

The Conditions of Guidance.

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It is remarkable that in the gospel of John, which presents Christ to us as the eternal Son, we see Him everywhere, and constantly, taking the place of the Servant. In accordance with this position we find Him asserting three things; first, that He did not come of Himself, but that He was sent by the Father; secondly, that He did not speak His own words; and, thirdly, that He did not do His own works. (See John 5: 19, 36, 43; John 6: 38-40; John 7: 16, 28; John 8: 28, 29; John 9: 4; John 10: 36-38; John 14: 10, etc.) In a word, He came, as He tells us, not to do His own will, but the will of Him that sent Him. We call attention to this only for the purpose of showing that it was the maintenance of this subject and dependent position, which secured for Him at all times the perfect knowledge of His Father's will. This principle indeed is affirmed by His own words: "*The Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He seeth the Father do: for what things soever He doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise. For the Father loveth the Son, and sheweth Him all things that Himself doeth.*" (John 5: 19, 20.) A careful consideration of the several points involved in this statement will furnish us with instruction as to the conditions of guidance for ourselves in all circumstances, and in whatever perplexities.

The first thing is that He could do nothing of (or rather *from*) Himself — that is, in the lowly place which He voluntarily assumed. His whole mission being to accomplish the will of Another, He could not, while engaged in it, originate a single action. His will was perfect as He Himself was perfect, and yet He never allowed His will to govern Him in what He did. His meat was to do the Father's will, and on this very account He could do nothing of Himself.

And in this respect He is our perfect example. Unlike Him, our wills are utterly evil; and if they come into activity for one single moment, sin is the result. We cannot will that which is good. But God in His grace has associated us with the death of Christ, and as a consequence we ourselves, and therefore our wills as well as our sins, are gone in the cross. We have been crucified with Christ, and now it is not we who live, but Christ that liveth in us. This is the blessed place in which God has put us, and accordingly our true position before Him is that of having no will. We start with this, and hence should always take the ground of being unable to do anything of (or *from*) ourselves. Our own promptings, inclinations, suggestions, must be habitually refused, always bearing about in the body the dying of Jesus; for if Christ is in us the body is dead because of sin. It would save us from many a snare, and many a mistake, and, we may add, many a sin, to maintain this place — this denying ourselves, and this taking up the cross in order to follow our Lord. It is, in a word, the fundamental condition for any knowledge of the mind and will of God. Hence it may be truly said, that when our own wills are in action it is impossible to ascertain the Lord's mind. (See John 7: 17.)

The second point is, that our Lord could only do what He saw the Father do; "for what things soever He doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise." This involved two things. First, His eye was always on the Father, and then there was a constant response to everything the Father

was doing. If it may be so said, the Lord was ever on the watch for the slightest indication of His Father's will, and His feet were swift to run in the way of His commandments. He was therefore, in all that He did, the perfect expression of the Father's mind; and thus it was that His every act was a revelation, and consequently a presentation, of the Father to those around. (See John 14: 7-11.) This also may be applied to ourselves. As He was in relation to the Father we are in relation to Himself. (John 17: 18.) To know therefore what to do at any given juncture, it is essential that we should have the "single eye." When Gideon was about to attack the Midianites, he said to his followers, "Look on me, and do likewise: and, behold, when I come to the outside of the camp, it shall be that, as I do, so shall ye do." (Judges 7: 17.) So it must be now with the Christian; he must look on Christ that he may do what he sees Him doing. As already said, his eye must be single; i.e. his eye must be on Christ alone, seeing nothing but Christ, desiring nothing but His mind and His glory. If the eye be diverted from Christ to self, to saints, to relatives, or to any other object for a single moment, it ceases to be single, and perplexity will ensue. But if the eye be single the whole body will be full of light; the mind of Christ will be known and enjoyed; the light of His own presence and counsel will fill the soul, and even the body will become a vessel of light.

But then, as with our blessed Lord, there must be the doing as well as the knowledge of the Father's will: "What things soever the Father doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise." The activity of the Father found a full and perfect response in that of the Son. With us, alas! it is often far otherwise. Our light, our knowledge, far exceeds our answer to it, and thus the very truth we delight to hold searches and humbles us in the dust before God. Without, however, pursuing this aspect now, we desire rather to press that our responsibility in any given circumstances, the moment we know His mind, is to follow the Lord. Our danger is often in going before Him; but if our eye is steadfastly fixed on Him to discern what He is doing, then the whole of our responsibility lies in following in His steps. As with the Israelites in the wilderness, who remained in their camp when the cloud rested, and commenced their journey when it moved forward, so with ourselves. If the Lord wait we must also wait, and if He advance we must likewise advance, so that, whether in inaction or action, whether in forbearance or in conflict, we may be simply the reflex of His own mind. Today it may be, according to His will, that we should rest or rather endure; but tomorrow that same will might direct us to activity. Bearing this in mind, our only exercise will lie in detecting the Lord's path, and in seeking grace and strength to be found walking it. "If any man serve Me, let him follow Me." (John 12: 26.)

