

slavish fear? If it were so, one had better be a slave to God with a trembling heart, than a free man to the devil, with a seared conscience and a heart of adamant. But it is not so; you may love him, and thus fear him too; yea, you ought to do it, though you were saints of the first magnitude. See Psalm cxix. 120; Matt. x. 28; Luke xii. 5; Heb. xii. 28, 29. Although you have passed the gulph of wrath, being in Jesus Christ, yet it is but reasonable that your hearts should shiver when you look back to it. Your sin still deserves wrath, even as the sins of others; and it would be terrible to be in a fiery furnace, although by a miracle we were so protected against it, as that it could not harm us.

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### PART III.

#### MAN'S UTTER INABILITY TO RECOVER HIMSELF.

*For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.*—ROMANS v. 6.

*No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him.*—JOHN v. 44.

WE have now had a view of the total corruption of man's nature, and that load of wrath which lies on him, that gulf of misery into which he is plunged in his natural state. But there is one part of his misery that deserves particular consideration; namely, his utter inability to recover himself; the knowledge of which is necessary for the due humiliation of a sinner. What I design here, is only to propose a few things, whereby to convince the unregenerate man of this his inability; that he may see an absolute need of Christ and of the power of his grace.

As a man that is fallen into a pit cannot be supposed to help himself out of it, but by one of two ways; either by doing all himself alone, or taking hold of, and improving, the help offered him by others: so an unconverted man cannot be supposed to help himself out of his natural state, but either in the way of the law, or covenant of works, by doing all himself without Christ; or else in the way of the Gospel, or covenant of grace, by exerting his own strength to lay hold upon, and to make use of the help offered him by a Saviour. But, alas! the unconverted man is dead in the pit, and cannot help himself either of these ways; not the first way; for the

first text tells us, that when our Lord came to help us, "we were without strength," unable to recover ourselves. We were ungodly, therefore under a burden of guilt and wrath; yet "without strength," unable to stand under it; and unable to throw it off, or get from under it: so that all mankind would have undoubtedly perished, had not "Christ died for the ungodly," and brought help to those who could never have recovered themselves. But when Christ comes and offers help to sinners, cannot they take it? Cannot they improve help when it comes to their hands? No, the second text tells, they cannot; "No man can come unto me," &c.—that is, believe in me, John vi. 44, "except the Father draw him." This is a drawing which enables them to come, who, till then could not come; and therefore could not help themselves by improving the help offered. It is a drawing which is always effectual; for it can be no less than "hearing and learning the Father," which, whoever partakes of, cometh to Christ, ver. 45. Therefore it is not drawing in the way of mere moral suasion, which may be, yea, and always is effectual. But it is drawing by mighty power, Eph. i. 12, absolutely necessary for those who have no power in themselves to come and take hold of the offered help.

Hearken then, O unregenerate man, and be convinced that as thou art in a most miserable state by nature, so thou art utterly unable to recover thyself any way. Thou art ruined; and what way wilt thou go to work, to recover thyself? Which of the two ways wilt thou choose? Wilt thou try it alone; or wilt thou make use of help? Wilt thou fall on the way of works, or on the way of the Gospel? I know very well that thou wilt not so much as try the way of the Gospel, till once thou hast found the recovery impracticable in the way of the law. Therefore, we shall begin where corrupt nature teaches men to begin, namely, at the way of the law of works.

I. Sinner, I would have thee to believe that thy working will never effect it. Work, and do thy best; thou wilt never be able to work thyself out of this state of corruption and wrath. Thou must have Christ, else thou wilt perish eternally. It is only "Christ in you" that can be the hope of glory. But if thou wilt needs try it, then I must lay before thee, from the unalterable word of the living God, two things which thou must do for thyself. If thou canst do them, it must be yielded, that thou art able to recover thyself; but if not, then thou canst do nothing this way for thy recovery.

