

makes, and I challenge him to rethink this.[3] In his outline he frequently addressed the Calvinistic argument that if God requires any conditions in order to save us it would make us "worthy" of salvation in the sense that we deserve it. By commanding the Ephesians to **"walk worthy"** of their calling does he command them to live in a way that is *deserving* of salvation? No. As sinners before God we will never deserve salvation! That's not what Paul is saying. The word translated **"worthy"** is the Greek word *axiōs* (ἀξίως) the adverbial form of the adjective *axios* (ἄξιος) meaning "befitting, congruous, corresponding to a thing" (Thayer). Paul is simply urging the Ephesians to live as Christians should. That is not flawlessness, but it is something that is within our ability.

Bro. Crozier submitted an edited version of his outline to bro. Deason following the study in which he changed his original statement about God's commands to read, "God, IN SOME WAYS, commands things of us we cannot do in order to drive us to Him and His grace in order to accomplish them" (emphasis mine). I appreciate that change. The examples of God's deliverance from enemies of superior power could be seen as commands to do what could only be accomplished with God's power. That parallels salvation in Christ. In that spirit perhaps it would be more accurate to modify my own statement, "God never commands us to do anything IN HIS LAW that we are incapable of doing." As we continue to study and meditate on these things I pray that we will be very careful not to ever give the impression that our salvation depends upon our own power to live flawlessly, but at the same time avoid any concept that says we cannot obey God unless He directly empowers us to do. Both concepts are contrary to God's word and contrary to what has been revealed to us about His nature.

[3] After reading this bro. Crozier clarified that he was not emphasizing the word "worthy" but the word "walk" in this text. He explained, "While I am able to take discrete steps, I am unable to walk continuously without ever stumbling and falling." It was not my intent to mischaracterize his point. I would argue that this text does not command a "walk" (or life) free of stumbling and falling. The worthy walk of a Christian leads to repentance and confession if stumbling and falling occurs (cf. 1 John 1:9). If this is Paul's meaning this is not an example of a command we cannot obey.

4700 Andrews Ave.
Amarillo TX 79106
806-352-2809
www.olsenpark.com

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Faithful Sayings



Services

Sunday: 9:00 AM
10:00 AM
11:00 AM
Wednesday: 7:00 PM

Elders:
Pat Ledbetter
Jeff Nunn

Deacons:
Steve Dixon
Ryan Ferguson
Arend Gressley
Ben Hight
Blake McAlister
Brady McAlister
Walker McAnear
Sam Nunn
Lance Purcell
Rusty Scott
Justin Smiley
Trevor Yontz

Evangelist:
Kyle Pope

Inability and God's Grace

By Kyle Pope

It was a joy and privilege to participate in the recent preachers' study organized and hosted by brother Jim Deason on the subject of Calvinism in Cullman Alabama. Those two days of intense study and discussion with fellow-laborers in the kingdom recharge the "spiritual batteries" and strengthen individual efforts in the pulpit and within the local church. Sitting at the feet of the men who devoted themselves to present such good lessons was encouraging and edifying.

One of the most profitable aspects of the study was the question and answer sessions that followed each lecture. These allowed for opportunity to clarify our understanding of points presented, test all things said by the standard of God's word, and challenge one another's thinking on the subjects discussed. Truly, **"As iron sharpens iron, so a man sharpens the countenance of his friend."** (Prov. 27:17). It is unfortunate that these cordial interactions and times of mutual sharpening cannot be posted, downloaded, and shared on the web in the same way lectures, outlines, and slides can be—an audio file would not accurately reflect the full measure of the experience.[1]

Near the close of the study bro. Edwin Crozier gave a thought-provoking lecture on salvation by grace. Bro. Crozier forcefully refuted many Calvinistic errors on the subject of grace and powerfully addressed the

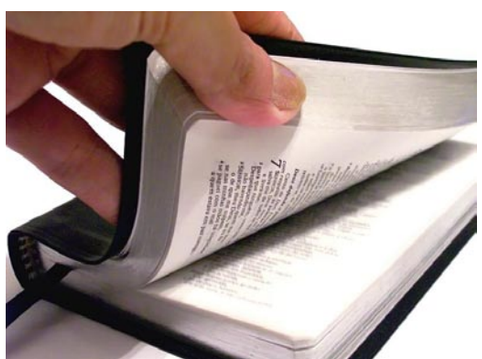
[1] Brother Deason posts the materials from this study on his website: *Exploring Contemporary Issues* http://eciconference.com.

biblical meaning of salvation. He illustrated how God's deliverance of Israel from enemies of superior power serves to demonstrate how salvation in Christ involves God's deliverance from sin—something we cannot attain for ourselves.

