

What Saith the Scripture?

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Sinners Not Willing To Be Christians- No. 2

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Lecture XIII

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Text.--John 5:40: "Ye will not come to me that ye might have life."

V. Wherein lies your mistake?

- 1. You mistake wish for will. A drunkard might wish that he was a sober man, and that he was rid of his habit of intemperance; the most debased sinner in the world might wish that he was a better man; the vilest harlot might wish that she was a chaste woman. But in these cases wishing is not willing. While the drunkard wishes that he was a sober man, still he is not willing; and does not make up his mind forever to renounce drinking. He wishes he were a sober man, but he is not willing, and does not at once will to forsake his cups. He does not rule the appetite down, and make up his mind to drink no more.

Now this is precisely so with you. When you consider the error of your ways, your guilt and your danger, you wish that you were a Christian, but this is not being a Christian. You do not resign your will to Christ; you do not come to him; you do not at once settle it, now and forever, that obedience is to be the rule of your life forever--that trust, and confidence, and love shall be your state of mind forever.

- 2. You mistake a desire to be safe and happy for a willingness to come to Christ.

When sinners realize their guilt and danger, I know that they are very willing to be safe. They desire and are even willing to be safe and happy--indeed, they are greatly anxious to be safe and happy. But this is not the same thing as to will obedience to Christ. It is not the same thing as to trust in Christ; it is not by any means the same thing as to enter into sympathy with him, and to receive him in all the relations that he sustains to the soul.

- 3. You mistake a willingness to do other things for a willingness to come to Christ. You are willing perhaps, to perform external duties; you may be willing to pray, in your way, to read your Bible, and to use the means of grace, as you express it; but this is not the same thing as to be willing to take Christ's yoke upon you; willing to obey him; willing to become his follower; willing to take up your cross and follow him, which is implied in a willingness to come to him.

- 4. You stop short in the means. In immediate connection with the text Christ says to the Jews, "Ye do search the Scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life; and they are they which testify of me."

The English translation needs amending in this case. It reads, "Search the Scriptures," as if it were imperative; whereas it is indicative; "Ye do search the Scriptures." It is not a command to search them; but an assertion that they do search them. They stopped short in the Scriptures. They read the Scriptures a great deal, and they laid great stress on this; but after all they were not willing to do what they might have learned from the Scriptures. And sinners are now making precisely the same mistake in this respect which Christ charged upon the Jews. The Jews were set upon doing certain duties which the law required of them; by doing which duties they expected to be saved. They read the Scriptures, not for the sake of understanding about Christ, that they might come to him, but they read the Scriptures as a duty--they read the Scriptures as a task. They searched the Scriptures, and made a great deal of reading and searching the Scriptures; and they rested in that duty without trusting in him whom the Scriptures taught.

Now there are a great many persons who are willing to pray in their way; but when they have done their duty they stop and wait for God to answer their prayer. They pray that they may come to Christ; but they do not come. They pray that they may repent, and then stop for God to give them repentance. They pray for faith, and then wait for faith to come, instead of at once exercising faith. They pray that they may be willing to come to Christ; but instead of putting forth the act of will, they do not get beyond their prayer. They use the means, and then console themselves that they have done their duty. They go to meeting and hear about Jesus; but they do not come to him. In short, they are self-righteously using and stopping short in the means. These means were designed to lead them quite to Christ; but instead of seeing in these means how to come to Christ, and instead of coming to him, they pray, and read the Bible, and attend meeting, and there they stop, content with that.

Now are you not making precisely this mistake. You go to meeting--many of you profess to pray--you think you are anxious to be Christians--many of you profess, probably, to be willing to be Christians; and yet you do not put forth the act of will that would constitute you a Christian.

You do not trust; you do not submit; you do not embrace his will, or his atonement; you do not accept him in the relations in which he presents himself to you. Do not then, deceive yourselves, and suppose yourselves to be willing while your own unwillingness is your only difficulty.

REMARKS.

1. From what has been said you can see why you need, and the sense in which you need, the Holy Spirit to make you Christians. You do not need the Holy Spirit in the sense that you are unable, but because you are unwilling to come to Christ.

