

Lesson Seven GOOD-WILL

In our last study in the book, *Pilgrim's Progress*, we finally reached the point where the Pilgrim has become a true Christian. He has experienced what it means to be truly converted by coming to Christ in true repentance and saving faith. We found that this took place in his pilgrimage at the event known as the Wicket or the narrow gate which is set forth by our Lord in the Book of Matthew. As Christian went up to this gate and knocked, he saw that above the gate it said, "**Knock and it shall be opened unto you.**" So he knocked several times, and finally the individual, Good-will, who we are going to be studying about in this lesson, comes to the gate and receives him in through the gate. We found that there was a castle erected not far from the gate in which Satan dwelt, who began shooting his fiery darts at Christian as he approached the gate. We learned from this that at the point of true conversion, when a sinner is coming to Christ, there will be a real crisis. At that point, all the forces of Satan will be loosed upon that person in an attempt to prevent him from a true sense of conversion, or by distracting his mind with other thoughts, thus preventing him from closing with the Lord. Because of this, the man at the gate named Good-will pulls our Pilgrim through the gate. This, of course, corresponds to the drawing work of the Holy Spirit of God, drawing the seeking sinner into safety in Christ Jesus.

We are now going to concentrate on this character at the gate named "Good-will," who we were introduced to in our last lesson. We did not spend time discussing him in particular because we were concerned about getting our Pilgrim converted and through the narrow gate. We read this account in our book,

At last there came a grave person to the gate, named Good-will, who asked, "who was there? And whence he came? And what he would have?"

Good-will represents the Lord Jesus Christ in His willingness to save sinners. That is, it is at the gate of true conversion where we first encounter the person and work of Jesus Christ, and what He has done on behalf of seeking sinners. It is important we recognize that before any person can truly be in a right relationship with God, he must have a personal encounter with Jesus Christ. This involves an embracing of Christ in all of His person and His work. His work is three-fold. He is a Prophet to teach us of our sin and need of a Savior; He is a Priest to intercede on behalf of sinners; and He is a King to rule over and subdue the will of the sinner unto Himself. In order to experience true

conversion, the seeking sinner must embrace Christ in all of His offices, not in just part of them. We pointed out that this was contrary to the teachings of modern evangelicals who emphasize that you can be converted and have Christ as Savior, but you don't have to take Him as Lord. However, in the old time beliefs of Bunyan and the Puritans, who I think were the closest to the Bible, it was taught that you must receive Christ in all of His offices, not piece-meal or a little bit at a time. So when the sinner truly gets down to business with God, and wants salvation more than anything else, he will willingly embrace the Lord Jesus Christ in His person as the Son of God and in all of His offices as Prophet, Priest and King.

When Pilgrim replied that he was a poor burdened sinner, that he formerly lived in the city of Destruction, and he was on the way to Mount Zion, he then asked the individual at the gate if He was willing

In order to enter into the true way, one must enter through the person and work of Christ.

to let him in. Here is the answer from Good-will, ***"I am willing with all my heart.' And with that He opened the gate."*** That is why He is called Good-will. Let us not forget that this is the first time in our study of the book that we have actually encountered the person of Christ and what He has done on behalf of sinners. It is important to note that up until now the Pilgrim has not truly been in the way, but he has only been a seeker for salvation. However, now in order to enter into the true way, one must enter through the person and work of Christ. You cannot enter into a right relationship with God in any other fashion by trying to avoid the person and work of Jesus Christ in true conversion.

We have this question as we come to up to the gate, "Is God willing to save sinners?" Let us look at some of the things about Good-will, who represents the good will of God on behalf of seeking sinners. After Good-will's explanation of the enemies who were shooting arrows at them, He (or Christ) asks Christian a question. ***"How is it that you came alone?"*** In other words, He asks, "Why did you come here by yourself? I don't see anyone with you."

Christian replies, "Because none of my neighbors saw their danger, as I saw mine."

Good-will: "Did any of them know of your coming?"

Christian: "Yes, my wife and children saw me at the first, and called after me to turn again: also some of my neighbors stood crying and calling after me to return; but I put my fingers in my ears, and so came on my way."