1. "If thou wilt enter into life keep the commandments," Matt. xix. 17. That is, if thou wilt by doing enter into life, then perfectly keep the ten commandments; for the object of these words

is to beat down the pride of the man's heart, and to let him see an absolute need of a Saviour, from the impossibility of keeping the law. The answer is given suitably to the address. Our Lord checks him for his compliment, "Good Master," ver. 16, telling him, "There is none good but one, that is God," ver. 17. As if he had said, You think yourself a good man, and me another; but where goodness is spoken of, men and angels may veil their faces before the good God. As to his question, wherein he discovered his legal disposition, Christ does not answer him, saying, "Believe and thou shalt be saved;" that would not have been so seasonable in the case of one who thought he could do well enough for himself, if he but knew "what good he should do;" but, suitable to the humour the man was in, he bids him "keep the commandments;" keep them nicely and accurately, as those that watch malefactors in prison, lest any of them escape, and their life be taken for those which escape. See then, O unregenerate man, what thou canst do in this matter; for if thou wilt recover thyself in this way, thou must perfectly keep the commandments of God.

(1.) Thy obedience must be perfect, in respect of the principle of it; that is, thy soul, the principle of action, must be perfectly pure, and altogether without sin. For the law requires all moral perfection; not only actual, but habitual: and so condemns original sin; impurity of nature, as well as of actions. Now, if thou canst bring this to pass, thou wilt be able to answer that question of Solomon, so as never one of Adam's posterity could yet answer it, "Who can say, I have made my heart clean?" Prov. xx. 9. But if thou canst not, the very want of this perfection is sin, and so lays thee open to the curse and cuts thee off from life. Yea, it makes all thine actions, even thy best actions, sinful: "For who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?" Job xiv. 4. And dost thou think by sin to help thyself out of sin and misery?

(2.) Thy obedience must also be perfect in parts. It must be as broad as the whole law of God: if thou lackest one thing, thou art undone; for the law denounces the curse on him that continueth not in every thing written therein, Gal. iii. 10. Thou must give internal and external obedience to the whole law; keep all the commands in heart and life. If thou break any one of them, that will insure thy ruin. A vain thought, or idle word, will still shut thee up under the curse.

(3.) It must be perfect in respect of degrees; as was the obedience of Adam, while he stood in his innocence. This the law requires, and will accept of no less, Matt. xxii. 37, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God, with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and

with all thy mind." If one degree of that love, required by the law, be wanting; if each part of thy obedience be not brought up to the greatest height commanded; that want is a breach of the law, and so leaves thee still under the curse. A man may bring as many buckets of water to a house that is on fire, as he is able to carry; and yet it may be consumed, and will be so, if he bring not as many as will quench the fire. Even so, although thou shouldst do what thou art able, in keeping the commandments, if thou fail in the least degree of obedience, which the law enjoins, thou art certainly ruined for ever; unless thou take hold of Christ, renouncing all thy righteousness, as filthy rags. See Rom. x. 5; Gal. iii. 10.

(4.) It must be perpetual, as the man Christ's obedience was, who always did the things which pleased the Father; for the tenor of the law is, "Cursed is he that continueth not in all things written in the law to do them." Hence, though Adam's obedience was, for a while, absolutely perfect; yet because at length he failed in one point, namely, in eating the forbidden fruit, he fell under the curse of the law. If a man were to live a dutiful subject to his prince, till the close of his days, and then conspire against him, he must die for his treason. Even so, though thou shouldst, all the time of thy life, live in perfect obedience to the law of God, and yet at the hour of death only entertain a vain thought, or pronounce an idle word, that idle word, or vain thought, would blot out all thy former righteousness, and ruin thee; namely, in this way in which thou art seeking to recover thyself.

Now, such is the obedience which thou must perform, 'if thou wouldst recover thyself in the way of the law.—But though thou wouldst thus obey, the law stakes thee down in the state of wrath, till another demand of it be satisfied.

2. Thou must pay what thou owest. It is undeniable that thou art a sinner; and whatever thou mayest be in time to come, justice must be satisfied for thy sins already committed. The honour of the law must be maintained, by thy suffering the denounced wrath. It may be thou hast changed thy course of life, or art now resolved to do it, and to set about keeping the commands of God: but what hast thou done, or what wilt thou do, with the old debt? Your obedience to God, though it were perfect, is a debt due to him, for the time wherein it is performed; and can no more satisfy for former sins, than a tenant's paying the current year's rent can satisfy the landlord for all arrears. Can the paying of new debts acquit a man from old accounts? Nay, deceive not yourselves; you will find these laid up in store with God, and sealed up among

