

# **THE FREEDOM OF THE WILL**

Explained and Defended

(Lectures from 1851 Systematic Theology)

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## LECTURE XLVIII.

### NATURAL ABILITY.

We next proceed to the examination of the question of man's ability or inability to obey the commandments of God. This certainly must be a fundamental question in morals and religion; and as our views are upon this subject, so, if we are consistent, must be our views of God, of his moral government, and of every practical doctrine of morals and religion. This is too obvious to require proof. The question of ability has truly been a vexed question. In the discussion of it, I shall consider the elder President Edwards as the representative of the common Calvinistic view of this subject, because he has stated it more clearly than any other Calvinistic author with whom I am acquainted. When, therefore, I speak of the Edwardean doctrine of ability and inability, you will understand me to speak of the common view of Calvinistic theological writers, as stated, summed up, and defended by Edwards.

In discussing this subject I will endeavour to show,--

I. PRESIDENT EDWARDS'S NOTION OF NATURAL ABILITY.

II. THAT THIS NATURAL ABILITY IS NO ABILITY AT ALL.

III. WHAT CONSTITUTES NATURAL INABILITY ACCORDING TO THIS SCHOOL.

IV. THAT THIS NATURAL INABILITY IS NO INABILITY AT ALL.

V. THAT NATURAL ABILITY IS PROPERLY IDENTICAL WITH FREEDOM OR LIBERTY OF WILL.

VI. THAT THE HUMAN WILL IS FREE, AND THEREFORE MEN ARE NATURALLY ABLE TO OBEY GOD.

*I. I am to show what is President Edwards's notion of natural ability.*

Edwards considers freedom and ability as identical. He defines freedom or liberty to consist in "the power, opportunity, or advantage, that any one has, to do as he pleases." "Or, in other words, his being free from hindrance or impediment in the way of doing or conducting in any respect as he wills."--Works, vol. ii., page 38.

Again, page 39, he says, "One thing more I should observe concerning what is vulgarly called liberty; namely, that power and opportunity for one to do and conduct as he will, or according to his choice, is all that is meant by it; without taking into the meaning of the word anything of the cause of that choice; or at all considering how the

person came to have such a volition; whether it was caused by some external motive, or internal habitual bias; whether it was determined by some internal antecedent volition, or whether it happened without a cause; whether it was necessarily connected with something foregoing, or not connected. Let the person come by his choice anyhow, yet, if he is able, and there is nothing in the way to hinder his pursuing and exerting his will, the man is perfectly free, according to the primary and common notion of freedom." In the preceding paragraph, he says, "There are two things contrary to what is called liberty in common speech. One is, constraint; which is a person's being necessitated to do a thing contrary to his will: the other is, restraint, which is his being hindered, and not having power to do according to his will."

Power, ability, liberty, to do as you will, are synonymous with this writer. The foregoing quotations, with many like passages that might be quoted from the same author, show that natural liberty, or natural ability, according to him, consists in the natural and established connexion between volition and its effects. Thus he says in another place, "Men are justly said to be able to do what they can do, if they will." His definition of natural ability, or natural liberty, as he frequently calls it, wholly excludes the power to will, and includes only the power or ability to execute our volitions. Thus it is evident, that natural ability, according to him, respects external action only, and has nothing to do with willing. When there is no restraint or hindrance to the execution of volition, when there is nothing interposed to disturb and prevent the natural and established result of our volitions, there is natural ability according to this school. It should be distinctly understood, that Edwards, and those of his school, hold that choices, volitions, and all acts of will, are determined, not by the sovereign power of the agent, but are caused by the objective motive, and that there is the same connexion, or a connexion as certain and as unavoidable between motive and choice, as between any physical cause and its effect: "the difference being," according to him, "not in the nature of the connexion, but in the terms connected." Hence, according to his view, natural liberty or ability cannot consist in the power of willing or of choice, but must consist in the power to execute our choices or volitions. Consequently, this class of philosophers define free or moral agency to consist in the power to do as one wills, or power to execute one's purposes, choices, or volitions. That this is a fundamentally false definition of natural liberty or ability, and of free or moral agency, we shall see in due time. It is also plain, that the natural ability or liberty of Edwards and his school, has nothing to do with morality or immorality. Sin and holiness, as we have seen in a former lecture, are attributes of acts of will only. But this natural ability respects, as has been said, outward or muscular action only. Let this be distinctly borne in mind as we proceed.

## *II. This natural ability is no ability at all.*

We know from consciousness that the will is the executive faculty, and that we can do absolutely nothing without willing. The power or ability to will is indispensable to our acting at all. If we have not the power to will, we have not power or ability to do anything. All ability or power to do resides in the will, and power to will is the necessary condition of ability to do. In morals and religion, as we shall soon see, the willing is the doing. The power to will is the condition of obligation to do. Let us hear Edwards himself

upon this subject. Vol. ii. p. 156, he says, "The will itself, and not only those actions which are the effects of the will, is the proper object of precept or command. That is, such a state or acts of men's wills, are in many cases properly required of them by commands; and not only those alterations in the state of their bodies or minds that are the consequences of volition. This is most manifest; for it is the mind only that is properly and directly the subject of precepts or commands; that only being capable of receiving or perceiving commands. The motions of the body are matters of command only as they are subject to the soul, and connected with its acts. But the soul has no other faculty whereby it can, in the most direct and proper sense, consent, yield to, or comply with any command, but the faculty of the will; and it is by this faculty only that the soul can directly disobey or refuse compliance; for the very notions of consenting, yielding, accepting, complying, refusing, rejecting, &c., are, according to the meaning of terms, nothing but certain acts of will." Thus we see that Edwards himself held, that the will is the executive faculty, and that the soul can do nothing except as it wills to do it, and that for this reason a command to do is strictly a command to will. We shall see by and by, that he held also that the willing and the doing are identical, so far as moral obligation, morals, and religion are concerned. For the present, it is enough to say, whether Edwards or anybody else ever held it or not, that it is absurd and sheer nonsense to talk of an ability to do when there is no ability to will. Every one knows with intuitive certainty that he has no ability to do what he is unable to will to do. It is, therefore, the veriest folly to talk of a natural ability to do anything whatever, when we exclude from this ability the power to will. If there is no ability to will, there is, and can be no ability to do; therefore the natural ability of the Edwardean school is no ability at all.

Let it be distinctly understood, that whatever Edwards held in respect to the ability of man to do, ability to will entered not at all into his idea and definition of natural ability or liberty. But according to him, natural ability respects only the connection that is established by a law of nature between volition and its sequents, excluding altogether the inquiry how the volition comes to exist. This the foregoing quotations abundantly show. Let the impression, then, be distinct, that the Edwardean natural ability is no ability at all, and nothing but an empty name, a metaphysico-theological fiction.

### III. *What constitutes natural inability according to this school.*

Edwards, vol. ii. p. 35, says, "We are said to be naturally unable to do a thing when we cannot do it if we will, because what is most commonly called nature, does not allow of it; or because of some impeding defect or obstacle that is extrinsic to the will; either in the faculty of understanding, constitution of body, or external objects." This quotation, together with much that might be quoted from this author to the same effect, shows that natural inability, according to him, consists in a want of power to execute our volitions. In the absence of power to do as we will, if the willing exists and the effect does not follow, it is only because we are unable to do as we will, and this is natural inability. We are naturally unable, according to him, to do what does not follow by a natural law from our volitions. If I will to move my arm, and the muscles do not obey volition, I am naturally unable to move my arm. So with anything else. Here let it be distinctly observed, that natural inability, as well as natural ability, respects and belongs only to

outward action or doing. It has nothing to do with ability to will. Whatever Edwards held respecting ability to will, which will be shown in its proper place, I wish it to be distinctly understood that his natural inability had nothing to do with willing, but only with the effects of willing. When the natural effect of willing does not follow volition, its cause, here is a proper natural inability.

*IV. This natural inability is no inability at all.*

By this is intended that, so far as morals and religion are concerned, the willing is the doing, and therefore where the willing actually takes place, the real thing required or prohibited is already done. Let us hear Edwards upon this subject. Vol. ii. p. 164, he says, "If the will fully complies and the proposed effect does not prove, according to the laws of nature, to be connected with his volition, the man is perfectly excused; he has a natural inability to the thing required. For the will itself, as has been observed, is all that can be directly and immediately required by command, and other things only indirectly, as connected with the will. If, therefore, there be a full compliance of will, the person has done his duty; and if other things do not prove to be connected with his volition, that is not criminally owing to him." Here, then, it is manifest, that the Edwardean notions of natural ability and inability have no connection with moral law or moral government, and, of course, with morals and religion. That the Bible everywhere accounts the willing as the deed, is most manifest. Both as it respects sin and holiness, if the required or prohibited act of the will takes place, the moral law and the lawgiver regard the deed as having been done, or the sin committed, whatever impediment may have prevented the natural effect from following. Here, then, let it be distinctly understood and remembered that Edwards's natural inability is, so far as morals and religion are concerned, no inability at all. An inability to execute our volitions, is in no case an inability to do our whole duty, since moral obligation, and of course, duty, respect strictly only acts of will. A natural inability must consist, as we shall see, in an inability to will. It is truly amazing that Edwards could have written the paragraph just quoted, and others to the same effect, without perceiving the fallacy and absurdity of his speculation--without seeing that the ability or inability about which he was writing, had no connection with morals or religion. How could he insist so largely that moral obligation respects acts of will only, and yet spend so much time in writing about an ability or inability to comply with moral obligation that respects outward action exclusively? This, on the face of it, was wholly irrelevant to the subject of morals and religion, upon which subjects he was professedly writing.

*V. Natural ability is identical with freedom or liberty of will.*

It has been, I trust, abundantly shown in a former lecture, and is admitted and insisted on by Edwards,--

1. That moral obligation respects strictly only acts of will.
2. That the whole of moral obligation resolves itself into an obligation to be disinterestedly benevolent, that is, to will the highest good of being for its own sake.

3. That willing is the doing required by the true spirit of the moral law.

Ability, therefore, to will in accordance with the moral law, must be natural ability to obey God. But,--

4. This is and must be the only proper freedom of the will, so far as morals and religion, or so far as moral law is concerned. That must constitute true liberty of will that consists in the ability or power to will, either in accordance with, or in opposition to the requirements of moral law. Or in other words, true freedom or liberty of will must consist in the power or ability to will in every instance either in accordance with, or in opposition to, moral obligation. Observe, moral obligation respects acts of will. What freedom or liberty of will can there be in relation to moral obligation, unless the will or the agent has power or ability to act in conformity with moral obligation? To talk of a man's being free to will, or having liberty to will, when he has not the power or ability, is to talk nonsense. Edwards himself holds that ability to do, is indispensable to liberty to do. But if ability to do be a *sine qua non* of liberty to do, must not the same be true of willing? that is, must not ability to will be essential to liberty to will? Natural ability and natural liberty to will, must then be identical. Let this be distinctly remembered, since many have scouted the doctrine of natural ability to obey God, who have nevertheless been great sticklers for the freedom of the will. In this they are greatly inconsistent. This ability is called a natural ability, because it belongs to man as a moral agent, in such a sense that without it he could not be a proper subject of command, of reward or punishment. That is, without this liberty or ability he could not be a moral agent, and a proper subject of moral government. He must then either possess this power in himself as essential to his own nature, or must possess power, or be able to avail himself of power to will in every instance in accordance with moral obligation. Whatever he can do, he can do only by willing; he must therefore either possess the power in himself directly to will as God commands, or he must be able by willing it to avail himself of power, and to make himself willing. If he has power by nature to will directly as God requires, or by willing to avail himself of power, so to will, he is naturally free and able to obey the commandments of God. Then let it be borne distinctly in mind, that natural ability, about which so much has been said, is nothing more nor less than the freedom or liberty of the will of a moral agent. No man knows what he says or whereof he affirms, who holds to the one and denies the other, for they are truly and properly identical.

VI. *The human will is free, therefore men have power or ability to do all their duty.*

1. The moral government of God everywhere assumes and implies the liberty of the human will, and the natural ability of men to obey God.