Christian explains that there were many who knew he was going to become a Christian. "My wife and my own children knew it, but they tried to persuade me against it because it would demand too much change in their family, so they tried to persuade me not to become a Christian. Also, my neighbors who lived around me, tried to discourage me from setting out upon becoming a Christian and living a Christian life." But he says, "***I put my fingers in my ears and came on.***" But Good-will asks,

"But did none of them follow you, to persuade you to go back?"
Christian: "Yes, both Obstinate and Pliable: but when they saw that they could not prevail, Obstinate went railing back, but Pliable came with me a little way."

Remember the character of Obstinate, who stood for the person who stubbornly objects when the gospel is presented to him. Obstinate wants nothing to do with the gospel. So when he came out of the city of Destruction in an attempt to persuade the Pilgrim to not follow the Lord and become a true Christian, he was very obstinate or stubborn when Christian told him what he intended to do. Therefore, Obstinate went back to the city of Destruction. If you remember the story, his other companion named Pliable did follow a little way with the Christian. Good-will asks him, "***But why did he not come through?"*** If Pliable came a little way on the path, then why isn't he here with you at the gate?

Christian said, "We indeed came both together, until we came to the Slough of Despond, into the which we also suddenly fell. And then was my neighbor Pliable discouraged, and would not adventure further. Wherefore, getting out again on the side next to his own house, he told me, I should possess the brave country alone for him: so he went his way, and I came mine; he after Obstinate, and I to this gate."

It is very important to see the way Bunyan emphasizes this in his writing about Pliable. Pliable had a certain way, and his way was such that he was interested in himself entirely. When he first heard about heaven, he thought that would really be great, but he never sat down to count the cost of what it was going to take to get there. So Pliable had a way, he wanted heaven, but he wanted it on his own terms. The Pilgrim says, "I went my way." That is, he wanted heaven too, but he would have it on any terms. He must be rid of

this burden of sin, whatever it would cost. So Pliable went back to his way, which was the way of destruction, and Pilgrim continued on the path, which now has brought him to the point of true conversion.

Then said Good-will, "Alas, poor man! (about Pliable), is the celestial glory of so little esteem with him, that he counteth it not worth running the hazard of a few difficulties to obtain it?"

In reference to Pliable, Good-will says, "Is heaven so meaningless that a person isn't willing to endure a little difficulties of their own in order to possess heaven?" So Good-will is not only setting forth His interest in the Christian, who has been truly converted, but here we see that the Good-will of God also extends out to those who never come to true conversion. That is, God is a compassionate God, even for those who never experience true conversion. We will be pointing this out a little bit more, but it is important that we understand this because of two errors or two extremes which come up in presenting the gospel of Christ to sinners. Good-will (or Christ) not only has a compassion for the person who truly believes in Christ, but there is a compassion of God, a concern of God, even for those who never ultimately are converted and brought to the saving knowledge of Christ. This is what the Puritans of old called "common grace." They taught very definitely a particular and distinguishing grace that God applies to His own elect, to His own chosen, but they also taught and believed in a common grace which was common to all men. Such texts are found in the Bible that ***"The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance."*** (II Peter 3:9). And in the Old Testament, God says, ***"I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live"*** (Ezekiel 33:11). So there is a common compassion which God has, even for those who never ultimately seek out after His Son. Nevertheless, do not assume then, that the Bible taught, or that Bunyan believed, there was not a particular, distinguishing love which Jesus Christ had for His own chosen people, His own church. Jesus would describe His relationship with these individuals as a husband and wife relationship. He would say to those husbands, ***"Love your wives even as Christ loved the church and gave Himself for it."*** (Ephesians 5:25). There is a distinguishing, special love that a husband has for his wife, but at the same time, that does not mean that you, as a member of the human race, do not have a general love for other members of that race,

whether they be male or female. You read in the Bible that God has a common love for all of His creation, in that He is not willing that any of His creation perish. But at the same time, while it may seem a paradox to some, (not when it is properly understood), God has a special, distinguishing love which He bestows upon His own chosen in Christ, and He brings them to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ through the drawing work of the Holy Spirit. This needs to be understood, that while Good-will is willing for all, "whosoever will, let him come," (see Luke 6:47), yet at the same time, there is a special drawing work of the Holy Spirit which effectually converts the hearts of some.

