but because he would not endeavour to be saved.

But the sinner may be ready to say that he has again and again endeavoured to believe and give himself away to Christ. But let him try again and again. What is his difficulty? Does he still cherish some idol sin, or is he too wedded to the world? Is there something in Christ, or in his service that he does not

cordially approve? If so, he is unwilling to be a Christian. And he has been endeavouring to will against his will, and he need not be surprised that he has not succeeded. He has been endeavouring to give his whole heart to Christ, and at the same time to keep back a part of it. He has been endeavouring to do *impossibilities*. And yet such a sinner is excusing himself from duty on the ground of *inability*! - But has a sinner endeavoured to give his whole heart to God, without attempting at the same time to keep back a part of it? If so, we say again, let him continue his endeavours. Let him never give over his exertions: for it may be that God designs that he should try a long while yet, in order to convince him of his helplessness and also of his stubborn unwillingness. His infinite wisdom may have adopted this as the most suitable and efficacious means of convincing him at last, that his own wicked heart has been the real and operative difficulty all the while. Or it may be that He will extend to him the necessary grace and strength at the next endeavour. But, after all, may not the sinner's endeavours have been rather to compromise the matter, and to bring down the terms of God to his own inclination and convenience, than to bring his own heart up to an honest compliance with those terms? This may account for their long strivings to repent and believe, of which some sinners speak. They will sometimes say, that for months and years they have been endeavouring to become Christians. But it is to be feared that for the most part they have rather been endeavouring to hold out against God, while labouring under the conviction of a guilty and uneasy conscience. For it is seldom the case that those who in good earnest and with the whole heart, set about the salvation of their souls, are long seeking without finding the desired blessing. God's ordinary mode of granting to sinners repentance unto life, is in answer to prayer, and as the result of sincere endeavours to obtain it. "Then shall ye call upon me, and ye shall go and pray unto me, and I will hearken unto you. And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart. And I will be found of you, saith the Lord." Jer. xxix. 12—14. "I said not unto the seed of Jacob, seek ye me in vain." Isa. xlv. 19.

When Jacob sought to be reconciled to his brother Esau, whom he had offended, although he had no power over his brother's will or affections, yet he employed suitable means and made the necessary exertions, and said "I will appease him with the present that goeth before me, and afterward I will see his face; PERADVENTURE he will accept of me." Gen. xxxii. 20. Before the interview between these two brothers took place, Jacob encountered the Angel of the Covenant. He had

not sufficient power to overcome such an antagonist. But he tried his strength. He made what effort he could. And even his usual strength was diminished by the Angel touching the hollow of his thigh, and putting it out of joint. But still he wrestled with Him, and would not let him go till he blessed him. Though weak in himself, yet he prevailed.

When Jonah preached to the inhabitants of Nineveh, the King laid his robes aside "and covered himself with sackcloth and sat in ashes, and caused it to be proclaimed and published throughout the city, that man and beast should be covered with sackcloth, and that the inhabitants should cry mightily unto God; yea, that they should turn, every one, from his evil way, and from the violence that is in his hands. For who can tell if God will turn and repent and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not. And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way: and God repented of the evil that he had said that he would do unto them, and he did it not." Jonah iii. 6—10. If the sinner will but try his strength, if he will but turn from his evil way, and cry mightily unto God, peradventure God will hear and bless him: for who can tell if God may not, while the sinner strives to go to Christ, draw him to the cross by his grace and power?

The various calls of God are frequent, long, and loud. Opportunities and means are afforded to the sinner, and God has not been wanting in suitable appeals to his hopes and fears. Line upon line, and precept upon precept, have been given him; and the tenderest solicitude for his eternal welfare, is manifested both by the providence of God and by the Gospel of his grace.

Those who will not try to do their duty, imagine many difficulties that have no existence in reality. "The slothful man saith there is a lion in the way, a lion is in the streets." Prov. xxvi. 13. Mark ye, this is the excuse of a *slothful* man for the neglect of his duty. Others again are disposed to magnify every little difficulty into an insuperable obstacle. "The sluggard will not plough by reason of cold, therefore shall he beg in harvest, and have nothing." Prov. xx. 4. Mark ye, it is the *sluggard* who *will not* plough. And will such an one excuse himself by saying that this field cannot yield a crop? How does he know it cannot, till he makes a proper trial? It certainly will not, if he neglect the appropriate means of culture.

The sinner is required to love God supremely. It is evident that he cannot love him while he hates him. No sinner hates God or loves sin unwillingly. In the indulgence of either of these affections, he does no violence to his inclinations, or to his free agency. Why then should he attempt to excuse him-

self on the ground of inability, so long as his will and inclination accord with it? As a sense of his helplessness is not the reason why he offends God, so neither is it a reason why he should continue to offend him. Will a sinner continue to rebel against God merely because he is helpless and entirely at his disposal? This should rather humble him in the dust, and lead him to submission and repentance at the foot of the cross, crying for mercy and grace to help him in his time of need. "Murmur not among yourselves; no man can come to me except the Father which hath sent me, draw him." John vi. 43—44.

