

SECRETS OF GUIDANCE

(W.J. Pethybridge, Balance of Truth, 1966, May)

An amazing fact is that while the Bible is full of promises of the way in which the Lord will guide His people, yet guidance seems one of the most puzzling topics to many professing Christians. One reason for this may be that most of us have grown used to a sub-scriptural level of Christian experience. A great deal of so-called "doctrine" is basically an attempt to explain away the glorious promises of God, and try to make them fit in with our own meager experience of Him.

Just as we need to make personal commitment to accept the Lord Jesus as our own personal Saviour, so we need to make a deeper commitment to accept Him as our own personal Guide.

When Jesus called the disciples to follow Him, "they arose, left all, and followed him" (Luke 5:11, 18). And the Lord Himself said: "Whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:33). May be the trouble with many of us is that we really do not want to follow Christ as His disciples, but we merely desire good advice from Him when we reach perplexing spots on life's highway.

Foolish Tourist

Try to imagine a tourist engaging a guide to conduct him through some dangerous and intricate mountain pass. "Now listen," he instructs his guide, "I don't want you interfering with my free will at every corner of the road. I want to be free to use my own judgment most of the time and go the way that I think is best and easiest. But when we come to a dangerous place, I will call on you for help."

Would a guide take such a one as his charge? Suppose he did. After many self-satisfied and foolish choosing of his own path, the tourist at last finds himself facing an impassable barrier and asks, "Which way do we go from here?"

"Oh, the guide replies, "You will have to go back five miles to the place where you foolishly took the wrong turn. There is no way through from here!"

Or the tourist could blithely slither down some steep slope into a pleasant valley with no outlet, and find it impossible to climb back up the slope by which he descended, because there is no way to return!

The only way we can successfully know guidance is to accept the promise "The Lord shall guide thee **continually**" (Isa. 58: 11). Unless we are willing to put everything into His nail-pierced hands, and are willing to follow every commandment of the Word and every impression of His Spirit, we have no right to expect Him to take us on as His disciples and lead us through the deceitful and dangerous pathway from time to eternity. "Full surrender" means full surrender to the guidance of the Holy Spirit all the time.

Much of our guidance should of course come to us through the Bible. Here we get so many plain commands, and clear principles of life, that we shall not need any special inner guidance when our directions are already written for us. Also we shall strongly suspect anything that claims to be the guidance of the Holy Spirit if it conflicts with the Word of God. Sometimes too, the Lord will impress strongly upon us some text from His Word, which so fully answers the problem before us that we see this text as His voice speaking to us.

How does the Holy Spirit speak?

Guidance usually comes to us through the sense of "I ought" or "I ought not" to do so and so. In other words, the life of guidance includes doing everything I ought to do and refraining from everything I ought not.

This is so simple and basic, and yet most of us have reconciled ourselves to the idea that we shall always be doing what we ought not, and failing to do what we ought. But a moment's thought will show us how ridiculous is this idea. If we are not willing to follow our inner Guide in the little things, how can we expect Him to instruct us in the big things? It is when we are in the place reached by obedience in little things that we receive the guidance for the big things.

If we consistently choke off the voice of the voice of the Holy Spirit when He speaks about little things, we will spoil the fine edge of our sensitiveness to His voice and become spiritually deaf.

All this calls for a deeper repentance in our life. So often we take repentance to mean that we cease from gross sins. But the root of repentance is that I stop doing those things that I like. Many of us have never truly repented at all. We want

to get to heaven when we die, but we want to live all our time on earth pleasing ourselves in regard to gross sins, we may have refrained from them because of our pride (disguised as "self-respect"), instead of from love for God. So many who are asking for the secret of guidance, may have to begin by true repentance and the new birth.

Right and Wrong Impressions

Many ask, "How can I know which impressions come to me from the Holy Spirit and which from the devil or some deceiving spirit?" This has to be learned by experience.

"Jesus is our Shepherd,
Well we know His voice; How its gentlest whisper
Makes our hearts rejoice."

This is part of the secret. When the Lord speaks, there is joy in hearing His voice. Though we may be fearful of the path He sets before us, yet we recognize the love in the one directing. Often, too, we find He is positive in His directions: "This is the way, walk ye in it." But the devil's impressions are hard, demanding, fear-inspiring, and are often merely negative: "Thou shalt not surely- die."

Then again, Satan often appeals to our own pride, ambition, covetousness: "If you do this you will be recognized, as a success. You will be popular; you will gain riches." But the Lord Jesus calls us to go the way of the cross, the way of self-sacrifice, personal loss, suffering, and rejection "outside the camp" for His sake.

One of the modern heresies that seem unrecognized even in the midst of the evangelical church is to ignore the fact that the Lord has chosen the way of the cross, not only for Himself, but for His people too. "Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him?" (Jas. 2:5).

A Good Guide

A good guide can keep his followers from going wrong. For fear of making a mistake in guidance, many make the biggest mistake of all by shuffling along, following others and not the Lord who alone can lead them right.

A Good Plan

Should you feel the Lord is impressing on you to follow a certain course, take some tentative steps in that direction, but do not commit yourself at the start. As you go step by step; the way shall open up before you. But if at some point you feel a strong check in your spirit, you will recognize this as a danger signal and stop for more guidance from Him.

It is often much better to take some exploratory step forward after prayer, than to sit still and do nothing. A ship in motion can be guided into the right direction, but a stationary ship cannot be guided at all.

If we sincerely want God's precious will for our life, we may safely trust Him to guide us. He will hedge up our way and keep us from going disastrously astray. He will even bless our mistakes and make them a blessing to others. But we must be honest and sincere, seeking only His glory, and not trying to prove that we have been right or that we have the secret of infallible guidance. If we take such a proud attitude He will graciously humble us.

God's Motives in Guidance

Our Father has more than one motive in guiding us. First, He wants us to do His will on earth as it is done in heaven. Second, He wants to make us a channel of His divine blessing to others. Third, He wants to transform us into the image of His Son. This will mean, chastening and discipline. Fourth; He wants to make us partakers of His holiness. Fifth, He wants to prove to us that He is an all-sufficient Source of supply, wisdom, and grace.

"Only let us follow
whither He doth lead,
Through the thirsty desert,
Or the dewy mead."

—From the Message of the Cross