his treasures, Deut. xxxii. 34. It remains then, that either thou must bear that wrath, to which for thy sin thou art liable, according to the law; or else thou must acknowledge that thou canst not bear it, and thereupon have recourse to the surety, the Lord Jesus Christ. Let me now ask thee, Art thou able to satisfy the justice of God? Canst thou pay thy own debt? Surely not: for, as he is the infinite God, whom thou hast offended; the punishment, being suited to the quality of the offence, must be infinite.—But thy punishment, or sufferings for sin, cannot be infinite in value, for thou art a finite creature: therefore, they must be infinite in duration or continuance; that is, they must be eternal. And so all thy sufferings in this world are but an earnest of what thou must suffer in the world to come.

Now, sinner, if thou canst answer these demands, thou mayest recover thyself in the way of the law. But art thou not conscious of thy inability to do any of these things; much more to do them all? yet if thou do not all, thou dost nothing. Turn then, to what course of life thou wilt, thou art still in a state of wrath. Screw up thine obedience to the greatest height thou canst; suffer what God lays upon thee; yea, add, if thou wilt, to the burden, and walk under all without the least impatience: yet all this will not satisfy the demands of the law; therefore thou art still a ruined creature. Alas, sinner! what art thou doing, while thou strivest to help thyself, but dost not receive, and unite with, Jesus Christ? Thou art labouring in the fire, wearying thyself for very vanity; labouring to enter into heaven, by the door which Adam's sin so bolted, that neither he, nor any of his lost posterity, can ever enter by it. Dost thou not see the flaming sword of justice, keeping thee off from the tree of life? Dost thou not hear the law denouncing a curse on thee, for all thou art doing; even for thy obedience, thy prayers, thy tears, thy reformation of life, and so on; because, being under the law's dominion, thy best works are not so good as it requires them to be under the pain of the curse? Believe it, sirs, if you live and die out of Christ, without being actually united to him as the second Adam, the life-giving Spirit, and without coming under the covert of his atoning blood; though you should do the utmost that any man can do, in keeping the commands of God, you can never see the face of God in peace. If you should, from this moment, bid an eternal farewell to this world's joys, and all the affairs thereof, and henceforth busy yourselves with nothing but the salvation of your souls; if you should go into some wilderness, live upon the grass of the field, and be companions to dragons and owls; if you should retire to some dark cavern of the earth, and weep

there for your sins, until you had wept yourselves blind; if you should confess with your tongue, until it cleave to the roof of your mouth; pray, till your knees grow hard as horns; fast, till your body become like a skeleton; and, after all this, give it to be burnt; the word is gone out of the Lord's mouth in righteousness, and cannot return, that you shall perish for ever, notwithstanding all this, as not being in Christ: John xiv. 6, "No man cometh unto the Father, but by me." Acts iv. 12, "Neither is there salvation in any other." Mark xvi. 16, "He that believeth not, shall be damned."

*Objection.* But God is a merciful God, and he knows that we are not able to answer these demands; we hope therefore to be saved, if we do-as well as we can, and keep the commands as well as we are able. *Answer* 1. Though thou art able to do many things, thou art not able to do one thing right: thou canst do nothing acceptable to God, being out of Christ, John xv. 5, "Without me ye can do nothing." An unrenewed man, as thou art, can do nothing but sin; as we have already proved. Thy best actions are sin, and so they increase thy debt to justice: how then can it be expected they should lessen it? 2. Though God should offer to save men, upon condition that they did all they could do, in obedience to his commands, yet we have reason to think, that those who should attempt it, would never be saved: for where is the man that does as well as he can? Who sees not many false steps he has made, which he might have avoided? There are so many things to be done, so many temptations to carry us out of the road of duty, and our nature is so very apt to be set on fire of hell, that we surely must fail, even in some point that is within the compass of our natural abilities. But, 3. Though thou shouldst do all thou art able to do, in vain dost thou hope to be saved in that way. What word of God is this hope of thine founded on? It is neither founded on law nor gospel; therefore it is but a delusion. It is not founded on the Gospel; for the Gospel leads the soul out of itself, to Jesus Christ for all; and it establishes the law, Rom. iii. 31. Whereas this hope of yours cannot be established, but on the ruins of the law, which God will magnify and make honourable. Hence it appears, that it is not founded on the law neither. When God set Adam a-working for happiness to himself and his posterity, perfect obedience was the condition required of him; and the curse was denounced in case of disobedience. The law being broken by him, he and his posterity were subjected to the penalty for sin committed; and withal were still bound to perfect obedience: for it is absurd to think, that man's sinning, and suffering for his sin, should