You need his agency to make you Christians for the same reason that a drunkard might need the most powerful persuasive influences to be brought to bear upon him to make him a temperance man. Strictly speaking, his will being free, he is able to resist all temptation; and he does not need this powerful persuasion to make him able to will to give up his cups, but to secure him in temperance--to secure the consent of his will in fact.

He may need some powerful persuasive influences to be brought to bear upon him to really secure the consent of his will.

He needs to have his unwillingness overcome, which can only be done by persuasion; and in order to save him he may need to have a great moral influence brought to bear upon him to make him willing. It is not a physical influence that the drunkard needs, but a moral influence.

His will is not moved by an influence like a steel spring, by a physical force acting directly upon it; but it is moved by argument and persuasion, and by reasons addressed to his reason, his conscience, and his feelings. He is able to resist temptation in such a sense as that the temptation is no excuse for his sin. But still, such is the committal of his will to the gratification of his appetite, that as a matter of fact he will not give up his cups without this powerful moral influence brought to bear upon him.

Now just so it is with you, sinner, in respect to becoming a Christian. You need the Holy Spirit, not to make you able to come to Christ, but to make you willing.

2. We see also the nature of his agency--that his influence is not exerted physically upon the will; but it is a persuasive influence; it is by teaching, convincing, reproof, drawing; it is by a divine showing, an inward enlightening, that he makes the sinner willing.

3. You are not to wait to be converted before you come; but to come at once. To be converted is to be made willing to come. Or more strictly, to be converted is to be drawn to Christ, to turn to Christ. Now suppose you were trying to persuade your son to do something which you desired of him, and were presenting to him the reasons, and urging, and entreating, and using all moral means to secure a willingness in him; and suppose you should find that he was waiting for you to make him willing, to convert him to your views and requirements. You are using the appropriate means, and the only appropriate means, to make him willing; but instead of yielding to these means, instead of suffering himself thus immediately to be persuaded, to be influenced, he hardens himself and waits for you to make him willing.

This would be just as you are doing in regard to Christ--you are waiting to be converted, or waiting to be made willing. Perhaps you think that conversion and being willing are very different things; therefore, that you must be converted first--must have some physical change wrought in you to enable you to be willing. Now the truth is, that you are to yield at once to the considerations presented to you, and thus become willing. You are to become willing; to put forth the act of will at once, under the persuasions that press upon you.

4. Persistence in maintaining that you are willing to be Christians, will be fatal to you. While you

insist upon it that you are willing, you are never likely to become so; for in fact you are thus, justifying yourself, and throwing the responsibility upon God.

For you might very reasonably ask, if you are willing and yet unable, "Wherefore doth he yet find fault?" But if the difficulty is that of unwillingness, then the responsibility is altogether upon you.

I was once laboring in a revival where the most prominent man in the congregation, in several respects, became greatly disturbed about his soul. But he would maintain that he was willing to be a Christian.

His wife was a Christian woman, and prayed much for him; and he professed a willingness to be a Christian, and insisted upon it that he was unable to become one.

He became very restive, and even angry under the preaching; as my object was from time to time to show him, with all other sinners in the congregation, that they were not willing to be Christians, and that this was their only difficulty.

One night the truth pressed him so hard that he was very angry, and he used some very improper language, even before he left the house of God. But he spent a very uneasy night; and early in the morning he arose and wandered off from his house, away to a grove of wood in the distance. There he knelt down and attempted to pray.

He told me afterwards, that he felt as if he must get alone, where he could pray and use his voice without restraint.

When he had knelt to pray he found his mouth closed and that his heart would not pray. He felt a rebellious spirit within him; and he found himself even unwilling to ask for the grace and mercy of God with any heart in his prayer. Finding no prayer in his heart, it occurred to him that he would repeat the Lord's Prayer.

He began--"Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name." He said he felt condemned, and as if this were hypocritical in him to call God his Father when he had never treated him as a Father--he had never obeyed him as a Father--he had never honored him as a Father.

