

# The Inability of Unbelief II

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[ 0 : 00 ] A truly fascinating passage of scripture when the Apostle Paul arrived in the bustling metropolis city of Athens, seeing all of this statuary around, idols dedicated to various gods, and he saw the one that says, to an unknown god.

Well, of course, what the Athenians had in mind was assigning a statue to a deity that they may not know of, so as to keep from offending that deity, they just as much as said, this is the idol or the statue to the unknown god, and we don't know who you are, but whoever you are, you can write your name in there.

We don't want to leave anybody out. And when the Apostle Paul read that, he found a launching pad for his message, and the essence of it is this.

There is a god whom you do not know, but he is not merely one to be added to your list of deities.

The god of whom I speak is the one in whom we live and move and have our being.

He is, in fact, the only true god. And then Paul went on to explain to them the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. And the fact that the time is coming, God has appointed a day wherein he will judge humanity by that man whom he raised from the dead.

[ 1 : 32 ] And the essence of our message today, which is actually a continuation of the inability of unbelief, we would call this part two, has to deal with man's inability to behave, but his ability to believe.

We, as we are born, have a corrupt nature within us that brings a certain death.

And this is precisely why, apart from two individuals who remain very mysterious, Enoch and Elijah, apart from those two, we all go through this valley of the shadow of death.

We are all infected with a terminal disease of a moral nature, and that is the sin nature that is within us. Because our sins have been paid for, our spirits are redeemed, and we are able to be a new creation on the inside.

This does not eliminate the old creation that is there, and the struggle between the two is very well spelled out by the Apostle Paul in Romans chapter 7, just before Romans that we will be considering this morning in Romans chapter 8.

[ 3 : 02 ] So, with this new nature within us, we now have the ability, not the guarantee, but the ability to be pleasing to God.

We have a new capacity that enables us and empowers us to be something and do something that the old nature could never do, because the old nature is completely given over to self.

The scriptures refer to that as the flesh. And we saw in Romans 8, verses 7 and 8, The carnal mind, the fleshly mind, the natural mind, is enmity against God, for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.

So then, they that are in the flesh cannot please God. It is an impossibility. The carnal mind, or the fleshly mind, is the self-centered, fleshly part of our being, the unregenerated rebel that is against God and His authority.

The unregenerate, or the carnal mind, cannot please God because He is totally absorbed in pleasing Himself. This is the behavior of unbelief.

[ 4 : 31 ] And it is the only behavior that unbelief is capable of. And I told you, in connection with that, we as Christians ought not to have unreasonable expectations of non-Christians.

It is not reasonable for us to expect non-Christians to behave Christianly. They aren't going to do it. They can't do it.

They have no ability to do it. So, if we set standards for them that are Christian standards, and then we become disgusted and put out with them because they don't meet those standards, really, the fault lies with us in our unreasonable expectations.

They are just being what they are, doing what they do. That's all they can do. Rather than be disgusted and put out with them, we ought to be sympathetic and patient and kind toward them, recognizing that they are not the enemy.

They are captives of the enemy. This does not mean that we just look the other way and ignore their bad or ungodly behavior. The Apostle said we are to expose it.

[ 5 : 50 ] And that becomes the whole basis for proclaiming to them the gospel. But I don't want to get ahead of myself. Man's inability to behave so as to please God produces several negative consequences.

Now, I want you to understand this because it's really important. The distinction between belief and behavior. Man, in his fallenness, does not have the ability to behave so as to be pleasing to God. He does have the ability to believe. And there are some notable theologians who would even disagree with that, saying that he doesn't even have the ability to believe.

But, we'll look at that later. So, what I am saying is that unregenerate man in the flesh does not have the ability to please God, but he does have the ability to believe.

And if he believes, he can then please God. So, the formula is intact. And the several consequences, all of which are negative, that come from man's inability to behave, is first of all, it dishonors God by his perpetual disobedience.