After the statement regarding Pliable, Christian makes a most important statement. Listen carefully to this.

Truly, said Christian, I have said the truth of Pliable, and if I should also say all the truth of myself, it will appear there is no betterment betwixt him and myself. It is true, he went back to his own house, but I also turned aside to go into the way of death, being persuaded thereto by the carnal argument of one Mr. Worldly Wiseman.

This is a mark of a truly converted person. When it is pointed out how Pliable set out in the journey, but was never converted, and when the difficulty became rough, he turned back, Christian, who now has experienced conversion says, "Yes, I know Pliable did that, but when I look at my own heart, I see no difference between what I am by nature and what Pliable was by nature." Can you say that of yourself? Can you say with a genuine heart before God that, "I am what I am by the grace of God." As far as nature is concerned, there is no difference between me and the Pliables and the Obstinate. I still have within my heart the same degree of unconcern and indifference that they demonstrated, but in my case, the grace of God was special, in that it continued to draw me on to where I am this evening. So I have to say, that I am where I am by the grace of God. That is the difference between me and others. What goes through your mind when you walk by a drunkard on the street? Is it not, "There I am, but for the grace of God." You are actually saying that the difference between you and that man is that God's grace has made a difference in your life. You and I would be the same as that person, if we were left to our own inclinations without the restraining grace of God. So the Bible teaches that while there is a common grace, there is also a distinguishing grace.

In I Corinthians 4:7, the Apostle Paul asked the Corinthians this question: **"Who maketh thee to differ from another?"** How do we answer that question? There is not one individual (except for identical twins) that has the same physical characteristics. To what do you attribute that? Did you send a message to God and say, "God, before You allow me to be conceived in my mother's womb, I want you to give me black hair." Paul asks, **"what hast thou that thou didst not receive?"** Through the design of God, I received the physical characteristics that I possess today, and they are mine. I am a unique individual just like you are unique. As there are no two snowflakes alike, there are no two human beings which are exactly alike in characteristics. There may be some identical twins, but yet there is always some little difference between them somewhere. When it comes to the position that you find yourself in the spiritual realm, to what do you attribute your salvation? Is it to your own natural abilities, or to what God has worked in your heart to make you to differ from another person. If it be salvation by grace, then we have to give all the glory to God for who and what He is.

At this point, Good-will carries on a conversation with Christian describing Mr. Worldly Wiseman and Mr. Legality, but going on to this particular reply of Good-will, Christian replies to him with these words.

Why, truly, I do not know what had become of me there, (that is, speaking about where he got off the path) had not Evangelist happily met me again as I was musing in the midst of my dumps: but it was God's mercy that he came to me again, for else I had never come hither.

Christian is saying that it was God's mercy that came to him again by sending the Evangelist, **"for else I had never come hither."** I will have to say in my own personal experience before God that with the truth of Scripture borne out, if God had not continued in His providence to draw me and send the Evangelist to call upon me when He did, I would never be here tonight. I would have settled down in some city of Destruction or in the Village of Morality If God had not continued to draw me and send the Evangelist as He did. I know that in my own personal conversion experience, it was no accident that a minister came by that schoolhouse that afternoon when I happened to be cleaning out the school. Was that an accident, or was that again the providential work of God, even though I had spurned His offers of mercy, despised preachers, and hated the Bible? Yet, God sent a man

again to preach the gospel to me.

