



Man's Utter Inability to Rescue Himself

For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. Romans 5:6

No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him. John 6.44

by **Thomas Boston** (1676-1732)

The following article has been extracted from Boston's classic work *Human Nature In Its Fourfold State* (Chapter 3, pp. 183-197). This text, which was first published in 1720, is now in the public domain and may be freely copied and distributed. The material was scanned and edited by Shane Rosenthal for *Reformation Ink*.

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.

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. Likewise 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,' that is, believe in me (John 6.44), '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 of the Father,' which, whoever partakes of, come to Christ (verse

45). Therefore it is not drawing in the way of mere moral suasion, which may be, yea, and always is ineffectual. But it is drawing by mighty power (Eph. 1.9), 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 you are in a most miserable state by nature, so you are utterly unable to recover yourself any way. You are ruined; and what way will you go to work to recover yourself? Which of the two ways will you choose? Will you try it alone, or will you make use of help? Will you fall on the way of works, or on the way of the Gospel? I know very well that you will not so much as try the way of the Gospel, till once you have 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.

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

1: 'If thou wilt enter into life keep the commandments' (Matt 19.17). That is, if you will 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' (verse 16), telling him, 'There is none good but one, that is God' (verse 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 revealed 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 you can do in this matter; for if you will recover yourself in this way, you must perfectly keep the commandments of God.

(1) Your obedience must be perfect, in respect of the principle of it; that is, your 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 you can bring this to pass you will 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. 20.9). But if you cannot, the very want of this perfection is sin, and so lays you open to the curse and cuts you off from life. Yea, it makes all your actions, even your best actions, sinful: 'For who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?' (Job 14.4). And do you think by sin to help yourself out of sin and misery?

(2) Your obedience must also be perfect in parts. It must be as broad as the whole law of God: if you lack one thing, you are undone; for the law denounces the curse on him that continues not in every thing written therein (Gal 3.10). You must give Internal and external obedience to the whole law, keep all the commands in heart and life. If you break any one of them, that will ensure your ruin. A vain thought, or idle word, will still shut you 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 22.37), '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 your obedience be not brought up to the greatest height commanded, that want is a breach of the law, and so leaves you 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 you should do what you are able, in keeping the commandments, if you fail in the least degree of obedience which the law enjoins, you are certainly ruined for ever, unless you take hold of Christ, renouncing all your righteousness as filthy rags. (See Rom 10.5; Gal. 3.10).

(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 you should, all the time of your 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 your former righteousness, and ruin you; namely, in this way in which you are seeking to recover yourself.

Now, such is the obedience which you must perform, if you would recover yourself in the way of the law. But though you would thus obey, the law stakes you down in the state of wrath, till another demand of it be satisfied.

2: You must pay what you owe. It is undeniable that you are a sinner; and whatever you may be in time to come, justice must be satisfied for your sins already committed. The honour of the law must be maintained, by your suffering the denounced wrath. It may be you have changed your course of life, or are now resolved to do it, and to set about keeping the commands of God: but what have you done, or what will you 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. 32.34). It remains then, that either you must bear that wrath, to which for your sin you are liable, according to the law; or else you must acknowledge that you cannot bear it, and thereupon have recourse to the Surety, the Lord Jesus Christ. Let me now ask you, Are you able to satisfy the justice of God? Can you pay your own debt? Surely not: for, as He is the infinite God, whom you have offended, the punishment, being suited to the quality of the offence, must be infinite. But your punishment, or sufferings for sin, cannot be infinite in value, for you are a finite creature: therefore, they must be infinite in duration or continuance; that is, they must be eternal. And so all your sufferings in this world are but an earnest of what you must suffer in the world to come.

