

Problems in the Christian Life: Guidance

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[0 : 00] What happens over the next four weeks is that we'll be looking at a series of sermons of problems in the Christian life.

And the problem for today is the problem of guidance. And in Proverbs 3, there's a prescription about how to go about it.

So we read then from verse 1. My son, do not forget my teaching, but let your heart keep my commandments.

For length of days and years of life and abundant welfare will they give you. Let not loyalty and faithfulness forsake you. Bind them about your neck and write them on the tablet of your heart. So you will find favor and good repute in the sight of God and man. Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not rely on your own insight.

[1 : 06] In all your ways acknowledge him and he will make straight your paths. Be not wise in your own eyes, fear the Lord and turn away from evil.

It will be healing to your flesh and refreshment to your bones. Honor the Lord with your substance and with the firstfruits of all your produce.

Then your barns will be filled with plenty and your vats bursting with wine. Amen. Let's stand again and sing.

In heavenly love abiding, no change my heart can fear. And yes, it does have problems. And one of the first of these problems we look at this week is the problem of guidance.

Now, what I'm not talking about this morning are questions of conscience. Questions of conscience are things like, Is it right for a Christian to enroll in the service of the military and therefore be responsible for killing somebody?

[2 : 19] That's not what I'm talking about. What I'm talking about is guidance on a day-to-day basis. Some people find this difficult.

Now, why should that be? Perhaps some of the reason might be a lack of appreciation of the contents of God's Word. So we turn, first of all, to this prescription for guidance in the book of Proverbs.

Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not rely on your own insight. In all your ways acknowledge him and he will make straight your paths.

When you look at the book of Proverbs and you look at the first nine chapters, you find that the instructions are all addressed to my son.

The book was written by Solomon. The very first verse tells you the Proverbs of Solomon, son of David, king of Israel. So the son referred to his son Rehoboam.

[3 : 34] His reign is found in 1 Kings 12 to 14. Yet, in chapter 4, we're informed that, Hear, O sons, a father's instruction, and be attentive, that you may gain insight.

Now, the scriptural record only has one son. But there may have been more. And what has happened is, because of Solomon's lack of faith to the God of Israel, a secret veil has been put on his life.

However, we're now talking of Solomon giving guidance to his son Rehoboam. How he will discover the will of God for his life.

And the appalling fact is that neither the father who gave this advice, nor the son who received it, ever acted on that advice.

So what is it that Solomon says that's of importance this morning? Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on your own insight.

[4 : 49] What does it mean to trust the Lord? I want to suggest that the ideas of trusting and knowing are very closely linked.

And to show this, I want to bring a human illustration, which relates to the first time we came to Peebles in November of 2006. And we very shortly after that needed a plumber. Not knowing who to ask, we asked our next door neighbour, and he recommended this plumber. This plumber came along and did the work in such a way that you would never have known he was ever in the building.

He tidied up immaculately. What does this mean? It means we know him. Not only do we know him, we trust him for the future.

And we have. Now coming to the spiritual, these ideas of trusting the Lord and knowing the Lord are very closely linked.

[6 : 09] So how do you get to know the Lord? You do it by prayer, acknowledging your sins, and asking Christ to be the guidance in your life.

So this exercise of faith is to be performed with all of his personality because the book of Proverbs says, do this with all of your heart.

Now, if we turn to the experience of Jairus, the ruler of the synagogue in Mark 5, Jesus said to the ruler of the synagogue, do not fear, only believe.

I.e., put your faith in what I have said. The ruler of the synagogue had said to Jesus, my little daughter is at the point of death.

Come and lay your hands on her that she may be made well and live. So how is it that this Jairus comes to this place of faith in God, faith in Jesus?

[7 : 36] Well, he must have listened to people in the congregation of the synagogue who must have said something about the acts that Jesus did.

So because he listened to those who had already listened to Jesus, he had faith in his heart and in his mind.

And it's no different for us. We need to have faith. And if you haven't found it yet, you will find it in the Gospels that relate what Jesus did and said.

He will give you the gift of faith. Jesus himself said, the words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life.

So if we believe that this morning, what it means is that Jesus Christ is present in this congregation and he is speaking to you and to me right at this moment in time.

[8 : 48] It is a call to faith and trust. Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not rely on your own insight.

In all your ways acknowledge him and he will make straight your paths. An Old Testament promise but one that is also found on the lips of Jesus.

The testimony of John the Baptist about the ministry of Jesus is this. This is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah when he said, the voice of one crying in the wilderness, prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths great.

Jesus Christ still does that. If we have faith, if we acknowledge our own inadequacy and confess it to him, he will direct our paths.

Now we come to our second scripture reading, this morning, in Acts chapter 16 from verse 6 to verse 10. And this is a section where I'm now looking at pitfalls of guidance.

[10 : 16] Acts 16 verse 6. They went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia.

And when they had come opposite Mysia, they tempted to go in to Bithynia, but the spirit of Jesus did not allow them.

So passing down, they went down to Troas and a vision appeared to Paul in the night. a man of Macedonia was standing meseeching him and saying, come over to Macedonia and help us.

When he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

Pitfalls. You see, Paul and his companions had been traveling through the southern part of what is called nowadays Asia Minor in the regions of Phrygia and Galatia.

[11 : 34] They were successful there. So they thought that they had nothing else to do but to go northwards because Mysia is right on the north of Asia Minor and it's bordered by the Black Sea.

