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There are few subjects, bearing upon the practical side of the Christian life, that believers are more exercised about than that they may be "led of the Lord" in all their ways; yet when some important decision has to be made, they are often at a stand to know how "the Lord's mind" is to be obtained. We have read quite a number of tracts and booklets on this subject, but they were so general and vague that we obtained little or no light and help from them. This we find has been the experience of many others, and there certainly exists a real need today for some clear and definite article thereon.

For some years past the writer has been convinced that one thing which has contributed not a little unto the shrouding of this subject in mystery in the minds of many, is the loose and misleading terms which are generally employed by those referring thereto. While expressions are used as, "Is this according to God's will?," "Do I have the prompting of the Holy Spirit?," "Were you led of the Lord in that?" Simple minds will continue to be perplexed and never arrive at any certainty. So commonly are these expressions now used in religious circles, that probably quite a number of our readers will be surprised at our challenging of them. Let it be said that we certainly do not condemn such expressions as erroneous, rather do we wish to point out that they are too intangible for most people until they are more definitely defined.

What alternative, then, have we to suggest? This: in connection with every decision we make, every plan we form, every action we execute, let the question be put, Is this in harmony with God's Word? Is it what the Scriptures enjoin? Does it square with the Rule which God has given us to walk by? Is it in accord with the "example" which Christ has left us to follow? If it be in harmony with God's Word, then it must be "according to God's will," for His will is revealed in His Word. If I am doing that which the Scriptures enjoin, then I must be "prompted by the Holy Spirit," for He never moves any one to act contrary thereto. If my conduct squares with the Rule of Righteousness (the precepts and commands of the Word), then I must be "led of the Lord," for He leads only into the "paths of righteousness" (Psa. 23:1, 3). A great deal of mystical vagueness and puzzling uncertainty will be removed if the reader substitutes for "Is this according to God's will?" the simpler and more tangible "Is this according to God's Word?"

God, in His infinite condescension and transcendent grace, has given us His Word for this very purpose: that we need not stumble along blindly, ignorant of what is pleasing or displeasing to Him, but that we might know His "mind." That Divine Word is given to us not simply for information, but for the regulation of our conduct: to enlighten our minds, to mold our hearts, to direct all our conduct. That Divine Word supplies us with an unerring chart by which to steer through the dangerous sea of life, which if we sincerely and diligently follow, will deliver us from disastrous rocks and submerged reefs, and direct us safely to the Heavenly Harbour. In that Word is all the instructions we can need for every problem, every emergency we may be called upon to face. That Word has been given to us "that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works" (2 Tim. 3:17). O how thankful and joyful we should be that the Triune God has favoured us with such a Word!

"Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path" (Psa. 119:105). The metaphor which is here used is taken from a man walking along a difficult and dangerous road on a dark night, in urgent need of a lantern to show him where to plant his feet, so that he may be able to journey along safely and comfortably, avoiding injury and destruction. The same figure is used again in the New Testament. "We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place" (2 Peter 1:19). The "dark place" is this world, and it is only as we take heed to the Word, to the "light" God has given us that we shall be enabled to perceive and avoid the broad road which leadeth to destruction, and discern that narrow way which alone leadeth unto Life.

It is to be duly observed that the above verse plainly intimates that God has placed His Word in our hands for an intensely practical purpose, namely, for the directing of our walk, the regulating of our deportment. This at once shows us what is to be the first and principal use we are to make of this Divine gift. It would do a traveler little good to diligently scrutinize the mechanism of a lamp, or stand admiring its beautiful design; rather he is to take it up and make a practical use of the same. Many today are zealous in reading "the letter of Scripture," and many are charmed with the evidences of its Divine Authorship, but how few appear to realize the primary purpose for which God has given the Scriptures, how few are making a practical use of them—ordering the details of their lives by its rules and regulations. They eulogize the Lamp, but they walk not by its light.

Our first need and task as little children was to learn to walk. The milk we received from our mothers was but a means to an end: to nourish the infant's life, to strengthen its limbs so that they should be put to a practical

use. So it is spiritually. When we have been born again and fed by the Spirit on the pure milk of the Word, our first need and task is to learn to walk, to walk as becometh the children of God; and this can be learned only as we ascertain our Father's will as it is revealed in Holy Writ. By nature we are in total ignorance of His will for us and of what promotes our highest interests. It is a solemn and very humbling fact that man is the only creature born into this world devoid of intelligence as to how to act, and needing to be taught what is evil and what is good for him.