[ 7 : 15 ] The text says in Romans 8 that the fleshly mind is at enmity with God. What is enmity?

It's the word from which we get the word enemy. And it's related. And it simply means that the unregenerate person is in a state of war with his creator.

And what is desperately needed is peace. And we have the peace of God that passes all understanding.

We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. But this peace is realized only when we come to God's terms and embrace Jesus Christ as our Savior.

He paid the penalty for our sin. He removed the sin barrier. The war now has come to a conclusion. The war is over and we are one with him at peace with him.

[ 8 : 18 ] Until that time we dishonor God by perpetual disobedience. And secondly man's inability to behave produces the negative consequence of being morally self destructive to the rebel.

All the while the fleshly man thinks he is living his own life as he pleases. He is doing his own thing. He is calling his own shots. All the while he is doing that he is engaged in a self kind of moral destruction that goes further and further and further downhill.

He doesn't realize that. He thinks he's in charge. He thinks he is calling the shots. And he does not realize he is doing this to his own detriment. And thirdly of course no one lives to themselves and no one dies to themselves.

The rebel heart the flesh that is at enmity with God is not only self destructive it is destructive to others in the rebel's path or in his sphere of influence namely children siblings friends acquaintances etc.

this is the plight of every unsaved individual and it is all that they can produce but they don't know that they're not aware of that and how are they to become aware you tell them don't you like that assignment of course not none of us do that's the communication of the gospel and in order to communicate the gospel you have to give people bad news before you can give them good news you have to tell them something they do not want to hear in order to be able to tell them something that they will be glad to hear but the bad news has to come before the good news because the bad news of our being in a state of war with

[ 10 : 34 ] God and our sin excluding us from God that bad news has to be made understandable because if it isn't the good news doesn't make any sense you cannot skip the issue of sin and go right to salvation the grace and love of God because it doesn't apply so why do you need the grace of God why do you need salvation it is because of the bad news and if you leave that out you have a truncated gospel you have something that just emphasizes love of God grace of God isn't it wonderful but why do we need grace and how is God's love yet sinners God's love was demonstrated in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us that is a very essential part of the gospel well-known well-known

TV preacher whose name I will not mention but he's been on for years on all kinds of television stations throughout the world was being interviewed one time by Larry King and he said is it true that you are a preacher who doesn't say much about sin oh no I never preach on sin I never preach

about sin why not well people don't want to hear it well of course they don't they never have they didn't want to hear it when Isaiah and Jeremiah preached it they didn't want to hear it when Moses preached it didn't want to hear it when Abraham preached it didn't want to hear it when John the Baptist preached it and they certainly didn't want to hear it when Jesus Christ and the apostle Paul preached it in fact if you love to hear about your sin and have it exposed you're a head case of some kind there's something else wrong with you nobody likes that nobody wants that but you have got to do business with the bad news before you can embrace the good news well if this be the case and unbelief has no ability to please God does this mean are we saying that unbelievers don't do anything that's good no of course not unbelievers people people who are even atheistic in their thinking can do a lot of good things things that are helpful to humanity things that impress people they can perform acts of generosity they can do all kinds of things like that that please their fellow man sin but they do not please

God because all of the works performed by the individual living in the flesh in a state of enmity with God they are all contaminated with human good they are all contaminated with sin this is why a believer who is functioning in the spirit performs his good deeds in the spirit and they are acceptable to God because they are in the power of the spirit of God as opposed to the power of the flesh and let me tell you something there is a great deal that the flesh can accomplish the flesh can build huge churches the flesh can build cathedrals the flesh can garner a lot of name recognition the flesh can accomplish all sorts of things but none of it is pleasing to God it may be pleasing to man get a lot of print a lot of ink a lot of write ups and publications etc a lot of recognition a lot of accolades but that doesn't mean they are coming from