And then the petition, "Hallowed be thy name,"--he said he did not care for the sacredness of the name of God. He was a man that was sometimes profane, and had often used the name of God profanely;--and now that he should say, "Hallowed be thy name!"

And then the next petition, "Thy kingdom come:"--he said he could hardly say it. He knew that he had no sympathy with the kingdom of God; and that he was not honest and earnest when he asked God that his kingdom might come. He felt an inward reluctance to express such a sentiment as "thy kingdom come."

But at the next petition he found himself brought to a stand:--"Thy will be done on earth as it is done in heaven." He said that he could not say it. He found that his will rose up against God's will. What!

shall I pray that God's will may be done? Am I willing that it may be done in respect to me? Am I willing to do it myself.

Am I truly willing to do the will of God as they do the will of God in heaven? He said his mouth was shut, He saw at once that the difficulty was his unwillingness.

There he stood on his knees, confounded. Now the appalling fact was out before him, so that he could no longer resist it, that he was unwilling to do or suffer the will of God; hence that he was unwilling to be a Christian; that he always had been unwilling; and there on his knees a suppliant before God, he saw that he was in rebellion against the will of God.

But what should he do? I think he said he sweat with agony. It seemed as if his sins would crush him. He saw where the difficulty lay; the whole difficulty lay in his unwillingness; and a load of guilt was pressing him down to death.

But just here it occurred to him, "why should I not be willing? Why should not God's will be done? Ought not his will to be done? Is not his will perfect? Should not all his creatures submit to his will? Whose will should govern? Is it not right, is it not safe, is it not altogether best that I, and that all beings, should do the will of God?"

Such considerations flashed over his mind; and he said that he gathered up all his soul, and at the top of his voice he cried--"Thy will be done on earth as it is done in heaven."

He said that with his words he put forth the whole strength of his will, and yielded all up to the will of God. In a moment a great calm came over him,--he breathed easily and sweetly. He rose from his knees and walked back to his house in peace; and from that moment he was a man of God. So he lived and so he died.

See now! he did not wait to be made willing; but when he saw what the difficulty was, he instantly, as he said, gathered up all his energies and became willing. He gave his consent--he yielded the point. He was not passive in waiting, but active in willing. This is the way to do, sinner--to gather up your energies, and be willing. Consent as you would consent to do anything else; and throw yourself upon his sovereign mercy.

5. But perhaps you will say--"I do not feel enough; and I do not feel right: I must feel right before I can come."

But remember that coming is not a feeling but a consenting.

Does it not appear reasonable that you should consent to all the will of Christ? Does it not appear to you to be reasonable that you should trust him? that you should consent that you deserve to be sent to hell for your sins? Does it not appear to you reasonable that you should give up your sins? that you should turn away from sin, and give all up to Christ? Do you not regard this as reasonable? Then why do you not at once consent to what you know to be reasonable? If you acknowledge it to be reasonable that you ought at once to give all up to Christ, why then do you not consent to what you

see to be right and reasonable? Heartily consenting to this, is coming to Christ.

As I said, do not wait passively for anything to be done to you, as if some physical influence were to be brought to bear upon you, like an electric shock, to make you willing.

Yield to the persuasions of his truth and of his Spirit. Yield to your convictions. Yielding to your convictions is coming to Christ.

You are convinced that you ought to come, that you may come, that now is the time to come;--now yield to your convictions. Do not suppose it is possible for you ever to be converted while you do not yield to your convictions; for yielding to your convictions is conversion.

6. There is a great deal of false instruction given on this point to sinners.

I was much astonished to hear the celebrated Mr. Spurgeon, of London, affirm, in preaching, a doctrine the direct opposite of that which this text presents. He insisted upon it that sinners were willing to come to Christ--that this was not their difficulty at all. He said of himself, that he was willing to be a Christian long before he became so.