All the lower orders of creation are endowed with an instinct which moves them to act discreetly, to avoid that which is harmful, and to follow that which is good. But not so man. Animals and birds require not to be taught which herbs and berries are poisonous and which are not: they need no curb placed upon them not to over eat or over drink--you cannot even force a horse or a cow to gorge and make itself sick. Even plants turn their faces to the light and open their mouths to catch the falling rain. But fallen man has not even the instinct of the brutes, and usually has to learn by painful experience what is harmful and injurious; and, as it has been well said, "Experience keeps an expensive school"--her fees are high. Alas that so many only discover this when it is too late: when they have wrecked their constitutions beyond repair, life's temporal interest beyond recovery.

It may be said in the answer to the above, But man is endowed with a conscience. True, and how far does it serve him till enlightened by the Word and convicted by the Spirit! Man's understanding has been so darkened by sin, and folly is so bound up in his heart from childhood (Prov. 22:15), that until he is instructed he knows not what God requires of him, nor what makes for his own highest good. That is why God has given us His Word: to make known what He justly demands of us, to inform us of those things which destroy the soul, to reveal the baits which Satan uses to capture and slay so many, to point out the highway of holiness which alone leadeth unto Heaven (Heb. 12:14), to acquaint us with those rules which must be observed if we are to enter and walk that highway.

Our first duty, then, and our first aim, must be to take up the Scriptures so as to ascertain what is God's revealed will for us, what are the paths He forbids us to walk in, what are the ways which are pleasing in His sight. Many things are prohibited in the Word which neither our reason nor our conscience would discover. For example, we learn that "that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God" (Luke 16:15); that "the friendship of the world is enmity with God" (James 4:4); that "he that hasteth with his feet sinneth" (Prov. 19:2). Many things are also there commanded which can only be known by acquainting ourselves with its contents. For example, "Lean not unto thine own understanding" (Prov. 3:5); "Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help" (Psa. 146:3); "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you" (Matt. 5:44).

The above are but samples of hundreds of others. Now it is obvious that God's Word cannot be a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path unless we are familiar with its contents, and particularly, until we are informed upon the practical rules which God has given us to walk by. Hence it should be equally obvious that the first need of the Christian is not to delve into the intricacies and mysteries of Scripture, study the prophecies, nor even entertain himself with the wonderful types therein; but rather to concentrate on that which will instruct him as to the kind of conduct which will be pleasing to the Lord. The Holy Scriptures are given us, primarily, not for our intellectual gratification, nor for emotional admiration, but for life's regulation. Nor are the precepts and commands, the warnings and encouragements contained therein, simply for our information: they are to be reduced to practice, they require unqualified obedience.

"This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success" (Josh. 1:8). God will be no man's debtor: in keeping His commands there is "great reward" (Psa. 19:11). Part of that "reward" is a deliverance from being deceived by the false appearances of things, from forming erroneous estimates, from pursuing a foolish policy. Part of that "reward" is the acquiring of wisdom so that we choose that which is good, act prudently, and follow those paths which make for righteousness, peace and joy. He who treasures up in his heart the Divine precepts and diligently seeks to walk by their rule will escape those evils which destroy his fellows.

"If any man walk in the day, he stumbleth not, because he seeth the light of this world" (John 11:9). To "walk in the day" means to be in communion with Him who is Light, to conduct ourselves according to His revealed will. Just so far as the Christian walks in the path of duty as it is defined for him in the Word, will he walk surely and comfortably: by the light of that Word the way is plain before him, and he is preserved from falling over the obstacles by which Satan seeks to trip him up. "But if a man walk in the night, he stumbleth, because there is no light in him" (v. 10). Here is the solemn contrast: he who walks according to the dictates of his lusts,

following the counsel and example of the ungodly, falls into the snares of the Devil, and perishes. There is "no light" in such an one, for he is not regulated by the Sun of Righteousness.

"I am the light of the world: he that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life" (John 8:12). It is one thing to have "life," it is another thing to enjoy the "light of life"--that is only obtained by following Christ. Notice carefully the tense of the verb: it is not "he that follows Me," occasionally and spasmodically: but "he that followeth Me," which signifies a steady and continuous course of action; and the promise to such a one is, "he shall not walk in darkness." But what does it mean to "follow" Christ? First and foremost, to be emptied of self-will, for "even Christ pleased not Himself" (Rom. 15:3). This is absolutely essential; self-will and self-pleasing must be mortified if I am to be delivered from walking in darkness.

