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Description

PSALM 32: 8, 9

There are three special characters of blessing mentioned in the Psalms.

First, that which we get at the very opening of them: "Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of Jehovah; and in his law doth he meditate day and night. And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water," etc.; Ps. 1. It is here a contrast between the ungodly and Christ, the righteous Man.

In Psalm 119 we go a little farther. This psalm speaks of having wandered, and of being restored (v. 67, 71, 176). It is here, "Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of Jehovah." It speaks of one who has the word, delights in it, looks to it, and seeks to be guided by it; still it is not so absolute.

In the psalm before us (Ps. 32), we get the blessedness of, and God's dealings with, the sinner whose transgressions are removed. "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered [not who has not transgressed, who has not sinned]. Blessed is the man unto whom Jehovah imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile" (that is, the restored soul).

It is important to notice the work of the Spirit of God, in the process through which the soul is going here (as it says, "Thy hand was heavy upon me"), God's dealings with the soul that does not submit itself entirely in bringing it down into full subjection and confession. "When I kept silence my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long. For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me: my moisture is turned into the drought of summer. I acknowledge my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto Jehovah; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin," v. 2-5. This is always true, if the Lord's hand is upon a man, until he recognises the evil before God; and then there is forgiveness of the iniquity. It is very important that we should distinguish the government of God towards our souls in forgiveness. Until there is confession of sin, and not merely of a sin, there is no forgiveness. We find David, in Psalm 51, when he was confessing his sin, saying, "Behold I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me," etc., not merely, I have done this particular evil; that he does (v. 1-4); but he recognises the root and principle of sin. When our hearts are brought to recognise God's hand, it is not merely, then, a question of what particular sin, or of what particular iniquity may need forgiveness; God has brought down the soul, through the working of His Spirit on it, to detect the principle of sin, and so there is confession of that, and not merely of a particular sin. There is then positive restoration of soul.

Now this is a much deeper thing in its practical consequences, and the Lord's dealings thereon, than we are apt to suppose. Freed from the bondage of things which hinder its intercourse with God, the soul learns to lean upon God, instead of upon those things which, so to speak, had taken the place of God. "For this shall everyone that is godly pray unto thee in a time when thou mayest be found: surely in the floods of great waters they shall not come nigh unto him. Thou art my hiding place; thou shalt preserve me from trouble; thou shalt compass me about with songs of deliverance," v. 6,7. There is its confidence.

And then follows what, more especially, is the object of this paper - "I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye. Be ye not as the horse, or as the mule, which have no understanding: whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle lest they come near unto thee," v. 8,9.

Now we are often like the horse, or the mule, everyone of us-and this, because our souls have not been ploughed up. When there is anything in which the will of man is at work, the Lord deals with us, as with the horse or the mule, holding us in. When every part of the heart is in contact with Himself, He guides us with His "eye." "The light of the body is the eye: therefore when thine eye is single, thy whole body also is full of light; but when thine eye is evil, thy body also is full of darkness. Take heed therefore that the light which is in thee be not darkness. If thy whole body therefore be full of light, having no part dark, the whole shall be full of light, as when the bright shining of a candle doth give thee light," Luke 11:34-36. When there is anything wherein the eye is not single, so long as this is the case, there is not free intercourse in heart and affections with God; and the consequence is, our will not being subdued, we are not led simply of God. When the heart is in a right state, the whole body is "full of light," and there is the quick perception of the will of God. He just teaches us by His "eye" all He wishes, and produces in us quickness of understanding in His fear; Isaiah 11:3. This is our portion, as having the Holy Ghost dwelling in us, "quick of understanding in the fear of Jehovah," hearts without any object, save the will and glory of God. And that is just what Christ was: "Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me. I delight to do thy will, O my God; yea, thy law is within my heart," Ps. 40:7,8; Heb. 10:7. Where there is this, it may be bitter and painful as to the circumstances of the path, but there is in it the joy of obedience as obedience. There is always joy, and the consequence-God guiding us by His eye.