Every command, every threatening, every expostulation and denunciation in the Bible implies and assumes this. Nor does the Bible do violence to the human intelligence in this assumption; for,--

2. The human mind necessarily assumes the freedom of the human will as a first truth of reason.

First truths of reason, let it be remembered, are those that are necessarily assumed by every moral agent. They are assumed always and necessarily by a law of the intelligence, although they may seldom be the direct objects of thought or attention. It is a universal law of the intelligence, to assume the truths of causality, the existence and the infinity of space, the existence and infinity of duration, and many other truths. These assumptions every moral agent always and necessarily takes with him, whether these things are matters of attention or not. And even should he deny any one or all of the first truths of reason, he knows them to be true notwithstanding, and cannot but assume their truth in all his practical judgments. Thus, should any one deny the law and the doctrine of causality, as some in theory have done, he knows, and cannot but know,--he assumes, and cannot but assume, its truth at every moment. Without this assumption he could not so much as intend, or think of doing, or of any one else doing anything whatever. But a great part of his time, he may not, and does not, make this law a distinct object of thought or attention. Nor is he directly conscious of the assumption that there is such a law. He acts always upon the assumption, and a great part of his time is insensible of it. His whole activity is only the exercise of his own causality, and a practical acknowledgment of the truth, which in theory he may deny. Now just so it is with the freedom of the will, and with natural ability. Did we not assume our own liberty and ability, we should never think of attempting to do anything. We should not so much as think of moral obligation, either as it respects ourselves or others, unless we assumed the liberty of the human will. In all our judgments respecting our own moral character and that of others, we always and necessarily assume the liberty of the human will, or natural ability to obey God. Although we may not be distinctly conscious of this assumption, though we may seldom make the liberty of the human will the subject of direct thought or attention, and even though we may deny its reality, and strenuously endeavour to maintain the opposite, we, nevertheless, in this very denial and endeavour, assume that we are free. This truth never was, and never can be rejected in our practical judgments. All men assume it. All men must assume it. Whenever they choose in one direction, they always assume, whether conscious of the assumption or not, and cannot but assume, that they have power to will in the opposite direction. Did they not assume this, such a thing as election between two ways or objects would not be, and could not be so much as thought of. The very ideas of right and wrong, of the praise and blameworthiness of human beings, imply the assumption on the part of those who have these ideas, of the universal freedom of the human will, or of the natural ability of men as moral agents to obey God. Were not this assumption in the mind, it were impossible from its own nature and laws that it should affirm moral obligation, right or wrong, praise or blameworthiness of men. I know that philosophers and theologians have in theory denied the doctrine of natural ability or liberty, in the sense in which I have defined it; and I know, too, that with all their theorizing, they did assume, in common with all other men, that man is free in the sense that he has liberty or power to will as God commands. I know that, but for this assumption, the human mind could no more predicate praise or blameworthiness, right or wrong of man, than it could of the motions of a windmill. Men have often made the assumption in question without being aware of it, have affirmed right and wrong of human willing without seeing and understanding the conditions of this affirmation. But the fact is, that in all cases the assumption has laid deep in the mind as a first truth of reason, that men are free in the sense of being naturally able to obey God: and this

assumption is a necessary condition of the affirmation that moral character belongs to man.

## LECTURE XLIX.

### MORAL ABILITY AND INABILITY.

I. WHAT CONSTITUTES MORAL INABILITY, ACCORDING TO EDWARDS AND THOSE WHO HOLD WITH HIM.

II. THAT THEIR MORAL INABILITY TO OBEY GOD CONSISTS IN REAL DISOBEDIENCE AND A NATURAL INABILITY TO OBEY.

III. THAT THIS PRETENDED DISTINCTION BETWEEN NATURAL AND MORAL INABILITY IS NONSENSICAL.

IV. WHAT CONSTITUTES MORAL ABILITY ACCORDING TO THIS SCHOOL.

V. THAT THEIR MORAL ABILITY TO OBEY GOD IS NOTHING ELSE THAN REAL OBEDIENCE, AND A NATURAL INABILITY TO DISOBEY.

*I. What constitutes moral inability, according to Edwards and those who hold with him.*

I examine their views of moral inability first in order, because from their views of moral inability we ascertain more clearly what are their views of moral ability. Edwards regards moral ability and inability as identical with moral necessity. Concerning moral necessity, he says, vol. ii., pp. 32, 33, "And sometimes by moral necessity is meant that necessity of connexion and consequence which arises from such moral causes as the strength of inclination or motives, and the connexion which there is in many cases between these and such certain volitions and actions. And it is in this sense that I shall use the phrase moral necessity in the following discourse. By natural necessity, as applied to men, I mean such necessity as men are under through the force of natural causes, as distinguished from what are called moral causes, such as habits and dispositions of the heart, and moral motives and inducements. Thus men placed in certain circumstances are the subjects of particular sensations by necessity. They feel pain when their bodies are wounded; they see the objects presented before them in a clear light when their eyes are open: so they assent to the truth of certain propositions as soon as the terms are understood; as that two and two make four, that black is not white, that two parallel lines can never cross one another; so by a natural necessity men's bodies move downwards when there is nothing to support them. But here several things may be noted concerning these two kinds of necessity. 1. Moral necessity may be as absolute as natural necessity. That is, the effect may be as perfectly connected with its moral cause, as a natural effect is with its natural cause. Whether the will is in every case necessarily determined by the strongest motive, or whether the will ever makes any resistance to such a motive, or can ever oppose the strongest present inclination or not; if that matter should be controverted, yet I suppose none will deny, but that, in some cases a previous bias and inclination, or

the motive presented may be so powerful, that the act of the will may be certainly and indissolubly connected therewith. When motives or previous bias are very strong, all will allow that there is some difficulty in going against them. And if they were yet stronger, the difficulty would be still greater. And therefore if more were still added to their strength up to a certain degree, it might make the difficulty so great that it would be wholly impossible to surmount it, for this plain reason, because whatever power men may be supposed to have to surmount difficulties, yet that power is not infinite, and so goes not beyond certain limits. If a certain man can surmount ten degrees of difficulty of this kind, with twenty degrees of strength, because the degrees of strength are beyond the degrees of difficulty, yet if the difficulty be increased to thirty, or a hundred, or to a thousand degrees, and his strength not also increased, his strength will be wholly insufficient to surmount the difficulty. As therefore it must be allowed that there may be such a thing as a sure and perfect connexion between moral causes and effects; so this only is what I call by the name of moral necessity." Page 35, he says: "What has been said of natural and moral necessity may serve to explain what is intended by natural and moral inability. We are said to be naturally unable to do a thing when we cannot do it if we will, because of some impeding defect or obstacle that is extrinsic to the will, either in the faculty of understanding, constitution of body, or external objects. Moral inability consists not in any of these things, but either in a want of inclination, or the want of sufficient motives in view, to induce and excite the act of the will, or the strength of apparent motives to the contrary. Or both these may be resolved into one, and it may be said in one word that moral inability consists in the opposition or want of inclination. For when a person is unable to will or choose such a thing, through a defect of motives or prevalence of contrary motives, it is the same thing as his being unable through the want of an inclination, or the prevalence of a contrary inclination in such circumstances, and under the influence of such views."

From these quotations, and much more that might be quoted to the same purpose, it is plain that Edwards, as the representative of his school, holds moral inability to consist, either in an existing choice or attitude of the will opposed to that which is required by the law of God, which inclination or choice is necessitated by motives in view of the mind, or in the absence of such motives as are necessary to cause or necessitate the state of choice required by the moral law, or to overcome an opposing choice. Indeed he holds these two to be identical. Observe, his words are, "Or these may be resolved into one, and it may be said in one word, that moral inability consists in opposition or want of inclination. For when a person is unable to will or choose such a thing, through a defect of motives, it is the same thing as his being unable through the want of an inclination, or the prevalence of a contrary inclination, in such circumstances and under the influence of such views," that is, in the presence of such motives. If there is a present prevalent contrary inclination, it is, according to him: 1. Because there are present certain reasons that necessitate this contrary inclination; and 2. Because there are not sufficient motives present to the mind to overcome these opposing motives and inclination, and to necessitate the will to determine or choose in the direction of the law of God. By inclination Edwards means choice or volition, as is abundantly evident from what he all along says in this connexion. This no one will deny who is at all familiar with his writings.

It was the object of the treatise from which the above quotations have been made, to maintain that the choice invariably is as the greatest apparent good is. And by the greatest apparent good he means, a sense of the most agreeable. By which he means, as he says, that the sense of the most agreeable, and choice or volition, are identical. Vol. ii., page 20, he says, "And therefore it must be true in some sense, that the will always is as the greatest apparent good is." "It must be observed in what sense I use the term 'good,' namely, as of the same import with agreeable. To appear good to the mind, as I use the phrase, is the same as to appear agreeable, or seem pleasing to the mind." Again, pp. 21, 22, he says: "I have rather chosen to express myself thus, that the will always is as the greatest apparent good is, or as what appears most agreeable, than to say that the will is determined by the greatest apparent good, or by what seems most agreeable; because an appearing most agreeable to the mind and the mind's preferring, seem scarcely distinct. If strict propriety of speech be insisted on, it may more properly be said, that the voluntary action, which is the immediate consequence of the mind's choice, is determined by that which appears most agreeable, than the choice itself." Thus it appears that the sense of the most agreeable, and choice or volition, according to Edwards, are the same things. Indeed, Edwards throughout confounds desire and volition, making them the same thing. Edwards regarded the mind as possessing but two primary faculties--the will and the understanding. He confounded all the states of the sensibility with acts of will. The strongest desire is with him always identical with volition or choice, and not merely that which determines choice. When there is a want of inclination or desire, or the sense of the most agreeable, there is a moral inability according to the Edwardean philosophy. This want of the strongest desire, inclination, or sense of the most agreeable, is always owing; 1. To the presence of such motives as to necessitate an opposite desire, choice, &c.; and 2. To the want of such objective motives as shall awaken this required desire, or necessitate this inclination or sense of the most agreeable. In other words, when volition or choice, in consistency with the law of God, does not exist, it is, 1. Because an opposite choice exists, and is necessitated by the presence of some motive; and 2. For want of sufficiently strong objective motives to necessitate the required choice or volition. Let it be distinctly understood and remembered, that Edwards held that motive, and not the agent is the cause of all actions of the will. Will, with him, is always determined in its choice by motives as really as physical effects are produced by their causes. The difference with him in the connexion of moral and physical causes and effects "lies not in the nature of the connexion, but in the terms connected."

"That every act of the will has some cause, and consequently (by what has already been proved) has a necessary connection with its cause, and so is necessary by a necessity of connection and consequence, is evident by this, that every act of the will whatsoever is excited by some motive, which is manifest; because, if the mind, in willing, after the manner it does, is excited by no motive or inducement, then it has no end which it proposes to itself, or pursues in so doing; it aims at nothing, and seeks nothing. And if it seeks nothing, then it does not go after anything, or exert any inclination or preference towards anything; which brings the matter to a contradiction; because for the mind to will something, and for it to go after something by an act of preference and inclination, are the same thing.

"But if every act of the will is excited by a motive, then that motive is the cause of the act. If the acts of the will are excited by motives, then motives are the causes of their being excited; or, which is the same thing, the cause of their existence. And if so, the existence of the acts of the will is properly the effect of their motives. Motives do nothing, as motives or inducements, but by their influence; and so much as is done by their influence is the effect of them. For that is the notion of an effect, something that is brought to pass by the influence of something else.

"And if volitions are properly the effects of their motives, then they are necessarily connected with their motives. Every effect and event being, as was proved before, necessarily connected with that which is the proper ground and reason of its existence. Thus it is manifest that volition is necessary, and is not from any self-determining power in the will."--Vol. ii., pp. 86, 87.

Moral inability, then, according to this school, consists in a want of inclination, desire, or sense of the most agreeable, or the strength of an opposite desire or sense of the most agreeable. This want of inclination, &c., or this opposing inclination, &c., are identical with an opposing choice or volition. This opposing choice or inclination, or this want of the required choice, inclination, or sense of the most agreeable is owing, according to Edwards, 1. To the presence of such motives as to necessitate the opposing choice; and 2. To the absence of sufficient motives to beget or necessitate them. Here then we have the philosophy of this school. The will or agent is unable to choose as God requires in all cases, when, 1. There are present such motives as to necessitate an opposite choice; and, 2. When there is not such a motive or such motives in the view of the mind, as to determine or necessitate the required choice or volition; that is, to awaken a desire, or to create an inclination or sense of the agreeable stronger than any existing and opposing desire, inclination, or sense of agreeable. This is the moral inability of the Edwardeans.