The unchanging order is made known by Christ in Matthew 16:24, "Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me." Christ cannot be followed until self is denied and the cross accepted as the distinguishing mark of discipleship. What does it mean to "deny self"? It means to repudiate our own goodness, to renounce our own wisdom, to have no confidence in our own strength, to completely set aside our own will and wishes, that we "should not henceforth live unto ourselves, but unto Him which died for us" (2 Cor. 5:15). What does it mean to "take up our cross"? It signifies a readiness to endure the world's hatred and scorn, to voluntarily surrender our lives unto God, to use all our faculties unto His glory. The "cross" stands for unreserved and loving obedience to the Lord, for of Him it is written that "He became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." It is only as self with all its lustings and interests is denied, and as the heart is dominated by the spirit of Calvary, that we are prepared to "follow" Christ.

And what is signified by "follow" Christ? This: to take His "yoke" upon us (Matt. 11:29) and live in complete subjection to Him. It is to yield fully to His Lordship, to obey His commands, and thus truly serve Him. It is seeking to do only those things which are pleasing in His sight. It is to emulate the "example" which He has left us, and He was in all things subject to the Scriptures. And as we "follow" Him, we "shall not walk in darkness": no, we shall be in happy fellowship with Him who is the "true light." For our encouragement--for they were men of like passions with us--it is recorded of Caleb and Joshua "they have wholly followed the Lord" (Num. 32:12): having put their hand to the plow, they looked not back; consequently, instead of perishing in the wilderness with their disobedient fellows, they entered the promised land.

Thus the great business, the life-task of the Christian, is to regulate his life by and conform his conduct to the precepts of the written Word and the example left us by the incarnate Word. As he does so, in proportion as he does so, he is emancipated from the darkness of his natural mind, freed from the follies of his corrupt heart, delivered from the mad course of this world, and escapes the snares of the Devil. "Through knowledge shall the just be delivered" (Prov. 11:9). Yes, great is the "reward" of keeping God's commandments: "Then shalt thou understand righteousness, and judgment, and equity; yea, every good path. When wisdom entereth into thine heart, and knowledge is pleasant unto thy soul; Discretion shall preserve thee, understanding shall keep thee" (Prov. 2:9-11).

Â“Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord isÂ” (Eph. 5:17). It is clear from this verse that it is both the right and the duty of the Christian to have a knowledge of the Lord's will for him. God can neither be pleased nor glorified by His children walking in ignorance or proceeding blindly. Did not Christ say to His beloved disciples, Â“Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of My Father I have made known unto youÂ” (John 15:15). If, then, we are in the dark as to how we ought to proceed in any thing, it is clear that we are living far below our privileges. No doubt the majority of our readers will give their hearty assent to these statements, but the question which concerns most of them is, how are we to ascertain the Lord's will concerning the varied details of our daily lives?

First, let it be duly observed this exhortation, that we should be understanding Â“what the will of the Lord is,Â” is preceded by Â“Wherefore be ye not unwise.Â” That word Â“unwiseÂ” does not here signify bare ignorance or lack of knowledge, otherwise the two halves of the verse would merely express the same thought in its negative and positive forms. No, the word Â“unwiseÂ” there means Â“lacking in common sense,Â” or as the R.V. renders it Â“be not ye foolish.Â” Nor does the word Â“foolishÂ” signify no more than it now does in common speech: in Scripture the Â“foolÂ” is not simply one who is mentally deficient, but is the man who leaves God out of his life, who acts independently of Him. This must be duly borne in mind as we seek to arrive at the meaning of the second half of Ephesians 5:17.

Let it also be carefully observed that Ephesians 5:17 opens with the word Â“Wherefore,Â” which points us back

to what immediately precedes. There we read “See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil” (vv. 15, 16). Unless those exhortations are prayerfully and diligently heeded, it is impossible that we should be “understanding WHAT the will of the Lord is.” Unless our walk be right there can be no spiritual discernment of God’s will for us. And this brings us back to the central thought of the preceding article. Our daily walk is to be ordered by God’s Word, and in proportion as it is so shall we be kept in His will and preserved from folly and sin.