Now, sinner, if you can answer these demands, you may recover yourself in the way of the law. But are you not conscious of your inability to do any of these things, much more to do them all? yet if you do not all, you do nothing. Turn then to what course of life you will, you are still in a state of wrath. Screw up your obedience to the greatest height you can; suffer what God lays upon you; yea, add, if you will, to the burden, and walk under all without the least impatience: yet all this will not satisfy the demands of the law; therefore you are still a ruined creature. Alas, sinner I what are you doing, while you strive to help yourself, but do not receive, and unite with, Jesus Christ? You are labouring in the fire, wearying yourself 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. Do you not see the flaming sword of justice, keeping you off from the tree of life? Do you not hear the law denouncing a curse on you for all you are doing, even for your obedience, your prayers, your tears, your reformation of life, and so on; because, being under the law's dominion, your 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 will 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 14.6), 'No man cometh unto the Father, but by me (Acts 4.12), 'Neither is there salvation in any other.' (Mark 16.16), '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 I : Though you are able to do many things, you are not able to do one thing right: you can do nothing acceptable to God, being out of Christ (John 15.5), 'Without me ye can do nothing.' An unrenewed man, as you are, can do nothing but sin, as we have already proved. Your best actions are sin, and so they increase your 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 you should do all you are able to do, in vain do you hope to be saved in that way. What word of God is this hope of yours founded on? It is founded on neither 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 3.31). 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 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 10.4). And do you think that God will abate these terms as to you, when His own Son got no abatement of them? Expect it not, though you should beg it with tears of blood; for if they prevailed, they must prevail against the truth, justice, and honour of God (Gal 3.10). 'Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them. (Verse 12), 'And the law is not of faith: but the man that doeth 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 you, insensible of your own weakness, must needs think to recover yourself by your own works, while you are no more able to do it than to remove mountains of brass out of their place.

Wherefore I conclude, that you are utterly unable to recover yourself, in the way of works, or by the law. O that you would conclude the same concerning yourself!

Let us try next what the sinner can do to recover himself, In the way of the Gospel. It may be you think that you cannot do all by yourself alone, yet Jesus Christ offering you help, you can of yourself embrace it, and use it for

your recovery. But, O sinner, be convinced of your absolute need of the grace of Christ: for truly, there is help offered, but you cannot 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 5.44). 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. 45.22); but the natural man is spiritually blind (Rev. 3.17); and as to the things of the Spirit of God, he cannot know them, for they are spiritually discerned (1 Cor. 2.14). Nay, whosoever will, he is welcome; let him come (Rev. 22.17); but there must be a day of power on the sinner, before he can be willing (Ps. 110.3).

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 anyone believe, or repent, whose understanding is darkness (Eph. 5.8), whose heart is a stony heart, inflexible, insensible (Ezek. 36.26), whose affections are wholly disordered and distempered, 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 11.25), '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 16.14). He is dead in sin; he must be quickened, raised out of his grave; who can do this but God Himself? (Eph. 2.1-5). Nay, he must be 'created in Christ Jesus, unto good works' (Eph. 2.10). 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 3.5), '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 12.35). Nay, were it left to yourselves to choose what is easiest, Christ Himself tells you (John 15.5), '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 choose but 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 you know it or not, that 'thou art obstinate, and thy neck is an iron sinew, and thy brow brass' (Isa. 48.4), and cannot be overcome, but by Him who hath 'broken the gates of brass, and cut the bars of iron in sunder.' Hence, humanly 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, tin, 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, 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. 7.29), gave him a power to do everything 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 had 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. 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 unhumiliated 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, further, 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 to 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 shows 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 5.40). They will not repent, they will die (Ezek. 18.31). So they will be justly condemned, because they will neither tam to God, nor come to Christ, but love their chains better than their liberty, and darkness rather than light (John 3.19)

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 your 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 10.17), 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 raises 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. 5. 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 embalm 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 12.34), 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 5.5-8). 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 prayers 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 to 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 your 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 has 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 8.30-31). 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. Ile 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,' said the Lord to Moses, 'that they go forward' (Exod. 14.15). 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 covenants of promise (Eph. 2.12), 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, I. 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 8.22), 'Pray God, if perhaps the

thought of thy heart may be forgiven thee.' (Joel 2.14), '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 7.3-4). 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. 65.1). 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 16.13-14). You plough and sow, though nobody can tell you for certain that you win 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? Importunity, 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.

In conclusion then, 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 you are without strength: and cannot come to Christ, till you be drawn. You are lost, and cannot help yourself. 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 depravity.

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