God it just means that they are being recognized by their fellow men so human good cranked out by the flesh can be significant and can accomplish a great deal after the flesh but it cannot please God so Saul of Tarsus Saul of Tarsus did several good things put quotes around good that pleased his fellow Jewish followers who were steeped in a corrupted Judaism like he was don't you think that other Pharisees were impressed by Saul's behavior and his energetic pursuit of those Jewish brethren who embraced Jesus as their Messiah and constituted a cancer growing on Judaism and Saul of Tarsus was determined to stamp it out do you think his fellow Jewish brethren were not cheering him on thinking that he was zealous for

God and surely he's doing a good work let me put it this way do you think that the Muslim terrorists who brought down the trade towers were doing a good work in the minds of their fellow terrorists and many of the other Muslims who lived throughout the world who were literally seen on camera dancing in the streets for joy as they replayed time and time again the coming down of the twin towers do you not think that those 18 or 19 Muslim terrorists were looked upon as doers of God's will surely pleasing to Allah and pleasing to all of their fellow Arabs and Muslims of course you see you have to define good there is human good and human good is anything and everything that we do that is in the flesh even a

[16:55] Christian as a Christian you can write out a check for a million dollars and give it to charity and it can be nothing but human good God is not impressed at all on the other hand you can be like the widow and but if it is done with the right motive and in the spirit it is pleasing and acceptable to God those who are in the flesh can not please God it is beyond their capacity to do so and we need to keep that in mind because sometimes we can in our attitude and in our behavior expect behavior from unbelievers that they cannot provide now this does not mean they get a pass and that they are not accountable for bad behavior because God is going to judge the deeds of all and we are not suggesting that well because this is their nature this is the way they are they can't be anything other than they are so they're home free cut them some slack let them off the hook cannot do that cannot do that man is morally accountable and it is in this nature that he is locked into that demands that he produce these works of the flesh however the remedy is such that there is a way out for him and it is the same way that you took just because they do not have the ability to behave does not mean they do not have the ability to believe because they do and the text that was read earlier from

Acts chapter 17 and I would refer you to that once again because it says very clearly that verse 30 therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance we were talking about this in our men's class on Thursday it wasn't as satisfying there as I would like either my way of explaining it but I think that Paul is saying that there is a real contrast between the times of ignorance that is at that point in time before the death burial and resurrection of Christ what was required to be well pleasing and acceptable to God is not all that clear in the Old Testament we know that it was on the basis of

grace through faith and we know that it had to do with believing what God had revealed up to that particular point in time but here in the New Testament now because we have a historical reality of the death burial and resurrection of

Christ we are given a specific gospel a specific good news a specific formula to pass on to another person it is a transferable concept we have the idea in our mind death burial resurrection of Christ for our sins that's in my mind I can through verbalizing it take what is in my mind communicate it to you and you end up with the same thought and the same idea in your mind about the death burial and resurrection of Christ and its reality that makes it a transferable concept one person can tell another person and communication of the gospel people tell people and this good news that has already been embraced by one person can be communicated to another person for their consideration and hopefully for their positive response to it that's the dynamic of proclaiming the gospel and it is a beautiful thing and here in

Acts 17 Paul said having overlooked the times of ignorance God is now declaring to men that all everywhere should repent change their mind remove themselves from the sphere of flesh to the sphere of spirit and you do that by believing on the Lord Jesus Christ and the reason it is so critical is because God has fixed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness through a man whom he has appointed having furnished proof to all men by raising him from the dead Paul is saying you are now held more accountable than were those on the other side of the cross now you have definite specific information to which you must respond that is the gospel because God has already got a day fixed and he's going to judge the world and this will be the basis for that judgment so if they do not have the ability to behave but they do have the ability to believe that makes us part of the formula because the gospel and the proclamation of the gospel is nothing more than well it has been described as one sinner telling another sinner where to find bread and that's what the proclamation of the gospel is all about you just communicate what you have experienced because unregenerate man does not understand the nature of his problem which is his fallen nature he cannot grasp the remedy and this is a great problem this is the chief obstacle to the proclamation of the gospel this is the chief impediment this is the biggest hurdle to get over and it is this unregenerate man does not understand the nature of his problem he does not see it as being systemic it is part of what he is he was born that way most unregenerate people do not see that and do not understand that and do not believe that most think well

