

GUIDANCE FROM GOD

"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." -- Proverbs 3:5-6

When God permitted godless nations to threaten or overrun His Chosen People in ancient times, the prophets plead with their people to acknowledge their sins and turn from their evil ways, lest they be destroyed. Fervently devoted to their native land, these inspired men dealt with sin unsparingly and dared to predict dire disaster as the inevitable consequence of national iniquity. Unpopular as their opinions must have been, the prophets saw in national calamities the stern chastenings of the Lord, and often at the peril of their lives they plead with their people to repent and thereby escape destruction.

As we see our own Land, and all the free nations of the world threatened by ruthless powers, that are frankly atheistic, what are we to think? Does God care? Will He stand idly by and permit peoples who profess His name to be outrageously dealt with by nations that deny Him, and flout all the principles that we hold to be right and just?

In such a case we may think only of the wickedness of our enemies, or we may complain of the apparent injustice of God. But if we share the wisdom of the men of faith who speak to us through the Bible we shall turn our eyes upon ourselves. Surely it behooves us in a time of national humiliation and peril to lay aside all pride and complacency and examine ourselves and our ways. It is as true now as it ever has been that righteousness exalteth a nation, but sin is the reproach of any people. And it is still true that the only sure way of escape for an imperilled people is the hard way of repentance, and honest obedience to the holy will of God. God's ancient promise still stands "If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land." II Chronicles 7:14.

One cannot think back upon the beginnings of this nation without realizing that its roots went down deeply into the rich soil of faith in God. It is impossible to consider the pioneer days of the Pilgrim Fathers and the hard years of battling with wilderness trails without counting God definitely in. It was God's land and He was their leader.

Now ninety per cent of the American people do not attend church regularly; and many of the ten per cent who do attend do so perfunctorily. Of course, many may resent the implication and say, "I do not attend church, but I have not forgotten God." God knows and so do we that those who are not actively and openly for Him are against Him. Because America has pushed God out of its life, it has become an unhappy and restless nation. America will never be happier until she recaptures the faith of her fathers. Then she will find that the most practical way to get everything out of life that contributes to her well-being is by counting God in.

As we face a new year, we are certainly conscious of our need of guidance. Frequently we ask ourselves, "What shall I do?" "What course shall I pursue?" Such a feeling surges through our hearts can only be satisfied with the knowledge that God is willing to guide His people and to direct them in the way that they should go.

"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." Proverbs 3:5-6. God has not left us to order our own steps. What wondrous grace on His part! He sees us, the poor helpless sheep that we are, and has compassion upon us in our need. He knows this is a dark and sinful world, and therefore promises to guide His children. Over and over in the book of Proverbs there is the promise of guidance for God's people. "I have taught (directed) thee in the way of wisdom; I have led thee in right paths." 4:11

"A man's heart deviseth his way: but the Lord directeth his steps." 16:9. The Psalmist said, "The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord: and he delighteth in His way." Psalm 37:23. It is the steps of a meek and good man that are ordered. If Christians are carnal and worldly they cannot experience God's guiding hand in the common affairs of life. God is awaiting opportunity to lead us in His way.

I. A Plea.

"Trust in the Lord with all thine heart." But just what does it mean to trust in the Lord? Trust is a very beautiful word which represents a very wonderful experience. Trust conveys the idea that one is conscious of his feebleness and so turns to the Lord to rest wholly upon a stronger One for support. We often make trusting a hard matter, but God makes it an exercise of great simplicity. He points to a child and tells us to have the same loving confidence in Him which the child reposes in his parents. In the heart of the little one there is no worrying, no fear, no looking ahead, no reasoning and no questioning. There is perfect resignation toward the father and mother.

We must keep in mind that the Lord is the object of our trust. Many times in the hour of difficulty and need we trust almost everyone else before we trust Him. On our coins we print, "In God we trust," but it is principally the dollar we trust. It is not hard to talk about trusting God when everything moves along like a song, but when everything seems to go "dead wrong" then comes the difficulty. Every one of us ought to memorize the middle verse of the Bible, because of what it teaches -- "It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in man." Psalm 118:8. The Christian life starts with trusting and it is to be continued in the same manner.

We are told here how to trust -- "with all thine heart." Half-heartedness finds no place in the purposes of God for His people. If we cannot trust Him fully, why trust Him at all? We can count on the faithfulness of God in the face of every condition. He has never failed us, and He never will. Projecting Himself into the daily affairs of His people, He says, "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee." Therefore, let us commit all our concerns to Him.

II. A Prohibition.

"Lean not unto thine own understanding." This is a prevalent evil. Men practice it in all walks of life. It may be observed in the business world, in social activities and in religious matters. Our text prohibits the continuation of this evil practice. We are admonished to distrust our own understanding. Nothing is more fickle, more frail, more deceptive and more wicked than our own understanding. Because we are so apt to repose our trust in other things, such as fortune or chance, the favor of the world, friends, our own abilities, etc., we are strictly forbidden to do so.

III. A Precept.

"In all thy ways acknowledge Him." A precept is a maxim or a rule of conduct. In this precept God calls for the supreme affection of our hearts, the complete homage of our intellects, and the unswerving loyalty of our lives. The little word "all" is the key which unlocks a great secret in connection with the matter of divine guidance. Our blessed Lord is to be acknowledged in all the details of life. Our acknowledgment is to be of Him in business affairs, in social life, in family life, and in religious life. We are to acknowledge Him as our Saviour. Every Christian should bear gladly His witness that he has found Jesus Christ precious to his own heart and that through Him he knows that he has the forgiveness of sins. He is worthy to be acknowledged as the Lord of life. We should gladly acclaim Him as coming King and point to His return as the solution to all the ills of the world.

If we want to enjoy the guidance of God for the days that lie ahead, then it is most essential that we meet the simple condition imposed upon us in the matter of acknowledgment. All of us who are saved can say a good word for the Lord Jesus if we want to. The Holy Spirit has promised to give us the grace needed for the task.

IV. A Promise.

"And He shall direct thy paths." In the Bible there are conditional and unconditional promises. This promise is conditional. He will direct our paths on the condition that we acknowledge Him. Our attitude toward the condition specified here will mark the difference between a rebellion against God's will and yieldedness to His will; joyous Christian experience and unhappiness in our Christian lives; victory and defeat; the guided life and the wandering life; the life of fellowship with Christ or one without His fellowship; the fruitful life and the barren life; the hopeful life and the hopeless life; walking in the light and walking in the shadow; and the peaceful life and the life of fretfulness.

Just how God will guide us I am unable to say. That is His business. The thing that interests me is the fact and not the method. Faith is not concerned with methods, but with His promises. God speaks to us through His Word and directs us by His Holy Spirit. God will neither deceive nor disappoint His people if they will trust in Him, lean not unto their own understanding, and in all their ways acknowledge Him. God forbid that we should go through any part of this new year without the sweet consciousness that we are going in the path of His appointment. There is not any satisfaction like living in accordance with His will.