

“More on Human Inability”  
John 6:40-46  
(Preached at Trinity, May 1, 2019)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

**Disclaimer:** These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. Jesus declares the true Bread from Heaven.  
**John 6:32-33 NAU** - "Truly, truly, I say to you, it is not Moses who has given you the bread out of heaven, but it is My Father who gives you the true bread out of heaven. <sup>33</sup> "For the bread of God is that which comes down out of heaven, and gives life to the world."
2. The words of Jesus were absolutely incomprehensible to them. The day before they witnessed the miracle of 5000 + people being fed with five barley loaves and two fish. They could not grasp the meaning of it all. And they could not comprehend the One who stood before them.
3. Jesus made the most profound statement to them.  
**John 6:35 NAU** - "I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me will not hunger, and he who believes in Me will never thirst."
  - A. Jesus is declaring Himself to be the true bread, the Bread of Life. Coming to Christ demands embracing His claims and following Him as Lord and King. Believing in Christ demands resting upon His accomplished work as our Redeemer.
  - B. Jesus was standing before them. They were seeing Him with their eyes and hearing Him with their ears. They were witnessing His miracles. Why is it they would not come to Him nor believe Him?  
**John 6:36 NAU** - "But I said to you that you have seen Me, and yet do not believe."

They did not believe Him. They grumbled at Him. In fact, they killed Him. Why?
4. The same question could be asked today. We have the infallible Word of God and the Gospel it declares. We see the testimony of the transformed lives it produces. Why is it few receive the Gospel and follow Christ? Why is it so few believe the promise of eternal life for those who trust Him alone as Savior?

The plain truth is they are not able. Jesus says in **Verse 44** they cannot come. Again, **Verse 65**  
**John 6:65 NAU** - "And He was saying, "For this reason I have said to you, that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted him from the Father."

A.W. Pink explained it well –

“The depravity of man is, from the human side, the only thing which will explain the general rejection of the Gospel. The only satisfactory answer to the questions, Why is not Christ cordially received by all to whom He is presented? Why do the majority of men despise and reject Him? is man is a fallen creature, a depraved being who loves sin and hates holiness.”<sup>1</sup>

5. In **Chapter 5** we saw the account of multitudes of sick people laying around the Pool of Bethesda, unable to help themselves.
  - A. One man in particular had been sick for 38 years. In his helpless condition he could not move himself when the waters were stirred, thus he remained in his condition. I presented him as an example of the depravity of man, helpless to restore himself to God.
  - B. But the man at the Pool of Bethesda doesn’t give us the full picture of depravity. He wasn’t dead. No matter how desperate his condition, he could still reach out to Christ. When Jesus asked him, “Do you wish to get well,” he was able to answer.
  - C. The lost man has zero ability to come to Christ.
  
- I. Jesus is describing moral inability.
  - A. The lost man is not able to come to Christ for salvation
    1. Jesus is using a word that describes ability  
 "No one can come to Me"  
 δύναται – it expresses capacity, power, or ability  
 It is a common word in the NT used 210 times.  
**Matthew 3:9 NAS** - "God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham."  
**Matthew 7:18 NAU** - "A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit."  
**John 3:3 NAU** - "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."
    2. The lost man is not able to come to Him. He has zero ability.
      - a. Jesus isn’t describing physical ability. They fall has not made us unable to move physically.
      - b. Jesus is not describing volitional freedom of the will. The fall has not taken away our ability to make choices.
      - c. Jesus is describing moral ability.  
 Sin has so corrupted the heart that the lost man is completely oblivious to his desperate need. No place is it stated clearer than in these verses.

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<sup>1</sup> Pink, *Exposition of the Gospel of John*, (Swengel, PA: Bible Truth Depot, 1923–1945), 337.

- B. This issue has been debated for most of church history
1. Many have written on the subject of the bondage of the will including Augustine, Luther, and Jonathan Edwards.
  2. Augustine debated with Pelagius who insisted that the fall of Adam did not affect the disposition of the human will. Pelagius believed that men after the fall are born in the same condition as Adam before the fall. Pelagius taught that man had the ability to do whatever God required of him.  
James Montgomery Boice wrote –  
“Pelagius felt that if we are commanded to do something, we must be able to do it. “Ought” implies “can.” But instead of throwing out the command (which is what most people seem to want to do today), Pelagius threw out the inability, arguing that we can turn from sin, believe on Christ, and pursue obedience in our own strength, entirely unaided by the Holy Spirit.”<sup>2</sup>
  3. Charles Hodge wrote of Pelagian theology: “It makes redemption in the sense of deliverance from sin unnecessary or impossible. It is unnecessary that there should be a redeemer for a race which has not fallen, and which had full ability to avoid all sin or to recover itself from its power. And it is impossible, if free agents are independent of the control of God.”<sup>3</sup>
  4. Jesus is saying in these verses that the fall of Adam had such a profound effect upon the human being that he is completely indisposed from seeking that which might lead to his salvation and reconciliation with God.
  5. The Bible describes the lost man as dead. If he were just sick or weak he might get up and walk to Jesus. But dead people do nothing. Jesus is not speaking of a mere physical limitation. It is moral inability.
    - A. There is a difference between the words “may” and “can.”  
If child asks his parent, “May I go outside and play,” he is asking a question of permission.  
If the child asks, “Can I go outside and play,” he is asking a question of ability. “Am I able to go outside?”
    - B. The lost man may come. There is no physical limitation to his coming. He has permission to come. There is a genuine offer of grace. “Whosoever will may come.” All have permission to come. Mere permission or invitation does not imply ability. It doesn’t imply that anyone “can” come.  
All “may” come but God determines who “will” come.  
**John 6:37** - "All that the Father gives Me will come to Me"

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<sup>2</sup> James Montgomery Boice, *Romans: Justification by Faith*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1991–), 1:57.

