

Discourse XII

"The Necessity of Divine Influence in Salvation" (Part 2)

by
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***"No man can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him."
John 6:44***

Very good reason had our Saviour to utter these memorable words. They were addressed to a multitude of Jews who refused to believe on him in spite of the most overwhelming proofs which they witnessed of his Divine mission. They saw what many prophets and kings had desired to see, and had not seen--the glory of this only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth, and in him the clear and striking signature of that Messiah of whom Moses in the Law and the Prophets did write. They heard the instructive lessons of Wisdom and the gracious invitations of the Gospel from His lips, who spoke as never man spoke.

They had just been refreshed--to the number of five thousand men, besides women and children--by a wonderful miracle of his power, calculated as well to remove all their doubts concerning Jesus as to melt their hearts into gratitude and love. Indeed, their doubts seem partially, and for a little while, to have been removed. For when they had seen the miracles that Jesus did, they said, "This is of a truth that Prophet who should come into the world." They even sought to take him by force and make him a king, thinking no doubt that he whose hands held such astonishing resources for the supply of their bodily wants was able also to bestow upon them more illustrious temporal benefits; to rescue them and their nation from the yoke of Roman servitude; to make the Jewish people rich, powerful, and happy; and to wield, as their mighty and magnificent Prince, the sceptre of universal empire. For that they had no thoughts of bowing to him as the Deliverer of their souls from the dominion of sin, and as the Head of that spiritual kingdom of God "which is not meat and drink, but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost," their subsequent conduct fully testified.

Jesus secretly withdrew from their unhallowed importunity, and soon after, with his disciples, crossed the sea of Galilee and entered into Capernaum. There, on the succeeding day, the multitude followed him, and when they had found him they said unto him, "Rabbi, when did you come here?" Their address was respectful, and their conduct denoted a certain kind of attachment to Christ. But he who knew the hearts of all men said, "Truly, truly I say to you, you seek me, not because you saw the miracles, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled." Then ensued a conversation between them, which, on the part of the Jews, was full of disrespect and distrust, of captiousness [nitpicking] and doubt, of murmuring and unbelief; and, on the part of our Saviour, of condescending instruction, sober reasoning, and mild reproof.

His discourse, of which our text forms a part, seems to have had no salutary effect upon the multitude. Indeed, even many of his professed followers from that time went back and walked no more with him. Good reason, therefore, had our Saviour to say, "No man can come to me unless

the Father who sent me draws him." "No man can come to me." For, "as in water face reflects face," so did the hearts of those Jews [reflect] the hearts of sinners of whatever age or nation--to our hearts, my brethren, if we are not reconciled to God through Jesus Christ. In that case, let us turn our censure of these faithless and ungrateful people upon ourselves. Let us consider how we also, most of us in times past and perhaps some of us at the present time, have rejected, or continue to reject, the only Saviour of our souls. And this too in spite of the most abundant and satisfactory proofs of his being sent from God, and in opposition to the most powerful motives which either the joys of heaven or the pains of hell can place before us. So deep is this depravity of our hearts, and so perverse this inclination of our wills, that we also cannot go to Jesus Christ for salvation unless we are drawn to him by the influence of God.

I propose, my brethren, to direct your thoughts to the farther contemplation of these truths by considering, first, what is meant by the drawing spoken of in our text: "No man can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him," and secondly, why this drawing is necessary.

I. *What is meant by the drawing spoken of in our text?* Its Author is the Holy Spirit, procured by the sufferings and intercession of Christ and sent by God the Father into our miserable world to accomplish the benevolent purposes of Redeeming Love. This mighty and mysterious Agent is everywhere spoken of in Scripture as the proper efficient cause of faith in Christ. It is He who rouses the conscience of the sinner to discern the enormity of his guilt, the spirituality and extent of that law which he has broken, the holiness and justice of that Being against whom he has sinned, the dreadful doom to which he stands exposed and from which nothing can save him but the mercy of God through Jesus Christ. It is this Spirit who, having thus convinced of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment, discloses to the guilty soul its forlorn and wretched state, guides it to the foot of the Cross, destroys all its proud reluctance to receive the pardon of God as a free and unmerited gift, and disposes it to rely on Jesus Christ as its only Saviour.

Such is the effect of the drawing spoken of in our text, and such its Divine original. And is it not the part of true humility, my brethren, to rest satisfied with this concise and scriptural account of our subject? Shall we venture to explore its profound and mysterious abysses? Shall we measure the thoughts of the infinite and incomprehensible Mind by our own? Shall we, to whom everything that surrounds us is a mystery, who are bewildered and lost in the contemplation of the meanest [lowest] reptile that crawls beneath our feet--shall we dare to scan the mode in which the Holy Spirit of God has access to our minds, how he enlightens our understandings, controls our will, regulates our affections, subdues our sins, renovates our hearts, and draws us to Jesus Christ? Shall we attempt to reconcile the absolute necessity of this agency with man's entire responsibility and guilt, or its certain and uncontrollable effect with his character of moral freedom? Shall we do this in the hope of getting rid of difficulties which, it must be confessed, attend the consideration of this subject?

