

Studies on Saving Faith

Part 3 – CHAPTER 6

By [A.W. Pink](#)

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Part 3

CHAPTER 6 – OBSTACLES IN COMING TO CHRIST

Under this head it will be our endeavor to show why it is that the natural man is unable to "come to Christ." As a starting point let us again quote John 6:44, "No man can come to me, except the Father which has sent me draw him." The reason why this is such a "hard saying," even unto thousands who profess to be Christians, is because they utterly fail to realize the terrible havoc which the Fall has wrought; and, it is greatly to be feared, because they are themselves strangers to "the plague" of their own hearts (1 Kings 8:38). Surely if the Spirit had ever awakened them from the sleep of spiritual death, and given them to see something of the dreadful state they were in by nature, and they had been brought to feel that the carnal mind in them was "enmity against God" (Romans 8:7), then they would no longer cavil against this solemn word of Christ's. But the spiritually dead can neither see nor feel spiritually.

WHEREIN LIES THE TOTAL INABILITY OF THE NATURAL MAN?

1. It is not in the lack of the necessary faculties. This needs to be plainly insisted upon, or otherwise fallen man would cease to be a responsible creature. Fearful as were the effects of the Fall, yet they deprived man of none of the faculties with which God originally endowed him. True it is that the coming in of sin took away from man all power to use those faculties aright, that is, to employ them for the glory of his Maker. Nevertheless, fallen man possesses identically the same threefold nature, of spirit and soul and body, as he did before the Fall. No part of man's being was annihilated, though each part was defiled and corrupted by sin. True, man died spiritually, but death is not extinction of being: spiritual death is alienation from God (Ephesians 4:18): the spiritually dead one is very much alive and active in the service of Satan.

No, the inability of fallen man to come to Christ" lies in no physical or mental defect. He has the same feet to take him unto a place where the Gospel is preached, as he has to walk with to a picture-show. He has the same eyes by which to read the Holy Scriptures, as he has to read the world's newspapers. He has the same lips and voice for calling upon God, as he now uses in idle talk or foolish song. So too he has the same mental faculties for pondering the things of God and the concerns of eternity, as he now uses so diligently in connection with his business. It is because of this that man is "without excuse." It is the misuse of the faculties with which the Creator has endowed him which increases man's guilt. Let every servant of God see to it that these things are constantly pressed upon their unsaved hearers.

2. We have to search deeper in order to find the seat of man's spiritual impotency. His inability lies in his corrupt nature. Through Adam's fall, and

through our own sin, our nature has become so debased and depraved, that it is impossible for any to "come to Christ," to "love and serve Him," to esteem Him more highly than all the world put together and submit to His rule, until the Spirit of God renews him, and implants a new nature. A bitter fountain cannot send forth sweet waters, nor an evil tree produce good fruit. Let us try and make this still clearer by an illustration. It is the nature of a vulture to feed upon carrion: true, it has the same bodily members to feed upon the wholesome grain as the hens do, but it lacks the disposition and relish for it. It is the nature of a sow to wallow in the mire: true, it has the same legs as a sheep, to conduct it to the meadow, but it lacks the desire for the green pastures. So it is with the unregenerate man. He has the same physical and mental faculties as the regenerate have for the things and service of God, but he has no love for them.

"Adam...begat a son in his own likeness, after his image" (Genesis 5:3). What an awful contrast is found here from that which we read two verses before: 'God created man, in the likeness of God made he him.' In the interval, Adam had fallen, and a fallen parent could beget only a fallen child, transmitting unto him his own depravity. "Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?" (Job 14:4). Therefore do we find the sweet singer of Israel declaring, "Behold I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me (Psalm 51:5). Though, later, grace made him the man after God's own heart, yet by nature David (as we) was a mass of iniquity and sin. How early does this corruption of nature appear in children. "Even a child is known by his doings" (Proverbs 20:11): the evil bias of its heart is soon manifested—pride, self-will, vanity, lying, averseness to good, are the bitter fruits which quickly appear on the tender but vitiated twig.

3. The inability of the natural man to "come to Christ" lies in the complete darkness of his understanding. This leading faculty of the soul has been despoiled of its primitive glory, and covered over with confusion. Both mind and conscience are defiled: "there is none that understandeth" (Romans 3:11). Solemnly did the apostle remind the saints: "ye were sometimes darkness" (Ephesians 5:8), not merely "in darkness," but "darkness" itself.