“A good understanding have all they that do his commandments” (Psa. 111:10). A “good understanding” may be defined as spiritual instinct. We all know what is meant by that “instinct” with which the Creator has endowed animals and birds: that inward faculty which prompts them to avoid danger and moves them to seek that which makes for their well being. Now man was, originally, endowed with a similar instinct, though of a far superior order to that possessed by the lower creatures. But at the Fall, he, to a large extent, lost it, and, as one generation of depraved beings has followed another, their “instinct” has become more and more weakened, until now we see the vast majority of our fellows conducting themselves with far less intelligence than do the beasts of the field—rushing madly to destruction, which the instinct of the brutes would avoid: acting foolishly, yea, madly, contrary even to “common sense,” conducting their affairs and concerns without discretion.

Now at regeneration God gives to His elect “the spirit . . . of a sound mind” (2 Tim. 1:7), but that “spirit” has to be cultivated, it needs training and directing. The necessary instruction for this is found in the Word. From that Word we may learn what are the things which will prove beneficial to us, and what be injurious; what things are to be sought after, and what avoided. As the precepts of Scripture are reduced to practice by us, and as its prohibitions and warnings are heeded, we are enabled to judge things in their true light, we are delivered from being deceived by false appearances, we are kept from making foolish “mistakes.” The closer we walk by the Word, the more fully will this prove to be the case with us: a “good judgment” or spiritual instinct will be formed within us, so that we shall conduct our affairs discreetly and adorn the doctrine we profess.

So highly does the saint prize this spiritual instinct or sound mind, that he prays “Teach me good judgment and knowledge: for I have believed Thy commandments” (Psa. 119:66). He realizes that it can only be increased as he is Divinely “taught,” that is, by the Spirit applying the Word to his heart, opening to him its meaning, bringing it to his remembrance when needed, and enabling him to make a proper use of the same. But let it be duly noted that in this prayer the petition is backed up with a plea: “for I have believed Thy commandments”: “believed,” not merely by an intellectual assent, but approved with the affections. Only when that be truly the case is such a petition sincere. There is an inseparable connection between the two things: where God’s commandments are loved by us, we can count upon Him teaching us “good judgment.”

As we have said above, the “fool” is not the mentally deficient, but the one who leaves God out of his thoughts and plans, who cares not whether his conduct pleases or displeases Him: the “fool” is a Godless person. Contrariwise, the “wise” (in Scripture) are not the highly intellectual or the brilliantly educated, but those who honestly seek to put God first in their hearts and lives. And God “honours” those who honour Him (1 Sam. 2:30): He gives them “good judgment.” True, it is not acquired all in a day: it is “here a little and there a little.” Yet the more completely we are surrendered to God, the more the principles of His Word regulate our conduct, the swifter is our growth in spiritual wisdom. In saying that this “good judgment” is not acquired all at once, we do not mean that a whole lifetime has to be lived before it becomes ours—though, alas, this is often the case with many. No indeed; some who have been converted but two or three years are often more spiritual, godly, and possess more spiritual wisdom than those who have been converted years before them.

By treasuring up in his mind the doctrines, precepts, promises, exhortations, and warnings of Scripture, and by diligently comparing himself with the Rule by which he is to walk, the Christian grows into a habitual frame of spiritual wisdom, and acquires a gracious “taste” which enables him to judge of right and wrong with a degree of readiness and certainty as a musical ear judges sounds, so that he is rarely mistaken. He who has the Word ruling in his heart is influenced thereby in all his actions, and because the glory of God is the great aim which he has before him, he is not suffered to go far wrong. Moreover, God has promised to show Himself strong on the behalf of the one whose heart is perfect toward Him, and this He does by regulating His providences and causing all things to work together for his good.

“The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light” (Matt. 6:22). This language is of course figurative, yet its meaning is not difficult to ascertain: what the eye is to the body, the heart is to the soul, for out of the heart are “the issues of life” (Prov. 4:23). The actions of the body are directed by the light received from the eye: if the eye be “single,” that is, sound and clear, perceiving

objects as they really are, then the whole body has light for the directing of its members, and the man moves with safety and comfort. In like manner, if the heart be undivided, set on pleasing God in all things, then the soul has clear vision, discerning the true nature of things, forming a sound judgment of their worth, choosing wisely, and directing itself prudently. While the heart is right with God, the soul is endowed with spiritual wisdom so that there is full light for our path.

