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Sinners Not Willing To Be Christians- No. 1

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Lecture XII

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

In speaking from these words, I remark,

1. That sinners think themselves willing to become Christians. I know I thought so myself at one time before I was converted; and this is a very common mistake with impenitent men.
2. Many professors of religion admit and assume the willingness of sinners to become Christians; and hence they can hardly blame them for not being Christians.
3. Because professors of religion think that sinners are willing to come to Christ but cannot; they therefore maintain the natural, proper inability of the sinner to come to Christ, in other words, to be a Christian. Many professors of religion talk to sinners, and pray for them as if they thought them all right so far as their willing is concerned. They represent them as being perfectly willing to be Christians, but as being unable.
4. This text affirms an opposite doctrine, and teaches that sinners are unwilling to come to Christ.

The text was addressed to the Jews to whom Christ was speaking, but is no doubt designed to affirm a universal truth of impenitent sinners. To come to Christ is to become a Christian, and this text plainly teaches that sinners are not willing to be Christians.

But to make this plain, I will inquire,

I. What is this life of which Christ speaks?

II. What is implied in coming to Christ for life?

III. Sinners will not come.

IV. Why you will not come.

V. Wherein lies your mistake?

I. What is this life of which Christ speaks?

There are two senses in which we have life in Christ.

- 1. In the sense of exemption from the death penalty, under which men are by reason of sin. In other words, we are indebted to Christ for pardon, and for an escape from eternal death.
- 2. Sinners are indebted to Christ for that spiritual and eternal life which God has given us in Christ.

Rom. 6:23 -- "The wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord."

1 John 5:11-12 -- "And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son of God hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life."

These, and many other texts, speak of the eternal life which we have in Christ Jesus. This spiritual life consists substantially in a moral union and fellowship with God's will and with God's feelings -- with God's whole state of mind.

When a sinner turns to Christ, he thereby, and in the very act of turning to him, comes into sympathy with his will and with his state of mind. This is the beginning of eternal life; it is the beginning of moral union and fellowship with God; as John says, "Surely, our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ."

Let no one think that the eternal life which we have in Christ Jesus is a mere continuance of existence; for existence without moral sympathy with God would be to me a curse, and not a blessing. Eternal life implies continued existence, but consists in that state of mind in which God is.

II. To bring out clearly the truth affirmed in the text, I must enquire what is implied in coming to Christ for life?

- 1. Coming to Christ does not imply a change of place. It is not a going any whither; but it is a change of mind.
- 2. Coming to Christ is not a change of mind in the sense of a change of opinion; not in the sense of a mere change of intellectual views, nor in the sense of a mere change of feelings. These are all involuntary changes. Change of views, change of opinion, and change of feelings, are involuntary states of mind, and do not constitute any change of moral character; nor do they

necessarily imply it. Nor does a change of views, opinions, or feelings, imply any coming, or properly any mental act of which we are the authors. Coming to Christ is a thing required of us; it is a thing also to which we are invited. Coming to Christ, then is something for us to do; it involves our moral activity, and must consist in a moral act.

- 3. But it must consist in a mental act, an act of the mind, and not a bodily or outward act. Mental action is not motive, like an outward act.

It is nevertheless an act, and an act which will produce changes in the acts of the body. But coming to Christ is a mental act, or an act of the mind as distinct from an act of the body.

- 4. Again, coming to Christ is an intelligent act of the mind; that is, the mind acts for reasons. It knows why and wherefore it acts, and therefore acts intelligently.
- 5. Coming to Christ is a voluntary act; that is, it is an act of the will. Coming to any person in the sense of a mere outward coming, always implies an inward coming, an act of will. But the coming to Christ does not necessarily imply any change of place at all, but is simply an act of the will.
- 6. Coming to Christ is a mental act, like coming to any one else for a favor. If I come to one of you for some favor, the coming in this case may imply a change of place in me. I may come from my place where I stand to the place where you sit. But observe, this outward coming implies an inward act of the will that has set my body in motion. The moral act is the inward willing. My mind decides upon it; I choose. I have a reason for coming in view of which I make up my mind, and put forth the act of will which constitutes the inward coming.
- 7. Coming to Christ for this life implies an intelligent closing of the will with Christ's offer; a taking him at his word, a committing of ourselves to him for this end, that is, for this life spoken of in the text.
- 8. Coming to Christ for life in the double sense of which I have spoken, must involve,
 - (1.) A cordial consent to the justice of the death-penalty. If we do not recognize the fact that we deserve the death-penalty, how should we come to Christ for pardon? "The whole need not a physician, but they that are sick."