VI. The Scriptures uniformly represent the sinner's unwillingness, as the operative reason of his refusal to repent and believe in Christ. "Ye WILL NOT come unto me that ye might have life." On this broad fact are based the invitations, exhortations, warnings, and threatenings of the Gospel. In these we find an invariable appeal to the sinner's will. God reasons with the sinner. Christ calls him, waits to be gracious, and knocks at the door of his heart, till his head is wet with the dew and his locks with the drops of the night. He asks with lamentation "why WILL ye die?" He wept over Jerusalem in view of the awful doom that awaited its perverse and blinded inhabitants; and bewailed the obduracy of their hearts. "How often would I have gathered you together as a hen gathereth her brood under her wings and ye WOULD NOT!" These appeals fasten conviction on the sinner's mind, that unwillingness keeps him from the Saviour.

It is the judgment of common sense, the conviction of conscience, and the doctrine of the Scriptures, that he who is unwilling to do his duty is blameworthy if he neglect it. If he will not do what is properly required of him, he is justly punishable. The mere fact of unwillingness, without regard to those influences which determine the will, is a just and sufficient ground of judgment in every case where it is concerned.

The reason assigned why the man with one talent did not improve it, was, not a sense of inability, but unwillingness. He is addressed "thou wicked and slothful servant." He was regardless and negligent of what was committed to his care, he made no effort, and manifested no desire to improve it. The sinner's talents are his natural faculties, his moral agency, his opportunities, the means of grace, together with the instructions and warnings which from time to time and in various ways, he receives. If these be misimproved he is guilty of wilful delinquency. But no one calls him *slothful* who does all he can towards his duty, whether he be able perfectly to perform it or not. No one calls him *wicked* who desires, and with corres-

ponding effort, endeavours to do well, whether he be fully able or not. If the man with one talent had shown a willingness to improve it, by making every suitable exertion to that end, he would never have been stigmatized as slothful and wicked, even though he had been unable to succeed.

Unwillingness on the part of the sinner, is, moreover, as real a barrier as inability: for they are in fact but different exhibitions of the same truth, and parts of the same depravity; and the one will as effectually keep him from Christ as the other. For it is as certain that he **WILL NOT** repent and believe in Christ, till made willing in the day of God's power, as that he **CANNOT**, till God works in him both to will and to do it. The truth is that, generally speaking, men are fully convinced neither of their inability nor their unwillingness. Hence some will say they would repent if they could; thus supposing themselves willing, but pleading inability as the obstacle. Others say they purpose to repent at a more convenient season, and plead some other excuse for refusing to do it *now*; thus supposing themselves both willing and able to do it now, if it were a convenient season. They suppose themselves able to repent, otherwise they would not purpose to do it at a future time; and they suppose themselves willing to repent *now*, otherwise they would plead no other excuse for neglecting it *now*, but a want of will; whereas they imagine or feign other hinderances to the immediate performance of the duty.

Those who were bidden to the marriage feast, refused to come, not because they supposed that they *could not*, but because they *would not*. One indeed did say "I cannot come." But why could he not? he had married a wife. But did this make him unable to come? He had spoken the truth, if he had said, I have married a wife and *will not* come. The others who were invited, excused themselves, one on the ground that he had bought a piece of ground, and must needs go and see it. He *would not* come. The other had bought a yoke of oxen, and wished to prove them, and he *would not* come. They were wedded to the things of this world. They loved the world more than God. They were *unwilling* to leave all and follow Christ. This parable of the supper is designed to illustrate the Gospel offer, and the rejection of it by sinners. And it is worthy of remark, that their refusal to come to the feast, is referred to unwillingness, and not to conscious inability. The conscience of a sinner may at times urge upon him the duty of repenting and believing, but his heart and will draw back, and rebel. And he may mistake the counsel of his inward monitor, for the inclination of his will. The sinner in rejecting Christ, is sensibly influenced by considerations which

appeal to his will. He objects to the terms of salvation as too rigid and self-denying. He is unwilling to give up the world, or to part with some favourite sin, which must be abjured in coming to Christ. Such considerations decide his preference to remain as he is. Yet they are but motives presented to his will, and by which it is influenced; and do not arise from any conscious inability. No sinner, therefore, can say with truth "I would be saved, but God will not save me." For this is what Christ says of the sinner, "How often would I have gathered you together as a hen gathereth her brood under her wings, but YE WOULD NOT." Sinners are sometimes disposed to cast the blame upon God. The man with one talent attempted this by saying to his Lord, "I knew thee that thou art a hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strewed." But his Lord cast back upon him, the guilt of misimprovement, and stigmatized him as a wicked and slothful servant.