“But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!” (Matt. 6:23). Here is the solemn contrast. If the vision of our bodily eye be defective, a cataract dimming it, then nothing is seen clearly, all is confusion, and the man stumbles as if in the dark, being continually liable to lose his way and run into danger. In like manner, where the heart be not right with God, where sin and self dominate, the whole soul is under the reigning power of darkness-native depravity; and in consequence, the judgment is blinded so that it cannot rightly discern between good and evil, cannot see through the gild of Satan’s baits, and so is fatally deceived by them. The very “light” which is in fallen man, namely, his “reason,” is controlled by his lusts, so, great is his “darkness.”

It is to be noted that the verses we have just been considering were spoken by Christ immediately after what He had been saying in Matthew 6:19-21 concerning the right and wise laying up of treasures. It was as though He now anticipated and answered a question from His disciples: If it be so important and essential for us not to lay up treasures in earth, but to lay up for ourselves treasures in Heaven, then why is it that those men who are commonly regarded as the “shrewdest” and are considered by their fellows to be the most “successful,” seek after earthly treasures, rather than after Heavenly? To this Christ replied: marvel not at this-they cannot see what they are doing: they are like blind men gathering pebbles supposing that they are valuable diamonds.

Much light does Christ here cast on what we now behold going on on every side. They who have set their hearts upon the things of time and sense, are but spending their energies for that which will stand them in no stead when they come to their deathbed, labouring for that which satisfieth not (Isa. 55:2); and the reason why they conduct themselves so insanely-pursuing so eagerly the pleasures of this world, which will bear nothing but bitter regrets in the world to come-is because their hearts are evil. God has no real place in their thoughts, and in consequence He gives them up to the spirit of madness. There must be the “single eye”-the heart set upon pleasing God-if the soul is to be filled with heavenly wisdom, which loves, seeks, and lays up heavenly things. That wisdom is something which no college or university can impart: it is “from above” (James 3:17).

It is also to be carefully observed that our Lord’s teaching upon the “single eye” with the whole body “full of light,” and the “evil eye” with the whole body “full of darkness,” is immediately followed with, “No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon” (Matt. 6:24). This at once establishes the meaning of the preceding verses. Christ had been speaking (under a figure) of setting the Lord supremely before the heart, which necessarily involves the casting out of worldly things and fleshly considerations. Men think to compound with God and their lusts, God and mammon, God and worldly pleasures. No, says Christ: God will have all or nothing: he that serveth Him must serve Him only and supremely. Ah, my reader, are you willing to pay the necessary price to have Divine light on your path?

It is quite likely that not a few readers are disappointed at our method of treating this subject, that which has been said being very different from what the title led them to expect. Neither in the preceding article nor in this one have we attempted to enter into specific details and state how a person is to act when some difficult or sudden emergency confronts him; rather have we sought to treat of basic principles and thoroughly establish them. Though it might satisfy his curiosity, it would serve no good purpose for a teacher to explain an intricate problem in higher mathematics to a student who had not already mastered the elementary rules of arithmetic. So it would be out of place for us to have explained how particular cases and circumstances are to be dealt with before we have pressed those rules which must guide our general walk.

Thus far we have dealt with two chief things: the absolute necessity of being controlled by the Word of God without us, and the having a heart within which is single to God’s glory and set upon pleasing Him, if we are to have the light of Heaven shining upon our earthly path. A third consideration must now engage our attention: the help of the Holy Spirit. But it is at this point we most need to be upon our guard, lest we lapse into a vague mysticism on the one hand, or become guilty of wild fanaticism on the other. Many have plunged into the most foolish and evil courses under the plea they were “prompted by the Spirit.” No doubt they were “prompted” by some “spirit,” but most certainly not by the Holy Spirit. HE never prompts to anything contrary to the Word. Our only safety is to impartially bring our inward impulses or promptings to the test of Holy Writ.

“For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the children of God” (Rom. 8:14). This Divine Guide is perfectly acquainted with the path which God has ordained for each celestial traveler: He is fully conversant with all its windings and narrowness, its intricacies and dangers. To be led by the Spirit is to be under His government. He perceives our temptations and weakness, knows our aspirations, hears our groans, and marks our strugglings after holiness. He knows when to supply a check, administer a rebuke, apply a promise, sympathize with a sorrow, strengthen a wavering purpose, confirm a fluctuating hope. The sure promise is, “He will guide you into all truth” (John 16:13): this He does by regulating our thoughts, affections and conduct; by opening our understandings to perceive the meaning of Scripture, applying it in power to the heart, enabling us to appropriate and reduce it to practice. Then let us each time we open the Sacred Volume, humbly and earnestly seek the aid of Him who inspired it.