Or shall we not rather acknowledge that we find no greater perplexities here than in a thousand other topics connected with man's existence as an accountable or even intellectual being. Shall we not, as becomes us, believe what Christ has spoken, although to us mysterious and incomprehensible--"No man can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him?" But, my brethren, such is not the humility of man. He pries with eager and even audacious curiosity into the secret things of God. Hence it is that so much has been written on the subject of Divine influence with the design of rendering it plain and intelligible to the human capacity. And hence

the necessity which is laid upon the ministers of God's word sometimes to discuss this important topic, according to the measure of their feeble abilities, in order to guard it against misapprehension and mistake. Suffer me, then, to lay before you a few thoughts which may possibly serve to throw some light upon the meaning of our text.

1. *This drawing is not physical, nor mechanical, nor compulsory, and yet it is certain in its effect.*

It is not physical. By this I mean that it is not like that agency which God exercises over the material world and which we term, in its various developments and operations, "the Laws of Nature." The vast lights of heaven perform their accustomed rounds. Day and night, summer and winter, seed time and harvest successively return. The vegetable and animal race spring into life, flourish, fade, and decay. Our own bodies carry on their silent and hidden processes. All this is done by the physical agency of God. The subject of it is matter; a substance inert, senseless, and involuntary in all its motions. It cannot even wish to resist the hand of God, and it is only by a bold figure of rhetoric that it is ever spoken of as yielding obedience to his command. Such is not the spirit of man. To say that his moral character is affected by a physical agency of God is to confound the use of language, to destroy the distinction between mind and matter, to reduce the human soul to a level with the clod [of earth] of the valley.

Nor is it any objection to what has just been said that the Scriptures speak of sinners as being dead in trespasses and sins, and of saints as being created anew in Christ Jesus. Such terms are not to be taken in a literal sense. They describe not the nature but the reality, and the might, and the sovereignty of that Divine Agency which is employed in the conversion of the wicked. Those persons, therefore, I apprehend, pervert the right meaning of the word of God who say that sinners have no more power--of whatever kind--to go unto Christ than the corpse has to restore itself to life, or the thing formed to produce its own existence. The sinner is able to go unto Christ if he were only willing. Nothing but his own obstinacy and guilt prevent him. Matter has neither inclination nor ability to move.

For similar reasons *this drawing is not mechanical.* The principles of mechanism are nothing more than a certain modification and direction of the laws of nature. The matter of which the machine is composed is as truly inert as any other matter. It yields an unconscious and involuntary obedience to the control of the artist. Such is not the spirit of man. His moral character cannot be affected by any mechanical process or agency without destroying his free and intelligent nature.

Nor is this drawing compulsory. Its very nature implies that the subject of it should be drawn to Jesus Christ of his own accord, cheerfully and heartily. To speak of one's being compelled to become a Christian is a contradiction in terms. Of what moral worth is the forced obedience of the child to its parent, or the constrained loyalty of the subject to his sovereign? The *will* must yield. It always does yield when sinners are drawn to Jesus Christ. This drawing, therefore, may be resisted. It often is resisted; and when it becomes effectual, it is by making the sinner willing in the day of God's power. And it does thus become effectual whenever Divine Wisdom and Sovereignty so determine. For what says our Saviour in the very chapter from which our text is taken? "All who the Father gives me *shall* come to me."

2. In the second place, *This drawing is suited to the faculties of a rational and accountable*

moral agent.

Observe, my hearers, it is man who is drawn; man as he is--full of frailty and error, and loaded with guilt, "having his understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in him, because of the blindness of his heart." But yet *man as he is*--a being capable of discerning between right and wrong, having a conscience to reprove his transgressions, an understanding to discern and comprehend the doctrines of the Cross, and a will to be affected, if such be the pleasure of God, by the motives which the Gospel holds forth. Truth, therefore, and motives are the medium through which the Spirit of God acts in drawing sinners to Jesus Christ. And this truth and these motives are to be derived by us from no other source than the sacred Scriptures. "So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." Hence we read, "Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth." And, "In Christ Jesus have I begotten you, through the Gospel."