Now in his teaching there was such an utter want of discrimination as to quite agonize me. I must say, that he spoke as if in experience he had never really known what it was to be willing or unwilling--really to come to Christ. By this I do not mean to express a doubt that he was ever converted. But certainly he had never justly discriminated, he had never analyzed the subject so as to perceive exactly what is implied in coming to Christ. This was quite evident in his instructions. He completely mystified the subject.

Now false instruction upon this point is often fatal to the sinner. While he really thinks himself willing to be a Christian he cannot rationally and truly blame himself for not being a Christian. It is therefore of the greatest importance that on this point right instruction should be given:--that the sinner should be made to understand right where his difficulty lies, and to see that it consists in his pertinacious obstinacy, his utter unwillingness to embrace the will of Christ.

I can hardly suppose that Mr. Spurgeon himself, if questioned upon the subject--and I must say, that I greatly desired to question him--I say, I can hardly suppose that he himself would fail to acknowledge that if the sinner cordially accepted the will of Christ--that this is coming to Christ.

I suppose also that he would admit, if questioned, that if the sinner did not cordially accept the will of Christ--that this is an unwillingness to come to Christ.

Indeed, it is plain that the false instruction so often given upon this point, is owing to a want of discrimination in regard to what is really implied in a willingness to come to Christ.

7. There is a great deal of unintelligent praying for sinners on this subject, and even in their presence. I have often heard persons pray for sinners substantially in this way: They would say to the Lord--"These sinners are seeking thee sorrowing; they are seeking thy love to know." Indeed, in some

instances I have heard it plainly expressed in prayer, that these sinners were willing; and the suppliant plainly imagined that the sinner was all right so far as his will was concerned, and would say in prayer that which implied it. Now this must be most offensive to God, and a great stumbling block to the sinner. It is really taking the sinner's part against God. The sinner should be made to know and feel that his only difficulty is stubbornness, hardness of heart; or, which is the same thing, unwillingness to accept the will of Christ, and to receive Christ just as he is presented in the Bible. Any praying for the sinner that does not imply this, is an offence to God and a stumbling block to the sinner.

Such praying in the presence of the sinner begets only pity, and not repentance. The sinner says, "Yes, I am seeking his love to know--I am seeking him sorrowing--I wonder he does not hear me. I am entirely willing to do his will--I am entirely willing to be, and to do, and to suffer everything that he desires."

Now of every impenitent sinner this is all false. And for a Christian, or a Christian minister, to pray, or to say, that so far as his will is concerned he is all right, must be an abomination to God; and if the sinner believes it, it must be a ruin to the sinner.

8. The truth is that sinners are universally stubborn and unbelieving; and it is just this that constitutes them sinners.

The will does not bow; it does not embrace the will of God; it does not accept the atonement, the authority, and the will of Christ.

This is the exact point of controversy between God and every impenitent sinner. He is unwilling that God should govern; he does not cordially consent to receive God as his king, his ruler, or Christ in the relations in which he is presented to him.

9. We should aim to draw the sinner to Christ, that he may come to him for the life here presented. We should try to make the sinner understand exactly what he is to receive from Christ, what he is to come to Christ for, why he is to come to Christ, when he is to come to Christ, and to strip him of every refuge of lies and of all his mistakes and self-righteousness.

Urge him at once to give up his sins, to put away his unbelief, to trust in Christ, and to embrace his whole will.

10. Lastly, all sinners may come. The Bible says, "Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." "The Spirit and the bride say, come, and let him that heareth say, come, and let him that is athirst come, and whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely."

"Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price." "Look unto me and be ye saved, all ye ends of the earth."

Now do any of you say, ah! may I come? Yes, you may: however great your sins, you may come. Perhaps some of you are thinking--"Well, the time was when I might have come. But oh, I have

wandered so far, I have been in sin so long I fear I am a castaway. There is no hope for me. I have done so much to disoblige Christ, and have so often grieved and quenched his Spirit that I greatly fear that now the invitation does not extend to me."

Sinner, remember the language still is, "whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely."

"Let him that is athirst come" "Let all the ends of the earth come." This is the unalterable language of the Bible. Do not fail, then, through unbelief.

Do not, now, sin against your own mercies. You may come--you may come now. You may have this life. You may enter into it at once.