It is to be noted that Romans 8:14 opens with the word “For,” the Apostle introducing a confirmation of what he had been affirming in the previous verses. They who “walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit” (v. 4), they who “mind the things of the Spirit” (v. 5), they who “through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body” (v. 13), are the ones who are “led by the Spirit.” As the “Spirit of holiness,” it is His aim to deepen the impress of the restored image of God in the soul, to increase our happiness by making us more holy. Thus He “leads” to nothing but what is sanctifying. The “Spirit guides” by subduing the power of indwelling sin, by weaning us from the world, by maintaining a tender conscience in us, by drawing out the heart to Christ, by causing us to live for Eternity.

“Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths” (Prov. 3:5, 6). Note well the order here: the promise at the close of the passage is conditional upon our meeting three requirements. First, we are to have full confidence in the Lord. The Hebrew verb for “trust” here literally means “to lean upon”: it conveys the idea of one who is conscious of feebleness turning unto and resting upon a stronger one for support. To “trust in the Lord” signifies to count upon Him in every emergency, to look to Him for the supply of every need, to say with the Psalmist “The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want” (Psa. 23:1). It means that we cast all our cares upon Him, drawing from Him strength day by day and hour by hour and thus proving the sufficiency of His grace. It means for the Christian to continue as he began: when we first cast ourselves upon Him as lost sinners, we abandoned all our own doings and relied upon His abounding mercy. Rely now on His wisdom, power and grace.

But what is meant by “trust in the LORD with all thine heart”? First, the giving unto God of our undivided confidence, not looking to any other for help and relief. Second, turning to Him with childlike simplicity. When a little one trusts there is no reasoning, but a simple taking of the parent's words at their face value, being fully assured that his father will make good what he has said; he dwells not on the difficulties which may be in the way, but expects a fulfillment of what is promised. So it should be with us and our heavenly Father's words. Third, it means with our affections going out to Him: love “believeth all things, hopeth all things” (1 Cor. 13:7). Thus, to trust in the Lord, “with all our heart” is love's reliance in believing dependence and expectation.

The second requirement is, “and lean not unto thine own understanding,” which means we are not to trust in our own wisdom or rely upon the dictates of human reason. The highest act of human reason is to disown its sufficiency and bow before the wisdom of God. To lean unto our own understanding is to rest upon a broken reed, for it has been deranged by sin; yet many find it harder to repudiate their own wisdom than they do to abandon their own righteousness. Many of God's ways are “past finding out,” and to seek to solve the mysteries of Providence is the finite attempting to comprehend the Infinite, which is not only being guilty of presumptuous sin, but is acting against our own well being. Philosophizing about our lot, reasoning about our circumstances, is fatal to rest of soul and peace of heart.

Third, “in all thy ways acknowledge Him.” This means, first, we must ask God's permission for all that we do, and not act without His leave; only then do we conduct ourselves as dutiful children and respectful servants. It means, second, that we seek God's guidance in every undertaking, acknowledging our ignorance and owning our complete dependence upon Him. “In every thing by prayer and supplication” (Phil. 4:6): only so is God's lordship over us owned in a practical way. It means, third, seeking God's glory in all our ways: “whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Cor. 10:31). Ah, if we only did so, how very different many of our “ways” would be! If we more frequently paused and inquired, Will this be for God's glory? we should be withheld from much sinning and from much folly, with all its painful consequences. It means, fourth, seeking God's blessing upon everything. Here is another simple and sufficient rule: anything on which I cannot ask God's blessing is WRONG.

“And He shall direct thy paths”: meet the three conditions mentioned above and here is the sure consequence.

The need for being directed by God is real and pressing. Left to ourselves we are no better off than a rudderless ship or a motor-car without a steering-wheel. It is not without reason that the Lord's people are so often termed "sheep," for no other creature is so apt to stray or has such a propensity to wander. The Hebrew word for "direct" means "to make straight." We are living in a world where everything is crooked: sin has thrown everything out of joint, and in consequence, confusion, worse, confoundedness, abounds all around us. A deceitful heart, a wicked world, and a subtle Devil, are ever seeking to lead us astray and compass our destruction. How necessary it is, then, for God to "direct our paths."