This was a powerful point with which I would fully agree. We cannot deliver ourselves from sin. In violating Divine law we **"sin against God"** (Gen. 39:9). Only God can grant forgiveness. Whatever terms God sets by which He grants forgiveness, it is and has always been true that **"it is God who justifies"** (Rom. 8:33)—we cannot do that ourselves. As brother Crozier expanded upon this, however, he made a statement that responded to something I had said during an earlier discussion period. In the question and answer session after my own lesson on imputed righteousness I made the statement, "God never commands us to do anything that we are incapable of doing." Bro. Crozier disagreed with that statement and gave examples he had already included in his outline that, "God commands things of us that we cannot do in order to drive us to Him and His grace." He then offered examples of Israel's deliverance from Egypt, the conquest of Canaan, deliverance from the Midianites, Peter walking on the water, and the lame man walking as examples of commands men were incapable of doing without God's power.

This generated much discussion during the question and answer session that followed bro. Crozier's lecture. I think the first question was, "Can you give me one example of something God commands that we are incapable of doing?" Since he had directly referred to the statement I had made, bro. Crozier was kind enough to allow me to make some comments regarding this idea. I argued that the examples of deliverance from a superior enemy (as he had well observed) demonstrate our inability to save ourselves from sin, not our inability to follow God's law. Bro. Crozier explained that while he rejects the Calvinistic concept of inherited depravity, he does believe that when man chooses to sin he becomes enslaved to sin, and only Christ can deliver us from that slavery.

This presents some challenging points for us to consider. It is true that Jesus taught, **"whoever commits sin is a slave of sin"** (John 8:34). Paul affirmed, **"to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey"** (Rom. 6:16). Does that mean, however, that having given ourselves to sin we forfeit the ability to obey God's law? No.



Bro. Crozier expressed his understanding that there is a distinction between the ability to carry out "discreet acts" of sin or righteousness and the ability to avoid sin altogether. While that is much different than the Calvinistic concept of depravity is that truly what Scripture teaches about slavery to sin? Immediately after Paul's reference to this in Romans 6:16 he goes on to say, **"But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered"** (Rom. 6:17). We note here that while God is to be thanked for all things, Paul says the Romans **"obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine"** (i.e. the gospel and law of Christ). They had the ability to obey and thus accept the gospel of grace that granted them deliverance. God did not have to empower them with this ability, they simply had to choose to accept God's deliverance.[2]

Certainly, **"all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God"** (Rom. 3:23) but that is not because man has to sin, or forfeits his ability to resist sin. Man sins because he chooses to sin. James teaches, **"each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed"** (Jas. 1:17). Like the addict it is true that once we have first chosen to sin it may become easier to sin again after having made that initial act of rebellion. That's because **"the spirit indeed is willing but the flesh is weak"** (Matt. 26:41). Weakness, however, is not inability. With every temptation God always provides a **"way of escape, that you may be able to bear it"** (1 Cor. 10:13b). That says something about God's providence, about His nature, and about His law. Like the Law of Moses, all Divine Law is within our ability to carry out. It is not **"too mysterious"** nor is it too **"far off"—"it is near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may do it"** (Deut. 30:11-14; cf. Rom. 10:4-8). That is not only true for those who have entered into a covenant relationship with God. Paul's words about temptation speak to that which **"is common to man"** (1 Cor. 10:13a). Though we cannot save ourselves from the spiritual death sin brings to us, all human beings have the ability to resist sin.

As the discussion went on brother Crozier said at one point "maybe I shouldn't use the term inability," and further explained his concept of slavery to sin in this way—"We cannot do God's will if we refuse to yield ourselves to God." That is absolutely correct! The stubborn heart that is unwilling to obey God's word by definition cannot be said to be obedient to God's word. This type of inability is an issue of conflicting definitions not the inability to actually do something. For example, Paul would say, **"the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be"** (Rom. 8:7). So long as I continue to set my mind **"on the things of the flesh"** (Rom. 8:6)—which is how Paul defines being *carnally minded*—I am not and cannot be subject to the law of God. In other words I can't do right and wrong at the same time. This doesn't mean, however, that I can't turn from wrong and do right without some additional empowering aid from God apart from His word.

In bro. Crozier's list of examples of times God has commanded things man could not do he wrote, "When God commands us to walk in a manner worthy of our calling, He commands us to do what we cannot in order to drive us to His mercy, grace, strength, and power (Ephesians 3:14-4:1)." This is perhaps the most troubling application he

[2] Earlier in his lecture bro. Crozier made this very point in refuting Calvinistic concepts of depravity. He wrote, "though I am dead in sin, I can still have the ability to perform discrete acts of obedience."