And now, will you come? Come, dying sinner, and let it not be said another hour that you will not come. Oh, let it no longer be true of you, that you will not come to Christ that you might have life. Come, dear soul! Come now--consent now. Cast away your objections, your unbelief, and your sins. Come, for all things are now ready. Will you come?

GLOSSARY

of easily misunderstood terms as defined by Mr. Finney himself.

Compiled by Katie Stewart

1. **Complacency, or Esteem:** "Complacency, as a state of will or heart, is only benevolence modified by the consideration or relation of right character in the object of it. God, prophets, apostles, martyrs, and saints, in all ages, are as virtuous in their self-denying and untiring labours to save the wicked, as they are in their complacent love to the saints." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE VII)*. Also, "approbation of the character of its object. Complacency is due only to the good and holy." *Lectures to Professing Christians (LECTURE XII)*.
2. **Disinterested Benevolence:** "By disinterested benevolence I do not mean, that a person who is disinterested feels no interest in his object of pursuit, but that he seeks the happiness of others for its own sake, and not for the sake of its reaction on himself, in promoting his own happiness. He chooses to do good because he rejoices in the happiness of others, and desires their happiness for its own sake. God is purely and disinterestedly benevolent. He does not make His creatures happy for the sake of thereby promoting His own happiness, but because He loves their happiness and chooses it for its own sake. Not that He does not feel happy in promoting the happiness of His creatures, but that He does not do it for the sake of His own gratification." *Lectures to Professing Christians (LECTURE I)*.
3. **Divine Sovereignty:** "The sovereignty of God consists in the independence of his will, in consulting his own intelligence and discretion, in the selection of his end, and the means of accomplishing it. In other words, the sovereignty of God is nothing else than infinite benevolence directed by infinite knowledge." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE LXXVI)*.
4. **Election:** "That all of Adam's race, who are or ever will be saved, were from eternity chosen by God to eternal salvation, through the sanctification of their hearts by faith in Christ. In other words, they are chosen to salvation by means of sanctification. Their salvation is the end- their

sanctification is a means. Both the end and the means are elected, appointed, chosen; the means as really as the end, and for the sake of the end." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE LXXIV)*.

5. **Entire Sanctification:** "Sanctification may be entire in two senses: (1.) In the sense of present, full obedience, or entire consecration to God; and, (2.) In the sense of continued, abiding consecration or obedience to God. Entire sanctification, when the terms are used in this sense, consists in being established, confirmed, preserved, continued in a state of sanctification or of entire consecration to God." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE LVIII)*.
6. **Moral Agency:** "Moral agency is universally a condition of moral obligation. The attributes of moral agency are intellect, sensibility, and free will." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE III)*.
7. **Moral Depravity:** "Moral depravity is the depravity of free-will, not of the faculty itself, but of its free action. It consists in a violation of moral law. Depravity of the will, as a faculty, is, or would be, physical, and not moral depravity. It would be depravity of substance, and not of free, responsible choice. Moral depravity is depravity of choice. It is a choice at variance with moral law, moral right. It is synonymous with sin or sinfulness. It is moral depravity, because it consists in a violation of moral law, and because it has moral character." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE XXXVIII)*.
8. **Human Reason:** "the intuitive faculty or function of the intellect... it is the faculty that intuits moral relations and affirms moral obligation to act in conformity with perceived moral relations." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE III)*.
9. **Retributive Justice:** "Retributive justice consists in treating every subject of government according to his character. It respects the intrinsic merit or demerit of each individual, and deals with him accordingly." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE XXXIV)*.
10. **Total Depravity:** "Moral depravity of the unregenerate is without any mixture of moral goodness or virtue, that while they remain unregenerate, they never in any instance, nor in any degree, exercise true love to God and to man." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE XXXVIII)*.
11. **Unbelief:** "the soul's withholding confidence from truth and the God of truth. The heart's rejection of evidence, and refusal to be influenced by it. The will in the attitude of opposition to truth perceived, or evidence presented." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE LV)*.