II. *Their moral inability to obey God consists in real disobedience and a natural inability to obey.*

1. If we understand Edwardeans to mean that moral inability consists,--

(1.) In the presence of such motives as to necessitate an opposite choice; and,--

(2.) In the want or absence of sufficient motives to necessitate choice or volition, or, which is the same thing, a sense of the most agreeable, or an inclination, then their moral inability is a proper natural inability.

Edwards says, he "calls it a moral inability, because it is an inability of will." But by his own showing, the will is the only executive faculty. Whatever a man can do at all, he can accomplish by willing, and whatever he cannot accomplish by willing he cannot accomplish at all. An inability to will then must be a natural inability.

We are, by nature, unable to do what we are unable to will to do. Besides, according to Edwards, moral obligation respects strictly only acts of will, and willing is the doing that

is prohibited or required by the moral law. To be unable to will then, is to be unable to do. To be unable to will as God requires, is to be unable to do what he requires, and this surely is a proper, and the only proper natural inability.

2. But if we are to understand this school, as maintaining that moral inability to obey God, consists in a want of the inclination, choice, desire, or sense of the most agreeable that God requires, or in an inclination or existing choice, volition, or sense of the most agreeable, which is opposed to the requirement of God, this surely is really identical with disobedience, and their moral inability to obey consists in disobedience. For, be it distinctly remembered, that Edwards holds, as we have seen, that obedience and disobedience, properly speaking, can be predicated only of acts of will. If the required state of the will exists, there is obedience. If it does not exist, there is disobedience. Therefore, by his own admission and express holding, if by moral inability we are to understand a state of the will not conformed, or, which is the same thing, opposed to the law and will of God, this moral inability is nothing else than disobedience to God. A moral inability to obey is identical with disobedience. It is not merely the cause of future or present disobedience, but really constitutes the whole of present disobedience.

3. But suppose that we understand his moral inability to consist both in the want of an inclination, choice, volition, &c., or in the existence of an opposing state of the will, and also,--

(1.) In the presence of such motives as to necessitate an opposite choice, and,--

(2.) In the want of sufficient motives to overcome the opposing state, and necessitate the required choice, volition, &c., then his views stand thus: moral inability to choose as God commands, consists in the want of this choice, or in the existence of an opposite choice, which want of choice, or, which is the same thing with him, which opposite choice is caused:--

(i.) By the presence of such motives as to necessitate the opposite choice, and,--

(ii.) By the absence of such motives as would necessitate the required choice.

Understand him which way you will, his moral inability is real disobedience, and is in the highest sense a proper natural inability to obey. The cause of choice or volition he always seeks, and thinks or assumes that he finds, in the objective motive, and never for once ascribes it to the sovereignty or freedom of the agent. Choice or volition is an event, and must have some cause. He assumed that the objective motive was the cause, when, as consciousness testifies, the agent is himself the cause. Here is the great error of Edwards.

Edwards assumed that no agent whatever, not even God himself, possesses a power of self-determination. That the will of God and of all moral agents is determined, not by themselves, but by an objective motive. If they will in one direction or another, it is not from any free and sovereign self-determination in view of motives, but because the

motives or inducements present to the mind, inevitably produce or necessitate the sense of the most agreeable, or choice.

If this is not fatalism or natural necessity, what is?

III. *This pretended distinction between natural and moral inability is nonsensical.*

What does it amount to? Why this:--

1. This natural inability is an inability to do as we will, or to execute our volitions.
2. This moral inability is an inability to will.
3. This moral inability is the only natural inability that has, or can have, anything to do with duty, or with morality and religion; or, as has been shown,--
4. It consists in disobedience itself. Present moral inability to obey is identical with present disobedience, with a natural inability to obey!

It is amazing to see how so great and good a man could involve himself in a metaphysical fog, and bewilder himself and his readers to such a degree, that an absolutely senseless distinction should pass into the current phraseology, philosophy, and theology of the church, and a score of theological dogmas be built upon the assumption of its truth. This nonsensical distinction has been in the mouth of the Edwardean school of theologians, from Edwards's day to the present. Both saints and sinners have been bewildered, and, I must say, abused by it. Men have been told that they are as really unable to will as God directs, as they were to create themselves; and when it is replied that this inability excuses the sinner, we are directly silenced by the assertion, that this is only a moral inability, or an inability of will, and, therefore, that it is so far from excusing the sinner, that it constitutes the very ground, and substance, and whole of his guilt. Indeed! Men are under moral obligation only to will as God directs. But an inability thus to will, consisting in the absence of such motives as would necessitate the required choice, or the presence of such motives as to necessitate an opposite choice, is a moral inability, and really constitutes the sinner worthy of an "exceeding great and eternal weight" of damnation! Ridiculous! Edwards I revere; his blunders I deplore. I speak thus of this Treatise on the Will, because, while it abounds with unwarrantable assumptions, distinctions without a difference, and metaphysical subtleties, it has been adopted as the text-book of a multitude of what are called Calvinistic divines for scores of years. It has bewildered the head, and greatly embarrassed the heart and the action of the church of God. It is time, high time, that its errors should be exposed, and so exploded, that such phraseology should be laid aside, and the ideas which these words represent should cease to be entertained.

IV. *What constitutes moral ability according to this school.*

It is of course the opposite of moral inability.

Moral ability, according to them, consists in willingness with the cause of it. That is, moral ability to obey God consists in that inclination, desire, choice, volition, or sense of the most agreeable, which God requires together with its cause. Or it consists in the presence of such motives as do actually necessitate the above-named state or determination of the will. Or, more strictly, it consists in this state caused by the presence of these motives. This is as exact a statement of their views as I can make. According to this, a man is morally able to do as he does, and is necessitated to do, or, he is morally able to will as he does will, and as he cannot help willing. He is morally able to will in this manner, simply and only because he is caused thus to will by the presence of such motives as are, according to them, "indissolubly connected" with such a willing by a law of nature and necessity. But this conducts us to the conclusion,--

*V. That their moral ability to obey God is nothing else than real obedience, and a natural inability to disobey.*

Strictly, this moral ability includes both this state of will required by the law of God, and also the cause of this state, to wit, the presence of such motives as necessitate the inclination, choice, volition, or sense of the most agreeable, that God requires. The agent is able thus to will because he is caused thus to will. Or more strictly, his ability, and his inclination or willing, are identical. Or still further, according to Edwards, his moral ability thus to will and his thus willing, and the presence of the motives that cause this willing, are identical. This is a sublime discovery in philosophy; a most transcendental speculation! I would not treat these notions as ridiculous, were they not truly so, or if I could treat them in any other manner, and still do them anything like justice. If, where the theory is plainly stated, it appears ridiculous, the fault is not in me, but in the theory itself. I know it is trying to you, as it is to me, to connect anything ridiculous with so great and so revered a name as that of President Edwards. But if a blunder of his has entailed perplexity and error on the church, surely his great and good soul would now thank the hand that should blot out the error from under heaven.

Thus, when closely examined, this long established and venerated fogbank vanishes away; and this famed distinction between moral and natural ability and inability, is found to be "a thing of nought."

## LECTURE L.

### INABILITY.

THERE are yet other forms of the doctrine of inability to be stated and considered before we have done with this subject. In the consideration of the one before me, I must--

I. STATE WHAT I CONSIDER TO BE THE FUNDAMENTAL ERRORS OF EDWARDS AND HIS SCHOOL ON THE SUBJECT OF ABILITY.

II. STATE THE PHILOSOPHY OF THE SCHEME OF INABILITY WHICH WE ARE ABOUT TO CONSIDER.

III. CONSIDER ITS CLAIMS.

I. *I am to state what I consider to be the fundamental errors of Edwards and his school upon the subject of ability.*

1. He denied that moral agents are the causes of their own actions. He started, of course, with the just assumption, that every event is an effect, and must have some cause. The choices and volitions of moral agents are effects of some cause. What is that cause? He assumes that every act of will must have been caused by a preceding one, or by the objective motive. By the *reductio ad absurdum*, he easily showed the absurdity of the first hypothesis, and consequently assumed the truth of the last. But how does he know that the sovereign power of the agent is not the cause? His argument against self-determination amounts to nothing; for it is, in fact, only a begging of the whole question. If we are conscious of anything, we are of the rational affirmation that we do, in fact, originate our own choices and volitions. To call this in question, is to question the validity of the intuitions of reason. But if the testimony of this faculty can deceive us, we can be certain of nothing. But it cannot deceive us, and no man can practically doubt the intuitions of the reason. All moral agents do, and always must, in all their practical judgments, assume and admit the truth of all the rational intuitions. Edwards, as really as any other man, believed himself to originate and be the proper cause of his own volitions. In his practical judgment he assumed his own causality, and the proper causality of all moral agents, or he never could have had so much as a conception of moral agency and accountability. But in theory, he adopted the capital error of denying the proper causality of moral agents. This error is fundamental. Every definition of a moral agent that denies or overlooks, his proper causality, is radically defective. It drops out of the definition the very element that we necessarily affirm to be essential to liberty and accountability. Denying, as he did, the proper causality of moral agents, he was driven to give a false definition of free agency, as has been shown. Edwards rightly regarded the choices and volitions of moral agents as effects, but he looks in the wrong direction for the cause. Instead of heeding the rational affirmation of his own mind that causality, or the power of self-determination, is a *sine qua non* of moral agency, he assumed, in theorizing, the

direct opposite, and sought for the cause of choice and volition out of the agent, and in the objective motive; thus, in fact, denying the validity of the testimony of the pure reason, and reducing moral agents to mere machines, and stultifying the whole subject of moral government, moral action, and just retribution. No wonder that so capital an error, and defended with so much ability, should have led one of his own sons into scepticism. But the piety of the president was stronger than even his powerful logic. Assuming a false major premise, his straightforward logic conducted him to the dogma of a universal necessity. But his well-developed reason, and deep piety of heart, controlled his practical judgment, so that few men have practically held the doctrines of accountability and retribution with a firmer grasp.

2. Edwards adopted the Lockean philosophy. He regarded the mind as possessing but two primary faculties, the understanding and the will. He considered all the desires, emotions, affections, appetites, and passions as voluntary, and as really consisting in acts of will. This confounding of the states of the sensibility with acts of the will, I regard as another fundamental error of his whole system of philosophy, so far as it respects the liberty of the will, or the doctrine of ability. Being conscious that the emotions, which he calls affections, the desires, the appetites and passions, were so correlated to their appropriate objects, that they are excited by the presence or contemplation of them, and assuming them to be voluntary states of mind, or actions of the will, he very naturally, and with this assumption, necessarily and justly concluded, that the will was governed or decided by the objective motive. Assuming as he did that the mind has but two faculties, understanding and will, and that every state of feeling and of mind that did not belong to the understanding, must be a voluntary state or act of will, and being conscious that his feelings, desires, affections, appetites and passions, were excited by the contemplation of their correlated objects, he could consistently come to no other conclusion than that the will is determined by motives, and that choice always is as the most agreeable is.

Had he not sat down to write with the assumption of the Lockean school of philosophy in his mind, his Treatise on the Will, in anything like its present form, could never have seen the light. But assuming the truth of that philosophy, a mind like his could arrive at no other conclusions than he did. He took upon trust, or assumed without inquiry, an error that vitiated his whole system, and gave birth to that injurious monstrosity and misnomer, "Edwards on the Freedom of the Will." He justly held that moral law legislates and can strictly legislate only over acts of will, and those acts that are under the control of the will. This he, with his mental development, could not deny, nor think of denying. Had he but given or assumed a correct definition of the will, and excluded from its acts the wholly involuntary states of the sensibility, he never could have asserted that the will is always and necessarily determined by the objective motive. Assuming the philosophy of Locke, and being conscious that the states of his sensibility, which he called acts of will, were controlled or excited by motives, or by the consideration of their correlated objects, his great soul laboured to bring about a reconciliation between the justice of God and this real, though not so called, slavery of the human will. This led him to adopt the distinction which we have examined between a moral and a natural inability. Thus, as a theologian, he committed a capital error in suffering himself to take upon trust

another man's philosophy. Happy is the man who takes the trouble to examine for himself, whatever is essential to his system of opinion and belief.

II. *I am to state the philosophy of the scheme of inability which we are about to consider.*

1. This philosophy properly distinguishes between the will and the sensibility. It regards the mind as possessing three primary departments, powers, or susceptibilities--the intellect, the sensibility, and the will. It does not always call these departments or susceptibilities by these names, but if I understand them, the abettors of this philosophy hold to their existence, by whatever name they may call them.