If a sinner does not recognize himself as condemned and under sentence of death, of course he is not willing to come to Christ for exemption from the execution of this death-penalty.

- (2.) Again. If he admits that he is under sentence of eternal death, but does not consent to the justice of the penalty, he cannot cordially come to Christ for exemption from execution; for while he contends against the justice of the sentence, he is making an issue with justice, instead of cordially accepting mercy. It is a contradiction to say that he is willing to be indebted to Christ for a pardon, while he rebels against the justice of his

sentence.

Coming, then, for pardon, or exemption from the execution of the death-penalty, implies a consent to the justice of God in passing the sentence of eternal death upon him.

- o (3.) It implies the acceptance of the sentence of death under which the sinner is. Let no one think, therefore, that he is willing to come to Christ for a pardon, while he does not heartily accept the justice of his sentence. But this is a common mistake. Sinners think that they are willing to be Christians, while they resolutely deny their desert of endless death.

Let me illustrate this point. Suppose a man should receive a letter from the executive department of the state; and upon opening it should find that it contained the pardon for a crime of which he never has been guilty.

Could he cordially receive this pardon? No. He would say, either that it was some mistake; or else, that he was grossly insulted.

But again: suppose he had committed a crime for which he deserved punishment in the state-prison for three years; and suppose the pardon should purport to be a pardon for the crime of murder, and thus exempt him from the death-penalty, could he cordially accept this? No. He would say as before, either that this was a mistake; or else, that he was grossly insulted. But again, suppose that the pardon should profess to pardon him for a crime for which he was sentenced twenty years to the state-prison,--could he cordially consent to this? Would not this imply that he had committed a greater crime than he had? Would not this also imply that greater favor and grace was shown him than he really needed? Could he regard it as a fair and generous transaction, and worthy of a government?

Would he not, after all, consider himself as injured by the implication that he had committed a greater crime than he had? To be sure he would. A condition of his cordially accepting it must be, that it shall cover no more time than that for which he deserved to be punished.

- o (4.) Now Christ is presented to us as offering us eternal life as a mere gift, no part of which is due to us in justice. "The wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life." The very fact that the whole of the eternal life is a gift, implies that the forfeiture incurred by sin is eternal death.
- 9. Coming to Christ implies the coming to him for pardon and the expecting of pardon from him. That is, it is looking to him for pardon with the expectation -- the applying to him for it, in the expectation that he will grant it.
- 10. Coming to Christ for spiritual and eternal life must involve,

- (1.) Repentance, or the renunciation of sin. Observe, this spiritual life consists in moral union with God's state of mind, fellowship with God. Of course the very act of coming for this life involves the renunciation of sin.
- (2.) Implies and involves the yielding of the will and of the whole being to him and to his will.
- (3.) Coming to him for spiritual life is the voluntary yielding up of the mind to the divine attraction,--to the teachings, and drawings, and persuasions of his loving spirit.

It is a cordial trusting in him,--a cordial submission of the will to his will,--a cordial embracing of his promises and offers of mercy. The act is an act of will.

True, such is the will's relation to the feelings, that the act of will draws with it the feelings into sympathy with God's feelings; yet the responsible act of coming is a responsible, free choice or act of the will--an intelligent decision, yielding, committal of the whole mind to Christ in the relations in which the gospel presents him.

This cordial yielding of the will influences the sensibility, and brings the whole mind into fellowship with God.

III. Sinners will not come.

- 1. By sinners of course I mean impenitent sinners--sinners who do not come--who are not in fact Christians.
- 2. We have just seen that willing is coming--that to come is to will, or be willing. Willing, in the sense in which I have explained it, is the very act of coming.
- 3. Therefore there can be no other reason why a sinner does not come than that he will not. If he is willing, he has come already. If he wills as he ought to will, there is no power in the universe that can prevent his coming, for in fact he does come.
- 4. If he were willing and could not, he would not be to blame for not coming. Whatever one cannot do by willing, he cannot do at all. And if he were truly willing to come, and was really unable, it would be impossible to blame him for not coming. And in fact, while the sinner thinks himself willing to come, he cannot blame himself for not coming. He may regret his inability in a certain sense; but he cannot recognize his desert of damnation for not coming, while he regards himself as willing to come but unable.
- 5. But if you could not come in the sense of a proper inability, you would not be commanded to come. Do you believe that an infinitely good God would command you, on pain of eternal death, to come, if you could not?

I have asked this question to hundred's of sinners, I think I may safely say, when they have plead their inability and professed their willingness to come. I have asked them--"Do you believe that God would command you on pain of eternal death, to come to Christ, if he believed that you could not come? In other words, do you believe that God would command you to perform an impossibility, on pain of eternal death?" I do not recollect ever to have found a person who would affirm, that he believed that God would command him to do what he knew he was unable to do.