It is a mournful fact, and one strikingly illustrative of the point in hand, that sinners are contented with their inability. They are satisfied that it should be so. They are willingly what they are in this respect, "my people love to have it so." This inability excites within them no anxiety about eternity. It alarms no slumbering fears. It begets no dread despair. It extorts no piercing cry for help. It wrings from their eyes no tears of bitter penitence. Instead of mourning over it as their sin, they offer it as an apology for sin. Instead of being humbled in the dust and led to cry for mercy, some rely upon it as a license to continue in rebellion, and thus glory in their shame. Do you say that you *cannot* be holy? you *prefer* to be unholy. Do you say that you *cannot* forsake your sins? you *love* and *enjoy* them. Do you say that you *cannot* come to Christ? you *choose* to stay away. Sinners "*will not* frame their doings to turn unto the Lord." Hosea v. 4. They will not stir themselves up to lay hold on God. They will not attempt to stretch forth their withered hands at his bidding.

If the sinner supposes himself to be willing to repent and believe, we may address to him the language of Jeremiah, "How long shall thy vain thoughts lodge within thee." Jer. iv. 14. It is a willingness based upon inadmissible terms, and upon reservations irreconcilable with gospel sincerity. God is willing to give his blessing to all who are willing to receive it. If the sinner be willing, why is he not reconciled and blessed? Is it because adequate ability to repent is withheld? Then the substance of the sinner's excuse is a charge against God, "Why hast thou made me thus?" Rom. ix. 20. If the sinner is willing to be reconciled and yet continues to live at enmity with

God, it must be because God is unwilling; if so, the language of that sinner's heart is "why doth he yet find fault?" "Nay, but O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, why hast thou made me thus?"

Sinners are apt to confound a willingness to escape hell, with a willingness to come to Christ; and a desire to be happy, with a desire to be holy. But these things are widely different, the one from the other. This confusion of distinguishable desires, arises out of imperfect and erroneous views of the nature of heaven, and of its happiness and employments. It is said of sinners that they "hate knowledge and do not choose the fear of the Lord." Prov. i. 29.

Indeed when a sinner is made willing to come to Christ, he is not able of himself to follow him, and to hold on his way of faith. After he has received Christ Jesus the Lord, he needs continued help and grace, to walk in him. The spirit may be willing, but the flesh weak. Paul declared that to will was present with him, but how to perform that which is good, he found not. Rom. vii. 18. For the good he *would*, he *did* not, and the evil which he would not, that he did; verse 19. This he attributed to sin that still dwelt in him; verse 20. Hence he complains of a warfare between the law of his members, and the law of his (now renewed) mind; verse 23. "So that it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy." Rom. ix. 16. The apostle calls his inability his sin. Rom. vii. 20. And yet it was an inability which he could not remove: for he cries out "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" verse 24. He did not suppose that he could deliver himself, on the contrary he attributes to God his ability to serve Him with his mind. "I thank God, through Jesus Christ our Lord;" verse 25. This indwelling sin which hindered him from doing the good he would, was not laid to Paul's charge for his condemnation, because he consented not to it, but delighted in the law of God after the inward man; verse 22. But in the case of an impenitent sinner, who serves God neither with his mind nor flesh, this inability is regarded as a sufficient ground of condemnation; and cannot, therefore, be named as his excuse for impenitency. Besides, it ought to be borne in mind, that sinners plead their inability as their *infirmity*, and not as their sin. They overlook the fact that their inability is their sin. Viewing inability in this light, they are not fully convinced of its existence; for a sinner is described in the third chapter of Revelation, verse 17, as saying "I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing," and yet as

‘Knowing not that he is wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked.’ To plead inability as an infirmity, is to be ignorant of its criminality, and is only equalled in perverseness and folly by the plea of a murderer, who relies, for an escape from punishment, upon the excuse that his aversion to the man he has slain was unconquerable, and his inclination to take his life, was irresistible; a circumstance which enhances his guilt rather than extenuates his offence.

The design of this discussion has been to show that there is in the doctrine of human helplessness and dependence, no impeachment of the divine character and justice. David confesses and bewails his wilful transgressions, and his native depravity, in which latter this inability consists, in order that God might be justified when he speaks, and clear when he judges. Ps. li. 1—5. It was the further design of this discussion, thus to wrest from the sinner’s hand the feeble and unhallowed weapon with which he would contend against God and his government; and in love to the sinner, to tear away from beneath him the sandy foundation on which he stands, in self-justification and in the wilful indulgence of vain, delusive, and destructive hopes of ultimate acquittal at the bar of God; and thus arouse him from the dream of a false security, before it be forever too late, and bring him, if possible, to the foot of the cross, without excuse, convicted and self-condemned, to look upon Him whom he had pierced, and mourn.

THE END.