2. This philosophy also holds, that the states of the intellect and of the sensibility are passive and involuntary.

3. It holds that freedom of will is a condition of moral agency.

4. It also teaches that the will is free, and consequently that man is a free moral agent.

5. It teaches that the will controls the outward life and the attention of the intellect, directly, and many of the emotions, desires, affections, appetites, and passions, or many states of the sensibility, indirectly.

6. It teaches that men have ability to obey God so far as acts of will are concerned, and also so far as those acts and states of mind are concerned that are under the direct or indirect control of the will.

7. But they hold that moral obligation may, and in the case of man at least, does extend beyond moral agency and beyond the sphere of ability; that ability or freedom of will is essential to moral agency, but that freedom of will or moral agency does not limit moral obligation; that moral agency and moral obligation are not coextensive; consequently that moral obligation is not limited by ability or by moral agency.

8. This philosophy asserts that moral obligation extends to those states of mind that lie wholly beyond or without the sphere or control of the will; that it extends not merely to voluntary acts and states, together with all acts and states that come within the direct or indirect control of the will, but, as was said, it insists that those mental states that lie wholly beyond the will's direct or indirect control, come within the pale of moral legislation and obligation; and that therefore obligation is not limited by ability.

9. This philosophy seems to have been invented to reconcile the doctrine of original sin in the sense of a sinful nature, or of constitutional moral depravity with moral obligation. Assuming that original sin in this sense is a doctrine of divine revelation, it takes the bold and uncompromising ground already stated, namely, that moral obligation is not merely co-extensive with moral agency and ability, but extends beyond both into

the region of those mental states that lie entirely without the will's direct or indirect control.

10. This bold assertion the abettors of this philosophy attempt to support by an appeal to the necessary convictions of men and to the authority of the Bible. They allege that the instinctive judgments of men, as well as the Bible, everywhere assume and affirm moral obligation and moral character of the class of mental states in question.

11. They admit that a physical inability is a bar to or inconsistent with moral obligation; but they of course deny that the inability to which they hold is physical.

### III. *This brings us to a brief consideration of the claims of this philosophy of inability.*

1. It is based upon a *petitio principii*, or a begging of the question. It assumes that the instinctive or irresistible and universal judgments of men, together with the Bible, assert and assume that moral obligation and moral character extend to the states of mind in question. It is admitted that the teachings of the Bible are to be relied upon. It is also admitted that the first truths of reason, or what this philosophy calls the instinctive and necessary judgments of all men, must be true. But it is not admitted that the assertion in question is a doctrine of the Bible or a first truth of reason. On the contrary both are denied. It is denied, at least by me, that either reason or divine revelation affirms moral obligation or moral character of any state of mind, that lies wholly beyond both the direct and the indirect control of the will. Now this philosophy must not be allowed to beg the question in debate. Let it be shown, if it can be, that the alleged truth is either a doctrine of the Bible or a first truth of reason. Both reason and revelation do assert and assume, that moral obligation and moral character extend to acts of will, and to all those outward acts or mental states that lie within its direct or indirect control. "But further these deponents say not." Men are conscious of moral obligation in respect to these acts and states of mind, and of guilt when they fail in these respects to comply with moral obligation. But who ever blamed himself for pain, when, without his fault, he received a blow, or was seized with the tooth-ache, or a fit of bilious choleric?

2. Let us inquire into the nature of this inability. Observe, it is admitted by this school that a physical inability is inconsistent with moral obligation--in other words, that physical ability is a condition of moral obligation. But what is a physical inability? The primary definition of the adjective *physical*, given by Webster, is, "pertaining to nature, or natural objects." A physical inability then, in the primary sense of the term physical, is an inability of nature. It may be either a material or a mental inability, that is, it may be either an inability of body or mind. It is admitted by the school whose views we are canvassing, that all human causality or ability resides in the will, and therefore that there is a proper inability of nature to perform anything that does not come within the sphere of the direct or indirect causality of, or control of the will. It is plain, therefore, that the inability for which they contend must be a proper natural inability, or inability of nature. This they fully admit and maintain. But this they do not call a physical inability. But why do they not? Why, simply because it would, by their own admissions, overthrow their favourite position. They seem to assume that a physical inability must be a material

inability. But where is the authority for such an assumption? There is no authority for it. A proper inability of nature must be a physical inability, as opposed to moral inability, or there is no meaning in language. It matters not at all whether the inability belongs to the material organism, or to the mind. If it be constitutional, and properly an inability of nature, it is nonsense to deny that this is a physical inability, or to maintain that it can be consistent with moral obligation. It is in vain to reply that this inability, though a real inability of nature, is not physical but moral, because a sinful inability. This is another begging of the question.

The school, whose views I am examining, maintain, that this inability is founded in the first sin of Adam. His first sin plunged himself and his posterity, descending from him by a natural law, into a total inability of nature to render any obedience to God. This first sin of Adam entailed a nature on all his posterity "wholly sinful in every faculty and part of soul and body." This constitutional sinfulness that belongs to every faculty and part of soul and body, constitutes the inability of which we are treating. But mark, it is not physical inability, because it is a sinful inability! Important theological distinction!--as truly wonderful, surely, as any of the subtleties of the Jesuits. But if this inability is sinful, it is important to inquire, Whose sin is it? Who is to blame for it? Why to be sure, we are told that it is the sin of him upon whom it is thus entailed by the natural law of descent from parent to child without his knowledge or consent. This sinfulness of nature, entirely irrespective of and previous to any actual transgression, renders its possessor worthy of and exposed to the wrath and curse of God for ever. This sinfulness, observe, is transmitted by a natural or physical law from Adam, but it is not a physical inability. It is something that inheres in, and belongs to every faculty and part of soul and body. It is transmitted by a physical law from parent to child. It is, therefore, and must be a physical thing. But yet we are told that it cannot be a physical inability, because first, it is sinful, or sin itself; and, secondly, because a physical inability is a bar to, or inconsistent with, moral obligation. Here, then, we have their reasons for not admitting this to be a physical inability. It would in this case render moral obligation an impossibility; and, besides, if a bar to moral obligation, it could not be sinful. But it is sinful, it is said, therefore it cannot be physical. But how do we know that it is sinful? Why, we are told, that the instinctive judgments of men, and the Bible everywhere affirm and assume it. We are told, that both the instinctive judgments of men and the Bible affirm and assume, both the inability in question and the sinfulness of it; "that we ought to be able, but are not;" that is, that we are so much to blame for this inability of nature entailed upon us without our knowledge or consent by a physical necessity, as to deserve the wrath and curse of God for ever. We are under a moral obligation not to have this sinful nature. We deserve damnation for having it. To be sure, we are entirely unable to put it away, and had no agency whatever in its existence. But what of that? We are told, that "moral obligation is not limited by ability;" that our being as unable to change our nature as we are to create a world, is no reason why we should not be under obligation to do it, since "moral obligation does not imply ability of any kind to do what we are under obligation to do!" . . . . I was about to expose the folly and absurdity of these assertions, but hush! It is not allowable, we are told, to reason on this subject. We shall deceive ourselves if we listen to the "miserable logic of our understandings." We must fall back, then, upon the intuitive affirmations of reason and the Bible. Here, then, we are willing to lodge our appeal. The Bible defines

sin to be a transgression of the law. What law have we violated in inheriting this nature? What law requires us to have a different nature from that which we possess? Does reason affirm that we are deserving of the wrath and curse of God for ever, for inheriting from Adam a sinful nature?

What law of reason have we transgressed in inheriting this nature? Reason cannot condemn us, unless we have violated some law which it can recognize as such. Reason indignantly rebukes such nonsense. Does the Bible hold us responsible for impossibilities? Does it require of us what we cannot do by willing to do it? Nay, verily; but it expressly affirms, that "if there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to what a man hath, and not according to what he hath not." The plain meaning of this passage is, that if one wills as God directs, he has hereby met all his obligation; that he has done all that is naturally possible to him, and therefore nothing more is required. In this passage, the Bible expressly limits obligation by ability. This we have repeatedly seen in former lectures. The law also, as we have formerly seen, limits obligation by ability. It requires only that we should love the Lord with all our strength, that is, with all our ability, and our neighbour as ourselves.

Does reason hold us responsible for impossibilities, or affirm our obligation to do, or be, what it is impossible for us to do and be? No indeed. Reason never did and never can condemn us for our nature, and hold us worthy of the wrath and curse of God for ever for possessing it. Nothing is more shocking and revolting to reason, than such assumptions as are made by the philosophy in question. This every man's consciousness must testify.

But is it not true that some, at least, do intelligently condemn themselves for their nature, and adjudge themselves to be worthy of the wrath and curse of God for ever for its sinfulness? The framers of the Presbyterian Confession of Faith made this affirmation in words, at least; whether intelligently or unintelligently, we are left to inquire. The reason of a moral agent condemning himself, and adjudging himself worthy of the wrath and curse of God for ever, for possessing a nature entailed on him by a natural law, without his knowledge or consent! This can never be.

But is it not true, as is affirmed, that men instinctively and necessarily affirm their obligation to be able to obey God, while they at the same time affirm that they are not able? I answer, no. They affirm themselves to be under obligation simply, and only, because deeply in their inward being lies the assumption that they are able to comply with the requirements of God. They are conscious of ability to will, and of power to control their outward life directly, and the states of the intellect and of their sensibility, either directly or indirectly, by willing. Upon this consciousness they found the affirmation of obligation, and of praise and blame-worthiness in respect to these acts and states of mind. But for the consciousness of ability, no affirmation of moral obligation, or of praise or blame-worthiness, were possible.

But do not those who affirm both their inability and their obligation, deceive themselves? I answer, yes. It is common for persons to overlook assumptions that lie, so

to speak, at the bottom of their minds. This has been noticed in former lectures, and need not be here repeated.

It is true indeed that God requires of men, especially under the gospel, what they are unable to do directly in their own strength. Or more strictly speaking, he requires them to lay hold on his strength, or to avail themselves of his grace, as the condition of being what he requires them to be. With strict propriety, it cannot be said that in this, or in any case, he requires directly any more than we are able directly to do. The direct requirement in the case under consideration, is to avail ourselves of, or to lay hold upon his strength. This we have power to do. He requires us to lay hold upon his grace and strength, and thereby to rise to a higher knowledge of himself, and to a consequent higher state of holiness than would be otherwise possible to us. The direct requirement is to believe, or to lay hold upon his strength, or to receive the Holy Spirit, or Christ, who stands at the door, and knocks, and waits for admission. The indirect requirement is to rise to a degree of knowledge of God, and to spiritual attainments that are impossible to us in our own strength. We have ability to obey the direct command directly, and the indirect command indirectly. That is, we are able by virtue of our nature, together with the proffered grace of the Holy Spirit, to comply with all the requirements of God. So that in fact there is no proper inability about it.

But are not men often conscious of there being much difficulty in the way of rendering to God all that we affirm ourselves under obligation to render? I answer, yes. But strictly speaking, they must admit their direct or indirect ability, as a condition of affirming their obligation. This difficulty, arising out of their physical depravity (See distinction between moral and physical depravity,\*(see below), and the power of temptation from without, is the foundation or cause of the spiritual warfare of which the Scriptures speak, and of which all Christians are conscious. But the Bible abundantly teaches, that through grace we are able to be more than conquerors. If we are able to be this through grace, we are able to avail ourselves of the provisions of grace, so that there is no proper inability in the case. However great the difficulties may be, we are able through Christ to overcome them all. This we must and do assume as the condition of the affirmation of obligation.

\*See distinction between moral and physical depravity, Lecture XXXVIII. II)

## LECTURE LI.

### GRACIOUS ABILITY.

I. I WILL SHOW WHAT THOSE WHO USE THIS PHRASEOLOGY MEAN BY A GRACIOUS ABILITY.

II. THAT THE DOCTRINE OF A GRACIOUS ABILITY AS HELD BY THOSE WHO MAINTAIN IT IS AN ABSURDITY.

III. IN WHAT SENSE OF THE TERMS A GRACIOUS ABILITY IS POSSIBLE.

Grace is unmerited favour. Its exercise consists in bestowing that which, without a violation of justice, might be withheld.

Ability to obey God, as we have seen, is the possession of power adequate to the performance of that which is required. If, then, the terms are used in the proper sense, by a gracious ability must be intended that the power which men at present possess to obey the commands of God, is a gift of grace relatively to the command; that is, the bestowment of power adequate to the performance of the thing required, is a matter of grace as opposed to justice. But let us enter upon an inquiry into the sense in which this language is used.

