

"THE GUIDING EYE"

"I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye." Psalm 32:8.

One of the inescapable responsibilities of life is the necessity of making decisions. From the child who must choose between two ways of spending a holiday to the statesman who must decide a nation's policies, every human being is compelled to make decisions.

At times we travel a plain road. Then we come to a parting of the ways. We cannot see very far ahead. Often we are perplexed as to what we should do.

Though the necessity of making decisions is sometimes a painful experience, we should recognize it as one of the essential dignities of human life. It is also one of the major disciplines of life. Through the necessity of making difficult decisions we grow in wisdom and in strength of character.

One of the precious advantages of the Christian life is that a child of God does not have to make choices without help. God is always there. And He has promised to guide those who trust Him.

There is hardly any promise more constantly reiterated in the Bible or more strikingly illustrated. From his father's house and the land of his kindred Abram "went out, not knowing whither he went," but with the assurance that God was guiding him. The result fully justified his faith. The story of Joseph is a thrilling account of divine guidance through strange and perplexing experiences. When Moses at the burning bush shrank from the task to which God called him, he was persuaded to undertake the great adventure by the assurance that God would be with him and direct him. Before the host of Israel in the wilderness went a pillar of cloud by day, and by night a pillar of fire. So it is all through the Bible. When Christ Jesus left His disciples with the command that they go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature, they were appalled at the perplexing difficulties that confronted them. How should they begin? Where should they go? What methods should they employ? The book of Acts is the wonderful story of how God guided them step by step in the great undertaking.

I. The Promise.

There is something beautiful and tender in the thought of God offering to be the guide of His children. We should remind ourselves of His promises in this connection. The guidance promised to and provided for the children of Israel in their wilderness journeyings was unmistakable; they had the pillar of fire by night and the cloud by day. The promise of God to the Psalmist was just as distinct: "I will guide thee with mine eye." The promise of guidance is for us just as it was for men of faith who lived long ago. God is as truly present now as then. He is quite as willing and as able to direct our steps as He was to guide those who lived before us.

Guidance is not something unusual, exclusive to a privileged minority of Christians. It is one of the "all things" that make up the inheritance of those who belong to Christ. If we love Him, we should expect His guidance. The Christian life is a direct, personal relationship with God. As I live in the enjoyment of this relationship I shall take pleasure in speaking to Him, and I shall also listen while He speaks to me. Guidance is therefore a daily, regular experience.

II. The Privilege.

This guidance is very full in its nature. "I will instruct thee," that is, I will make thee intelligent. "I will teach thee in the way which thou shalt go," that is, I will point out thy way with the finger. That is a picture of God dealing with a soul that is perplexed or troubled. God says, "I will make thee intelligent, and then

with My finger I will point out the way." It is as though God said to the soul that is perplexed and in difficulty about the way, "I will give thee the capacity for understanding Me, and having done that, I will show thee the right way." "I will guide thee with mine eye." Herein is fellowship as well as instruction; for the guide goes with the traveller, and thus will God, in the process of our instruction, give us fellowship with Himself. Blessed are they who follow Him; they have the privilege of holy walk and heavenly company. We are not only to be told the way, and led in it, but to be accompanied in it by our Teacher and Friend.

Consider the nature of divine guidance. It is very slender guidance. "I will guide thee with mine eye." A glance of the eye is sufficient for the servant, who is keenly watching his master. In like manner, the Christian soul in fellowship and loving intimacy with God will have intimations of His will, which can be felt rather than explained and proved.

God's guidance is like a silk thread, which may be broken by the recalcitrant. It bears no comparison with the rope by which some captive might be dragged along a road he was unwilling to take. There is no compulsion in God's guidance. It is offered to those who seek it and are willing to follow the way made known. God's children, in their freedom, can ask and receive indications of God's will and purpose for them, but they will be left free to follow or turn aside. In this freedom is the sweetness of their fellowship and the moral worth of their obedience. Divine guidance must be desired, asked for and accepted.

There is a negative aspect of God's guidance. There is a guidance of restraint. There is a voice which says, "This is not the way." In the old story of the Exodus of the children of Israel from Egypt we read, "God led them not through the way of the land of the Philistines, though that was near." They were unprepared to hew their way through a country where they would be strongly opposed. So it may be with us. God leads us in a safe way for us. Self-will leads many into dangers which would have been escaped had they sought guidance of God at a sufficiently early stage.

The easy and attractive way will not always be the right way for any of us. Two friends were riding bicycles one night. One had traversed the road many times, but to the other the way was not known. Presently the one who knew the road said, "We are on the wrong road. This road is too easy. We are going down-hill, and the right road out of the town we have just passed through is up hill. We must turn back." If the road is too easy for any Christian, it is time for him to ask whether he is on the right road. The wrong road never yet led to the right place.

There is also a positive aspect to God's guidance. Christ Jesus said, "To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into this world." What a glorious confidence that gave Him! We, too, may have this assurance of divine selection, direction and control. Christian biography gives many examples of devoted servants of God who have had an unwavering assurance that all their times were in God's hands. Therefore, their path of life and service had been joyfully acceptable to them as having been planned by God. What peace in storm, what rest in trial, what courage in adversity, must be the portion of those who know divine guidance in that assured way!