As on the one hand, therefore, we are to acknowledge the Holy Spirit as the proper efficient cause in drawing sinners to the Saviour, so on the other we must be careful not to disparage the means which he sees fit to use. There is an economy of grace as well as of providence and of nature. There is a connection between the presentation of truth and motives to the mind and heart of the sinner, and his subsequent faith in Christ. [It is] a connection, indeed, independent of man, for it is constituted by God; a connection, too, which is affected by so many hidden and intricate causes, various as the infinite diversity of human character and God's difference of providential dealing with man, that it eludes our view and often disappoints our conjectures. Yet [it is] a connection which we discover in general to exist, and which therefore justifies the conclusion that in the kingdom of grace God acts by general laws and through the instrumentality of what we term secondary causes.

In all this, however, my brethren, God forbid that I should detract from the sovereignty of his grace or the necessity of his proper and direct influence in leading us to Jesus Christ. What I mean to assert is that the Holy Spirit has seen fit to adopt a mode of acting in what relates to the salvation of sinners; that this mode is, in one important respect, disclosed to us; that in this respect it consists in using Truth and motives derived from God's word to affect the mind and heart of man; and that such means, so far as we can discern, are the only means which are suited to a being of a rational and accountable nature. These means produce no effect without man's agency, yet their efficacy depends on God's agency. Neglecting them we can have no hope of salvation. In their use, if effectual in drawing us to Jesus Christ, to God will be all the glory.

3. In the third place, *This drawing usually discovers [reveals] itself only by its **effects**, and is not usually to be distinguished from the operations of our own minds.*

I say *usually*, for I would not deny that God may in some cases vouchsafe [deign] to manifest by distinct and certain marks his peculiar and immediate presence to the soul. But such is not usually the fact. His Spirit acts, but we see only its effects. All is under his guidance and control, yet all appears to be our own thoughts and purposes. He leads us in the way in which he would have us to go, but his hand is unseen. He draws us to Jesus Christ, but we seem to ourselves to direct our steps. Shall we then arrogate any merit to our faith? By no means. God is its Author, but he sees fit to conceal his agency.

4. Hence, in the fourth place, *This drawing is of such a nature as to render it extremely difficult, and in most cases impossible, to determine the precise time at which the sinner is first affected by it.*

Were the agency of God in producing faith in the heart a sensible one, [and] were the hand which leads us to the Cross visible, then might the first moment of our reliance upon the Saviour be most easily ascertained. But our spiritual state is to be estimated by a comparison of our hearts with the word of God. And what says this word? The fruit of the Spirit is "love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance."

Now what scrutiny, my brethren, what scrupulous caution is necessary in order to determine whether we possess these heavenly graces. Let the advanced Christian (who, like a tree planted by the rivers of water, has constantly brought forth his fruit in his season) indulge the unwavering hope that he shall eternally flourish in the paradise of God. But how shall the young convert, whose mind has been tortured and distracted with a sense of his guilt, who has been tremblingly alive to every alternate suggestion of hope and despair, who has had so many doubts and perplexities--how shall he venture to say with certainty that at just such a moment he passed from death unto life?

So far, then, as time and scrutiny and caution are necessary to enable us to pass a judgment upon our spiritual state, so far it becomes difficult to determine that at any one moment overwhelming evidence was afforded us of our having an interest in Christ. Still I would be far from saying that this is not sometimes the case. What I have offered is in the way of caution to those who think it necessary, or even important, that the believer should be able to ascertain precisely, or nearly so, when his faith in Christ had its commencement.

II. Having thus attempted to throw some light, however faint, upon this difficult subject of Divine influence, I proceed in the second place to consider why the drawing spoken of in our text is necessary. "No man can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him."

Observe, my brethren, the impossibility here spoken of is simply that which results from the want of inclination in the sinner to go to Christ. It is that same impossibility which the froward child pleads when he says to his parent, "I cannot perform this or that act of obedience." It is that same impossibility to which we refer when we say of the inveterate sot [drunkard] that he cannot renounce his cups [intoxicating beverages]. Now the lamentable fact is, that we are all by nature prone to sin. We are attached to our own selfish and sensual interest. We are unwilling to love God with our whole soul, and strength, and mind, and our neighbor as ourselves. Although conscience condemns us and would justify God in passing his sentence of condemnation upon us, although we see that there is no hope of reconciliation with God but [except] through the death and merits of Jesus Christ, still we are unwilling to submit to the righteousness of God and to be interested in the great propitiation which has been made for sin. Hence we cannot go to Christ. In other words, we will not.

So deep and thorough is this depravity of the human heart, as the Scripture everywhere teaches us, that there is no hope for man but in the sovereign mercy of God. If left to himself, it is morally impossible that he should be saved. And, my hearers, can we want proof of this? Alas, we find it near at hand--in our own hearts! Is there any one motive which we can conceive that

God does not this day present to our minds to lead us to Jesus Christ? He promises to the believer complete deliverance from the burden and punishment of guilt, his continual protection and blessing in this life, and beyond the grave an immortality of bliss. Why then do any of us reject the Saviour? Why is it that we cannot go to Christ unless drawn there by the Spirit of God? Let conscience answer.