*I. I will show what is intended by the term gracious ability.*

The abettors of this scheme hold that by the first sin of Adam, he, together with all his posterity, lost all natural power and all ability of every kind to obey God; that therefore they were, as a race, wholly unable to obey the moral law, or to render to God any acceptable service whatever; that is, that they became, as a consequence of the sin of Adam, wholly unable to use the powers of nature in any other way than to sin. They were able to sin or to disobey God, but entirely unable to obey him; that they did not lose all power to act, but that they had power to act only in one direction, that is, in opposition to the will and law of God. By a gracious ability they intend, that in consequence of the atonement of Christ, God has graciously restored to man ability to accept the terms of mercy, or to fulfil the conditions of acceptance with God; in other words, that by the gracious aid of the Holy Spirit which, upon condition of the atonement, God has given to every member of the human family, all men are endowed with a gracious ability to obey God. By a gracious ability is intended, then, that ability or power to obey God, which all men now possess, not by virtue of their own nature or constitutional powers, but by virtue of the indwelling and gracious influence of the Holy Spirit, gratuitously bestowed upon man in consequence of the atonement of Christ. The inability, or total loss of all natural power to obey God into which men as a race fell by the first sin of Adam, they call original sin, &c., perhaps more strictly, this inability is a consequence of that original sin into which man fell; which original sin itself consisted in the total corruption of man's

whole nature. They hold, that by the atonement Christ made satisfaction for original sin, in such a sense, that the inability resulting from it is removed, and that now men are by gracious aid able to obey and accept the terms of salvation. That is, they are able to repent and believe the gospel. In short, they are able by virtue of this gracious ability to do their duty, or to obey God. This, if I understand these theologians, is a fair statement of their doctrine of gracious ability. This brings us,--

*II. To show that the doctrine of a gracious ability, as held by those who maintain it, is an absurdity.*

The question is not whether, as a matter of fact, men ever do obey God without the gracious influence of the Holy Spirit. I hold that they do not. So the fact of the Holy Spirit's gracious influence being exerted in every case of human obedience, is not a question in debate between those who maintain, and those who deny the doctrine of gracious ability, in the sense above explained. The question in debate is not whether men do, in any case, use the powers of nature in the manner that God requires, without the gracious influence of the Holy Spirit, but whether they are naturally able so to use them. Is the fact that they never do so use them without a gracious divine influence, to be ascribed to absolute inability, or to the fact that, from the beginning, they universally and voluntarily consecrate their powers to the gratification of self, and that therefore they will not, unless they are divinely persuaded, by the gracious influence of the Holy Spirit, in any case turn and consecrate their powers to the service of God? If this doctrine of natural inability and of gracious ability be true, it inevitably follows:--

1. That but for the atonement of Christ, and the consequent bestowment of a gracious ability, no one of Adam's race could ever have been capable of sinning. For in this case the whole race would have been, and remained, wholly destitute of any kind or degree of ability to obey God. Consequently they could not have been subjects of moral government, and of course their actions could have had no moral character. It is a first truth of reason, a truth everywhere and by all men necessarily assumed in their practical judgments, that a subject of moral government must be a moral agent, or that moral agency is a necessary condition of any one's being a subject of a moral government. And in the practical judgment of men, it matters not at all whether a being ever was a moral agent, or not. If by any means whatever he has ceased to be a moral agent, men universally and necessarily assume, that it is impossible for him to be a subject of moral government any more than a horse can be such a subject. Suppose he has by his own fault made himself an idiot or a lunatic; all men know absolutely, and in their practical judgment assume, that in this state he is not, and cannot be a subject of moral government. They know that in this state, moral character cannot justly be predicated of his actions. His guilt in thus depriving himself of moral agency may be exceeding great, and, as was said on a former occasion, his guilt in thus depriving himself of moral agency may equal the sum of all the default of which it is the cause,--but be a moral agent, be under moral obligation in this state of dementation or insanity, he cannot. This is a first truth of reason, irresistibly and universally assumed by all men. If therefore Adam's posterity had by their own personal act cast away and deprived themselves of all ability to obey God, in this state they would have ceased to be moral agents, and consequently

they could have sinned no more. But the case under consideration is not the one just supposed, but is one where moral agency was not cast away by the agent himself. It is one where moral agency was never, and never could have been possessed. In the case under consideration, Adam's posterity, had he ever had any, would never have possessed any power to obey God, or to do anything acceptable to him. Consequently, they never could have sustained to God the relation of subjects of his moral government. Of course they never could have had moral character; right or wrong, in a moral sense, never could have been predicated of their actions.

2. It must follow from this doctrine of gracious ability and natural inability, that mankind lost their freedom, or the liberty of the human will in the first sin of Adam; that both Adam himself, and all his posterity would and could have sustained to God only the relation of necessary, as opposed to free agents, had not God bestowed upon them a gracious ability.

We have seen in a former lecture, that natural ability to obey God, and the freedom or liberty of will, are identical. We have abundantly seen that moral law and moral obligation respect strictly only acts of will; that hence, all obedience to God consists strictly in acts of will; that power to will in conformity with the requirements of God, is natural ability to obey him; that freedom or liberty of will, consists in the power or ability to will in conformity or opposition to the will or law of God; that, therefore, freedom or liberty of will, and natural ability to obey God, are identical. Thus we see, that if man lost his natural ability to obey God in the first sin of Adam, he lost the freedom of his will, and thenceforth must for ever have remained a necessary agent, but for the gracious re-bestowment of ability or freedom of will.

But that either Adam or his posterity lost their freedom or free agency by the first sin of Adam, is not only a sheer but an absurd assumption. To be sure Adam fell into a state of total alienation from the law of God, and lapsed into a state of supreme selfishness. His posterity have unanimously followed his example. He and they have become dead in trespasses and sins. Now that this death in sin either consists in, or implies the loss of free agency, is the very thing to be proved by them. But this cannot be proved. I have so fully discussed the subject of human moral depravity or sinfulness on a former occasion, as to render it unnecessary to enlarge upon it here.

3. Again, if it be true, as these theologians affirm, that men have only a gracious ability to obey God, and that this gracious ability consists in the presence and gracious agency of the Holy Spirit, it follows that, when the Holy Spirit is withdrawn from man, he is no longer a free agent, and from that moment he is incapable of moral action, and of course can sin no more. Hence, should he live any number of years after this withdrawal, neither sin nor holiness, virtue nor vice, praise nor blame-worthiness could be predicated of his conduct. The same will and must be true of all his future eternity.

4. If the doctrine in question be true, it follows, that from the moment of the withdrawal of the gracious influence of the Holy Spirit, man is no longer a subject of moral obligation. It is from that moment absurd and unjust to require the performance of

any duty of him. Nay, to conceive of him as being any longer a subject of duty; to think or speak of duty as belonging to him, is as absurd as to think or speak of the duty of a mere machine. He has, from the moment of the withholding of a gracious ability, ceased to be a free and become a necessary agent, having power to act but in one direction. Such a being can by no possibility be capable of sin or holiness. Suppose he still possesses power to act contrary to the letter of the law of God: what then? This action can have no moral character, because, act in some way he must, and he can act in no other way. It is nonsense to affirm that such action can be sinful in the sense of blameworthy. To affirm that it can, is to contradict a first truth of reason. Sinners, then, who have quenched the Holy Spirit, and from whom he is wholly withdrawn, are no longer to be blamed for their enmity against God, and for all their opposition to him. They are, according to this doctrine, as free from blame as are the motions of a mere machine.

5. Again, if the doctrine in question be true, there is no reason to believe that the angels that fell from their allegiance to God ever sinned but once. If Adam lost his free agency by the fall, or by his first sin, there can be no doubt that the angels did so too. If a gracious ability had not been bestowed upon Adam, it is certain, according to the doctrine in question, that he never could have been the subject of moral obligation from the moment of his first sin, and consequently, could never again have sinned. The same must be true of devils. If by their first sin they fell into the condition of necessary agents, having lost their free agency, they have never sinned since. That is, moral character cannot have been predicable of their conduct since that event, unless a gracious ability has been bestowed upon them. That this has been done cannot, with even a show of reason, be pretended. The devils, then, according to this doctrine, are not now to blame for all they do to oppose God and to ruin souls. Upon the supposition in question, they cannot help it; and you might as well blame the winds and the waves for the evil which they sometimes do, as blame Satan for what he does.

6. If this doctrine be true, there is not, and never will be, any sin in hell, for the plain reason, that there are no moral agents there. They are necessary agents, unless it be true, that the Holy Spirit and a gracious ability be continued there. This is not, I believe, contended for by the abettors of this scheme. But if they deny to the inhabitants of hell freedom of the will, or, which is the same thing, natural ability to obey God, they must admit, or be grossly inconsistent, that there is no sin in hell, either in men or devils. But is this admission agreeable, either to reason or revelation? I know that the abettors of this scheme maintain, that God may justly hold both men, from whom a gracious ability is withdrawn, and devils, responsible for their conduct, upon the ground that they have destroyed their own ability. But suppose this were true--that they had rendered themselves idiots, lunatics, or necessary as opposed to free agents, could God justly, could enlightened reason still regard them as moral agents, and as morally responsible for their conduct? No, indeed. God and reason may justly blame, and render them miserable, for annihilating their freedom or their moral agency, but to hold them still responsible for present obedience, were absurd.

7. We have seen that the ability of all men of sane mind to obey God, is necessarily assumed as a first truth of reason, and that this assumption is, from the very laws of mind,

the indispensable condition of the affirmation, or even the conception, that they are subjects of moral obligation; that, but for this assumption, men could not so much as conceive the possibility of moral responsibility, and of praise and blame-worthiness. If the laws of mind remain unaltered, this is and always will be so. In the eternal world and in hell, men and devils must necessarily assume their own freedom or ability to obey God, as the condition of their obligation to do so, and, consequently to their being capable of sin or holiness. Since revelation informs us that men and devils continue to sin in hell, we know that there also it must be assumed as a first truth of reason, that they are free agents, or that they have natural ability to obey God.

8. But that a gracious ability to do duty or to obey God is an absurdity, will further appear, if we consider that it is a first truth of reason, that moral obligation implies moral agency, and that moral agency implies freedom of will; or in other words, it implies a natural ability to comply with obligation. This ability is necessarily regarded by the intelligence as the *sine qua non* of moral obligation, on the ground of natural and immutable justice. A just command always implies an ability to obey it. A command to perform a natural impossibility would not, and could not, impose obligation. Suppose God should command human beings to fly without giving them power, could such a command impose moral obligation? No, indeed. But suppose he should give them power, or promise them power, upon the performance of a condition within their reach, then he might in justice require them to fly, and a command to do so would be obligatory. But relatively to the requirement, the bestowment of power would not be grace, but justice. Relatively to the results or the pleasure of flying, the bestowment of power might be gracious. That is, it might be grace in God to give me power to fly, that I might have the pleasure and profit of flying, so that relatively to the results of flying, the giving of power might be regarded as an act of grace. But, if God requires me to fly as a matter of duty, he must in justice supply the power or ability to fly. This would in justice be a necessary condition of the command, imposing moral obligation.

Nor would it at all vary the case if I had ever possessed wings, and by the abuse of them had lost the power to fly. In this case, considered relatively to the pleasure, and profit, and results of flying, the restoring of the power to fly might and would be an act of grace. But if God would still command me to fly, he must, as a condition of my obligation, restore the power. It is vain and absurd to say, as has been said, that in such a case, although I might lose the power of obedience, this cannot alter the right of God to claim obedience. This assertion proceeds upon the absurd assumption that the will of God makes or creates law, instead of merely declaring and enforcing the law of nature. We have seen in former lectures, that the only law or rule of action that is, or can be obligatory on a moral agent, is the law of nature, or just that course of willing and acting, which is for the time being, suitable to his nature and relations. We have seen that God's will never makes or creates law, that it only declares and enforces it. If therefore, by any means whatever, the nature of a moral agent should be so changed that his will is no longer free to act in conformity with, or in opposition to, the law of nature, if God would hold him still obligated to obey, he must in justice, relatively to his requirement, restore his liberty or ability. Suppose one had by the abuse of his intellect lost the use of it, and become a perfect idiot, could he by any possibility be still required to understand and

obey God? Certainly not. So neither could he be required to perform anything else that had become naturally impossible to him. Viewed relatively to the pleasure and results of obedience, his restoring power would be an act of grace. But viewed relatively to his duty or to God's command, the restoring of power to obey is an act of justice and not of grace. To call this grace were to abuse language, and confound terms. But this brings me to the consideration of the next question to be discussed at present, namely,--

III. *In what sense a gracious ability is possible.*

1. Not, as we have just seen, in the sense that the bestowment of power to render obedience to a command possible, can be properly a gift of grace. Grace is undeserved favour, something not demanded by justice, that which under the circumstances might be withholden without injustice. It never can be just in any being to require that which under the circumstances is impossible. As has been said, relatively to the requirement and as a condition of its justice, the bestowment of power adequate to the performance of that which is commanded, is an unalterable condition of the justice of the command. This I say is a first truth of reason, a truth everywhere by all men necessarily assumed and known. A gracious ability to obey a command, is an absurdity and an impossibility.