Now notice what Christian is saying.
"If the Evangelist had not come when I was
in the midst of my depression, **'but it was
God's mercy that he came to me again,
for else I had never come hither.'**" In
your conversion experience, have you been

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brought to see that you would have been just like Pliable and Obstinate if God had stopped drawing you? Now remember, God doesn't have to draw anybody, because it would appear that by nature men ought to be seeking the Lord for mercy. What did Adam do when he fell into sin in the Garden? Did he run to God and ask for forgiveness? On the contrary, he ran and hid, and God had to seek him. That in itself was an act of mercy. God could have condemned Adam and Eve under His law the same way He did with the fallen angels. But in an act of mercy, God drew them out of the bushes and dealt with them in mercy. God doesn't have to continue to do that with any person. That is why it is so important that if you are being drawn by God, and there is an offer of the gospel made to you, for you to recognize that God is granting to you additional grace and mercy. However, this mercy may not be there tomorrow. The offer is now, **"Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation."** (II Corinthians 6:2). So Christian says that the Evangelist came, and he drew me hither.

Christian goes on to say, **"Oh, what a favor is this to me, that yet I am
admitted entrance here."** Notice that Pilgrim was rejoicing in the fact that he had been received into good favor with God. He counted it a privilege. He did not have the idea, that many have today, that God owes us His good favor, that God is obligated to automatically forgive a person of his sin. Christian found such a great spirit of rejoicing when God actually received him as a sinner and granted him forgiveness in Christ. When Christian said, "Oh, I just count this a great favor," Good-will replies,

**"We make no objections against any, notwithstanding all that they
have done before they come hither; they in no wise are cast out. And
therefore, good Christian, come a little way with me, and I will teach
thee about the way thou must go."**

This is the Good-will of God in His statement to the sinner who comes. Maybe he is a sinner like the Apostle Paul who, though righteous in his own eyes for awhile, he persecuted the church, put people to death, and yet he obtained forgiveness. The question is, will God receive a murderer? Is God willing to receive such a great sinner as this? Here is the answer from God in the gospel to those who genuinely desire forgiveness of sin when they apply for mercy in Jesus Christ:

Good-will: "We make no objections against any, notwithstanding all that they have done before they come hither; they in no wise are cast out."

I want to spend the remainder of this lesson in dealing with why this is so important, and why Bunyan points out why it is important that there be a free offer of the gospel. Why is it important that God be presented to the sinner as One who is willing and ready to receive sinners on the basis that sinners acknowledge their need of Jesus Christ? The answer is this. There has been a two-fold error which has existed down through the ages because of particular extreme beliefs involving the doctrine of salvation. I invite your attention in the Bible to John 6:37 where Jesus said, ***"All that the Father giveth me shall come to me, and him that cometh to me, I will in no wise cast out."*** Here is a great text of Scripture, but notice that it is broken down into two sections. First is this, ***"All that the Father giveth me shall come to me."*** This involves what is known in the Scripture as the doctrine of election. There are people who have been given to Jesus Christ by the electing grace of God, and not one of those people shall ultimately fail to come and embrace Jesus Christ as their Savior. Jesus described them as His sheep when He said, "My sheep hear my voice and they come at my call, but a stranger's voice they will not hear and they will not follow." In that same passage of Scripture, which made the Jews angry, He said to these unbelieving Jews in John 10:26, ***"But ye believe not, because you are not of my sheep, as I said unto you, my sheep hear my voice and I know them and they follow me."*** There is a group of people who have been given to Jesus Christ by the distinguishing or electing grace of God in the gospel. That doctrine is readily established from the book of Genesis through the book of Revelation. However, if you only read this scripture by itself, it is easy to arrive at a deadly error. That error is believing that no effort needs to be made through missions or by evangelistic efforts because Jesus Christ has an elect people, and they are going to be converted. We just need to let God save them. Also,

we should never tell everyone that they can be saved, because only the elect can be saved. That is an erroneous extreme that comes from this particular doctrine. Now it is true that all of God's people shall come to Him, or else we would have to take that verse out of the Bible. **"All that the Father giveth me shall come."** Then, someone immediately raises an objection and asks, "Does that mean that if someone wants to be saved, they can't be unless they are one of the chosen of God?" To avoid falling into that error, Jesus Christ gave this statement, **"All that the Father giveth me shall come and him that cometh, I will in no wise cast out."** (John 6:37). Today, there are certain groups of Baptists who would be classified as "Hardshell Baptists," who believe in the doctrine of election. They believe that only God's elect are going to be converted, but because of this, they believe it is possible for a person to want salvation, and God will refuse to save them because they are not one of His chosen. That is an error for this reason. While there is a people who shall come to Jesus Christ, yet the offer of the gospel is to be given to all that God is willing to receive all who earnestly desire salvation in Jesus Christ. So when you only take one-half of the teaching of this text, you can stray into an extreme doctrine. How often do you hear John 6:37 quoted today without the first part of the verse? This error that modern evangelicalism has fallen into is quoting the last half of this verse, **"Him that cometh to me, I will in now wise cast out,"** and omitting the first part of the verse, **"All that the Father giveth Me shall come."** You cannot divide these two parts.

