

A Willing Mind Indispensable to a Right Understanding of Truth

by Charles Finney

A willingness to do God's will is indispensable to a right understanding of the truth of God, and we should fulfill the conditions laid down in Prov. 2:1-9 to expect God's teachings.

Scripture: Proverbs 2:1, John 7:17

Topics: "Understanding God's Truth", "Willingness to Obey"

Description

Charles Finney emphasizes that a willing mind is essential for understanding God's truth, as highlighted in John 7:17. He explains that God's promises reveal the principles of His governance and that a genuine willingness to do His will involves implicit trust, love, and a desire for truth. Finney argues that this state of mind is crucial for honest inquiry and embracing truth, and neglecting the means of knowledge can tempt God. Ultimately, he encourages believers to seek a candid state of mind to fully know and do God's will, urging them to open their hearts to divine guidance.

Transcript

TEXT.--John 7:17: If any man will do His will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself.

In discoursing upon this subject I shall show:

I. THAT GOD'S PROMISES, WITH THEIR CONDITIONS, ARE A REVELATION OF THE GREAT PRINCIPLES OF HIS GOVERNMENT.

II. WHAT IS IMPLIED IN A WILLINGNESS TO DO THE WILL OF GOD.

III. THAT THIS STATE OF MIND IS INDISPENSABLE TO A RIGHT UNDERSTANDING OF THE TRUTH OF GOD.

IV. THAT THIS STATE OF MIND WILL CERTAINLY RESULT IN A RIGHT KNOWLEDGE OF THE TRUTH, UNLESS YOU TEMPT GOD BY NEGLECTING THE MEANS OF KNOWLEDGE.

I. God's promises, with their conditions, are a revelation of the great principles of His government.

God is unchangeable. What He does, or promises, or says at one time, He would do, or promise, or say, the circumstances being the same, at all times. Every thing that He does and says, is but a revelation of his character. He knows nothing of favoritism. His regards are always founded in the reason, and nature, and relations of things. He regards all beings and events according to their true nature, character, and relations. His providence, his threatenings, his law, gospel, and promises, only reveal so many great, unchangeable principles of his government. And as He never changes, as there is in Him "no variableness nor shadow of turning," we may rest with the utmost confidence in the fact, that both a promise and its condition, that all the promises with their conditions, are founded in, and are a revelation of the unalterable principles of His government; both the promise and the condition being founded in the nature and relations of things. And that He always holds Himself pledged to fulfill the same promises, under the same or similar circumstances, and upon the same conditions. These are irresistible inferences from his unchangeableness.

II. What is implied in a willingness to do His will.

1. It implies implicit confidence in his character. We should have no right to be willing to do the will of God, unless we had reason to confide in the perfection of his will. His character consists in the state of his will. To be willing, therefore, that his will should be done, implies an unwavering confidence, that his will is perfectly right. It implies the ripe conviction on our part, that He is absolutely omniscient, and knows perfectly what He ought to will, or what upon the whole is best to be done, and that his will is for ever and unalterably just what it ought to be.

2. It implies supreme love to God. If any other being is loved more than He is, we should feel more desirous to please that being than to please God; for indeed the object, so loved, is in reality our God. A willingness therefore to do the will of God implies a supreme attachment to Him for his own sake, and the supreme desire of pleasing Him.

3. It implies a supreme regard to God's authority. It is absurd to say that we are willing to do his will, and yet, that our regard to his authority is not supreme. It is one thing to desire to do his will, and another thing to be willing to do it. It is a common thing for persons to desire what, upon the whole, they do not choose. But to be willing to do God's will, instead of our own or that of any other being, certainly implies a supreme regard to his authority.

4. It also implies a supreme desire or willingness in us to do or to be wholly right or wholly conformed to the will of God. It implies an intense desire and willingness to be right on every subject, to have our whole being and all the influences that we exert wholly and perfectly right--to be wholly conformed to the will of God in all the relations we sustain to Him and to the whole Universe--an intense desire and willingness to do and feel exactly right towards ourselves and all other beings.

5. It implies an intense desire and willingness to do our utmost to glorify God--to be used all up to his service--to have every power and every moment, and every thing in, about, and belonging to us, wholly devoted to the infinitely important end of glorifying God. It is God's will that we should be so; and a willingness to do his will implies a willingness in us to be so.