A few reflections by way of improvement will conclude this discourse.

In the first place, *How careful should we be not to reject or pervert the doctrine of a Divine influence because it is attended with some apparent difficulties!*

It is the part of wisdom and good sense to be humble and modest. The greater the progress made by the philosopher in intellectual improvement, the greater reason has he to pause and admire the wonders, and even mysteries, of creation. As we advance also in the knowledge of Divine truth, we should learn to bow with the most complete prostration of soul before the infinite and eternal One, and to exclaim with devout humility that "as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are his ways higher than our ways, and his thoughts than our thoughts."

You have seen, my brethren, that the drawing spoken of in our text is every way worthy of God, and suited to man--as a rational, accountable, and withal sinful being. Do not, I beseech you, let any seeming difficulties which may attend the subject and which result from our weak and limited understandings--and perhaps too often from our wayward hearts--lead you to despise or resist that influence which is necessary to lead us to Jesus Christ.

In the second place, *If it be true that the Spirit of God acts through the instrumentality of truth and motives, how dreadful is the situation of those who neglect the public ministration of God's word and the frequent and careful perusal of the sacred Scriptures!*

These are "able to make us wise unto salvation through faith which is in Jesus Christ." In them we learn the character of God and of his Son. In them we behold as in a glass our own deformity and guilt. In them are placed before us the most cogent motives which can be drawn either from the joys of heaven or the pains of hell, to induce us to lay hold of the hope which is set before us in the Gospel. He, therefore, who willfully closes his eyes against this Divine light, who makes the Bible (as to himself) a sealed book, who endeavors to escape from the very hearing of the proclamation of peace, how can he expect aught of God but an entire withdrawal of his restraining grace and a complete abandonment to sin and ruin?

In the third place, *If the influences of the Holy Spirit are not usually to be distinguished from the operations of our own minds (or, in other words, if we can discover them only in their effects by their direction and controlling our thoughts, emotions and purposes), how watchful should Christians be over their own hearts!*

"Every good gift and every perfect gift," my brethren, "is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights." To God are you indebted for all your moments of sober thought on the vanities of this life and the awful realities of the future. Do you ever, amid the busy and fascinating scenes of the world, chide yourselves for consenting too much to its spirit and imbibing too readily its maxims? Does conscience ever smite you for yielding to a temptation or neglecting a

duty which, in the view of the world, is too insignificant to demand the notice of your moral judgment? Are you sometimes inclined, even amid your cares and business, to direct the eye of faith to your heavenly Father and to supplicate the continuance of his mercy and his grace? Resist not, I beseech you, these heavenly suggestions. Grieve not the Holy Spirit who thus calmly and silently leads your thoughts heavenward, and sheds abroad his love and his graces in your hearts. Do not rest satisfied with those Divine influences which purify and elevate the holy soul in its secret retirements or seasons of social devotion. God is ever with you, although you see him not. His grace is ever ready for those who sincerely seek it, although the nature of its operation may elude their research.

Watch over your hearts, then, that they may become fit temples for the residence of the Holy Spirit. So shall you be more and more cheered in this pilgrimage of trial by the constant presence and guidance of God until you reach at last the holy city, the new Jerusalem, where "the sun shall no longer be your light by day, nor for brightness shall the moon give light to you; but the LORD [Yahweh] will be to you an everlasting light, and your God your glory" [Isa. 60:19].

Again, as the influences of the Holy Spirit are usually to be discovered only in their effects upon our own minds, then let the sinner beware how he attempts to stifle the alarms of conscience, to banish sober reflection from his mind, or to check any inclination which he may feel to attend to the things of his everlasting peace. Perhaps God's Spirit may now be striving with his spirit. Let him dread, then, to resist its monitory suggestions, lest haply he be found fighting against God.

Finally, *How deep and entire must be the depravity of the human heart which renders necessary the interposition of God's Spirit to draw sinners unto Jesus Christ.*

O let him who continues to reject the Saviour ponder well this momentous and alarming truth; it is one which our Saviour uttered in the hearing of his unbelieving countrymen: "Ye will not come to me that ye may have life!" "No man can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him." Yes, my hearers, we all lie at the mercy of our offended Sovereign. We can do nothing that will make us deserving of his favor. If abandoned to ourselves, we must perish. We have only hope left; it is that of the drowning mariner, that some arm may be extended to save him. We have only one Refuge; it is the Cross of Christ.

Discourse XII from *Discourses on Various Points of Christian Faith and Practice* by Thomas H. Gallaudet (London: Ellerton and Henderson, 1818). **Note:** The text has not been modified, except that punctuation and KJV-era pronouns and verb forms have been modernized and long paragraphs have been divided.