6The Effects of Sin

**God’s Power and Man’s Ability**

Rom. 8:1-11

Introduction:

1. In the past several lessons we have studied about the effects of sin. How does Adam’s sin affect his descendants? How does our own sin affect us?

2. We have questioned whether Adam’s sin makes us unable to do good and thus unable to respond to the good news of God’s grace manifest in Christ.

3. We have examined what men have thought throughout history as

a. Evidenced in the text of Scripture.

b. And in the church fathers.

c. We have given consideration to the views held by Pelagius and Augustine, by Arminius

and Calvin, and by those who take more moderate positions.

4. We have asked

a. Are we sinners by birth or by practice?

b. Are we able or unable to respond positively to God?

5. For more than 16 centuries men have debated these issues. Honestly, I am disappointed in what they have said. Their answers do not satisfy. They seem convoluted and confusing. Some make God out to be unfair. Others seem to minimize the powerfulness of sin and suggest that we can overcome sin by pulling ourselves up by our own bootstraps.

6. Some have said we are **able** to respond to God, others have said we are **unable** until

the Holy Spirit acts upon us to regenerate us and give us spiritual life.

7. The question of ability is critical, but so is the question of how God acts to give us spiritual life.

8. The passage that we have just read speaks both of human weakness and God’s power.

Discussion:

I. The argument between Desiderius Erasmus and Martin Luther.

A. In September 1524 Erasmus published a document entitled Freedom of the Will. In it 5

arguments were presented.

1. The fact that God commands something implies that man has the ability to obey the

commands.

2. If man does not have free-will to obey God and/or to believe, then God is unjust to

demand it.

3. He denied that natural man could only do evil. Even the pagans, he insists, do

good.

4. He reasoned man’s natural will is weak, but not powerless. Man’s will needs grace

to do good.

5. Man can merit with God.

B. Fifteen months later (December 1525) Luther wrote his Bondage of the Will.

1. Luther believed that original sin incapacitated human beings; that they are

incapable of coming to God; that they are overwhelmed by the influence of sin.

2. Underlying his beliefs were his ideas about the omnipotence and omniscience of

God. He believed that God was in total control over man’s salvation and that God

had to change a person’s heart and turn him toward good ends and that anything

else undermined God’s omnipotence and omniscience.

3. For Luther God’s foreknowledge was the cause of the events, **not** the result of

events.

4. “God foreknows nothing by contingency,” he said, “but he foresees, purposes,

and does all things according to his immutable, eternal and infallible will.”

If God knows it he makes it happen. He makes it happen therefore he knows it.

5. But what if God’s foreknowledge is determined by the actual occurrence of the

event? And his foreknowledge is not based on his omnipotence, but upon his not

being limited by time?

II. In the Augustinian, Lutheran and Calvinistic tradition God had to act to give spiritual life to man apart from man’s will. Since man is totally depraved and therefore unable, God must act unconditionally, in an irresistible way if the man is to come to life.

A. This irresistible grace has taken different forms in different individual’s minds.

1. I think I illustrated it earlier in this series of lessons by “Raccoon” John Smith’s

perception. Desiring to know whether he was one of the elect and unclear on

God’s manifestation of irresistible grace . . . Smith found himself in the field with an

angry bull. Running for his life he determined that he would consider himself one of

the elect if he escaped. When the bull knocked him over the fence and he was not

hurt he concluded that this was his saving experience.

2. Some have described it as a “better felt than told experience.”

3. There is often some ambiguity about the experiences.

4 Many have looked to Acts 9 and Saul’s Damascus Road experience as an example

of irresistible grace. But this was about Saul’s commission as a prophet. This is not

an example of Calvinistic irresistible grace.

B. It is important to understand that the idea is that God acts to choose an individual to

salvation apart from any action by that individual. It is an action that takes place

before the foundation of the world. It is unconditional, that is, it is not conditioned on

any response by the individual. It is importation to realize that it is irresistible.

C. It is important to realize that some who come from this tradition have softened their

position on this. Norman Geisler, who describes himself as a moderate Calvinist says

that God’s grace is “irresistible on the willing” and that strong Calvinism means that

God’s grace is “irresistible on the unwilling.”

III. What the Scriptures actually teach.

A. God’s foreknowledge is not determined by His power to make something happen but

by the actual occurrence of the event.

1. Gen. 22 describes how God called upon Abraham to offer up Isaac.

2. When Abraham did so God said, “Now I know that you fear God.” Didn’t God

already know it before by reason of His causing it to happen?

3. The actual occurrence of the event determined God’s foreknowledge.

4. And it was Abraham’s faith, or His trust in God’s power to raise the dead, that lead

to His action (Heb. 11:17-19).

B. God does act to give new life and He softens hard hearts by the message of Christ.

1. Ezek. 11:19-20—God promises to soften hard hearts “that they may walk in My

statutes and keep My ordinances and do them.” How does God do that?

2. Ezek. 36:25-29a—God says He will put His Spirit within people. How does God

do that?

3. Ezek. 37:2-14—God makes dry bones live. How does He do it? What caused

these bones to come to life? “It was the Spirit of God in them.” And how did the

Spirit of God come into these bones? “Prophesy over these bones.” “Thus says

the Lord God to these bones.” “Then you will know that I, the Lord, have spoken

and done it.”

4. What is it that softened the hearts of those who crucified Jesus? Was it not the

message of what God had done through Jesus Christ? (Cf. Acts 2:22ff). What is it

that softened your heart? Was it not the realization of what God had done for you

through Jesus Christ? (cf. Acts 3:17-26).

5. But some seem to see this process as a merely logical acceptance of some facts.

They seem to think of the message of Christ or the word of God as something

other than seed that actually has life. When God spoke things into existence that

was evidence of His word being living and powerful. Others think there must be

some “better felt that told experience,” maybe a miraculous experience like

speaking in tongues or some “bright light seen” like Saul in order to know that God

has acted.

a. The Spirit of God has always been associated with life.

b. And here in the softening of hearts the Spirit is active in bringing the message of

what God has done in Jesus Christ to bear on men’s hearts.

c. He is active in the giving of life (Col. 2:12-13). He raises men to spiritual life.

He regenerates (Titus 3:3-7). Thus the new birth is of water and the Spirit (Jn.

3:3-5). Not two births but one spiritual birth.

C. How all this “fits” in Rom. 8.

1. The mind set on the flesh vs. the mind set on the Spirit.

2. The mind set on the flesh cannot please God.

3. But the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace.

4. The Spirit of God dwells in those who set their mind on Him.

5 It is these who have the life that God gives.

Conclusion:

1. God by His power softens our hearts by what He has done in Jesus Christ in paying the penalty for our sin.

a. His great mercy makes us ashamed of our sin.

b. Coming to believe in what God has done softens our hearts.

c. And we turn to Him in repentance.

d. The Spirit by means of the message of God has moved us.

2. Then He raises us to spiritual life as we submit to Him in baptism. Confessing His greatness as we accept the gift of His Son.

3. No, it is not about what we do. It is about what He has done. He is about His great work upon us. We are His workmanship created in Christ Jesus (Eph. 2:4-10).

4. Sin has great power over us, but God in His great power overcomes sin and death through Jesus Christ. Will you believe it? Will you accept His gift?