free him from his duty of obedience to his Creator. When Christ came in the room of the elect, to purchase their salvation, the terms were the same. Justice had the elect under arrest: if he is desirous to deliver them, the terms are known. He must satisfy for their sin, by suffering the punishment due to it; he must do what they cannot do, namely, obey the law perfectly, and so fulfil all righteousness. Accordingly, all this he did, and so became "the end of the law for righteousness, to every one that believeth," Rom. x. 4. And dost thou think that God will abate these terms as to thee, when his own Son got no abatement of them? Expect it not, though thou shouldst beg it with tears of blood; for if they prevailed, they must prevail against the truth, justice, and honour of God: Gal. iii. 10, "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things, which are written in the book of the law to do them." Ver. 12, "And the law is not of faith: but, the man that doth them, shall live in them." It is true, that God is merciful: but cannot he be merciful, unless he save you in a way that is neither consistent with his law, nor his Gospel? Have not his goodness and mercy sufficiently appeared, in sending the Son of his love, to do "what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh?" He has provided help for those who cannot help themselves: but thou, insensible of thine own weakness, must needs think to recover thyself by thine own works, while thou art no more able to do it, than to remove mountains of brass out of their place.

Wherefore I conclude, that thou art utterly unable to recover thyself, in the way of works, or by the law. O that thou wouldst conclude the same concerning thyself!

II. Let us try next what the sinner can do to recover himself, in the way of the gospel. It may be thou thinkest, that thou canst not do all by thyself alone, yet Jesus Christ offering thee help, thou canst of thyself embrace it, and use it for thy recovery. But, O sinner, be convinced of thine absolute need of the grace of Christ: for truly, there is help offered, but thou canst not accept it: there is a rope cast out to draw shipwrecked sinners to land, but, alas! they have no hands to lay hold of it. They are like infants exposed in the open field, who must starve, though their food be lying by them, unless some one put it in their mouths. To convince natural men of this, let it be considered,

1. That although Christ is offered in the gospel, yet they cannot believe in him. Saving faith is the faith of God's elect; the special gift of God to them, wrought in them by his Spirit. Salvation is offered to them that will believe in Christ, but how can you believe? John v. 44. It is offered to those that will come to Christ; but

“no man can come unto him, except the Father draw him.” It is offered to those that will look to him, as lifted on the pole of the gospel, Isa. xlv. 22; but the natural man is spiritually blind, Rev. iii. 17; and as to the things of the Spirit of God, he cannot know them, for they are spiritually discerned, 1 Cor. ii. 14. Nay, whosoever will, he is welcome; let him come, Rev. xxii. 17; but there must be a day of power on the sinner, before he can be willing, Psalm cx. 3.

2. Man naturally has nothing wherewithal to improve, for his recovery, the help brought in by the gospel. He is cast away in a state of wrath; and is bound hand and foot, so that he cannot lay hold of the cords of love thrown out to him in the gospel. The most cunning artificer cannot work without tools; neither can the most skilful musician play well on an instrument that is out of tune. How can any one believe, or repent, whose understanding is darkness, Eph. v. 8; whose heart is a stony heart, inflexible, insensible, Ezek. xxxvi. 26; whose affections are wholly disordered and dis-tempered; who is averse to good, and bent to evil? The arms of natural abilities are too short to reach supernatural help: hence those who most excel in them, are often most estranged from spiritual things, Matt. xi. 25, “Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent.”