But the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them. So how is it that he then goes on and attempts to go into Bithynia but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them?

So the Apostle Paul had obviously thought that these were areas which would be ripe for the preaching of the Gospel. The Spirit of Jesus did not allow them.

So how was it that this will was made known? In the church at that time in history there were prophets and it may have been disclosed to them.

their original call to missionary work in Acts 13 is made in a similar fashion. Now in the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers and while they were worshipping the Lord and fasting the Holy Spirit said, set apart from me Barnabas and Saul to the work that I have called them.

[13:04] So there's no knowledge there of how this will is being made known. All there is, is a fact that it did take place. So he's not allowed to go to Bithynia.

Now as far as that destiny is concerned, Paul did not go there but Peter did. In 1 Peter 1-1 he writes at the beginning, Peter an apostle of Jesus Christ to the exiles of the dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia.

So here we have to learn a lesson in divine guidance. God will say no to one person but yes to another. So now we come to a vision.

In verse 9, a vision appeared to Paul in the night. A man of Macedonia was standing beseeching him and saying, come over to Macedonia and help us.

So here is something that's being revealed to Paul in a vision of the night. Now Dr. Scroggie has made the intriguing suggestion that the man of Macedonia who appeared in this vision was in fact Luke himself.

[14:33] Now if that is the case it's not just a question of recognizing that this is the beloved doctor Luke the physician but it's other than that because it's an identification of an individual who with Paul would be used of God to open up the entire area of Macedonia.

So it's necessary for us to have a clear vision of what God has called us to do. So what happens next is that in verse 11 and 12 setting sail from Troas we made a direct voyage and came the following day to Neapolis and from there to Philippi which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia.

now in Philippi things did start to happen. It was very much a Roman city of the province and there was no synagogue there and rabbinic sources tell us that to form a synagogue you need ten men that were not to be found in Philippi.

So the people whom Paul is witnessing to and preaching the gospel are women and the first to believe is one of these called Lydia.

One who heard us was a woman named Lydia from the city of Thyatira a seller of purple goods and she was a worshipper of God. The Lord opened her heart to give heed to what was said by Paul.

[16:17] So if he needed proof that he was in the right place at the right time, here it is. God had said yes.

This is the open door. I want to go on now to yet another scripture to discuss possibilities of guidance and that scripture is found in the epistle to the Romans and in the first two verses.

I appeal to you therefore brothers and sisters by the mercies of God to present your bodies as a living sacrifice holy and acceptable to God which is your spiritual worship.

Do it be confirmed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind that you may prove what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

So here it is. Possibilities. But these possibilities rest on something else. And in this letter he's beginning to sum up what he's already said in the first eight chapters.

[17:37] I appeal to you therefore brothers and sisters by the mercies of God to present your bodies as a living sacrifice holy and acceptable to God which is your spiritual worship.

What are the mercies of God? The greatest mercy which the apostle refers to in chapter one is the fact that he has a gospel to preach to the whosoever.

That is the first and great mercy. mercy. But that mercy in itself is based on something greater. And it is that Christ in his great love for us has died in our place and risen again that we might experience new life in him.

These are the great mercies of God. God. Now we have to do something with these mercies.

And what we do is to present your bodies as a living sacrifice holy and acceptable to God which is your spiritual worship.

[18:53] This is one of the great mercies of God. That we who are sinners by nature should be able to do this in light of the fact that we have offended a holy and absolute and unapproachable

God by breaking his ten commandments.

But the mercy of God is that if we do this, it's our spiritual worship. How wonderful are the mercies of God.

God. The condition is do not be conformed to this world. Here are the claims of Christ on your life and on mine.

Jesus said in Mark 8, if any man would come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow me.

For whosoever will save his life will lose it, and whosoever loses his life for my sake and the gospels will save it.

[20 : 01] The challenge of the cross, do not be conformed to this world, but instead be transformed by the renewal of your mind.

How is this happening? This is happening because the moment you bowed the knee and you confessed your sins to God for the first time, God gave you the Holy Spirit to dwell within and he can transform you no matter who you are or what you are or what your background is.

God can make you a different person. Now we know this great text, do we not, in 2 Corinthians 5 and 17.

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he, she, is a new creation. The old has passed away, behold, the new has come.

And this truth is something that the apostle had to prove for himself. In Acts chapter 9, we see him on the road to Damascus with a view to arresting all the Christians in that place.

[21 : 32] And before he came to Christ in that marvelous conversion in Acts 9, he was an enemy of the truth, a persecutor of the church, church.

But he says in 2 Timothy, God showed me mercy because I had acted innocently or ignorantly in unbelief.

No longer a persecutor of the church, but its builder. He's been transformed by the movement of the spirit in his life.

The old has passed away, the new has come. This is why he can now say, you can prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

He's in a position of grace. We sang about this this morning. Amazing grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me.

[22 : 48] These are the words of John Newton, who by profession was a slave trader, a captain of a slave ship at sea. But his mother prayed for him.

And one day, he came to his senses and confessed what he'd done. Amazing grace.

The same is true for you and me this morning. In bringing this to conclusion, I want to just illustrate it slightly further, by saying that a minister friend of mine died some years ago, and after the funeral, his wife showed me his Bible.

And on the fly leaf of his Bible, I found the following words. The will of God, nothing more, nothing less, and nothing else.

That ambition is what we require to have to find God's will and his plan for our lives.

[24 : 07] Amen.