

STUDIES ON SAVING FAITH Part III 9. COMING TO CHRIST WITH OUR WILL

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Transcript

STUDIES ON SAVING FAITH

Part III

9. COMING TO CHRIST WITH OUR WILL

The man within the body is possessed of three principal faculties: the understanding, the affections, and the will. As was shown earlier, all of these were radically affected by the Fall: they were defiled and corrupted, and in consequence, they are used in the service of self and sin, rather than of God and of Christ. But in regeneration, these faculties are quickened and cleansed by the Spirit: not completely, but initially, and continuously so in the life-long process of sanctification, and perfectly so at glorification. Now each of these three faculties is subordinated to the others by the order of nature, that is, as man has been constituted by his Maker. One faculty is influenced by the other. In Genesis 3:6 we read, "the woman saw (perceived) that the tree was good for food"—that was a conclusion drawn by the understanding; "and that it was pleasant to the eyes"—there was the response of her affections; "and a tree to be desired"—there was the moving of the will; "she took"—there was the completed action. Now the motions of Divine grace work through the apprehensions of faith in the understanding, these warming and firing the affections, and they in turn influencing and moving the will. Every faculty of the soul is put forth in a saving "coming to Christ": "If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest"—be baptized (Acts 8:37). "Coming to Christ" is more immediately an act of the will, as John 5:40 shows; yet the will is not active toward Him until the understanding has been enlightened and the affections quickened. The Spirit first causes the sinner to perceive his deep need of Christ, and this, by showing him his fearful rebellion against God, and that none but Christ can atone for the same. Secondly, the Spirit creates in the heart a desire after Christ, and this, by making him sick of sin and in love with holiness. Third, as the awakened and enlightened soul has been given to see the glory and excellency of Christ, and His perfect suitability to the lost and perishing sinner, then the Spirit draws out the will to set the highest value on that excellency, to esteem it far above all else, and to close with Him. As there is a Divine order among the three Persons of the Godhead in providing salvation, so there is in the applying or bestowing of it. It was God the Father's good pleasure appointing His people from eternity unto salvation, which was the most full and sufficient impulsive cause of their salvation, and every whit able to produce its effect. It was the incarnate Son of God whose obedience and sufferings were the most complete and sufficient meritorious cause of their salvation, to which nothing can be added to make it more apt and able to secure the travail of His soul. Yet neither the one nor the other

can actually save any sinner except as the Spirit applies Christ to it: His work being the efficient and immediate cause of their salvation. In like manner, the sinner is not saved when his understanding is enlightened, and his affections fired: there must also be the act of the will, surrendering to God and laying hold of Christ. The order of the Spirit's operations corresponds to the three great offices of Christ, the Mediator, namely, His prophetic, priestly, and kingly. As Prophet, He is first apprehended by the understanding, the Truth of God being received from His lips. As Priest, He is trusted and loved by the heart or affections, His glorious person being first endeared unto the soul by the gracious work which He performed for it. As Potentate, our will must be subdued unto Him, so that we submit to His government, yield to His scepter, and heed His commandments. Nothing short of the throne of our hearts will satisfy the Lord Jesus. In order to do this, the Holy Spirit casts down our carnal imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and brings into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ (2 Cor. 10:5), so that we freely and gladly take His yoke upon us; which yoke is, as one of the Puritans said, "lined with love." "No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him" (John 6:44). This "drawing" is accomplished by the Spirit: first, in effectually enlightening the understanding; secondly, by quickening the affections; third, by freeing the will from the bondage of sin and inclining it toward God. By the invincible workings of grace, the Spirit turns the bent of that will, which before moved only toward sin and vanity, unto Christ. "Thy people," said God unto the Mediator, "shall be willing in the day of thy power" (Ps. 110:3). Yet though Divine power be put forth upon a human object, the Spirit does not infringe the will's prerogative of acting freely: He morally persuades it. He subdues its sinful intractability. He overcomes its prejudice, wins and draws it by the sweet attractions of grace. "God never treats man as though he were a brute; He does not drag him with cart ropes; He treats men as men; and when He binds them with cords, they are the cords of love and the bands of a man. I may exercise power over another's will, and yet that other man's will may be perfectly free; because the constraint is exercised in a manner accordant with the laws of the human mind. If I show a man that a certain line of action is much for his advantage, he feels bound to follow it, but he is perfectly free in so doing. If man's will were subdued or chained by some physical process, if man's heart should, for instance, be taken from him and be turned round by a manual operation, that would be altogether inconsistent with human freedom, or indeed with human nature; and yet I think some few people imagine that we mean this when we talk of constraining influence and Divine grace. We mean nothing of the kind; we mean that Jehovah Jesus knows how, by irresistible arguments addressed to the understanding, by mighty reasons appealing to the affections, and by the mysterious influence of His Holy Spirit operating upon all the powers and passions of the soul, so to subdue the whole man, that whereas it was once rebellious it becomes obedient; whereas it stood stoutly against the Most High, it throws down the weapons of its rebellion and cries, 'I yield! I yield! subdued by sovereign love, and by the enlightenment which Thou hast bestowed upon me, I yield myself to Thy will'" (C. H. Spurgeon, John 6:37). The perfect consistency between the freedom of a regenerated man's spiritual actions and the efficacious grace of God moving him thereto, is seen in 2 Corinthians 8:16,17. "But thanks be to God, which put the same earnest care into the heart of Titus for you. For indeed he accepted the exhortation: but being more forward, of his own accord he went unto you." Titus was moved to that work by Paul's exhortation, and was "willing of his own accord" to engage therein; and yet it was "God which put the same earnest care into the heart of Titus" for them. God controls the inward feelings and acts of men without interfering either with their liberty or responsibility. The zeal of Titus was the spontaneous effusion of his own heart, and was an index to an element of his character; nevertheless, God wrought in him both to will and to do of His good pleasure. No sinner savingly "comes to Christ," or truly receives Him into the heart, until the will freely consents (not merely "assents" in a theoretical way) to the severe and self—denying terms upon which He is presented in the