There are two errors which we want to deal with briefly, before we bring our subject to a close. The first error is that God will not save a person who wants to be saved. That error comes about because some see that God has a people, and they deduct from that belief that there might be somebody wanting to be converted that can't be because God won't save them. You will find such teachings as this in the Hardshell Baptist churches. They will teach that if you are not one of the chosen, then you have no hope, because you can't be converted unless you are one of the chosen. That is an error, because God offers Himself freely to any sinner who desires to come to Christ. The great teaching of Christ in the work of electing grace does not shut the door of salvation to any. It opens it up to whosoever will. However, that is particular, it is not just to whosoever, but it is to whosoever will. When you put a willingness there, then you have Good-will at the gate ready to embrace that person. You won't have to contend with this error much today, because there are very few of these people left. Most of them are older people whose

churches have virtually died down to only a few people.

Also, today we find another error on the other extreme. That error is this, that there is no such thing as a gate through which one must apply for salvation, because Christ has died for everybody. He has already forgiven everybody's sins, so all you have to do is believe it.

No one has a right to believe that he is in a right relationship with God without personally applying to Jesus Christ in His person and work for forgiveness of sin.

That is as deadly an error as the belief that you can't be saved, because there are only a few going to be converted. This presentation of Christ goes like this. It indiscriminately says to the sinner that God already has the gate open, now all you have to do is just claim His promise and go

through it. But the scripture says nothing like that, and Bunyan does not set forth that doctrine. We must understand that no one has a right to believe that they are in a right relationship with God without personally applying to Jesus Christ in His person and work for forgiveness of sin. Our sin is not to be viewed as being covered by Christ's blood until confession of that sin is made, and an application is made at the gate of conversion for forgiveness of that sin. Otherwise, you would have what the liberals teach that Jesus Christ died for every member of Adam's race, and that He bore every one of their sins. Therefore, as they teach, God cannot demand payment for sin from Christ and from the sinner at the same time, so ultimately everybody is going to be converted. The modern presentation of the gospel works something like this. Christ has already died for you. He has already forgiven you of your sins if you will just believe it. However, if you don't believe it, He didn't die for you some mysterious way. If that be true, consider this scenario. Say that I am a sinner, and the presentation to me is like this, "Jim Gables, Christ has already died for you and He has already forgiven you of your sins." If I had any intelligence at all, I would respond, "Alright, there is nothing more I need to do if all my sins are taken care of, and they are under the blood of Christ. Therefore, I cannot be required of my sins at my hand, because God has already dealt with them in Christ." Then I would go on my way believing that I am already in a right relationship with Christ and don't need to do anything else. But that is not the way the gospel is presented to sinners.

The gospel is that Jesus Christ, in His person and work, has done something on

behalf of sinners, and all of those who acknowledge in repentance that they are a sinners deserving of the wrath of God, when they repent and acknowledge Christ's Lordship and trust Him, they become partakers of the forgiveness of sin. That means a person cannot say, "There is nothing I need to do if I am already forgiven." No, an individual sinner must come up to the gate of the gospel and personally apply for forgiveness of sin. That is called repentance and faith. Now it is true that repentance and faith are gifts of God, but the sinner must personally apply at the gate of true conversion.