But again, if you could not come, you would not be invited to come. Do you believe that God would invite you seriously to come to him when he knew that you could not come? If he knew that you were well-disposed enough, and really were willing to come but could not,--do you believe that he would invite you to come?

- 6. But perhaps you will say, Is it not taught in John 6:46, that no man can come to Christ except the Father draw him?

I answer, Yes, but what is this drawing? Christ immediately adds, "They shall all be taught of God;" which he quotes from the Old Testament. Here then we learn that this drawing is teaching.

Now remember that this text in the sixth chapter of John, does not contradict the text upon which I am preaching. Christ does not contradict himself when he says, "Ye will not come unto me that ye might have life;" and when he says, "No man can come to me except the Father which hath sent me, draw him." He means to affirm in the text upon which I am speaking, that sinners are unwilling to come to him; and in John, 6:44, he means to teach that no man can be willing until he is informed about Christ. It is expressly affirmed that this drawing is teaching--"They shall all be taught of God." This drawing, then, is not a physical, but a moral drawing,--a teaching; a persuasion.

This text, then, does not teach any natural inability of a sinner to come to Christ who is taught by the Lord who Christ is, and what Christ's relations to men are. This drawing is only intended to secure our cordial consent, that is, our cordial willing, or coming to Christ. Observe, this text which you bring forward as teaching that you are unable to come, implies that you are unwilling to come. The drawing is designed to influence the will. If you were willing, as you suppose, you would not need the drawing.

- 7. But as coming is an act of the will, it cannot be impossible to one whose will is free, and who is instructed by the word and Spirit of God in regard to who Christ is.

Freedom of will consists in proper ability to will either way in every case of moral obligation or duty. The will is not free in the sense that it can act where there is no motive whatever for action, or no object of choice presented. A heathen who has never heard of Christ, is not free to come to Christ, because he knows nothing of him.

But one who is instructed, and who has been drawn in the sense of having been taught who and what Christ is, must be free to come; that is, he must have natural power to

come; and his not coming is simply an unwillingness--an unwillingness for which he is entirely responsible--an unwillingness which he is under infinite obligation to overcome. If he knows who and what Christ is, and what Christ's requirements and offers are, he must be able to come; and hence the great guilt of his unwillingness.

- 8. If you do not come, it is a plain fact that you will not; therefore you are deceived in supposing yourself to be willing to come.

IV. Why you will not come.

- 1. Because of what is implied or involved in coming. For example: you are too proud, and blind, and self-righteous, to accept the justice of the sentence which has been passed upon you. You may say, perhaps, that it is just; but you are not cordial in accepting the propriety and equity of the sentence which God has passed upon you; consequently you are not willing to come to Christ for pardon.
- 2. You do not cordially embrace the atonement. Christ's death has been substituted for yours; but being unwilling to accept with cordiality the justice of the sentence against yourself, you are unwilling cordially to embrace the atonement of Christ as offered for you. You do not cordially recognize its fitness, and propriety, and necessity. Virtually denying your own desert of death, you do not cordially accept the substitute that has been offered. You will not embrace, and make the atonement offered by Christ your own offering, as needed to honor and sustain the government of God in the forgiveness of your sins. You do not realize yourself to be a sinner deserving so great a curse and so dire a damnation as that such an atonement is a needed expression of God's abhorrence of your sins.
- 3. Another reason why you are not willing to come to Christ is, you are unwilling to give up a life of sin, and now to enter upon a life of holiness. But this, as we have seen, is implied in coming to Christ. Truly coming to Christ for pardon, implies repentance, or the giving up of sin. Truly coming to Christ for the eternal life here spoken of, implies the giving up of sin and entering into sympathy with God's holiness. This you are unwilling to do. Indeed, as we have seen, to will this is to do it.
- 4. You will not come to Christ, for the same reason that a drunken, debased wretch would not come into sympathy with a holy family, though he had the offer of adoption by that family, and of being made a joint heir with the children of the family. If such a debased wretch had the offer of adoption, and of heirship, you can understand why he would not come into sympathy with their state of mind, and become holy like them. Now this is the same reason why you are unwilling to come to Christ for this life.

To come to Christ for this life is to become like Christ,--is to come into sympathy with Christ,--is to yield yourself to obey Christ. But all this you are unwilling to do. The very fact that you do not do it, shows that you are unwilling; for to be really and truly willing were to do it.

The difficulty, then, is solely in your unwillingness; and you are unwilling as I have said,

because of what is implied or involved in coming to Christ.

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)*.