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The New Life

by Andrew Murray

XLVII. DISCRETION

'For wisdom shall enter into thine heart, and knowledge shall be pleasant unto thy soul; discretion shall watch over thee, understanding shall keep thee.' -- Prov. 2:10,11

'My son, keep sound wisdom and discretion: so shall they be life unto thy soul.' -- Prov. 3:21,22

'Ye ought to be quiet, and to do nothing rash.' -- Acts. 19:36

Indiscretion is not merely the sin of the unconverted: amongst the people of God, it is often the cause of much evil and misery. We read of Moses: 'They angered him also at the waters of Meribah, so that it went ill with Moses for their sakes: because they were rebellious against his spirit, and he spake unadvisedly with his lips.' So of Uzzah's touching the ark: 'And God smote him there for his error' (margin, rashness). (2 Sam. 6:7; Ps. 106:38; Prov. 12:18)

What discretion is, and why it is so necessary, may be easily explained. When an army marches into the province of an enemy, its safety depends on the guards which are set, which are to be always on the watch, to know and to give warning when the enemy approaches. Advance guards are sent out that the territory and power of the enemy may be known. This prudence, which looks out beforehand and looks round, is indispensable.

The Christian lives in the province of the enemy. All that surrounds him may become a snare or an occasion of sin. Therefore his whole walk is to be carried out in a holy reserve and watchfulness, in order that he may do nothing indiscreet. He watches and prays that he may not enter into temptation. (Matt. 26:41; Luke 1:36; Eph. 6:18; 1 Pet. 4:7; 5:8) Prudence keeps guard over him. (1 Sam. 18:14; Matt. 10:16; Luke 1:17; 16:8; Eph. 5:15; Tit. 2:4)

Discretion keeps watch over the lips. O what loss many a child of God suffers by the thought that if he only speaks nothing wrong, he may speak what he will. He knows not how, through much speaking, the soul becomes ensnared in the distractions of the world, because in the multitude of words there is not wanting transgression. Discretion endeavours not to speak, save for the glory of God and blessing to neighbours. (Ps. 39:2; 141:3; Prov. 10:19; Eccles. 5:1,2)

Over the ear also discretion keeps guard. Through the gate of the ear comes to me all the news of the world, all the indiscreet speech of others, to infect me. Very hurtful for the soul is eagerness for news. One can afterwards no more look into one's self: one lives wholly in the world round about. Corinth was much more godless than Athens; but in this last place, where they 'spent their time in nothing else but either to tell or to hear some new thing,' very few were converted. Take heed, says Jesus, what ye hear. (Prov. 2:2; 18:15; Mark 4:24; Acts. 17:21)

On this account, discretion keeps watch over the society in which the Christian mingles. 'He that separateth himself seeketh his own desire.' The child of God has no the freedom to yield himself to the society of the world so much and so long as he would: he must know the will of his Father. (Ps. 1:1; Prov. 28:1; 2 Cor. 6:14; 2 Thess. 3:14; 2 John 10,11)

Discretion keeps watch over all lawful occupations and possessions. It knows how gradually and stealthily the love of money, worldly-mindedness, the secret power of the flesh, obtains the upper hand, and that it can never reckon itself free from this temptation. (Matt. 13:22; Luke 21:34; 1 Tim. 6:9,17)

And, above all, it keeps watch over the heart, because there are the issues of life, there is the fountain out of which everything springs. Remembering the word, 'he that trusteth in his own heart is a fool,' it walks in deep humility, and it works out salvation with fear and trembling. (Prov. 3:21,23; 4:23; 28:16; Jer. 31:33)

And whence has the soul the power to be with a never-resting watchfulness on its guard against the thousand dangers that surround it on all sides? Is it not fatiguing, exhausting, harassing, to have thus to watch always and never to be at rest in the certainty that there is no danger? No: absolutely not. Discretion brings just the highest restfulness. It has its security and strength in its heavenly Keeper, who slumbers not nor sleeps. In confidence in Him, under the inspiration of His Spirit, discretion does its work: the Christian walks as one that is wise; the dignity of a holy prudence adorns him in all his actions. The rest of faith, the faith that Jesus watches and guards, binds to Him in love, and holy discretion springs as of its own accord from a love that would not grieve or abandon Him, from a faith that has its strength for everything in Him.

O Lord my God, guard me, that I may not be of the indiscreet in heart. Let the prudence of the righteous always characterize me, in order that in everything I may be kept from giving offense. Amen.

1. To one who bestowed great care on having his horse and cart in thoroughly good order, it was once said: Come, it is not necessary to be always taking so much pains with this. His answer was: I have always found my prudence paid. How many a Christian has need of this lesson. How many a young Christian may well pray for this -- that his conversion may be, according to God's word, 'to the prudence of the righteous.'

2. Discretion has its root in self-knowledge. The deeper my knowledge of my impotence and the sinfulness of my flesh is, the greater is the need of watchfulness. It is thus our element of true self-denial.

3. Discretion has its power in faith: the Lord is our Keeper, and He does His keeping through the Spirit keeping us in mind. It is from Him that our discretion comes.

4. Its activity is not limited to ourselves: it reaches out especially to our neighbour, in the way of giving him no offense, and in laying no stumbling-block in his way. (Rom. 14:13; 1 Cor. 8:9; 10:32; Phil. 1:10)

5. It finds great delight in silence, so as to commit its way to the Lord with composure and deliberation. It esteems highly the word of the town-clerk of Ephesus: 'Ye ought to be quiet, and to do nothing rash.'

6. In great generals and their victories, we see that discretion is not timidity: it is consistent with the highest courage and the most joyful certitude of victory. Discretion watches against rashness, but enhances the courage of faith.