

A DIVIDED HEART

"Teach me thy way, O Lord; I will walk in thy truth: unite my heart to fear thy name."
Psalm 86:11.

These words compose a short but comprehensive prayer of a heartbroken penitent who was yearning for God's forgiveness. Stricken with an overwhelming sense of need, due to his own sinfulness, the psalmist asked God to take note of his need and to have mercy upon his guilty soul. This earnest prayer is appropriate still.

The psalmist had not been ignorant of the divine precepts, or of God's requirements, but he had failed to render a complete obedience. He had surrendered to the momentary dictates of inclination and desire. There was a lack of unified purpose as well as a singleness of aim, but David had come to realize the discord and tragedy of a divided heart. He felt the weight of chance desires. He saw the shame and disaster into which they had plunged him. Longing to be delivered from the misery and futility of the divided heart, David prayed: "Teach me thy way, O Lord; I will walk in thy truth: unite my heart to fear thy name."

That was the prayer of a man walking in dark and uncertain ways, greatly perplexed and troubled, and hesitating as to which course he ought to take. His fellows could not help him. Intellectual light was not sufficient. Conscience was not a safe guide. He therefore sought direction from God, and prayed that the light from heaven might make his path clear. He prayed: "Teach me thy way, O Lord." We find this same prayer woven into various psalms. David did not have great confidence in himself. He was not wise in his own conceit. He was afraid of yielding to his own impulses. They had frequently played tricks with him and betrayed him into blunders and crimes. He knew that the human heart is disposed to take that which is easy and pleasant in preference to that which is difficult and right. He knew how easily we mistake an ambition for an inspiration; a prejudice for a conscientious conviction; and a torch-light of vanity and self-love for a star of duty. Desiring to be saved from this sort of thing He looked up to God and said: "Teach me thy way, O Lord."

David needed special light, because he did not have spiritual masters at whose feet he could sit. David's world was a dark one; saints were few; the lamp of truth burned dimly and smokily; the path of right was not clearly defined. David was often tossed between opposite opinions — puzzled, distracted, and at his wits' end. It is always much easier to follow than to lead. Our world has been made brilliant by the life, example, teachings, and influence of Christ and His followers.

We, too, are often perplexed. We are not always sure what God would have us to do, or even what Christ would do if He were placed in our circumstances. Therefore, we cannot offer this prayer too frequently or too earnestly. And when we offer it, we must be prepared to go in God's way when He reveals it to us.

"Teach me thy way, O Lord; I will walk in thy truth: unite my heart to fear thy name." That was the cry of a man who knew how unhappy, unhealthy, and unfruitful is the life that issues from a divided heart. Such a person is the man of double mind — partly for Christ, partly for self. He is the man of double will — partly surrendered, partly reserved. He is the man of double loyalty — partly to the kingdom of God, partly to the kingdom of this world. Such a man pleases neither himself nor his Lord. More than that, such a man is not likely to remain just where he is. Sooner or later, he will go all-out for God and all-out for the world. Such a man had better pray with the psalmist: "Unite my heart to fear thy name," even though this is not the trend of this age. The range of this modern preoccupation with splitting up things is astonishing. Almost every modern trend, and every fashionable habit, contributes to a frenzy of fragmentation. This tends to obscure life's essential unity, to dissolve social cohesiveness, to leave only bits and pieces of experience that we find desperately hard to fit back together into any

ordered pattern.

I. The Condition.

The fact that too commonly such a condition exists among us requires no labored proof. A divided heart is something from which practically all suffer. No heart among us is absolutely single, or devoted entirely to God. Many of us are living echoes of Paul's words: "For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do" (Romans 7:19).

What a pity that we have not come to the place to which Paul had come when he cried: "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from this body of death?" Acknowledging that this matter of a dual personality is a fact of experience, Paul referred to the "new man" and the "old man."

Frequently somebody says: "I know what I ought to do, but I am not sure that I want to do it." That reveals a divided heart, and therefore an impotent personality. Another says: "I want to do it, but I don't want to do it enough to get it done, not enough to say 'Yes' to God." A divided heart is the explanation.