2. But a gracious ability considered relatively to the advantages to result from obedience is possible.

Suppose, for example, that a servant who supports himself and his family by his wages, should by his own fault render himself unable to labour and to earn his wages. His master may justly dismiss him, and let him go with his family to the poor-house. But in this disabled state his master cannot justly exact labour of him. Nor could he do so if he absolutely owned the servant. Now suppose the master to be able to restore to the servant his former strength. If he would require service of him, as a condition of the justice of this requirement, he must restore his strength so far at least as to render obedience possible. This would be mere justice. But suppose he restored the ability of the servant to gain support for himself and his family by labour. This, viewed relatively to the good of the servant, to the results of the restoration of his ability to himself and to his family, is a matter of grace. Relatively to the good or rights of the master in requiring the labour of the servant, the restoration of ability to obey is an act of justice. But relatively to the good of the servant, and the benefits that result to him from this restoration of ability, and making it once more possible for him to support himself and his family, the giving of ability is properly an act of grace.

Let this be applied to the case under consideration. Suppose the race of Adam to have lost their free agency by the first sin of Adam, and thus to have come into a state in which holiness and consequent salvation were impossible. Now, if God would still require obedience of them, he must in justice restore their ability. And viewed relatively to his right to command, and their duty to obey, this restoration is properly a matter of justice. But suppose he would again place them in circumstances to render holiness and consequent salvation possible to them:-- viewed relatively to their good and profit, this restoration of ability is properly a matter of grace.

A gracious ability to obey, viewed relatively to the command to be obeyed, is impossible and absurd. But a gracious ability to be saved, viewed relatively to salvation, is possible.

There is no proof that mankind ever lost their ability to obey, either by the first sin of Adam, or by their own sin. For this would imply, as we have seen, that they had ceased to be free, and had become necessary agents. But if they had, and God had restored their ability to obey, all that can be justly said in this case, is, that so far as his right to command is concerned, the restoration of their ability was an act of justice. But so far as the rendering of salvation possible to them is concerned, it was an act of grace.

3. But it is asserted, or rather assumed by the defenders of the dogma under consideration, that the Bible teaches the doctrine of a natural inability, and of a gracious ability in man to obey the commands of God. I admit, indeed, that if we interpret scripture without regard to any just rules of interpretation, this assumption may find countenance in the word of God, just as almost any absurdity whatever may do, and has done. But a moderate share of attention to one of the simplest and most universal and most important rules of interpreting language, whether in the Bible or out of it, will strip this absurd dogma of the least appearance of support from the word of God. The rule to which I refer is this, "that language is always to be interpreted in accordance with the subject-matter of discourse."

When used of acts of will, the term "cannot" interpreted by this rule, must not be understood to mean a proper impossibility. If I say, I cannot take five dollars for my watch, when it is offered to me, every one knows that I do not and cannot mean to affirm a proper impossibility. So when the angel said to Lot, "Haste thee, for I cannot do anything until thou become thither," who ever understood him as affirming a natural or any proper impossibility? All that he could have meant was, that he was not willing to do anything until Lot was in a place of safety. Just so when the Bible speaks of our inability to comply with the commands of God, all that can be intended is, that we are so unwilling that, without divine persuasion, we, as a matter of fact, shall not and will not obey. This certainly is the sense in which such language is used in common life. And in common parlance, we never think of such language, when used of acts of will, as meaning anything more than unwillingness, a state in which the will is strongly committed in an opposite direction.

When Joshua said to the children of Israel, "Ye cannot serve the Lord, for he is a holy God," the whole context, as well as the nature of the case, shows that he did not mean to affirm a natural, nor indeed any kind of impossibility. In the same connexion, he requires them to serve the Lord, and leads them solemnly to pledge themselves to serve him. He undoubtedly intended to say, that with wicked hearts they could not render him an acceptable service, and therefore insisted on their putting away the wickedness of their hearts, by immediately and voluntarily consecrating themselves to the service of the Lord. So it must be in all cases where the term "cannot," and such-like expressions which, when applied to muscular action, would imply a proper impossibility, are used in reference to acts of will; they cannot, when thus used be understood as implying a proper

impossibility, without doing violence to every sober rule of interpreting language. What would be thought of a judge or an advocate at the bar of an earthly tribunal, who should interpret the language of a witness without any regard to the rule, "that language is to be understood according to the subject-matter of discourse." Should an advocate in his argument to the court or jury, attempt to interpret the language of a witness in a manner that made "cannot," when spoken of an act of will, mean a proper impossibility, the judge would soon rebuke his stupidity, and remind him that he must not talk nonsense in a court of justice; and might possibly add, that such nonsensical assertions were allowable only in the pulpit. I say again, that it is an utter abuse and perversion of the laws of language, so to interpret the Bible as to make it teach a proper inability in man to will as God directs. The essence of obedience to God consists in willing. Language, then, used in reference to obedience must, when properly understood, be interpreted in accordance with the subject-matter of discourse. Consequently, when used in reference to acts of will, such expressions as "cannot," and the like, can absolutely mean nothing more than a choice in an opposite direction. But it may be asked, Is there no grace in all that is done by the Holy Spirit to make man wise unto salvation? Yes, indeed, I answer. And it is grace, and great grace, just because the doctrine of a natural inability in man to obey God is not true. It is just because man is well able to render obedience, and unjustly refuses to do so, that all the influence that God brings to bear upon him to make him willing, is a gift and an influence of grace. The grace is great, just in proportion to the sinner's ability to comply with God's requirements, and the strength of his voluntary opposition to his duty. If man were properly unable to obey, there could be no grace in giving him ability to obey, when the bestowment of ability is considered relatively to the command. But let man be regarded as free, as possessing natural ability to obey all the requirements of God, and all his difficulty as consisting in a wicked heart, or, which is the same thing, in an unwillingness to obey, then an influence on the part of God designed and tending to make him willing, is grace indeed. But strip man of his freedom, render him naturally unable to obey, and you render grace impossible, so far as his obligation to obedience is concerned.

But it is urged in support of the dogma of natural inability and of a gracious ability, that the Bible everywhere represents man as dependent on the gracious influence of the Holy Spirit for all holiness, and consequently for eternal life. I answer, it is admitted that this is the representation of the Bible, but the question is, in what sense is he dependent? Does his dependence consist in a natural inability to embrace the gospel and be saved? or does it consist in a voluntary selfishness--in an unwillingness to comply with the terms of salvation? Is man dependent on the Holy Spirit to give him a proper ability to obey God? or is he dependent only in such a sense that, as a matter of fact, he will not embrace the gospel unless the Holy Spirit makes him willing? The latter, beyond reasonable question, is the truth. This is the universal representation of scripture. The difficulty to be overcome is everywhere in the Bible represented to be the sinner's unwillingness alone. It cannot possibly be anything else; for the willingness is the doing required by God. "If there is but a willing mind, it is accepted according to what a man hath, and not according to what he hath not."

But it is said, if man can be willing of himself, what need of divine persuasion or influence to make him willing? I might ask, suppose a man is able but unwilling to pay

his debts, what need of any influence to make him willing? Why, divine influence is needed to make a sinner willing, or to induce him to will as God directs, just for the same reason that persuasion, entreaty, argument, or the rod, is needed to make our children submit their wills to ours. The fact therefore that the Bible represents the sinner as in some sense dependent upon divine influence for a right heart, no more implies a proper inability in the sinner, than the fact that children are dependent for their good behaviour, oftentimes upon the thorough and timely discipline of their parents, implies a proper inability in them to obey their parents without chastisement.

The Bible everywhere, and in every way, assumes the freedom of the will. This fact stands out in strong relief upon every page of divine inspiration. But this is only the assumption necessarily made by the universal intelligence of man. The strong language often found in scripture upon the subject of man's inability to obey God, is designed only to represent the strength of his voluntary selfishness and enmity against God, and never to imply a proper natural inability. It is, therefore, a gross and most injurious perversion of scripture, as well as a contradiction of human reason, to deny the natural ability, or which is the same thing, the natural free agency of man, and to maintain a proper natural inability to obey God, and the absurd dogma of a gracious ability to do our duty.

#### REMARKS.

1. The question of ability is one of great practical importance. To deny the ability of man to obey the commandments of God, is to represent God as a hard master, as requiring a natural impossibility of his creatures on pain of eternal damnation. This necessarily begets in the mind that believes it hard thoughts of God. The intelligence cannot be satisfied with the justice of such a requisition. In fact, so far as this error gets possession of the mind and gains assent, just so far it naturally and necessarily excuses itself for disobedience, or for not complying with the commandments of God.

2. The moral inability of Edwards is a real natural inability, and so it has been understood by sinners and professors of religion. When I entered the ministry, I found the persuasion of an absolute inability on the part of sinners to repent and believe the gospel almost universal. When I urged sinners and professors of religion to do their duty without delay, I frequently met with stern opposition from sinners, professors of religion, and ministers. They desired me to say to sinners, that they could not repent, and that they must wait God's time, that is, for God to help them. It was common for the classes of persons just named to ask me, if I thought sinners could be Christians whenever they pleased, and whether I thought that any class of persons could repent, believe, and obey God without the strivings and new-creating power of the Holy Spirit. The church was almost universally settled down in the belief of a physical moral depravity, and, of course, in a belief in the necessity of a physical regeneration, and also of course in the belief, that sinners must wait to be regenerated by divine power while they were passive. Professors also must wait to be revived, until God, in mysterious sovereignty, came and revived them. As to revivals of religion, they were settled down in the belief to a great extent, that man had no more agency in producing them than in producing showers of rain. To attempt to effect the conversion of a sinner, or to promote a revival, was an

attempt to take the work out of the hands of God, to go to work in your own strength, and to set sinners and professors to do the same. The vigorous use of means and measures to promote a work of grace, was regarded by many as impious. It was getting up an excitement of animal feeling, and wickedly interfering with the prerogative of God. The fact is, that both professors of religion and non-professors were settled down upon their lees, in carnal security. The abominable dogmas of physical moral depravity, or a sinful constitution, with a consequent natural, falsely called moral, inability, and the necessity of a physical and passive regeneration, had chilled the heart of the church, and lulled sinners into a fatal sleep. This is the natural tendency of such doctrines.

3. Let it be distinctly understood before we close this subject, that we do not deny, but strenuously maintain, that the whole plan of salvation, and all the influences, both providential and spiritual, which God exerts in the conversion, sanctification, and salvation, of sinners, is grace from first to last, and that I deny the dogma of a gracious ability, because it robs God of his glory. It really denies the grace of the gospel. The abettors of this scheme, in contending for the grace of the gospel, really deny it. What grace can there be, that should surprise heaven and earth, and cause "the angels to desire to look into it," in bestowing ability on those who never had any, and, of course, who never cast away their ability to obey the requirements of God? According to them all men lost their ability in Adam, and not by their own act. God still required obedience of them upon pain of eternal death. Now he might, according to this view of the subject, just as reasonably command all men, on pain of eternal death, to fly, or undo all that Adam had done, or perform any other natural impossibility, as to command them to be holy, to repent and believe the gospel. Now, I ask again, what possible grace was there, or could there be, in his giving them power to obey him? To have required the obedience without giving the power had been infinitely unjust. To admit the assumption, that men had really lost their ability to obey in Adam, and call this bestowment of ability for which they contend, grace, is an abuse of language, an absurdity, and a denial of the true grace of the gospel not to be tolerated. I reject the dogma of a gracious ability, because it involves a denial of the true grace of the gospel. I maintain that the gospel, with all its influences, including the gift of the Holy Spirit, to convict, convert, and sanctify the soul, is a system of grace throughout. But to maintain this, I must also maintain, that God might justly have required obedience of men without making these provisions for them. And to maintain the justice of God in requiring obedience, I must admit and maintain that obedience was possible to man. But this the abettors of this scheme deny, and maintain, on the contrary, that notwithstanding men were deprived of all ability, not by their own act or consent, but by Adam, long before they were born, still God might justly, on pain of eternal damnation, require them to be holy, and that the giving them ability to obey is a matter of infinite grace; not, as they hold, the restoring of a power which they had cast away, but the giving of a power which they had never possessed. This power or ability, viewed relatively to the command to obey on pain of eternal death, a gift of grace! This baffles, and confounds, and stultifies the human intellect. The reason of a moral agent cannot but reject this dogma. It will, in spite of himself, assume and affirm, the absence of ability being granted, that the bestowment of an ability, viewed relatively to the command, was demanded by justice, and that to call it a gracious ability is an abuse of language.