What is meant by "He shall direct thy paths"? It means, He will make clear to me the course of duty. Let this be firmly grasped: God's "will" always lies in the path of duty, and never runs counter thereto. Much needless uncertainty and perplexity would be spared if only this principle were steadily recognised. When you feel a strong desire or "prompting" to shirk a plain duty, you may be assured it is a temptation from Satan, and not the "leading" of the Holy Spirit. For example, it is contrary to God's revealed will for a woman to be constantly attending meetings to the neglect of her children and home. It is shirking his responsibility for the husband to go off alone in the evenings, even in religious luxuriation, and leave his tired wife to wash the dishes and put the children to bed. It is a sin for a Christian employee to read the Scripture or "speak to people about their souls" during office or business hours.

The difficulty arises when it appears that we have to choose between two or more duties, or when some important change has to be made in our circumstances. There are many people who think they want to be guided by God when some crisis arrives or some important decision has to be made; but few of them are prepared to meet the requirements as intimated in our opening paragraphs. The fact is that GOD was rarely in their thoughts before the emergency arose: pleasing Him exercised them not while things were going smoothly for them. But when difficulty and trouble confronts them, when they are at their own wits end how to act, they suddenly become very pious, turn to the Lord, earnestly ask Him to direct them, and make His way plain before their face.

But God cannot be imposed upon in such a manner. Usually such people make a rash decision and bring themselves into still greater difficulties, and then they attempt to console themselves with "Well, I sought God's guidance." Ah, my reader, God is not to be mocked like that: if we ignore His claims upon us when the sailing is pleasant, we cannot count upon Him delivering us when the storm comes. The One we have to do with is holy and He will not set a premium upon Godlessness (called by many, "carelessness"), even though we howl like beasts when in anguish (Hosea 7:14). On the other hand, if we diligently seek grace to walk with God day by day, regulating our ways by His commandments, then we may rightfully count upon His aid in every emergency that arises.

But how is the conscientious Christian to act when some emergency confronts him? Suppose he stands at the parting of the ways: two paths, two alternatives, are before him, and he knows not which to choose: what must he do? First, let him heed that most necessary word, which as a rule of general application is ever binding upon us, "he that believeth shall not make haste" (Isa. 28:16). To act from a sudden impulse never becomes a child of God, and to rush ahead of the Lord is sure to involve us in painful consequences. "The LORD is good unto them that wait for Him, to the soul that seeketh Him. It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation (deliverance) of the LORD" (Lam. 3:25, 26). To act in haste generally means that afterward we shall repent at leisure. O how much each of us needs to beg the Lord to daily lay His cooling and quietening hand upon our feverish flesh!

Second, seek unto the Lord for Him to empty your heart of every wish of your own. It is impossible for us to sincerely pray "Thy will be done," until our own will has, by the power of the Holy Spirit, been brought into complete subjection to God. Just so long as there is secret (but real) preference in my heart, my judgment will be biased. While my heart is really set upon the attainment of a certain object, then I am only mocking God when I ask Him to make His way plain before my face; and I am sure to misinterpret all His providences, twisting them to fit my own desire. If an obstacle be in my path, I shall then regard it as a "testing of faith"; if a barrier be removed, I at once jump to the conclusion that God is "undertaking" for me, when instead He may be testing, on the eve of giving me up to my own "heart's lusts" (Psa. 81:12).

This is a point of supreme importance for those who desire their steps to be truly "ordered of the Lord." We cannot discern His best for us while the heart has its own preference. Thus it is imperative that we ask God to empty our hearts of all personal preferences, to remove any secret and set desire of our own. But often it is far from easy to take this attitude before God, the more so if we are not in the habit of seeking grace to mortify the flesh. By nature each of us wants his own way, and chafes against every curb placed upon him. But just as a photographic plate must be a blank if it is to receive the impression of a picture upon it, so our hearts must be

freed from their personal bias if God is to work in us "both to will and to do of His good pleasure" (Phil. 2:13).

If you find that as you continue waiting upon God the inward struggle between the "flesh" and the "Spirit" continues, and you have not reached the point where you can honestly say, "Have Thine own way, Lord," then a season of fasting is in order. In Ezra 8:21 we read, "Then I proclaimed a fast there, at the river of Ahava, that we might afflict ourselves before our God, to seek of Him a right way for us, and for our little ones." This is written for our instruction, and even a glance at it suffices to show it is pertinent to our present inquiry. Nor is fasting a religious exercise peculiar to Old Testament times, for in Acts 13:3 we are told that before Barnabas and Saul were sent forth on their missionary journey by the church at Antioch, "When they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away." There is nothing meritorious in fasting, but it expresses humility of soul and earnestness of heart.