There is a third thing. The Lord adds, "For the Father loveth the Son, and sheweth Him all things that Himself doeth." This addition is of the greatest importance. It might have been felt, from what has been already said, that the whole onus of discerning the Lord's mind had been thrown upon the believer himself. In a sense this is true; but this truth is now supplemented by another. And it is this, That the Son is the object of the Father's heart, and that consequently the Father delights to communicate His mind to Him. This is also true of the believer in relation to Christ. "As the Father hath loved Me, so have I loved you." And in this very connection He says to His disciples, "Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what His lord doeth: but I have called you friends: for all things that I have heard of My Father I have made known unto you." (John 15: 15.) If therefore the Father found His joy in unfolding His mind to the Son, the Son had likewise His delight in imparting what He received to His own. And this is as true now as it was then; for "when He, the Spirit of truth, is come, He will guide you into all

truth: for He will not speak of (or *from*) Himself; but whatsoever He shall hear, that shall He speak: and He will shew you things to come. He shall glorify Me: for He shall receive of Mine, and shall shew it unto you." (John 16: 13, 14.) To acquire the knowledge therefore of the Lord's mind for us is not an effort on our parts, but it is the result of being in a position to receive the communications, which He both desires and delights to make to His people.

This leads to another important observation. The Lord Himself was always in a position to hear and understand the Father's communication; but we, alas! are too often either deaf to His voice, or slow to apprehend it when heard. Everything depends therefore upon our state of soul; that is, upon our being in a condition to hear and to receive what the Lord may communicate. Two illustrations of this may be cited from the Scriptures. When the Lord was about to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah, He said, "Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do; seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him," etc. (Genesis 18: 17-19.) This is a striking instance of the truth we have named, and the whole chapter testifies also that the Lord's secrets — secrets of manifestation as well as of instruction — are only confided to those who fear Him — to those who are walking apart from the world in communion with Himself. Lot was left, until the very eve of the visitation of the judgment, in utter ignorance of Sodom's coming doom. It was Abraham, who maintained the walk of faith and the pilgrim character, who was admitted into the intimacies of the Lord's purposes and ways. The second illustration, while teaching the same truth, is of another kind. The Lord was seated with His disciples on the passover night, and while with them "He was troubled in spirit, and testified, and said, Verily, verily, I say unto you, that one of you shall betray Me." The disciples were concerned, as they looked one upon another, to know of whom He spake. And it is very noteworthy that Simon Peter, who was seldom lacking in forward energy, does not on this occasion venture to put the question which they all desired to ask. No; he was not near enough to his Lord, and he instinctively felt it, and hence he beckoned to the disciple whom Jesus loved, and who was leaning on Jesus' bosom, to do so for them. This disciple — John, without doubt — immediately responded, and enquires, "Lord, who is it?" And the Spirit of God, as if to call attention to the fact that no other but he could put the question, repeats that this disciple was "lying on Jesus' breast." From this scene, in addition to the teaching gleaned from the case of Abraham, we learn, not only that the Lord delights to impart His secrets to those who are in a condition to receive them, but also that those who occupy a place of special nearness can ask the Lord to reveal to them His mind — a thing impossible to do if at a distance from Him. It is really this principle which the Lord Himself affirms when He says, "He that hath My commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth Me: and he that loveth Me shall be loved of My Father, and I will love him, and will manifest Myself to him." (John 14: 21; compare Col. 1: 9.)

It will follow therefore that the knowledge of God's mind in any difficulties will never be wanting if; like John, we are living in the habitual enjoyment of the Lord's presence and love, if we know what it is, amid all the confusion and darkness of this evil day, and with the power of Satan present in the midst of the Lord's people, to repose upon that unwearied heart - a heart that remains ever the same, spite of the evil and declension within and around. Absorbed in His love we shall hear His faintest whisper, and His path will be plain before our face. On the other hand, if we are unspiritual or worldly, acting from our own desires or predilections, discernment of the Lord's way, what He is doing, will be impossible. It is quite true that in His tender mercy He may

drive us, even when in such a state, by circumstances, control us with the bit and bridle, but that is a far different thing from discerning what "He Himself doeth." In the former case we shall be walking in communion with Himself; in the latter sorrows and chastenings, if not stumblings and falls, may be His chosen instrumentalities to instruct us in the way we should go.

May we learn ever more fully the meaning of His own words, "If ye abide in Me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you!" E.D.