3. Man cannot work a saving change on himself: but so changed he must be, else he can neither believe nor repent, nor ever see heaven. No action can be without a suitable principle. Believing, repenting, and the like, are the product of the new nature; and can never be produced by the old corrupt nature. Now, what can the natural man do in this matter? He must be regenerate; begotten again unto a lively hope; but as the child cannot be active in his own generation, so a man cannot be active but passive only, in his own regeneration. The heart is shut against Christ: man cannot open it, only God can do it by his grace, Acts xvi. 14. He is dead in sin; he must be quickened, raised out of his grave; who can do this but God himself? Eph. ii. 1—5. Nay, he must be “created in Christ Jesus, unto good works,” Eph. ii. 10. These are works of omnipotence, and can be done by no less a power.

4. Man, in his depraved state, is under an utter inability to do any thing truly good, as was proved before at large: how then can he obey the gospel? His nature is the very reverse of the gospel: how can he, of himself, fall in with that plan of salvation, and accept the offered remedy? The corruption of man’s nature infallibly includes his utter inability to recover himself in any way, and whoso is convinced of the one, must needs admit the other; for they



stand and fall together. Were all the purchase of Christ offered to the unregenerate man, for one good thought, he cannot command it, 2 Cor. iii. 5, "Not that we are sufficient of ourselves, to think any thing as of ourselves." Were it offered on condition of a good word, yet "How can ye, being evil, speak good things? Matt. xii. 35. Nay, were it left to yourselves, to choose what is easiest, Christ himself tells you, John xv. 5, "Without me, ye can do nothing."

5. The natural man cannot but resist the Lord's offering to help him; yet that resistance is infallibly overcome in the elect, by converting grace. Can the stony heart but choose to resist the stroke? There is not only an inability, but an enmity and obstinacy in man's will by nature. God knows, O natural man, whether thou knowest it or not, that "thou art obstinate, and thy neck is an iron sinew, and thy brow brass," Isa. xlvi. 4, and cannot be overcome, but by him, who hath "broken the gates of brass, and cut the bars of iron in sunder." Hence, commonly speaking, there is such hard work in converting a sinner. Sometimes he seems to be caught in the net of the gospel; yet quickly he slips away again. The hook catches hold of him; but he struggles, till, getting free of it, he goes away with a bleeding wound. When good hopes are conceived of him, by those that travail in birth for the forming of Christ in him, there is oft-times nothing brought forth but wind. The deceitful heart makes many contrivances to avoid a Saviour, and cheat the man of his eternal happiness. Thus the natural man lies sunk in a state of sin and wrath, and utterly unable to recover himself.

*Objection 1.* If we be under an utter inability to do any good, how can God require us to do it? *Answer.* God making man upright, Eccl. vii. 29, gave him a power to do every thing that he should require of him; this power man lost by his own fault. We were bound to serve God, and do whatever he commanded us, as being his creatures; and also, we were under the superadded tie of a covenant, for that purpose. Now, we having, by our own fault, disabled ourselves, shall God lose his right of requiring our task, because we have thrown away the strength he gave us whereby to perform it? Has the creditor no right to require payment of his money, because the debtor has squandered it away, and is not able to pay him? Truly, if God can require no more of us than we are able to do, we need no more to save us from wrath, but to make ourselves unable for every duty, and to incapacitate ourselves for serving God any manner of way, as profane men frequently do: and so the deeper a man is plunged in sin, he will be the more secure from wrath; for where God can require no duty of us, we do not sin in omitting it;

and where there is no sin, there can be no wrath. As to what may be urged by the unhumbled soul, against the putting our stock in Adam's hand, the righteousness of that dispensation was explained before. But moreover, the unrenewed man is daily throwing away the very remains of natural abilities, that rational light and strength which are to be found amongst the ruins of mankind. Nay, farther, he will not believe his own utter inability to help himself; so that out of his own mouth, he must be condemned. Even those who make their natural impotency too good a covert to their sloth, do, with others, delay the work of turning to God from time to time, and, under convictions, make large promises of reformation, which afterwards they never regard, and delay their repentance to a death-bed, as if they could help themselves in a moment; which shews them to be far from a due sense of their natural inability, whatever they pretend.

