

Psalm 143

Teach me to do your will (part 1)

Introduction

An outstanding mark of the psalmists is their utter devotion to God. Since they belong to the Lord and want to please Him, they long to do His will and be led through life by Him. **Lead me, O Lord, in your righteousness** (Psalm 5:8). **Guide me in your truth and teach me. You are God my Saviour. My hope is on you all day long** (Psalm 25:5). **Teach me your way, O Lord, lead me in a straight path** (Psalm 27:11). They were able to pray this with confidence because they knew God has led His people in the past. **He guided them with cloud by day, and with fire by night** (Psalm 78:14). So they were assured He would do it again. **He leads me besides still waters** (Psalm 23:2). They know the conditions of guidance. **He guides the humble and the meek, and teaches them His way** (Psalm 25:9).

In Psalm 143 there is a description of the troubles into which David's enemies had brought him. He was crushed, heart-broken and discouraged. He was grateful for all God had done in the past, and the blessings received in former days. Now he reaches out to God Himself. He spreads out his hands to Him in earnest prayer. He thirsts for God, like a parched land longs for water. He wants a quick answer from God to manifest Himself to him. N.B. He does not just want the blessings and help, he wants God Himself.

God means everything to him. His life is centred in God. Three times he prays for guidance. **Show me the way I should go... Teach me to do your will... May your good spirit lead me on level ground** (Psalm 143:8,10). He does not want to risk stumbling and straying. He asks for his life to be preserved, that he will be delivered out of trouble, and his enemies will be destroyed (Psalm 143:11,12). **For I am your servant** – i.e. because he belongs to God, he asks these things. He wants God's name to be uplifted, and he wants to spend more time in His service.

The subject of guidance

We are going to consider these specific words – **Teach me to do your will, for you are my God... I am your servant** (Psalm 143:10,12). Going to speak about guidance. It is not a case of help to ensure my plans will succeed, for my career, for my Christian service, my future, my examinations. Instead, it all centres on God. I am His, I belong to Him, He possesses me. He has a perfect plan for my life. It may not lead to some of the things I would like – good income, success, comfort – but that does not matter. It is what God wants for me which is the only thing that matters.

Total abandonment to the will of God needs to be emphasised today. So much in the evangelical world today is centred on self. Sometimes we hear testimonies that speak not about God dealing with sin, but about God being there to answer my problems and inadequacies, to help me achieve, to make me feel good. People speak as if the Gospel is just spiritual polyfiller, to fill in the gaps in their personality, so that they are better and happier people, and are more fulfilled.

It is not unknown for Christian young people today to still be on drugs, having never been challenged to repentance and self-denial. They have only heard that Jesus is there for you, to meet your needs and indulge you. They have not heard that God calls us to a radically new life in which we leave our sins, self, the world, and start a new life with Christ as Lord and Master.

Guidance is real and definite, but on His conditions. It is only for those who have turned inside out, placed self on the cross and Christ on the throne. A call to self-denial and full surrender is essential at the beginning of the Christian life, and needs to be constantly heard and preached throughout our Christian life. Else we have no right to take the name of “Christian”.

Now the question is, “How does God guide us?” “How do we know His will?” “How can we please God?” “How can we ensure we are not wasting our lives?” Young Christians, with their lives before them, or people facing decisions mid career, or couples bringing up their family, those working in church, or working in secular business – all seek guidance. “What does God want me to do?” “What should I do next?” “What is the best course in this dilemma?”

Going to consider 10 points in answer to this question. This subject is of great importance and interest for anyone anxious to grow in grace and live a life worth living. Starting with first two points today.

(1) Our hearts must be assured

God loves His children. He is concerned for them, and has a plan for each life. There is blessedness in that plan. To be out of that plan is simply wasting time and life. We will never be really satisfied, we will be missing the best. God is anxious to and able to communicate that plan. He does not want us to make mistakes.

The Word of God is full of promises about guidance. **I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go** (Psalm 32:8). (Other translations – “I will counsel and watch over you”, “I will guide you with my eye”). **In all your ways acknowledge Him and He will make your paths straight** (Proverbs 3:6). (Other translations – “He will direct your paths”). **The Lord will guide you always or continually** (Isaiah 58:11). **I am the light of the world. He that follows me shall not walk in darkness but shall have the light of life** (John 8:12).

Not only promises, but also very concrete examples of these principles in action: Abraham was led out from his home, not knowing where the Lord was leading him (Hebrews 11:8). God guided him, drew near, gave him wife and family, provided a wife for his son Isaac. He became the Father of many nations, and through him all families of earth were blessed (Genesis 18:18). He had failures, but only when he took his eyes off God and took matters into his own hands, as we so often do, leading to disaster.

A New Testament example of these principles in action is Paul. He went on three great missionary journeys, taking in Turkey and Greece. He preached the Gospel, founded churches, and established Christians. But he did so by constantly seeking

God's guidance through the Holy Spirit closing doors and opening doors, continually giving assurance and support. The gift of the Holy Spirit – He has many functions in the Christian life, one of which is to lead us. **Those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God** (Romans 8:14).

The prayers for the churches, as recorded for us in the epistles, are a copy of what we ought to be praying for one another. **Discern what is best** (Philippians 1:10). **Asking God to fill you with the knowledge of His will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding** (Colossians 1:9). Guidance is available for all, not just for a spiritual elite or super Christians. And it is there for all continually, not just in great crises, but also in the many things of life, from our conversations to our everyday movements. God knows our problems, weaknesses, incomplete knowledge, how changeable we are, how soon we have to make a decision, how important each decision is. But if our confidence and hope are in Him, we can rely on His wisdom and overruling. If we are honest with Him and seek Him diligently, we need not worry unduly.

(2) Our will must be surrendered

We return to the previous emphasis on our spiritual state. The initial and basic condition for us to receive guidance is being prepared to do God's will whatever it is. We often claim we are seeking God's guidance, but what we really want is for God to rubber stamp the decision we have already made, to confirm our plan. "There must be no cloud and no bias – God wants the rudder, not the oars" (Bishop Henry Moule). This is particularly difficult when there is a strong bias. Here we must pray for help and trust Him to overrule our inclination. **If anyone chooses to do God's will, he will find out** (John 7:17). "Nine out of ten difficulties are solved when we are ready to do His will, whatever it is" (George Muller).

Hudson Taylor said we can go about our work for God in one of three ways: (a) Make the best plans we can and carry them out to the best of our ability, (b) Lay plans carefully. Be determined to carry them through and ask God to help us, or (c) Begin with God. Ask Him for His plans. Then offer ourselves to carry out His purposes.

There will not necessarily be guidance unless our will is surrendered, i.e. unless you are yielded. We never know where that will lead us, but the Lord's will is always best. **Offer you bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God....Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is – His good, pleasing and perfect will** (Romans 12:1,2).