[ 23 : 53 ] I'm not as bad as a lot of people and it's true I'm probably worse than some people but and all I have to do is clean up my act I need to stop stop some of these bad habits and I'm trying and I'm not as much this as I used to be and I don't do that as much as I used to be so I think I'm improved a little he doesn't understand that in his flesh he cannot please God doesn't make any difference how much you try you don't have the equipment it'll never work it is a sheer impossibility that's the diagnosis that's the problem you mean it's that bad yes it's that bad never forget an expression that

Dave Weinbrenner used many years ago really clicked with me when you talk about man's depravity people tend to think well I'm not that bad I mean I've got some good points I'm not don't call me depraved I'm not depraved total depravity means an utter inability to save oneself or to rectify one's situation a complete inability and he said it isn't that man or a man is as bad as he can be that's not what we're saying but he is as bad off as he can be his situation is as bad as it can be it cannot be rectified not through any resolutions not through any trying harder not through any praying more not through any I'm going to quit this not through any psychiatric couch it is completely irreparable totally unable to do anything the will is intact that's what enables us to not believe when someone refuses to believe what are they refusing to believe with their will their volition when they say

I won't that's exercising free moral judgment every human being has that we are all given a volition you have the ability to obey or to disobey when it comes to the gospel that gospel is the gate it is the entrance into a life that can be pleasing to God but if you have not passed through that gate the gate of the gospel of the grace of God you are consigned to an inability to please God and a complete giving over to pleasing yourself and let's face it that's the way many prefer that's one reason they don't believe I will not surrender my autonomy to anyone not even to God this is my life and I'm going to run it the way I want and what is it that makes that decision your will the will has to be broken if you don't want it to be broken it won't be you can have your way God will not invade your will overpower you and force you to submit to him he just doesn't do that he's

not going to give you volition and the ability to be a free moral agent and then take it away from you and override it and I know what our Calvinist friends think of that they think that because man is spiritually dead he is unable to respond and God has to give him the ability to believe or he can't even believe and

I think that that is simply a misunderstanding of what of what being spiritually dead means they liken it to a physical body of a corpse and they say here is someone laid out in a casket and they are completely impotent they are physically unable to respond to anything and that that's the way we are spiritually so that when we hear the gospel we can't believe we can't believe because we don't even have the ability to believe the gospel so God has to give us the gift of faith and those to whom he gives it are the elect and those to whom he doesn't are the non elect and that's very popular in fact that's the backbone of Calvinism and I must admit although I do so with no delight that I have taught that I have taught that in years past but my subsequent examination of the scriptures over the last 45 plus years

[ 29 : 34 ] I just in all good conscience regret having taught that and I cannot teach it any longer because to be spiritually dead does not mean you have an inability to respond to the gospel being spiritually dead means you are separated from God that's what death is it isn't a cessation of existence and it is not an inability to believe or an inability to respond it means death means spiritual death means you are separated from God you're cut off physical death is a separation of your spirit from your body spiritual death is a separation of your spirit from God but there is that innate capability of responding to the gospel when you hear it that's why the sin of unbelief is as great as it is because men can believe they choose not to and when they choose not to they are using the same volition and the same power of will that they would use if they believed it's just in the opposite direction we are indeed free moral agents new nature is what is needed but they do not understand the disease and if you do not understand the nature of the disease you will look in vain to find a remedy because no physician will prescribe a medication for an undiagnosed case you've got to first have the diagnosis and this is where man falls down the remedy the remedy consists of taking unto themselves an additional and a new nature that provides them with the ability to overcome their old nature how does this new nature get into an individual so that he has the ability to please