Now, if God can require of men the duty they are not able to do, he can in justice punish them for their not doing it, notwithstanding their inability. If he has power to exact the debt of obedience, he has also power to cast the insolvent debtor into prison, for his not paying it. Further, though unregenerate men have no gracious abilities, yet they want not natural abilities which nevertheless they will not improve. There are many things they can do, which they do not; they will not do them, and therefore their damnation will be just. Nay, all their inability to do good is voluntary; they will not come to Christ, John v. 40. They will not repent, they will die, Ezek. xviii. 31. So they will be justly condemned; because they will neither turn to God, nor come to Christ; but love their chains better than their liberty, and darkness rather than light, John iii. 19.

*Objection 2.* Why do you then preach Christ to us; call us to come to him, to believe, repent, and use the means of salvation?  
*Answer.* Because it is our duty so to do. It is your duty to accept of Christ, as he is offered in the Gospel; to repent of your sins, and to be holy in all manner of conversation: these things are commanded you of God; and his command, not your ability, is the measure of your duty. Moreover, these calls and exhortations are the means that God is pleased to make use of, for converting his elect, and working grace in their hearts: to them, "faith cometh by hearing," Rom. x. 17, while they are as unable to help themselves as the rest of mankind are. Upon very good grounds may we, at the command of God, who raiseth the dead, go to their graves, and cry in his name, "Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light," Eph. v. 14. And seeing

the elect are not to be known and distinguished from others before conversion; as the sun shines on the blind man's face, and the rain falls on the rocks as well as on the fruitful plains; so we preach Christ to all, and shoot the arrow at a venture, which God himself directs as he sees fit. Moreover, these calls and exhortations are not altogether in vain, even to those who are not converted by them. Such persons may be convinced, though they be not converted: although they be not sanctified by these means, yet they may be restrained by them, from running into that excess of wickedness, which otherwise they would arrive at. The means of grace serve, as it were, to enbalm many dead souls, which are never quickened by them: though they do not restore them to life, yet they keep them from putrefying, as otherwise they would do. Finally, Though you cannot recover yourselves, nor take hold of the saving help offered to you in the Gospel; yet even by the power of nature, you may use the outward and ordinary means, whereby Christ communicates the benefit of redemption to ruined sinners, who are utterly unable to recover themselves out of the state of sin and wrath. You may and can, if you please, do many things that would set you in a fair way for help from the Lord Jesus Christ. You may go so far on, as not to be far from the kingdom of God, as the discreet Scribe had done, Mark xii. 34, though, it should seem, he was destitute of supernatural abilities. Though you cannot cure yourselves, yet you may come to the pool, where many such diseased persons as you are, have been cured; though you have none to put you into it, yet you may lie at the side of it: "Who knows but the Lord may return, and leave a blessing behind him?" as in the case of the impotent man, recorded in John v. 5—8. I hope Satan does not chain you to your houses, nor stake you down in your fields on the Lord's day; but you are at liberty and can wait at the posts of wisdom's doors if you will. When you come thither he does not beat drums at your ears, that you cannot hear what is said; there is no force upon you, obliging you to apply all you hear to others; you may apply to yourselves what belongs to your state and condition. When you go home, you are not fettered in your houses, where perhaps no religious discourse is to be heard; but you may retire to some separate place, where you can meditate, and exercise your consciences with suitable questions upon what you have heard. You are not possessed with a dumb devil, that you cannot get your mouths opened in prayer to God. You are not so driven out of your beds to your worldly business, and from your worldly business to your beds again, but you might, if you would, make some prayer to God upon the case of your perishing souls.—

You may examine yourselves as to the state of your souls, in a solemn manner, as in the presence of God; you may discern that you have no grace, and that you are lost and undone without it; and you may cry unto God for it. These things are within the compass of natural abilities, and may be practised where there is no grace. It must aggravate your guilt, that you will not be at so much pains about the state and case of your precious souls. If you do not what you can, you will be condemned, not only for the want of grace, but for your despising it.