"Sin has closed the windows of the soul, darkness is over all the region: it is the land of darkness and the shadow of death, where the light is as darkness. The prince of darkness reigns there, and nothing but the works of darkness are framed there. We are born spiritually blind, and cannot be restored without a miracle of grace. This is thy case, whoever thou art, that art not born again" (Thos. Boston, 1680).

"They are wise to do evil, but to do good they have no knowledge" (Jeremiah 4:22).

"The carnal mind is enmity against God, for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be" (Romans 8:7).

There is in the unregenerate an opposition to spiritual things and an aversion against them. God has made a revelation of His will unto sinners touching the way of salvation, yet they will not walk therein. They hear that Christ alone is able to save, yet they refuse to part with those things that hinder their coming to Him. They hear that it is sin which slays the soul, and yet they cherish it in their bosoms. They heed not the threatenings of God. Men believe that fire will burn them, and are at great pains to avoid it; yet they show by their actions that they regard the everlasting burnings as a mere scarecrow. The Divine commandments are "holy, just, and good," but men hate them, and observe them only so far as their respectability among men is promoted.

4. The inability of the natural man to "come to Christ" lies in the complete corruption of his affections.

"Man as he is, before he receives the grace of God, loves anything and everything above spiritual things. If ye want proof of this, look around you. There needs no monument to the depravity of the human affections. Cast your eyes everywhere—there is not a street, nor a house, nay, nor a heart, which doth not bear upon it sad evidence of this dreadful truth. Why is it that men are not found on the Sabbath day universally flocking to the house of God? Why are we not more constantly found reading our Bibles? How is it that prayer is a duty almost universally neglected? Why is Christ Jesus so little beloved? Why are even His professed followers so cold in their affections to Him? Whence arise these things? Assuredly, dear brethren, we can trace them to no other source than this, the corruption and vitiation of the affections. We love that which we ought to hate, and we hate that which we ought to love. It is but human nature, fallen human nature, that man should love this present life better than the life to come. It is but the effect of the fall, that man should love sin better than righteousness, and the ways of this world better than the ways of God" (C.H. Spurgeon, Sermon on John 6:44).

The affections of the unrenewed man are wholly depraved and distempered.

"The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked" (Jeremiah 17:9). Solemnly did the Lord Jesus affirm that the affections of fallen man are a mother of abominations:

"For from within (not from the Devil!) out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness" (Mark 7:21,22).

The natural man's affections are wretchedly misplaced; he is a spiritual monster. His heart is where his feet should be, fixed on the earth: his heels are lifted up against heaven, which his heart should be set on: Acts 9:5. His face is towards Hell, his back towards Heaven; and therefore God

calls him to turn. He joys in what he ought to mourn for, and mourns for what he should rejoice in; glories in his shame, and is ashamed of his glory; abhors what he should desire, and desires what he should abhor: Proverbs 2:13-15 (From Boston's "Fourfold State").

5. The inability of the natural man to "come to Christ" lies in the total depravity of his will.

"Oh!" said the Arminian, "men may be saved if they will." We reply, "My dear sir, we all believe that; but it is just the if they will that is the difficulty." We assert that no man will come to Christ unless he be drawn; nay, we do not assert it, but Christ Himself declares it—"Ye will not come to me that ye might have life" (John 5:40); and as long as that "ye will not come" stands on record in Holy Scripture, we shall not be brought to believe in any doctrine of the freedom of the human will. It is strange how people, when talking about free-will, talk of things which they do not at all understand. "Now," says one, "I believe men can be saved if they will." My dear sir, that is not the question at all. The question is, are men ever found naturally willing to submit to the humbling terms of the gospel of Christ? We declare upon scriptural authority, that the human will is so desperately set on mischief, so depraved, and so inclined to everything that is evil, and so disinclined to everything that is good, that without the powerful, supernatural, irresistible influence of the Holy Spirit, no human being will ever be constrained towards Christ (C.H. Spurgeon).

Now here is a threefold cord against heaven and holiness, not easily to be broken; a blind mind, a perverse will, and disorderly, distempered affections. The mind, swelled with self-conceit, says the man should not stoop; and the corrupt affections rising against the Lord, in defense of the corrupt will, says, he shall not. Thus the poor creature stands out against God and goodness, till a day of power come, in which he is made a new creature (T. Boston).

Perhaps some readers are inclined to say, Such teaching as this is calculated to discourage sinners and drive them to despair. Our answer is, first, it is according to God's Word! Second, O that it may please Him to use this article to drive some to despair of all help from themselves. Third, it makes manifest the absolute necessity of the Holy Spirit's working with such depraved and spiritually helpless creatures, if they are ever to savingly come to Christ. And until this is clearly perceived, HIS aid will never be really sought in earnest!