<sup>3</sup> Hodge, Charles, *Systematic Theology – Vol II*, (Grand Rapids, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1986), Page 157.

## II. Coming to Christ demands a powerful Divine intervention

"No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him"

- A. Some believe this refers to the general action of the Holy Spirit upon all men
1. They refer to prevenient grace or a grace that enables but does not ensure.
    - a. It is a grace that woos all men by the love of God for all men. It's a grace that leads men to cooperate with God's leading him to Christ.
    - b. It is a grace that can be and is often resisted by sinful men.
  2. The intervention Jesus is referring to here is specific. It is powerful.  
**John 6:37 NAU** - "All that the Father gives Me will come to Me"
- B. The intervention spoken of here by Jesus is a particular, powerful intervention "unless the Father who sent Me draws him"
1. This word is far more powerful than the suggestion the God is "wooing" men or that God is stirring all men to come.
  2. It is from the word, ἔλκω – It literally means "to drag"  
**John 21:6 NAU** - "And He said to them, "Cast the net on the right-hand side of the boat and you will find a *catch*." So they cast, and then they were not able to haul it in because of the great number of fish."  
**Acts 16:19 NAU** - "But when her masters saw that their hope of profit was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the market place before the authorities,"
  3. Jesus is speaking of a particular grace, a powerful grace, an effectual grace. We are born dead in sin. Only God can overcome this spiritual death through regeneration.  
**John 3:3 NAU** - "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."  
 John Owen wrote: "The word rendered *draw*, is always used with the collateral idea of force and exertion, as when a ship is drawn down into the sea, or the body of an animal is dragged along. It is also used of wrestling, bending the bow, stretching sails—indeed of almost every physical act requiring strength and exertion. When employed therefore as here, of the drawing of men to Christ, the word carries with it the idea of a mighty exertion of moral power, such as would be required to overcome the opposing tendencies of sin and unbelief."<sup>4</sup>
  4. God's grace is effectual, irresistible. Man resists but it is ineffective.
  5. You may be asking, what about **Chapter 12**  
**John 12:32 NAU** - "if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself."  
 a. In Chapter 12 Jesus is referring to all men in contrast to the Jews, not all men without exception.  
 b. If Jesus was speaking of all men without exception **Verse 37** would make no sense  
 "All that the Father gives Me will come to Me"  
 c. If the Father gave all men to Christ, then all men would come.

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<sup>4</sup> Owen, *A Commentary, Critical, Expository, and Practical, on the Gospel of John*, (New York: Leavitt & Allen, 1861), 134.

- C. God's powerful "drawing" works powerfully and effectually upon the sinner
1. God opens the spiritually blind man's eyes to see his sin and condemnation. The Law presses upon the consciences of all men, but this conviction of sin is effectual.
  2. Second, God reveals the excellence of the Gospel to the heart. Scripture refers to this as opening the heart.  
**Acts 16:14 NAU** - "A woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple fabrics, a worshiper of God, was listening; and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul."  
 Paul describes it to the Thessalonians  
**1 Thessalonians 1:4-5 NAU** - "knowing, brethren beloved by God, *His* choice of you; <sup>5</sup> for our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as you know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake."
  3. Finally, the Holy Spirit breathes the grace of life enabling us to turn from our sin and but our full faith in the life and work of Christ.  
**2 Thessalonians 2:13 NAU** - "But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth."

#### Conclusion:

1. The teaching of Christ reminds us just how serious our situation is. If salvation is merely a matter of us choosing Christ, then we might feel comfortable in postponing it to a later time of life. But if you realize your situation is so desperate that nothing short of a miracle will help, you'll realize that if there is the slightest desire for Christ it must be the stirring of the Holy Spirit. God commands us:  
**Hebrews 3:7-9 NAS** - "Therefore, just as the Holy Spirit says, "Today if you hear His voice, <sup>8</sup> Do not harden your hearts as when they provoked Me, As in the day of trial in the wilderness, <sup>9</sup> Where your fathers tried *Me* by testing *Me*"
2. How do you know if you are one of the elect? The elect come to Christ.  
**John 6:37 NAU** - "All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out."
  - A. The Bible says,  
**Acts 2:21 NAS** - "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved."  
**Acts 16:31 NAS** - "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you shall be saved"  
**Romans 10:13 NAS** - "Whoever will call upon the name of the LORD will be saved."
  - B. Do you see the wretchedness of your sin?  
 Do you see Jesus Christ as the only way of salvation?  
 Do you desire His salvation? Then call upon Him.  
**Romans 10:13 NAS** - "Whoever will call upon the name of the LORD will be saved."