The prayer, "unite my heart," is one which each of us needs to pray. It expresses perfectly our deepest and most urgent need. Behind David's prayer was the realization that his heart was not single, but double. It was the prayer of a man who was conscious of inward strife. The "flesh" and the "spirit," the "old man" and the "new man" were struggling in his soul.

In "The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde" there is a vivid and arresting discussion of this problem of a divided heart. The hero of the book, Dr. Jekyll, at the time he is introduced to the reader, has won name and position for himself. He is wealthy, learned, and distinguished. But the Dr. Jekyll whom the world saw -- benevolent, brilliant, and irrefragable -- was not all there was of him. There was another being within him -- evil, cruel, sensual, and always craving for ugly and debasing pleasures. In the course of his scientific researches Dr. Jekyll discovered a potion by which he was able to give expression to the evil personality within him in a separate identity. He became literally a changed man, shrunken in figure, deformed in build, and of a countenance so sinister as to fill all who looked upon it with aversion and disgust. And to this changed identity, expressive of the evil principle within him, he gave the name of Edward Hyde. For a time he rejoiced in his discovery, for when the craving for sensual pleasure was strong, all that he had to do was to change himself into Edward Hyde and he was immediately beyond the recognition of all his friends, and when he had had his fill of such debasing pleasure, all he had to do was to resort to the potion and he was at once transformed back again into Henry Jekyll the great scientist, to whose name no breath of slander had ever attached itself. At last evil became dominant, supreme, and irresistible. Edward Hyde, the beastly and the vile, mastered and destroyed Dr. Jekyll, and not all of the potions he could concoct could turn him into the genial, gracious gentleman of other days. In this story, the author, Robert Louis Stevenson, is true to the solemn facts of experience. It is at his peril that any man indulges the lusts and evil desires that seethe in his soul.

Look out upon the world, and everywhere there will be evidence of the divided heart. It is a world filled with people who have divided hearts. The evil principle that fights against the good and disputes its rule takes many a different guise. In the case of some it takes the form of the love of money. In the case of others it takes the form of love of pleasure. Even in cases where the pleasures indulged in are not in themselves sinful, they are allowed to absorb the soul unduly. The prevailing passion for amusement is sterilizing the soul for thousands and robbing God of His due.

The self that Christ is seeking to produce is a unified whole. It is not now a fully grown self, but it should be, and can be, a surrendered self. There is an ambitious self that just will not wait humbly on God for Him to reveal His plan for our lives, and to define success for us as He wants to define it. It clamors for human applause, craves this world's goods, and would justify the use of shady methods to gain a coveted goal. There are tight places in the Christian life where so many try to serve Christ and have their own way at the same time. All of us Christians must choose which pain we want to suffer: that of a crucified self, or that of a divided mind.

II. The Consequences.

1. Lack of perception.

It is good to pray: "Teach me thy way, O Lord," but it is better to pray, "Unite my heart, and bring this utter confusion to an end." Some people sing hymns of dedication at the top of their voices, but at the bottom of their hearts there are locked doors of reservation. Then they wonder why no more light comes to them on their daily problems. If your eye is focused on God, then your whole being will be flooded with His light. "Teach me thy way, O Lord" is simply another way of saying, make my sense of right and wrong clear and definite. Do not let me grope in moral confusion, but train me in a fine discernment of moral values. "Teach me thy way, O Lord" indicates that there is a message to be heard.

2. Lack of power.

A divided heart means an ineffective life. "Out of the heart are the issues of life." When the heart is divided or discordant, the life that issues from it cannot be strong, positive, vigorous, and aggressive.

David said: "I will walk in thy truth." Obedience is the natural response to grace. "Walk" as used in the Scriptures signifies our practical living. In their Christian professions some people really "walk" for Christ, and others just wobble. The outer wobble is always evidence of an inner weakness -- a divided heart. As James said: "A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways." God sees his double-mindedness, but the rest of us see the instability of his ways. Reuben is a Bible character of divided heart. He had good emotions and impulses, but a weak will. At one moment he was all on the side of good, and then the next moment he was in the midst of evil.

In World War I the Allies tried the method of multiple control in the handling of their armies, and it failed. Then they made Foch the generalissimo of all the forces, and they got somewhere. In World War II it was decided early that the invasion of Europe could be carried through successfully if, and only if, someone was placed in supreme command. That position was given to General Eisenhower. Had that sort of thing not been done the confusion would have been terrible, due to all the frictions, vacillations, hesitations, and indecisions that invariably grow out of multiple or divided control. If any organization is to succeed, it must have one person at the head.