6. It implies an intense desire and disposition to avoid whatever is displeasing to Him or contrary to his will--a willingness on our part to submit to any sacrifice, rather than displease Him. If a man would not sacrifice his own life, rather than knowingly to displease God, he is not, in the sense of this text, willing to do his will.

7. It implies an intense desire and disposition to know the truth on all subjects--to know whatever concerns our highest interests and usefulness--whatever will contribute to the highest perfection of our body and soul, and to our highest usefulness. In short, it implies an intense desire and willingness to know the whole circle of truth, in relation to our whole being, all our duty, all our influences, and all the will of God concerning us. If there be one subject, relating to the highest perfection of our bodies or souls, or our highest and best influences and usefulness, upon which we are unwilling to be enlightened, upon which we are not intensely desirous to be enlightened, we cannot properly be said to be willing to do the will of God.

8. It implies that we have no lust or idol to spare or defend. But on the contrary, that we have wholly renounced idolatry, under every form, and have cast off the dominion of lust, and are wholly devoted to the will of God.

9. It implies the renunciation of our own will, and that we have no will except that God's will should be done. It implies the constant yielding up of our will to Him, and that it is the abiding state of our minds, and the constant echo of our hearts, "Thy will--thy will--THY WILL, O God, be done."

10. It implies that we have no longer any selfish interest to promote: that we have for ever renounced all idea or desire of setting up any interest of our own, as the end of pursuit, whether a temporal interest or an eternal interest, whether a material or a spiritual interest, and that "whether we eat or drink, or whatsoever we do," is designed by us to promote "the glory of God."

11. It implies that we have no longer any appetite or passion to consult or to defend--that we have no desire to pursue our own gratification in any respect as the great end and object of life, and that no appetite and passion is indulged merely for the sake of the indulgence. But that we consider our whole being as God's; that our appetites were created to subserve the highest interests of our being, to be the servants and not the masters of our souls; and that, whether we eat or drink, or sleep or wake, or labor, or rest, lie down, or rise up, or study, or pray, or preach, whatever we do, that all be done from a supreme desire to do the will of God.

12. It implies that we have no reputation of our own to maintain or defend; but that, like our Master, we have made ourselves of no reputation--that we have wholly renounced it as of no value, except as connected with the kingdom of Christ, and that we have so entirely given up our good name to Him, as to be willing to have it cast out as evil, or that any thing shall result respecting it that can in the highest manner promote the ultimate glory of God.

13. It implies that we have no longer any indulged prejudice to blind our minds, or harden our hearts, to prevent our knowing and doing the will of God. Prejudice is a state in which we make up our mind and commit ourselves, before we are possessed of all the facts. To condemn an author before we have patiently and candidly examined and possessed ourselves of his views, is a very common and injurious form of prejudice. To condemn a person or a sentiment without a most candid examination and hearing of the whole matter, is another odious form of prejudice. A willingness to do the will of God, therefore, implies the giving up of all prejudice on every subject, and a candid throwing of the mind open to conviction, to light, and truth with an entire readiness to follow the will of God, in whatever direction it shall lead us.

14. It implies that the love of truth and of God has swallowed up every thing else, and come to be the ruling principle of our whole being--that it is our meat, and our drink, and our life, to do the whole will of God--that a knowledge of his will has, with our minds, the power of omnipotence to sway our minds and

carry us all lengths in obedience to it.

15. It implies an honest and earnest disposition in us, to be acquainted with all our errors of opinion and practice--a willingness to be searched with the utmost scrutiny--yea, with the scrutiny of omniscience itself, and that we feel the utmost gratitude to any one who will point out to us any thing in which we can, in any respect, be more perfectly conformed to the will of God.

16. It implies the greatest abhorrence in us, of whatever shall give over to Satan any part of our influence, time, talents, property, or any thing whatever, that should in any way thwart the will of God.

III. This state of mind is indispensable to a right understanding of the truth of God.

1. Because it is indispensable to honest and diligent inquiry. It is certain that a man will never inquire honestly after truth, until he is in an honest state of mind, and that he will not inquire diligently and perseveringly until he is possessed of an intense desire and will to know and do the truth. To suppose the contrary of this is manifestly absurd.