How is a sinner going to know whether God will receive him, if on one hand he has already been told that God has already received him, and on the other hand, he is told that God will not receive anybody unless he is one of God's own elect. You see both of these limit the free offer of God's compassionate mercy in the gospel. I like what Charles Spurgeon said one time to one minister that believed very strongly in the doctrine of election. Mr. Spurgeon and Mr. Bunyan both believed in the doctrine of election as well. In one of his sermons, Mr. Spurgeon was pleading with sinners, "Come to Christ, come to Christ now!" The minister happened to be in his congregation and he met with Mr. Spurgeon afterwards and said, "Sir, I believe you misrepresented the gospel, because you were trying to invite some sinners to Christ who may not have been one of the elect. Only the elect are invited to come to Christ." Mr. Spurgeon replied, "Well, I certainly believe that all the elect of God shall come, but I will only preach to the elect, if you take a piece of chalk and go out here in this community and place an X mark on everyone of the elect people, then I will just preach the gospel to them." That is a good reply. We do not know who and what God is going to do in any given situation, but God has given us the obligation and the responsibility to take the gospel to sinners, and to deal with them as sinners. Whenever I see anyone coming to Jesus Christ and embracing Him, I can only say, "There is one of God's sheep." But I do not know who they are until they come.

In trying to reconcile God's sovereignty and man's free agency, D.L. Moody, the great evangelist of the past says:

On this side of the gate of the gospel, is entitled these words, "Whosoever will may come," but when you walk through that gate of conversion and you look on the other side of that door, you will see another sign that says, "chosen from the foundation of the world."

That is seemingly a dilemma, but is the truth of God. What we need to see is that what brought us through the gate of conversion was not our old adamic ability, but a sovereign work of grace. However, at the same time that offer was being given, it was to whosoever will, let him come. So don't ever misrepresent anyone who has a true understanding of the doctrine of electing grace, as teaching that there are some who want to be saved, but cannot be saved. Beloved, anyone who wants to be saved, there is "good will" on the part of God to save sinners. The promise of God to any person who will come to Christ is, "I will not cast him out." **"All that the Father giveth me shall come."** Do you want to know how to determine you were one of those who were given to Christ by the Father? Come to Jesus Christ and embrace Him in the gospel. Are you willing to do that? If you are not willing to do that, why should you be upset if you are not one of the elect? If you don't want to be saved, what difference is it whether you are one of the elect or not? The gospel question is this, do you earnestly desire salvation in Jesus Christ? If you do, I am authorized by the word of God to present to you that there is a man standing at the gate named "Good-will" who is ready, able, and willing to receive all sinners who will come and apply for mercy in Jesus Christ. If you come and close with Christ, you will begin to understand a little bit of what the doctrine of God's purposes and His election of grace is all about. But don't hesitate in trying to determine whether you are one of the elect or not. On the other hand, if you have not come to Christ in repentance and faith, don't sit back and say that God has already received me.

Let's briefly review the two errors again. One error is this, God may not receive me because I am not one of the elect. The other error is, God has already received me because Christ has already forgiven all of my sins. Do you want to know whether you have been received or not? If you are in a right relationship with God, then what you need to do is come to Jesus Christ, close with Him in the gospel. That is the important issue. Do not fall into one of these errors out here on the extreme perimeter, but if you earnestly desire forgiveness of sin, then again we can say to you on behalf of Christ, He stands as Mr. Good-will ready to receive sinners. Are you a sinner? Then come to Him. There is Good-will in the gospel. He offers it indiscriminately except on the basis that you must present yourself as a qualified candidate - a sinner under condemnation. There will be no self-righteous people enter into conversion. There will be no individuals who see themselves as already just, but they must come and apply to God as a sinner. Everyone who applies at the gate

on that basis, will receive forgiveness of sin. There is the hope. I can look back now and know that I am one of God's people because I know I have applied. I know that God has drawn me, and I know that He has taken me into His fold, because I have come to Christ and embraced Him in His person and His work. It is my prayer that everyone of you, man, woman, boy and girl, knows what we are talking about in the gospel. Have you applied at the gate of true conversion for forgiveness of sin? If you have genuinely presented yourself as a sinner, then the Good-will of God at the gate has said that anyone who comes, none will be rejected or cast out. That is the gospel that we have to preach.