This principle holds good on the battlefield of your life and mine. Who is to have our unmixed and undistracted loyalty -- Christ or Satan? Pontius Pilate, a man with a divided heart and under dual control, has gone down in history as the prince of vacillators and weaklings. Behind him trails the undying testimony that a divided heart lacks power -- power to do the will of God, and power to walk in the way of truth. The men who have done things, the men who have left their mark on the world, and the men who have counted for righteousness, have been men of united hearts and definite purposes. Paul said: "This one thing I do."

3. Lack of Praise.

Only after David had prayed, "Unite my heart," was he able to say: "I will praise thee, O Lord my God, with all my heart." A divided heart is always an unhappy one. If you can truthfully say: "Christ is all and in all to me," your days will "flow in endless praise." The hymn "My Jesus, As Thou Wilt" was written by a German minister and pastor, Schmolke, who composed it as an offering of holy adoration in the midst of the most desolate circumstances. A fire had swept over most of his parish, destroyed his church and the homes of nearly all his people. A little later death took away both his wife and his daughter. Then paralysis struck him and he was laid upon a bed of immovable quiet. In this condition his eyesight began to fail him. Yet there, with his parish devoured by flames, blindness creeping into his eyes, bereft of wife and daughter, held fast to a bed of pain, he wrote:

"My Jesus, as Thou wilt,
Oh, let Thy will be mine;
Into Thy hand of love
My all I new resign.
Through sorrow or through joy,
Conduct me as Thine own,
And help me still to say,
My Lord, Thy will be done.

"My Jesus, as Thou wilt,
Though seen through many a tear,
Let not my star of hope
Grow dim or disappear.
Since Thou so oft hast wept
And sorrowed all alone,
If I must weep with Thee,
My Lord, Thy will be done.

"My Jesus, as Thou wilt,
All shall be well with me;
Each changing future scene
I gladly trust to Thee.
Straight to my home above,
I travel calmly on;
And say in life and death,
My Lord, Thy will be done."

Throughout history every great and noble life has had a unified purpose. No voice could allure, no suffering could frighten, and no bribe could tempt such people. Their purposes clothed them with a courage that was dauntless. They saw what needed to be done and they did it. To achieve anything worthwhile a worthy purpose must control us. A half-hearted man is a failure anywhere and everywhere. The secret of success is that men put their whole beings -- heart, soul, mind, and strength -- into their work, and God enables them to succeed.

A divided heart is unfair to God. He will not share the dominion. He is intolerant of a rival. He demands service with every part of the nature. It is not the affections and emotions alone that He wants. He wants to be served with all the heart, the soul, the mind, and the strength.

III. The Cure.

Do you want the strife within your soul to be ended? Do you really long for release from this confusion of mixed motives, and double purposes and crossed-up desires? Do you

desire a unified command over the empire of your personality? If so, there are certain necessary steps to be taken.

1. Confess your condition.

It has been said that "The most courageous hour in any man's life is the hour in which he honestly faces himself." The clash has been there, deep within your soul, so admit it frankly and humbly. Your eye has not been single. You have looked God's way, but there has always been a side-glance toward yourself also. You have consented to go along with God's will when it has not been too inconvenient. At other times you have gone your own way, so confess it.

2. Call on the Lord.

That is exactly what the psalmist did. "Unite my heart to fear thy name" is a prayer. The Hebrew word which is translated "unite" means to "make one." Its root is a word which means one, yet never does it mean one alone, but always a composite unit. In other words it is a blending, a coming together, a fusion.

The only real blending of which the soul is capable is the blending with God. We were made for harmony and communion with Him. The Lord Jesus came and became our crucified Saviour in order that He might restore us to harmony with God. We should turn to the Lord and say, "Master, Thou art the only One to Whom I can give myself without reserve, and find thereby the release, the peace, the harmony and the victory for which I long."

3. Commit yourself to the Lord.

Unreservedly, yield your all to Christ. Just turn your case over completely to Him and He will supply your needs. He will see to it that sufficient resources are available when your need arises.