God it is through believing the bad news and then by believing the good news the bad news is the diagnosis of the condition the good news is the remedy that God has provided through Jesus Christ we appropriate the bad and the good news usually from someone who has already believed it and wants to share it and isn't that almost always the way it is someone who has already partaken of the good news is so grateful for it and so excited about it and so concerned about others who do not have it that they want to share it I want to tell you about the most wonderful thing that ever happened to me yeah what's that and then you tell them and very often the response will be something like well you know that's that's neat that's cool

I'm glad I'm glad for you I'm glad for you we each have our own way of doing things and our own beliefs and I'm glad you found something that makes you happy happy but that's that's not for me that's not me I've always been this or I've always been that or I've never been and but what you have done you have given them something to think about you have given them something to begin feeling guilty about guilt is a precursor to the gospel we have to become convinced of our sin not only aware of our sin convinced of our sin we have to look at our sin and evaluate it and when we do guilt tends to set in feelings of shortcoming feelings of not measuring up feelings of not being what we ought to be sometimes this is a process that goes on for years just little bits and pieces at a time sometimes the guilt is added to by the most unexpected thing things or even through little children who don't even know what they're saying or doing they can add a little more to and finally guilt begins to build up and

I don't know about you but guilt guilt is painful guilt is an emotional response to a moral failure and when we recognize our guilt we look for relief that's only natural how can I absolve my guilt how can I get rid of this burden for sin and he goes through all of these places and sees all of these people and each one has suggestions but nobody has a remedy and nobody can take that pack off his back and lighten his load and remove the guilt until finally one day he comes into contact with the cross and the cross but

Jesus Christ is the basis for the removal of our guilt so that in Christ you are completely free the guilt is gone the war is over peace with God has been declared through Jesus Christ and most of us

take a very circuitous route to get to that point and we'll stop off and try this and try that and try something else we'll try church and that won't work and we'll try psychiatric therapy and that doesn't work and we try going to some kind of confession and that doesn't work none of those things will work only the cross of Jesus Christ and the work that he accomplished on it will assuage us of our guilt we have the high and holy privilege and responsibility of telling this to people because dearly beloved they don't know they're clueless they don't know that they are in mortal danger they don't know that they're lost they don't know that they can't please

[ 37 : 23 ] God they don't know that there is a remedy for their guilt and we have the privilege and the responsibility of telling them and be reminded sometimes we're telling them something they don't want to hear they don't want to hear but if they ever get past that if they get over the hurdle of feeling bad because of their sin then we can direct them to the good news which is the cross of Jesus Christ and they have the ability to believe that wherever Paul went he proclaimed the gospel and he made it clear to people that coming into connection and coming into salvation and coming into forgiveness with the God who made them is a positive response of your volition to the good news of the grace of

God and there is absolutely nothing like it this is the only game in town this is the only remedy this is the only provision this is the only antidote God gave it and he didn't give a half dozen and say take your pick choose anyone you want lots of different roads up the mountain but they all lead to the mountain he never said that he said this is my beloved son you hear him and you can exclude all other voices there is no one else whom God ever said that and he is our remedy inability to behave but ability to believe and if they believe

God will give them the ability to behave so does this mean that all Christians those who have believed automatically have the ability to behave yep sure does you automatically have the ability to behave then the next logical question is why don't we why don't we if the ability to behave because we are in Christ is automatic why don't we that will be reserved for next week so would you pray with me please loving father there are still many elements to this issue that none of us beginning with myself really fully comprehend but we believe there is enough to be understood so that we can grasp the concepts and respond to it however inadequately it may have been provided and we thank you for the simplicity of the truth that is here and at the same time for its great great profundity most of all we are so grateful for making available a glorious remedy through the gospel of the grace of your son and what he did for us we pray that no one will knowingly willingly leave this place without having embraced the finished work of

Christ as their very own thank you for this wonderful gospel and for the privilege of reminding us who we are and what we believe Christ wonderful name amen