

THINKING AND TURNING

"I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy testimonies." Psalm 119:59.

The Psalmist is here referring to a certain yesterday in his life when he came into possession of that transforming experience which is described in the New Testament as a passing out of death into life. As he harks back to this radiant yesterday there is a warm glow in his heart, and there is a joy exuding from his spirit that has grown deeper and sweeter with the passing of the years. On that yesterday he thought and turned, and came into the possession of a great peace and power.

Human experience is an abidingly interesting something. We delight to hear of the struggles, the failures, and the triumphs of people. But of all human experiences there is none quite so gripping as the experience of a soul with God.

The Psalmist had made life's supreme discovery. How did he come to make it? How did he find his way to spiritual certainty? What road did he travel? What marked the turning point in his life? What was it that brought him to God? It was no momentary impulse of remorse consequent on some frightful sin; no terror caused by some sudden sense of the nearness of death; no stress of some affliction; no vision of judgment. What, then, started him on the quest for truth and the longing for salvation and godliness? When we ask the Psalmist what marked the turning point in his life, he tells us plainly that it was the outcome of his thinking.

The word "conversion" represents a genuine experience. It stands for a process that actually takes place in human hearts. When a man talks about his own life, about the things that have happened to him, about his various experiences, he does not use the stilted phraseology of the schools, but he uses the speech of every day. Such simplicity is very expressive and impressive. The Psalmist spoke very plainly, and said: "I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy testimonies." Technically we describe this as conversion, but how arresting, impressive, and suggestive to have that great experience spoken of in this simple way; how real and vital it appears to be when the process is unfolded and set forth in terms of actual experience, a page torn from the man's religious diary!

Two things will engage our attention as we study this text:

I. Right Thinking.

The Psalmist said, "I thought on my ways." He ceased allowing others to think for him, and began to think for himself. He not only thought for himself, but he thought about himself. The ability to think is man's royal prerogative. It is one of the evidences that he was created in the image of God and for companionship with Him. All right conduct has its source in right thinking. All wrong conduct is born of wrong thinking. It is a good day in the life of any person when he is brought to do some straight thinking.

Many of life's tragedies are not the results of viciousness or cruelty, but of sheer thoughtlessness. A large number of the present-day accidents are due to sheer carelessness. They are the result of a refusal to think. Many fine opportunities are thrown away because people refuse to think. Many trifle with their educational opportunities, fail to look ahead, and refuse to prepare for a definite task. How different their future would be had they been willing to think!

Our thoughtlessness works havoc in human relationships, but it is even more destructive in the spiritual realm. It is so easy to forget God. For so many, the fact of God is as the shadow of a dream.

The Psalmist said that he thought about his ways. It is easy enough for anybody to think about the ways of others. It is much more difficult to think upon our own ways, and especially when they are not what they ought to be. Frequently we are ready to see the mote in the eye of another and remain totally oblivious to the beam in our own eye.

Unfortunately thought is too seldom exercised in regard to divine things. One of the charges which God brought against His people long ago was their lack of thought concerning His claims and their duties. Speaking through His prophet, Isaiah, God said: "The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib: but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider" (Isaiah 1:3). In the same chapter He said: "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool" (1:18). God submits His claims to thoughtful people.

What led the Psalmist to think on his ways? He did not tell us, so we cannot say for certain.

1. It may have been a sense of the futility of life as he was living it.

No doubt he found himself in the grip of unsatisfied hungers. He was tortured by thirsts that the fountains of this earth had not been able to slake. In all probability he was driven to thinking by the aching void which this world could not fill.

2. It is possible that some terrible calamity had burst upon him and left his life in ruins.

Perhaps the treasures to which he had clung were ruthlessly wrung from his hands. Maybe the staff upon which he had leaned was knocked from under him. He wondered if there was not a hand somewhere that could help him. It may be that he was made thoughtful by having his heart broken.

3. Perhaps he had come in contact with a life of such rare spiritual beauty that it made his own life seem paltry and cheap.

Likely the day before the one on which he began to think on his ways he considered himself as being as good or better than the average. Then, when he came face to face with this person whose life was one of beauty, he realized that it was far superior to his life, and that it possessed a peace to which he was a stranger. As he thought about it, he was driven to the conclusion that God was back of this radiant life.

II. Right Turning.

Thinking on his ways caused the Psalmist to make the right turn. He said: "I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy testimonies." When a man begins to think about his ways, there are two or three channels in which the Holy Spirit turns the current of his thinking. For example, "Who am I?" "Where am I?" "Where am I going?" These are the thoughts that lie at the root of all genuine thinking.

Note how complete this turn was. The Psalmist said: "I turned my feet unto thy testimonies." A man may turn his eyes without moving his body. He may turn his head, and turn but little. He may turn his hand without much movement of the body. But, when he turns his feet, he turns himself completely. After thinking on his ways, the Psalmist was forced to the conclusion that he was traveling in the wrong direction. He was forced to say to himself: "Life is not counting for me as it ought to count. I am not realizing the possibilities that I ought to realize. I am not traveling in the direction I ought to travel."

What was the outcome of his thinking? Realizing that he was the subject of God's displeasure, he abandoned his evil ways, changed his course, and traveled in the opposite direction. This turning is what the Bible calls repentance. Exercising his personal freedom, and employing his own will, he promptly and immediately made "a right about face," and pursued a completely new course. When any of us listen aright to the divine voice, we promptly turn our feet unto His testimonies.

We frequently neglect to think on our ways. Sometimes this is due to the lack of courage. At other times it is due to preoccupation with things of lesser importance. At still other times it is due to the fact that the task is unpleasant because it makes us so dissatisfied. Thinking on our ways and turning unto the Lord should be done by all of us. Think on your ways with a stern censorship, a bitter penitence, and a strong resolution.