Gospel. No sinner is prepared to forsake all for Christ, take up "the cross," and "follow" Him in the path of universal obedience, until the heart genuinely esteems Him "The Fairest among ten thousand," and this none will ever do before the understanding has been supernaturally enlightened and the affections supernaturally quickened. Obviously, none will espouse themselves with conjugal affections to that person whom they account not the best that can be chosen. It is as the Spirit convicts us of our emptiness and shows us Christ's fulness, our guilt and His righteousness, our filthiness and the cleansing merits of His blood, our depravity and His holiness, that the heart is won and the resistance of the will is overcome. The holy and spiritual Truth of God finds nothing akin to itself in the unregenerate soul, but instead, everything that is opposed to it (John 15:18; Rom. 8:7). The demands of Christ are too humbling to our natural pride, too searching for the callous conscience, too exacting for our fleshly desires. And a miracle of grace has to be wrought within us before this awful depravity of our nature, this dreadful state of affairs, is changed. That miracle of grace consists in overcoming the resistance which is made by indwelling sin, and creating desires and longings Christward; and then it is that the will cries, "Nay, but I yield, I yield, I can hold out no more; I sink, by dying love compell'd, And own Thee Conqueror."

A beautiful illustration of this is found in Ruth 1:14-18. Naomi, a backslidden saint, is on the point of leaving the far country, and (typically) returning to her Father's house. Her two daughters-in-law wish to accompany her. Faithfully did Naomi bid them "count the cost" (Luke 14:28); instead of at once urging them to act on their first impulse, she pointed out the difficulties and trials to be encountered. This was too much for Orpha: her "goodness" (like that of the stony-ground hearers, and myriads of others) was only "as a morning cloud" and "as the early dew" it quickly went away (Hos. 6:4). In blessed contrast from this we read, "But Ruth clave unto her. . . saying, Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God." What depth and loveliness of affection was here! What whole-hearted self-surrender! See Ruth freely and readily leaving her own country and kindred, tearing herself from every association of nature, turning a deaf ear to her mother-in-law's begging her to return to her gods (v. 15) and people. See her renouncing idolatry and all that flesh holds dear, to be a worshipper and servant of the living God, counting all things but loss for the sake of His favour and salvation; and her future conduct proved her faith was genuine and her profession sincere. Ah, naught but a miraculous work of God in her soul can explain this. It was God working in her "both to will and to do of his good pleasure" (Phil. 2:13). He was drawing her with the bands of love: grace triumphed over the flesh. This is what every genuine conversion is—a complete surrender of the mind, heart and will to God and His Christ, so that there is a desire to "follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth" (Rev. 14:4). The relation between our understanding being enlightened and the affections quickened by God and the resultant consent of the will, is seen in Psalm 119:34, "Give me understanding, and I shall keep thy law; yea, I shall observe it with my whole heart." "The sure result of regeneration, or the bestowal of understanding, is the devout reverence for the law and a reverent keeping of it in the heart. The Spirit of God makes us to know the Lord and to understand somewhat of His love, wisdom, holiness, and majesty; and the result is that we honour the law and yield our hearts to the obedience of the faith. The understanding operates upon the affections; it convinces the heart of the beauty of the law, so that the soul loves it with all its powers; and then it reveals the majesty of the law-Giver, and the whole nature bows before His supreme will. He alone obeys God who can say 'My Lord, I would serve Thee, and do it with all my heart'; and none can truly say this till they have received as a free grant the inward illumination of the Holy Spirit" (C. H. Spurgeon). Ere turning to our final section, a few words need to be added here upon 1 Peter 2:4, "To whom coming as unto a living stone. . .we also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house." Has the sovereign grace of God inclined me to come unto Christ? then it is my duty and interest to "abide" in Him (John 15:4). Abide in Him by a life

of faith, and letting His Spirit abide in me without grieving Him (Eph. 4:30) or quenching His motions (1 Thess. 5:19). It is not enough that I once believed on Christ, I must live in and upon Him by faith daily: Galatians 2:20. It is in this way of continual coming to Christ that we are "built up a spiritual house." It is in this way the life of grace is maintained, until it issue in the life of glory. Faith is to be always receiving out of His fulness "grace for grace" (John 1:16). Daily should there be the renewed dedication of myself unto Him and the heart's occupation with Him.

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