2. This state of mind is indispensable to a just appreciation of the value and force of evidence. Certainly it is absurd to say that a mind will justly appreciate the force of evidence, upon any subject upon which it is not upright.

3. This state of mind is indispensable to the heart's embracing truth, when it is perceived by the intellect. It is not necessary to suppose that the mind already knows the truth upon every subject, in order to have a disposition to obey it. A mind may be in love with truth for its own sake. In this state it loves all truth upon all subjects. It goes forth with earnest longings in search of truth, and whenever and wherever it finds it, it receives and obeys it with all joyfulness. But unless the heart be in love with truth, it is not honest in the search of it, nor ready to embrace it when apprehended by the intellect.

4. It is impossible for the mind to receive the whole truth without this state of heart. Some shreds of truth may be perceived by the mind, and many things about it may be known, while the heart is in an unsubdued state; but the whole truth in its bearings, relations, tendencies, and results, is never apprehended by an uncandid mind, or by a mind unwilling to know and do it.

IV. This state of mind will certainly result in a right knowledge of the truth, unless you tempt God by rejecting the means of knowledge.

1. Tempting God may defeat the fulfillment of any promise where our own agency is concerned in its fulfillment. In Acts, 27th chapter, we have an account of the shipwreck of Paul. Here God expressly promised, by Paul, "that there should be no loss of any man's life among them, but of the ship." But when the sailors were about to abandon the ship, Paul informed them that if the sailors did not remain on board their lives could not be saved. The promise was without any condition expressed; yet it implied of course that they should use the best means of which they were possessed to preserve their lives. For the sailors, therefore, to abandon the ship, would be to tempt God; in which case, notwithstanding his promise, they would all be lost. Now it should be for ever understood, that where the conditions of a promise, either expressed or implied, are not complied with, we tempt God, and it is vain to expect their fulfillment.

2. We tempt God, when we expect Him to violate the principles of his own government, as revealed in his works, providence, and word. Example: If we neglect to use the means for the accomplishment of any end, and expect Him to bring it about by miracle, this is tempting God.

Again, being less honest, industrious and persevering than we ought to be, in search of truth, is tempting God, and may be expected to result in our remaining in ignorance.

Again, restraining prayer on the subject of divine teaching is tempting God. He has expressly said to us, "If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who giveth to all men liberally and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him." "Open your mouth wide and I will fill it." "Call unto me and I will answer thee, and show thee great and mighty things which thou knowest not." The conditions upon which we are to be taught the will of God are expressly laid down in Prov. 2:1-9: "My son, if thou wilt receive my words, and hide my commandments with thee; so that thou incline thine ear unto wisdom, and apply thine heart to understanding; yea, if thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding; if thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures; then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God. For the Lord giveth wisdom; out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding. He layeth up sound wisdom for the righteous; He is a buckler to them that walk uprightly; He keepeth the paths of judgment, and preserveth the way of his saints. Then shalt thou understand righteousness, and judgment, and equity; yea, every good path." Here the conditions are:

- (1.) A willingness to receive and treasure up his words as of great importance.
- (2.) Such a willingness as to incline the ear and apply the heart.
- (3.) Such a willingness as to cry after knowledge and lift up the voice for understanding.
- (4.) Such an intenseness of desire as to seek for her as silver, and search after her as for hid treasures.

Upon these conditions, it is added, "thou shalt understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God." To neglect any of these means, therefore, and then expect "to know the doctrine whether it be of God," is to tempt your Maker. But,

3. If we fulfill the condition, we may expect the fulfillment of the promise, and that we shall surely have whatever of truth is needful for us to know and as fast as we need to know it.

4. We are bound to feel assured of this. We are under just as much obligation to feel the inward assurance of it as we are to feel that God will not lie. If we are conscious that we fulfill the conditions, we have no right whatever to doubt. If we are conscious that we do not fulfill the conditions, we have no right to expect it.

5. God will teach us as fast as He safely can. "He knows our frame and remembers that we are dust." He knows how easily we are bewildered and overset with being taught too much at once. It is a well known truth that where children are taught too early and too fast, there is a determination of blood to the brain, and great danger of derangement or permanently impaired health. Just so it is with us, God teaches us, if we are His children, and are anxious to be taught as fast as we are able to learn. He said to His disciples, "I have many things to say to you, but ye cannot bear them now." They were not enough advanced in religious knowledge. There was not such a providential development of facts and such a degree of the Spirit's influences as to prepare them for the reception of certain great truths which He desired to teach them.