Let it not be said then, that we deny the grace of the glorious gospel of the blessed God, nor that we deny the reality and necessity of the influences of the Holy Spirit to convert and sanctify the soul, nor that this influence is a gracious one; for all these we most strenuously maintain. But I maintain this upon the ground, that men are able to do their duty, and that the difficulty does not lie in a proper inability, but in a voluntary selfishness, in an unwillingness to obey the blessed gospel. I say again, that I reject the dogma of a gracious ability, as I understand its abettors to hold it, not because I deny, but solely because it denies the grace of the gospel. The denial of ability is really a denial of the possibility of grace in the affair of man's salvation. I admit the ability of man, and hold that he is able, but utterly unwilling, to obey God. Therefore I consistently hold, that all the influences exerted by God to make him willing, are of free grace abounding through Christ Jesus.

## LECTURE LII.

### THE NOTION OF INABILITY.

#### PROPER METHOD OF ACCOUNTING FOR IT.

I have represented ability, or the freedom of the will, as a first truth of reason. I have also defined first truths of reason to be those truths that are necessarily known to all moral agents. From these two representations the inquiry may naturally arise, How then is it to be accounted for that so many men have denied the liberty of the will, or ability to obey God? That these first truths of reason are frequently denied is a notorious fact. A recent writer thinks this denial a sufficient refutation of the affirmation, that ability is a first truth of reason. It is important that this denial should be accounted for. That mankind affirm their obligation upon the real, though often latent and unperceived assumption of ability, there is no reasonable ground of doubt. I have said that first-truths of reason are frequently assumed, and certainly known without being always the direct object of thought or attention; and also that these truths are universally held in the practical judgments of men, while they sometimes in theory deny them. They know them to be true, and in all their practical judgments assume their truth, while they reason against them, think they prove them untrue, and not unfrequently affirm, that they are conscious of an opposite affirmation. For example, men have denied, in theory, the law of causality, while they have at every moment of their lives acted upon the assumption of its truth. Others have denied the freedom of the will, who have, every hour of their lives, assumed, and acted, and judged, upon the assumption that the will is free. The same is true of ability, which, in respect to the commandments of God, is identical with freedom. Men have often denied the ability of man to obey the commandments of God, while they have always, in their practical judgments of themselves and of others, assumed their ability, in respect to those things that are really commanded by God. Now, how is this to be accounted for?

1. Multitudes have denied the freedom of the will, because they have loosely confounded the will with the involuntary powers--with the intellect and the sensibility. Locke, as is well known, regarded the mind as possessing but two primary faculties, the understanding and the will. President Edwards, as was said in a former lecture, followed Locke, and regarded all the states of the sensibility as acts of the will. Multitudes, nay the great mass of Calvinistic divines, with their hearers, have held the same views. This confounding of the sensibility with the will has been common for a long time. Now everybody is conscious, that the states of the sensibility or mere feelings cannot be produced or changed by a direct effort to feel thus or thus. Everybody knows from consciousness that the feelings come and go, wax and wane, as motives are presented to excite them. And they know also that these feelings are under the law of necessity and not of liberty; that is, that necessity is an attribute of these feelings, in such a sense, that under the circumstances, they will exist in spite of ourselves, and that they cannot be controlled by a direct effort to control them. Everybody knows that our feelings, or the

states of our sensibility can be controlled only indirectly, that is, by the direction of our thoughts. By directing our thoughts to an object calculated to excite certain feelings, we know that when the excitability is not exhausted, feelings correlated to that object will come into play, of course and of necessity. So when any class of feelings exist, we all know that by diverting the attention from the object that excites them, they subside of course, and give place to a class correlated to the new object that at present occupies the attention. Now, it is very manifest how the freedom of the will has come to be denied by those who confound the will proper with the sensibility. These same persons have always known and assumed, that the actions of the will proper were free. Their error has consisted in not distinguishing in theory between the action of the proper will, and the involuntary states of the sensibility. In their practical judgments, and in their conduct, they have recognized the distinction which they have failed to recognize in their speculations and theories. They have every hour been exerting their own freedom, have been controlling directly their attention and their outward life, by the free exercise of their proper will. They have also, by the free exercise of the same faculty, been indirectly controlling the states of their sensibility. They have all along assumed the absolute freedom of the will proper, and have always acted upon the assumption, or they would not have acted at all, or even attempted to act. But since they did not in theory distinguish between the sensibility and the will proper, they denied in theory the freedom of the will. If the actions of the will be confounded with desires and emotions, as President Edwards confounded them, and as has been common, the result must be a theoretical denial of the freedom of the will. In this way we are to account for the doctrine of inability, as it has been generally held. It has not been clearly understood that moral law legislates directly, and, with strict propriety of speech, only over the will proper, and over the involuntary powers only indirectly through the will. It has been common to regard the law and the gospel of God, as directly extending their claims to the involuntary powers and states of mind; and, as was shown in a former lecture, many have regarded, in theory, the law as extending its claims to those states that lie wholly beyond, either the direct or indirect control of the will. Now, of course, with these views of the claims of God, ability is and must be denied. I trust we have seen in past lectures, that, strictly and properly speaking, the moral law restricts its claims to the actions of the will proper, in such a sense that, if there be a willing mind, it is accepted as obedience; that the moral law and the lawgiver legislate over involuntary states only indirectly, that is, through the will; and that the whole of virtue, strictly speaking, consists in good-will or disinterested benevolence. Sane minds never practically deny, or can deny, the freedom of the will proper, or the doctrine of ability, when they make the proper discriminations between the will and the sensibility, and properly regard moral law as legislating directly only over the will. It is worthy of all consideration, that those who have denied ability, have almost always confounded the will and the sensibility; and that those who have denied ability, have always extended the claims of moral law beyond the pale of proper voluntariness; and many of them even beyond the limits of either the direct or the indirect control of the will.

But the inquiry may arise, how it comes to pass that men have so extensively entertained the impression, that the moral law legislates directly over those feelings, and over those states of mind which they know to be involuntary? I answer, that this mistake

has arisen out of a want of just discrimination between the direct and indirect legislation of the law, and of the lawgiver. It is true that men are conscious of being responsible for their feelings and for their outward actions, and even for their thoughts. And it is really true that they are responsible for them, in so far as they are under either the direct or indirect control of the will. And they know that these acts and states of mind are possible to them, that is, that they have an indirect ability to produce them. They, however, loosely confound the direct and indirect ability and responsibility. The thing required by the law directly and presently is benevolence or good-will. This is what, and all that the law strictly, presently or directly requires. It indirectly requires all those outward and inward acts and states that are connected directly and indirectly with this required act of will, by a law of necessity; that is, that those acts and states should follow as soon as by a natural and necessary law they will follow from a right action of the will. When these feelings, and states, and acts do not exist, they blame themselves generally with propriety, because the absence of them is in fact owing to a want of the required act of the will. Sometimes, no doubt, they blame themselves unjustly, not considering that, although the will is right, of which they are conscious, the involuntary state or act does not follow, because of exhaustion, or because of some disturbance in the established and natural connection between the acts of the will and its ordinary sequents. When this exhaustion or disturbance exists, men are apt, loosely and unjustly, to write bitter things against themselves. They often do the same in hours of temptation, when Satan casts his fiery darts at them, lodging them in the thoughts and involuntary feelings. The will repels them, but they take effect, for the time being, in spite of himself, in the intellect and sensibility. Blasphemous thoughts are suggested to the mind, unkind thoughts of God are suggested, and in spite of one's self, these abominable thoughts awaken their correlated feelings. The will abhors them and struggles to suppress them, but for the time being, finds itself unable to do anything more than to fight and resist.

Now, it is very common for souls in this state to write the most bitter accusations against themselves. But should it be hence inferred that they really are as much in fault as they assume themselves to be? No, indeed. But why do ministers, of all schools, unite in telling such tempted souls, You are mistaken, my dear brother or sister, these thoughts and feelings, though exercises of your own mind, are not yours in such a sense that you are responsible for them. The thoughts are suggested by Satan, and the feelings are a necessary consequence. Your will resists them, and this proves that you are unable, for the time being, to avoid them. You are therefore not responsible for them while you resist them with all the power of your will, any more than you would be guilty of murder should a giant overpower your strength, and use your hand against your will to shoot a man. In such cases it is, so far as I know, universally true, that all schools admit that the tempted soul is not responsible or guilty for those things which it cannot help. The inability is here allowed to be a bar to obligation; and such souls are justly told by ministers, You are mistaken in supposing yourself guilty in this case. The like mistake is fallen into when a soul blames itself for any state of mind whatever that lies wholly and truly beyond the direct or indirect control of the will, and for the same reason, inability in both cases is alike a bar to obligation. It is just as absurd, in the one case as in the other, to infer real responsibility from a feeling or persuasion of responsibility. To hold that men are always responsible, because they loosely think themselves to be so is absurd. In

cases of temptation, such as that just supposed, as soon as the attention is directed to the fact of inability to avoid those thoughts and feelings, and the mind is conscious of the will's resisting them, and of being unable to banish them, it readily rests in the assurance that it is not responsible for them. Its own irresponsibility in such cases appears self-evident to the mind, the moment the proper inability is considered, and the affirmation of irresponsibility attended to. Now if the soul naturally and truly regarded itself as responsible, when there is a proper inability and impossibility, the instructions above referred to could not relieve the mind. It would say, To be sure I know that I cannot avoid having these thoughts and feelings, any more than I can cease to be the subject of consciousness, yet I know I am responsible notwithstanding. These thoughts and feelings are states of my own mind, and no matter how I come by them, or whether I can control or prevent them or not. Inability, you know, is no bar to obligation; therefore, my obligation and my guilt remain. Woe is me, for I am undone. The idea, then, of responsibility, when there is in fact real inability, is a prejudice of education, a mistake.

The mistake, unless strong prejudice of education has taken possession of the mind, lies in overlooking the fact of a real and proper inability. Unless the judgment has been strongly biased by education, it never judges itself bound to perform impossibilities, nor even conceive of such a thing. Who ever held himself bound to undo what is past, to recall past time, or to substitute holy acts and states of mind in the place of past sinful ones? No one ever held himself bound to do this; first, because he knows it to be impossible; and secondly, because no one that I have heard of ever taught or asserted any such obligation; and therefore none have received so strong a bias from education as loosely to hold such an opinion. But sometimes the bias of education is so great, that the subjects of it seem capable of believing almost anything, however inconsistent with the intuitions of the reason, and consequently in the face of the most certain knowledge. For example, President Edwards relates of a young woman in his congregation, that she was deeply convicted of being guilty for Adam's first sin, and deeply repented of it. Now suppose that this and like cases should be regarded as conclusive proof that men are guilty of that sin, and deserve the wrath and curse of God for ever for that sin; and that all men will suffer the pains of hell for ever, except they become convinced of their personal guilt for that sin, and repent of it as in dust and ashes! President Edwards's teaching on the subject of the relation of all men to Adam's first sin, it is well known, was calculated in a high degree to pervert the judgment upon that subject; and this sufficiently accounts for the fact above alluded to. But apart from education, no human being ever held himself responsible for, or guilty of, the first or any other sin of Adam, or of any other being, who existed and died before he himself existed. The reason is that all moral agents naturally know, that inability or a proper impossibility is a bar to moral obligation and responsibility; and they never conceive to the contrary, unless biased by a mystifying education that casts a fog over their primitive and constitutional convictions.