The next thing is to humbly and sincerely acknowledge to God our ignorance, requesting Him not to leave us to ourselves. Tell Him frankly that you are perplexed and know not what to do, and that you deserve to be left in this woeful plight. But plead before Him His own promise, and beg Him for Christ's sake to now make it good to you: "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering" (James 1:5, 6). Ask Him to grant the wisdom so much needed, that you may judge rightly, that you may discern clearly what will promote your spiritual welfare, and therefore be most for His glory.

"Commit thy way unto the LORD; trust also in Him; and He shall bring it to pass" (Psa. 37:5). In the interval of waiting, confer not with flesh and blood: if you go to fellow-Christians for advice, most probably no two of them will agree, and their discordant counsel will only confuse you. Instead of looking to man for help "Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving" (Col. 4:2). Be on the look-out for God's answer: mark attentively each movement of His providence, for as a straw in the air indicates which way the wind is blowing so the hand of God may often be discerned by a spiritual eye in what are trifling incidents to others. "And let it be, when thou hearest the sound of a going in the tops of the mulberry trees, that then thou shalt bestir thyself: for then shall the LORD go out before thee" (2 Sam. 5:24).

Finally, remember that we need not only light from the Lord to discover unto us our duty in particular cases, but, that being obtained, we also need His presence to accompany us, so that we may be enabled to rightly follow the path in which He bids us go. Moses realised this when he said to the Lord "If Thy presence go not with me, carry us not up hence" (Exo. 33:15). If we have not the presence of God with us in an undertaking--that is, His approval upon it, His assistance in it, and His blessing upon it--then we shall find it a snare if not a curse to us.

As a general rule it is better for us to trouble our minds very little about "guidance"--that is God's work: our business is to walk in obedience to Him day by day. As we do so, there is wrought within us a prudence which will preserve us from all serious mistakes. "I understand more than the ancients, because I keep Thy precepts" (Psa. 119:100). The man who keeps God's precepts becomes endowed with a wisdom which far surpasses that possessed by the sages of antiquity or the learning of philosophers. "Unto the upright there ariseth light in the darkness" (Psa. 112:4). The upright man may experience his days of darkness, but when the hour of emergency arrives light shall be given him by God. Serve God with all your might today, and you may calmly and safely leave the future with Him. A duteous conformity to what is right shall be followed by a luminous discernment of what would be wrong.

Seek earnestly to get the fear of God fixed in your heart so that you tremble at His Word (Isa. 66:2) and are really afraid of displeasing Him. "What man is he that feareth the LORD? him shall He teach in the way that he shall choose" (Psa. 25:12). "Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding" (Job 28:28). "Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the LORD" (Hosea 6:3). The more we grow in grace the fuller will be our knowledge of God's revealed will. The more we cultivate the practice of seeking to please God in all things, the more light shall we have for our path. "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God" (Matt. 5:8): if our motive be right, our vision will be clear.

"The integrity of the upright shall guide them: but the perverseness of transgressors shall destroy them" (Prov. 11:3). The upright man will not willingly and knowingly go aside into crooked paths: the honest heart is not bewildered by domineering lusts nor blinded by corrupt motives: having a tender conscience he possesses keen spiritual discernment; but the crooked policy of the wicked involves them in increasing trouble and ends in their eternal ruin. "The righteousness of the perfect (sincere) shall direct his way: but the wicked shall fall by his own wickedness" (Prov. 11:5): an eye single to God's glory delivers from those snares in which the ungodly are taken. "Evil men understand not judgment: but they that seek the LORD understand all things" (Prov. 28:5).

Unbridled passions and unmortified lusts becloud the understanding and pervert the judgment till men call good "evil" and evil "good" (Isa. 5:20); but he who seeks to be subject to the Lord shall be given discretion.

"The LORD shall direct thy paths." First, by His Word: not in some magical way so as to encourage laziness, nor like consulting a cookery-book full of recipes for all occasions, but by warning us of the by-ways of sin and folly and by making known the paths of righteousness and blessing. Second, by His Spirit: giving us strength to obey the precepts of God, causing us to wait patiently on the Lord for directions, enabling us to apply the rules of Holy Writ to the varied duties of our lives, bringing to our remembrance a word in due season. Third, by His providences: causing friends to fail us so that we are delivered from leaning upon the arm of flesh, thwarting our carnal plans so that we are preserved from shipwreck, shutting doors which it would not be good for us to enter, and opening doors before us which none can shut.