6. If we are anxious to do the will of God, on all subjects, with a proper use of means, we may expect His teachings on all subjects that relate to our highest perfection and usefulness--to direct us in regard to our health--the right management of our body--how to restraint its appetites and propensities--how to keep it under and cause it to subserve the highest interests of the soul. In short, there is no subject upon which

we need knowledge, upon which we may not confidently expect Him to teach us all that we need to know in the diligent and honest use of means.

REMARKS.

1. The opinions of a sensualist, or one under the dominion of his appetites and propensities are not to be trusted. He is uncandid and unwilling to know the truth in relation to the self-denying gospel of Jesus Christ.
2. His opinions on the subject of temperance and the true principles of physiological reform, are not to be trusted for the same reason.
3. The opinions of a speculator or worldly minded man are not at all worthy of credit in respect to the application of the law of God to the business transactions of this world. Upon this subject he is not, and remaining a speculator, cannot be in a candid state of mind.
4. Very few persons have so renounced themselves as to be willing to know the whole truth, in regard to all branches of reform.
5. Very few have so renounced their appetites as to be willing to know and do the truth upon the subject of dietetic reform.
6. Very few have so renounced self-interest as to be willing to know and do the truth upon the subject of sanctification.
7. He who has renounced himself will search for light, and hail and embrace it with great joy upon every subject. He will find his soul panting after it with unutterable longings.
8. He who is willing to do the will of God, will keep hard upon the heels of truth, and practice as fast as he can learn. Truth upon any subject is his law. He no sooner sees than he obeys. His practice and his theory are at one.
9. Many mistake the absence of felt resistance for a willingness to do the will of God.
10. There must be a felt willingness, a longing of soul to know the whole truth. Else there is no proper willingness to do the will of God.
11. We need not expect, as I have already intimated, that God will teach us all the truth at once. When Solomon prayed for wisdom and God informed him that He had given him his desire, it is not to be supposed that he felt at the time as if he had a great enlargement of wisdom. But this wisdom was imparted as he had occasion for it. Soon after his request and the assurance of God that his prayer was granted, the two women came to him with their controversy about the child, at which time wisdom equal to the decision of the question was imparted by God in accordance with His promise. So in our own case. We are to rest and feel assured that when we have occasion for knowledge by a faithful application to Him, in the diligent use of means, we shall surely be instructed.
12. From this subject it is easy to see that the cavils of infidels against the Christian religion are of no weight. If they were really pious and holy men and gave evidence of being willing to know and do the will of God, they would know of the doctrine whether it be of God.

13. The same remark is applicable to Universalists. What confidence can be placed in their assertions in respect to the gospel of Christ? Who does not know that as a body, they are ungodly and unholy men?

14. God often teaches us in ways that greatly agonize and astonish us at the time.

15. When we pray for divine teaching, we should be entirely reconciled to let God teach us in his own way, cost us what it may. Else we tempt the Spirit of the Lord.

And now, beloved, are you in a candid state of mind and are you willing to know and do the whole will of God in respect to your whole being? Are you willing to know and do your whole duty, and the whole truth, cost what it may, on all the great subjects of reform that are before the public? Are you anxious to look through, to understand, to know and do the whole truth on the subject of entire sanctification, abolition, temperance, moral reform? A man is very ill informed who does not see, that as certainly as we are made up of body and soul, physiological and dietetic reform are indispensable to permanent moral reform.

If a man is in an uncandid state of mind on any one subject, he will not know and thoroughly do his duty on any subject. He is in a state of mind that forbids the reasonable expectation that he will. Beware then dearly beloved, I beseech you of committing yourself on the wrong side of any question. I have greatly feared and I may truly say that I have been troubled lest multitudes should do on the subject of entire sanctification, what others have done on subjects of the temperance and moral reform--so commit themselves against the truth as never to know of the doctrine whether it be of God.

And now let me, as I have often done, ask you to go down upon your knees and lay your whole heart open before the Lord. Beseech Him to search you and try your reins and your heart, and see whether you are wholly willing to conform your entire being to the will of God--to do, to say, to be nothing more or less than is for His glory. May the Lord give us grace to know and do His whole will.

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