2. Some have denied ability because they have strangely held, that the moral law requires sinners to be just in all respects what they might have been had they never sinned. That is, they maintain that God requires of them just as high and perfect a service as if their powers had never been abused by sin; as if they had always been developed by the perfectly right use of them. This they admit to be a natural impossibility; nevertheless

they hold that God may justly require it, and that sinners are justly bound to perform this impossible service, and that they sin continually in coming short of it. To this sentiment I answer, that it might be maintained with as much show of reason, and as much authority from the Bible, that God might and does require of all sinners to undo all their acts of sin, and to substitute holy ones in their places, and that he holds them as sinning every moment by the neglect to do this. Why may not God as well require one as the other? They are alike impossibilities. They are alike impossibilities originating in the sinner's own act or fault. If the sinner's rendering himself unable to obey in one case does not set aside the right of God to command, so does it not for the same reason in the other. If an inability resulting from the sinner's own act cannot bar the right of God to make the requisition in the one case, neither can it for the same reason in the other. But every one can see that God cannot justly require the sinner to recall past time, and to undo past acts. But why? No other reason can be assigned than that it is impossible. But the same reason, it is admitted, exists in its full extent in the other case. It is admitted that sinners, who have long indulged in sin, or who have sinned at all, are really as unable to render as high a degree of service as they might have done had they never sinned, as they are to recall past time, or to undo all their past acts of sin. On what ground, then, of reason or revelation does the assertion rest, that in one case an impossibility is a bar to obligation, and not in the other? I answer, there is no ground whatever for the assertion in question. It is a sheer and an absurd assumption, unsupported by any affirmation of reason, or any truth or principle of revelation.

But to this assumption I reply again, as I have done on a former occasion, that if it be true, it must follow, that no one on earth or in heaven who has ever sinned will be able to render as perfect a service as the law demands; for there is no reason to believe, that any being who has abused his powers by sin will ever in time or eternity be able to render as high a service as he might have done had he at every moment duly developed them by perfect obedience. If this theory is true, I see not why it does not follow that the saints will be guilty in heaven of the sin of omission. A sentiment based upon an absurdity in the outset, as the one in question is, and resulting in such consequences as this must, is to be rejected without hesitation.

3. A consciousness of the force of habit, in respect to all the acts and states of body and mind, has contributed to the loose holding of the doctrine of inability. Every one who is at all in the habit of observation and self-reflection is aware, that for some reason we acquire a greater and greater facility in doing anything by practice or repetition. We find this to be true in respect to acts of will as really as in respect to the involuntary states of mind. When the will has been long committed to the indulgence of the propensities, and in the habit of submitting itself to their impulses, there is a real difficulty of some sort in the way of changing its action. This difficulty cannot really impair the liberty of the will. If it could, it would destroy, or so far impair, moral agency and accountability. But habit may, and, as every one knows, does interpose an obstacle of some sort in the way of right willing, or, on the other hand, in the way of wrong willing. That is, men both obey and disobey with greatest facility from habit. Habit strongly favours the accustomed action of the will in any direction. This, as I said, never does or can properly impair the freedom of the will, or render it impossible to act in a contrary direction; for if it could and should,

the actions of the will, in that case, being determined by a law of necessity in one direction, would have no moral character. If benevolence became a habit so strong that it were utterly impossible to will in an opposite direction, or not to will benevolently, benevolence would cease to be virtuous. So, on the other hand, with selfishness. If the will came to be determined in that direction by habit grown into a law of necessity, such action would and must cease to have moral character. But, as I said, there is a real conscious difficulty of some sort in the way of obedience, when the will has been long accustomed to sin. This is strongly recognized in the language of inspiration and in devotional hymns, as well as in the language of experience by all men. The language of scripture is often so strong upon this point, that, but for a regard to the subject-matter of discourse, we might justly infer a proper inability. For example, Jer. xiii. 23: "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil." This and similar passages recognize the influence of habit. "Then may ye who are accustomed to do evil:" custom or habit is to be overcome, and, in the strong language of the prophet, this is like changing the Ethiop's skin or the leopard's spots. But to understand the prophet as here affirming a proper inability were to disregard one of the fundamental rules of interpreting language, namely, that it is to be understood by reference to the subject of discourse. The latter part of the seventh chapter of Romans affords a striking instance and an illustration of this. It is, as has just been said, a sound and most important rule of interpreting all language, that due regard be had to the subject-matter of discourse. When "cannot," and such like terms, that express an inability are applied to physical or involuntary actions or states of mind, they express a proper natural inability; but when they are used in reference to actions of free will, they express not a proper impossibility, but only a difficulty arising out of the existence of a contrary choice, or the law of habit, or both. Much question has been made about the seventh of Romans in its relation to the subject of ability and inability. Let us, therefore, look a little into this passage, Romans vii. 15-23: "For that which I do, I allow not; for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I. If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that it is good. Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. For I know that in me (that is in my flesh) dwelleth no good thing; for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not; but the evil which I would not, that I do. Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. I find then a law, that when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members." Now, what did the Apostle mean by this language? Did he use language here in the popular sense, or with strictly philosophical propriety? He says he finds himself able to will, but not able to do. Is he then speaking of a mere outward or physical inability? Does he mean merely to say, that the established connexion between volition and its sequents was disturbed, so that he could not execute his volitions? This his language, literally interpreted, and without reference to the subject-matter of discourse, and without regard to the manifest scope and design of the writer, would lead us to conclude. But whoever contended for such an interpretation? The apostle used popular language, and was describing a very common experience. Convicted sinners and backslidden saints often make legal resolutions, and resolve upon obedience under the influence of legal motives, and without really becoming benevolent, and

changing the attitude of their wills. They, under the influence of conviction, purpose selfishly to do their duty to God and man, and, in the presence of temptation, they constantly fail of keeping their resolutions. It is true, that with their selfish hearts, or in the selfish attitude of their wills, they cannot keep their resolutions to abstain from those inward thoughts and emotions, nor from those outward actions that result by a law of necessity from a selfish state or attitude of the will. These legal resolutions the apostle popularly calls willings. "To will is present with me, but how to do good I find not. When I would do good, evil is present with me, so that the good I would I do not, and the evil I would not that I do. If then I do the evil I would not, it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. I delight in the law of God after the inner man. But I see another law in my members warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members," &c. Now, this appears to me to be descriptive of a very familiar experience of every deeply convicted sinner or backslider. The will is committed to the propensities, to the law in the members, or to the gratification of the impulses of the sensibility. Hence, the outward life is selfish. Conviction of sin leads to the formation of resolutions of amendment, while the will does not submit to God. These resolutions constantly fail of securing the result contemplated. The will still abides in a state of committal to self-gratification; and hence resolutions to amend in feeling or the outward life, fail of securing those results.

Nothing was more foreign from the apostle's purpose, it seems to me, than to affirm a proper inability of will to yield to the claims of God. Indeed, he affirms and assumes the freedom of his will. "To will," he says, "is present with me;" that is, to resolve. But resolution is an act of will. It is a purpose, a design. He purposed, designed to amend. To form resolutions was present with him, but how to do good he found not. The reason why he did not execute his purposes was, that they were selfishly made; that is, he resolved upon reformation without giving his heart to God, without submitting his will to God, without actually becoming benevolent. This caused his perpetual failure. This language, construed strictly to the letter, would lead to the conclusion, that the apostle was representing a case where the will is right, but where the established and natural connexion between volition and its sequents is destroyed, so that the outward act did not follow the action of the will. In this case all schools would agree that the act of the will constitutes real obedience. The whole passage, apart from the subject-matter of discourse, and from the manifest design and scope of the writer, might lead us to conclude, that the apostle was speaking of a proper inability, and that he did not therefore regard the failure as his own fault. "It is no more I, but sin that dwelleth in me. O wretched man that I am," &c. Those who maintain that the apostle meant to assert a proper inability to obey, must also admit that he represented this inability as a bar to obligation, and regarded his state as calamitous, rather than as properly sinful. But the fact is, he was portraying a legal experience, and spoke of finding himself unable to keep selfish resolutions of amendment in the presence of temptation. His will was in a state of committal to the indulgence of the propensities. In the absence of temptation, his convictions, and fears, and feelings were the strongest impulses, and under their influence he would form resolutions to do his duty, to abstain from fleshly indulgences, &c. But as some other appetite or desire came to be more strongly excited, he yielded to that of course, and broke his former resolution. Paul writes as if speaking of himself, but was doubtless speaking as the representative of

a class of persons already named. He found the law of selfish habit exceedingly strong, and so strong as to lead him to cry out, "O wretched man," &c. But this is not affirming a proper inability of will to submit to God.

4. All men who seriously undertake their own reformation find themselves in great need of help and support from the Holy Spirit, in consequence of the physical depravity of which I have formerly spoken, and because of the great strength of their habit of self-indulgence. They are prone, as is natural, to express their sense of dependence on the Divine Spirit in strong language, and to speak of this dependence as if it consisted in a real inability, when, in fact, they do not really consider it as a proper inability. They speak upon this subject just as they do upon any and every other subject, when they are conscious of a strong inclination to a given course. They say in respect to many things, "I cannot," when they mean only "I will not," and never think of being understood as affirming a proper inability. The inspired writers expressed themselves in the common language of men upon such subjects, and are doubtless to be understood in the same way. In common parlance, "cannot" often means "will not," and perhaps is used as often in this sense as it is to express a proper inability. Men do not misinterpret this language, and suppose it to affirm a proper inability, when used in reference to acts of will, except on the subject of obedience to God; and why should they assign a meaning to language when used upon this subject which they do not assign to it anywhere else?

But, as I said in a former lecture, under the light of the gospel, and with the promises in our hands, God does require of us what we should be unable to do and be, but for these promises and this proffered assistance. Here is a real inability to do directly in our own strength all that is required of us, upon consideration of the proffered aid. We can only do it by strength imparted by the Holy Spirit. That is, we cannot know Christ, and avail ourselves of his offices and relations, and appropriate to our own souls his fulness, except as we are taught by the Holy Spirit. The thing immediately and directly required, is to receive the Holy Spirit by faith to be our teacher and guide, to take of Christ's and show it to us. This confidence we are able to exercise. Who ever really and intelligently affirmed that he had not power or ability to trust or confide in the promise and oath of God?

Much that is said of inability in poetry, and in the common language of the saints, respects not the subjection of the will to God, but those experiences, and states of feeling that depend on the illuminations of the Spirit just referred to. The language that is so common in prayer and in the devotional dialect of the church, respects generally our dependence upon the Holy Spirit for such divine discoveries of Christ, as to charm the soul into a steadfast abiding in him. We feel our dependence upon the Holy Spirit so to enlighten us, as to break up for ever the power of sinful habit, and draw us away from our idols entirely and for ever.

In future lectures I shall have occasion to enlarge much upon the subject of our dependence upon Christ and the Holy Spirit. But this dependence does not consist in a proper inability to will as God directs, but, as I have said, partly in the power of sinful habit, and partly in the great darkness of our souls in respect to Christ and his mediatorial work and relations. All these together do not constitute a proper inability, for the plain

reason, that through the right action of our will which is always possible to us, these difficulties can all be directly or indirectly overcome. Whatever we can do or be, directly or indirectly, by willing, is possible to us. But there is no degree of spiritual attainment required of us, that may not be reached directly or indirectly by right willing. Therefore these attainments are possible. "If any man," says Christ, "will do his will," that is, has an obedient will, "he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God." "If thine eye be single," that is, if the intention or will is right, "thy whole body shall be full of light." "If any man love me, he will keep my words, and my Father will love him, and we will come and make our abode with him." The scriptures abound with assurances of light and instruction, and of all needed grace and help, upon condition of a right will or heart, that is, upon condition of our being really willing to obey the light, when and as fast as we receive it. I have abundantly shown on former occasions, that a right state of the will constitutes, for the time being, all that, strictly speaking, the moral law requires. But I said, that it also, though in a less strict and proper sense, requires all those acts and states of the intellect and sensibility which are connected by a law of necessity with the right action of the will. Of course, it also requires that cleansing of the sensibility, and all those higher forms of Christian experience that result from the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. That is, the law of God requires that these attainments shall be made when the means are provided and enjoyed, and as soon as, in the nature of the case, these attainments are possible. But it requires no more than this. For the law of God can never require absolute impossibilities. That which requires absolute impossibilities, is not and cannot be moral law. For, as was formerly said, moral law is the law of nature, and what law of nature would that be that should require absolute impossibilities? This would be a mockery of a law of nature. What! a law of nature requiring that which is impossible to nature, both directly and indirectly! Impossible.