Before anything can be done, if we have not this certainty, before we enter upon any particular service, we should seek to get it, judging our own hearts as to what may be hindering. Suppose I set about doing a thing, and meet with difficulties, I shall begin to be uncertain as to whether it is God's mind or not; and hence, there will be feebleness and discouragement. But on the other hand, if acting in the intelligence of God's mind in communion, I shall be "more than conqueror," whatever may meet me by the way; Rom. 8:37. And note here: not only does the power of faith, in the path of faith, remove mountains; but the Lord deals morally, and will not let me find out His way, unless there be in me the spirit of

obedience. What would it avail - unless indeed God should provide for His own dishonour? "If any man will do [wills to do] his will," says our Lord, "he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself," John 7:17. This is precisely the obedience of faith. The heart must be in the condition of obedience, as Christ's was, "Lo, I come," etc. The apostle speaks to the Colossians of being "filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding," Col.1:9. Here it is quickness of understanding in the fear of the Lord, the condition of a man's own soul, though his spirit of mind will be necessarily shewn in outward acts, when that will is set before him; as Paul goes on to say, "that ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful unto every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God." Here then is the blessed joyful state of being guided by God's "eye." "I have meat to eat," says our Lord to the disciples (John 4), "that ye know not of." And what was that meat? "My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work."

The Lord guides, or rather controls, us in another way by providential circumstances, so that we may not go wrong, even though we are those which have no understanding. And thankful we ought to be that He does so. But it is only as the horse or mule. Your will being subject to Mine, He says, "I will guide you with mine eye" - but, if you are not subject, I must keep you in with "bit and bridle." This is, evidently, a very different thing.

May our hearts be led to desire to know and to do God's will. It will then be not so much a question of what that will is, but of knowing and doing God's will. And then we shall have the certain and blessed knowledge of being guided by His "eye." There is all this government of God with those whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered, unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile - whose whole dependence is upon Him, and who feel they are sure to go wrong if not guided by Himself.

There is a guidance with knowledge, and there is also guidance without knowledge. The former is our blessed privilege; but it may be the latter is needed to humble us. In Christ there was everything exactly according to God. In a certain sense He had no character. When I look at Him, what do I see? A constant never-failing life-manifestation of obedience. He goes up to Bethany just when He is to go up, regardless of the fears of the disciples; He abides two days still in the same place where He is, after He has heard that Lazarus is sick; John 11. He has nothing but to do all, to accomplish all, for the glory of God. One man is tender and soft; in another firmness and decision predominate. There is great diversity of character amongst men. You do not see that in Christ at all; there is no unevenness; every faculty in His humanity obeyed, and was the instrument of the impulse the divine will gave to it.

Divine life has to be guided in a vessel that has constantly to be kept down. Thus even for the apostle the command not to go into Bithynia (Acts 16:7) was not guidance by the Spirit of the highest sort. It was blessed guidance, yet not the highest character of guidance an apostle knew. It was more like the government of the horse or the mule, not so much the intelligence of God's mind in communion.

A great range of the guidance of the Spirit is just what we get in Colossians 1:9-11 to those in communion with God. There we find the individual to be "filled with the knowledge of his will." The Holy Ghost guides into the knowledge of the divine will, and there is no occasion even to pray about it. If I have spiritual understanding about a given thing, it may be the result of a great deal of previous prayer, and not necessarily of the things having been prayed about at the time. One has often had to pray about a thing, because not in communion. I may have my mind exercised about that to-day, honestly, truly, graciously exercised, which, five years hence, it might be, I should not have a doubt about. When God is using us, if we are free from ourselves, He may put it into our hearts to go here, or to go there; then God is positively guiding us. But this assumes a person to be walking with God, and that' diligently; it assumes death to self. If we are walking humbly, God will guide us. I may be in a certain place, and there have one say to me, Will you go to - (naming some other place)? Now, if I have not the mind of God, as to my going or otherwise, I shall have to pray for guidance; but this, of course, assumes that I am not walking in the knowledge of God's mind. I may have motives pulling me one way or the other, and clouding my spiritual judgment. The Lord says (John 11) - when the disciples speak of the Jews having of late sought to stone Him, and ask, "Goest thou thither again?" - "Are there not twelve hours in the day? If any man walk in the day, he stumbleth not, because he seeth the light of this world. But if a man walk in the night, he stumbleth, because there is no light in him." This is just an application of the simple fact, that, if walking in the night, I must be on the look-out for stones, lest I stumble over them. So Paul prays for the Philippians, that their love might abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment; that they might approve things that are excellent [try things that differ]; that they might be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ, without a single stumble all the way along.

Many speak of providence as a guide. Providence does sometimes control, but it never, properly speaking, guides us; it guides things. If I am going to a place to preach, and I find, when I get to the terminus, that the train has started, God has ordered things about me (and I may have to be thankful for the over-ruling); but it is not God's guiding me; for I should really have gone, had the train not left: my will was to go. All we get of this guidance of providence is very blessed; but it is not guidance by the Spirit of God, not guidance by the "eye," but rather by the "bit" of God. Though providence over-rules, it does not, properly speaking, guide.