There are some souls greatly distressed and puzzled to know exactly what is signified by "coming to Christ." They have read and heard the words often, and perhaps many a preacher has bidden them to 'come to Him," yet without giving a scriptural explanation of what that term connotes. Such as have been awakened by the Spirit, shown their woeful condition, convicted of their high-handed and

lifelong rebellion against God, and brought to realize their dire need of Christ, and who are truly anxious to come savingly to Him, have found it a task altogether beyond their powers. Their cry is,

"Oh that I knew where I might find Him! that I might come even to His seat!" (Job 23:3).

True, there are not many who pass through such an experience, for God's 'flock' is but a "little" one (Luke 12:32). True, the vast majority of professing Christians claim that the found "coming to Christ" a very simple matter. But in the clear light of John 6:44 we must assure you, dear reader, that if you found "coming to Christ" to be easy, then it is proof you have never come to Him at all in a spiritual and saving way.

What, then, is meant by "coming to Christ"?

First, and negatively, let it be pointed out that it is not an act which we perform by any of our bodily members. This is so obvious that there should be no need for us to make the statement. But in these awful days of spiritual ignorance and the carnal perversion of the holy things of God, explanation of the most elementary truths and terms is really required. When so many precious souls have been deluded into thinking that a going forward to a "mourner's bench" or "penitent form," or the taking of some preacher's hand, is the same thing as coming to Christ, we dare not pass over the defining of this apparently simple term, nor ignore the need for pointing out what it does not signify.

Second, the word "come," when used in this connection, is a metaphorical one: that is to say, a word which expresses an act of the body is transferred to the soul, to denote its act. To "come to Christ" signifies the movement of a Spirit-enlightened mind toward the Lord Jesus—as Prophet, to be instructed by Him; as Priest, whose atonement and intercession are to be relied upon; as King, to be ruled by Him. Coming to Christ implies a turning of our back upon the world, and a turning unto Him as our only Hope and Portion. It is a going out of self so as to rest for longer on anything in self. It is the abandoning of every idol and of all other dependencies, the heart going out to Him in loving submission and trustful confidence. It is the will surrendering to Him as Lord, ready to accept His yoke, take up the cross, and follow Him without reserve.

To "come to Christ" is the turning of the whole soul unto a whole Christ in the exercise of Divine grace upon Him: it is the mind, heart and will being supernaturally drawn to Him, so as to trust, love and serve Him. "It is the duty and interest of weary and heavy-laden sinners to 'come to Jesus Christ'—renouncing all those things which stand in opposition to Him, or in competition with Him; we must accept Him as our Physician and Advocate, and give up ourselves to His conduct and government, freely willing to be saved by Him, in His own way, and on His own terms" (Matthew Henry). Ere proceeding further,

we would earnestly beg each reader to prayerfully and carefully test and measure himself of herself by what has been said in this and the preceding paragraph. Take nothing for granted: as you value your soul, seek Divine help to make sure that you have truly "come to Christ."

Now a popish "christ" is a christ of wood, and a false preacher's "christ" is a christ of words; but Christ Jesus, our Lord, is

"the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of peace" (Isaiah 9:6). The Christ of God fills heaven and earth: He is the One by whom all things exist and consist. He is seated at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having all power, dominion, and might. He is made higher than the heavens, and unto Him all principalities and powers are subject. At His presence both the earth and the heavens shall yet flee away. Such a Christ is neither to be offered nor proffered, sold nor given by sinful men. He is the unspeakable Gift of the Father to as many as He has ordained to eternal life, and none others. This Christ, this Gift of the Father, is supernaturally revealed and applied to the heirs of salvation by the Holy Spirit, when, where, and as He pleases; and not when, where, and how men please.

In the preceding article we dwelt at length upon those words of Christ in John 6:44, "no man can come unto me," seeking to show the nature of the fallen creature's spiritual impotency, or why it is the unregenerate are unable to come to Christ in a spiritual and saving way. Let us now ponder the remainder of our Lord's sentence: "except the Father which sent me draw him." Of what does that "drawing" consist? We answer, first, just as our "coming to Christ: does not refer to any bodily action, so this Divine "drawing" respects not the employment of any external force. Second, it signifies a powerful impulse put forth by the Holy Spirit within the elect, whereby their native impotency for performing spiritual actions is overcome, and an ability for the same is imparted. It is this secret and effectual operation of the Spirit upon the human soul which enables and causes it to come to Christ. This brings us to our next division.

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