*Objection 3.* But all this is needless, seeing we are utterly unable to help ourselves out of the state of sin and wrath. *Answer.* Give not place to that delusion, which puts asunder what God hath joined, namely, the use of means, and a sense of our own impotency, If ever the spirit of God graciously influence your souls, you will become thoroughly sensible of your absolute inability, and yet enter upon a vigorous use of means. You will do for yourselves, as if you were to do all; and yet overlook all you do, as if you had done nothing. Will you do nothing for yourselves, because you cannot do all? Lay down no such impious conclusion against your own souls. Do what you can; and, it may be, while you are doing what you can for yourselves, God will do for you what you cannot. "Understandest thou what thou readest?" said Philip to the eunuch; "How can I," said he "except some man should guide me?" Acts viii. 30, 31. He could not understand the scripture he read, yet he could read it: he did what he could, he read; and while he was reading, God sent him an interpreter. The Israelites were in a great strait at the Red Sea; and how could they help themselves, when on the one hand were mountains, and on the other the enemy in pursuit; when Pharaoh and his host were behind them, and the Red Sea before them? What could they do?—"Speak unto the children of Israel," saith the Lord to Moses, "that they go forward," Exod. xiv. 15. For what end should they go forward? Can they make a passage to themselves through the sea? No; but let them go forward, saith the Lord: though they cannot turn the sea to dry land, yet they can go forward to the shore. So they did; and when they did what they could, God did for them what they could not do.

*Question.* Has God promised to convert and save those who, in the use of means, do what they can towards their own relief? *Answer.* We may not speak wickedly for God: natural men, being strangers to the covenant of promise, Eph. ii. 12, have no such promise made to them. Nevertheless they do not act rationally unless they exert the powers they have, and do what they can

For, 1. It is possible this course may succeed with them. If you do what you can, it may be, God will do for you what you cannot do for yourselves. This is sufficient to determine a man in a matter of the utmost importance, such as this is, Acts viii. 22, "Pray God, if perhaps the thought of thy heart may be forgiven thee." Joel ii. 14, "Who knoweth if he will return?" If success may be, the trial should be. If, in a wreck at sea, all the sailors and passengers betake themselves each to a broken board for safety; and one of them should see all the rest perish, notwithstanding their utmost endeavour to save themselves: yet the very possibility of escaping by that means, would determine that one still to do his best with his board. Why then do not you reason with yourselves, as the four lepers did, who sat at the gate of Samaria? 2 Kings vii. 3, 4. Why do you not say, "If we sit still," not doing what we can, "we die;" let us put it to a trial; if we be saved, "we shall live;" if not "we shall but die?" 2. It is probable this course may succeed; God is good and merciful; he loves to surprise men with his grace, and is often "found of them that sought him not," Isa. lxxv. 1. If you do this, you are so far in the road of your duty; and you are using the means, which the Lord is wont to bless, for men's spiritual recovery: you lay yourselves in the way of the great Physician; and so it is probable you may be healed. Lydia went, with others, to the place "where prayer was wont to be made;" and "the Lord opened her heart," Acts xvi. 13, 14. You plough and sow, though nobody can tell you for certain that you will get so much as your seed again: you use means for the recovery of your health, though you are not sure they will succeed. In these cases probability determines you; and why not in this also? Importance, we see, does very much with men: therefore pray, meditate, desire help of God; be much at the throne of grace, supplicating for grace; and do not faint. Though God regard you not, who in your present state are but one mass of sin, universally depraved, and vitiated in all the powers of your soul; yet he may regard prayer, meditation, and the like means of his own appointment, and he may bless them to you.—Wherefore, if you will not do what you can, you are not only dead, but you declare yourselves unworthy of eternal life.

To conclude.—Let the saints admire the freedom and power of grace, which came to them in their helpless condition, made their chains fall off, the iron gate to open to them; raised the fallen creatures, and brought them out of the state of sin and wrath, wherein they would have lain and perished, had not they been mercifully visited. Let the natural man be sensible of his utter inability to

recover himself. Know, that thou art without strength : and canst not come to Christ, till thou be drawn. Thou art lost, and canst not help thyself. This may shake the foundation of your hopes, if you never saw your absolute need of Christ and his grace, but think to contrive for yourself by your civility, morality, drowsy wishes, and duties ; and by a faith and repentance, which have sprung out of your natural powers, without the power and efficacy of the grace of Christ. O be convinced of your absolute need of Christ, and his overcoming grace ; believe your utter inability to recover yourself ; that so you may be humbled, shaken out of your self-confidence, and lie down in dust and ashes, groaning out your miserable case before the Lord. A proper sense of your natural impotence, the impotence of depraved human nature, would be a step towards a delivery.

Thus far of man's natural state, the state of entire depravation.