Andrew Fuller declared that the text, "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not to thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge Him and He shall direct thy paths," had been to him the great stand-by of his life. Never did he enter upon any new departure in private life or public service without returning to that great text for prolonged meditation and prayer. Then things cleared up in his mind, he saw his way, and with the strong courage that marked the man, he went forward unhesitatingly. This is an example we must all follow if we would know peace of mind and strength of heart. When God's Word is the lamp of our feet and the light of our path we shall walk safely.

Such guidance we should all seek. If it be the path of truth that is not clear, there is a promise for us, "He shall guide you into all truth." If it be the path of life that has not yet been disclosed to us, there is a prayer of confidence that we can offer: "Thou wilt show me the path of life." Even if our folly has led us into some wrong path we may cry for the Guide to show us the way back to safety.

There must be the willing acceptance of divine guidance. It is a very happy thing when we are led to look to God for guidance in our early days. If we early learn the holy habit of inquiring of the Lord concerning our way, we shall escape many dangers and avoid many sorrows. God usually calls early those whom He designs for important service in His kingdom.

Guiding with the eye is not something that is unfamiliar to us. A good teacher frequently keeps order with his eye. He is sitting at his desk, looking at some papers, and the class is taking full advantage of his pre-occupation. There is a murmur of talk, and all manner of restless movement, until suddenly he looks up. His eye flashes over the class, and immediately there is silence and stillness again. I have had teachers like that.

At home we have noticed the controlling power of the eye. I have seen an obstinate child, who would not do what he was told, but his mother just looked at him. I cannot tell you what there was about that look, but the rebellion suddenly vanished, and he went straight and did what he was told.

Unless we are able to see God's eye, we cannot be guided correctly by it. What hinders our doing so? Our sins. "Mine iniquities have taken hold upon me, so that I am not able to look up." Psalm 60:12. Our eyes, our minds and our hearts should be fixed on God. Human life is a most hazardous journey. It lies through difficult regions. Youth travels in slippery places. Maturity is beset with snares. Age has its peculiar dangers. Our steps are dogged by enemies and surrounded with perils. This being so, our text is rich with encouragement and consolation. "I will guide thee with mine eye."

God guides us with the eye of foreknowledge, constant watchfulness and loving sympathy. He never loses sight of any one. No individual is missed in the crowd. No sin, no trouble and no need can escape His eye. His watchfulness is unceasing. Though He has seen failure so many times when He has looked down upon His own, the riches of His long-suffering are not exhausted.

III. The Perception.

God-guided men are always alert to intimations of God's will for them. Take Paul, for example. "We were forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia." Note that no reason was assigned. "We assayed to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit suffered us not." All his plans were laid aside at the divine bidding. But soon the reason appeared. "There stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, 'Come over into Macedonia and help us.'" He obeyed the call, and the result was that the gospel came to Europe and the West, instead of being confined to Asia.

How God's guidance may be perceived is an important question, and only a general answer can here be given. He who loves us has many ways of directing our steps.

1. He gives us guidance through His Word.

God has revealed His ways and purposes in the Bible. To know the Bible and cherish its teachings is to acquire a sense of direction in the affairs of life that will save us from many a wrong decision and often make the right way plain. Nothing that cuts across the plain teachings of the scriptures can be from God, for the Spirit does not speak with two voices.

2. He gives us guidance through His providences.
His hand is on things, and He brings about the opening of doors, and the closing of doors. We must watch the hand of God in all events.
3. He gives us guidance through the Holy Spirit.
The Holy Spirit speaks to our souls, and especially in the moments when we are very near to God in love and surrendered will. As we bring our case to Him, and abide in His presence waiting for Him to speak, we shall receive an impulse towards or against what we have brought before Him.

It is said that the way into the harbor at Holyhead, England, is indicated by three lights. As the ship approaches in the night, the man at the wheel must so steer the vessel that the three lights come into line and appear to the eye as one. When this is done the harbor entrance is straight ahead. So it is with the guiding lights of the Word of God, the Providences of God and the Spirit of God. When in doubt, we should ask, "What does the Word say?" Is there any prohibition there? "What do the Providences of God say?" Is there a closing door, and an opening door and a call? "What does the Spirit of God say?" Is there an inclination of the soul, an attraction not born of self-interest or self-pleasing? It is not by one light but by three that our path is made sure. When the three come into line we may go forward without fear.

To hear His guiding voice and clearly see the way in which we should go, as He would have us, we must be willing to wait upon the Lord. Much of our anxiety is due to impatience. We want to cross bridges before we get to them. We are worrying about tomorrow when we should be putting our whole hearts into the duties of today. Then, of course, we must be willing to follow the light He gives us. We can hardly expect Him to direct our steps so long as we are seeking our way rather than His. This surrender to God is the very core of faith, and it is also a condition not only of guidance but of victory and joy and power. The Lord of our lives often reveals the way to us only a step at a time. Obediently to take the next step is to be in a position to see further ahead. In such a case the trusting heart learns to say, "I do not ask to see the distant scene--one step enough for me." God expects us to trust Him.