

[STEM Publishing: The writings of C. H. Mackintosh](#): God's Way, and how to find it.

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Job 28; Luke 11: 34-36

C. H. Mackintosh.

"There is a path which no fowl knoweth, and which the vulture's eye hath not seen: the lion's whelps have not trodden it, nor the fierce lion passed by it." What an unspeakable mercy for one who really desires to walk with God, to know that there is a way for him to walk in! God has prepared a pathway for His redeemed in which they may walk with all possible certainty, calmness and fixedness. It is the privilege of every child of God, and every servant of Christ, to be as sure that he is in God's way as that his soul is saved. This may seem a strong statement; but the question is, Is it true? If it be true, it cannot be too strong. No doubt it may, in the judgment of some, savour a little of self-confidence and dogmatism to assert, in such a day as that in which we live, and in the midst of such a scene as that through which we are passing, that we are sure of being in God's path. But what saith the Scripture? It declares "there is a way," and it also tells us how to find and how to walk in that way. Yes; the self-same voice that tells us of God's salvation for our souls, tells us also of God's pathway for our feet; — the very same authority that assures us that "he that believeth on the Son of God hath everlasting life," assures us also that there is a way so plain that "the wayfaring men though fools shall not err therein."

This, we repeat, is a signal mercy — a mercy at all times, but especially in a day of confusion and perplexity like the present. It is deeply affecting to notice the state of uncertainty in which many of God's dear people are found at the present moment. We do not refer now to the question of salvation, of this we have spoken largely elsewhere; but that which we have now before us is the path of the Christian — what he ought to do, where he should be found, how he ought to carry himself in the midst of the professing Church. Is it not too true that multitudes of the Lord's people are at sea as to these things? Are there not many who, were they to tell out the real feelings of their hearts, would have to own themselves in a thoroughly unsettled state — to confess that they know not what to do, or where to go, or what to believe? Now, the question is, Would God leave His children, would Christ leave His servants, in such darkness and confusion?

No; my dear Lord, in following Thee

And not in dark uncertainty,

This foot obedient moves.

May not a child know the will of his father? May not a servant know the will of his master? And if this be so in our earthly relationships, how much more fully may we count upon it in reference to our Father and Master in Heaven. When Israel of old emerged from the Red Sea, and stood upon the margin of that great and terrible wilderness which lay between them and the land of promise, how were they to know their way? The trackless sand of the desert lay all around them. It was in vain to look for any footprint there. It was a dreary waste in which the vulture's eye could not discern a pathway. Moses felt this when he said to Hobab, "Leave us not, I pray thee; forasmuch as thou knowest how we are to encamp in the wilderness, and thou mayest be to us instead of eyes" (Num. 10:31). How well our poor unbelieving hearts can understand this touching appeal! How one craves a human guide in the midst of a scene of perplexity! How fondly the heart clings to one whom we deem competent to give us guidance in moments of darkness and difficulty!

And yet, we may ask, what did Moses want with Hobab's eyes? Had not Jehovah graciously undertaken to be their guide? Yes, truly; for we are told that "on the day that the tabernacle was reared up, the cloud covered the tabernacle, namely, the tent of the testimony; and at even, there was upon the tabernacle as it were the appearance of fire, until the morning. So it was always: the cloud covered it by day, and the appearance of fire by night. And when the cloud was taken up from the tabernacle, then after that the children of Israel journeyed; and in the place where the cloud abode, there the children of Israel pitched their tents. At the commandment of the Lord the children of Israel journeyed, and at the commandment of the Lord they pitched: as long as the cloud abode upon the tabernacle, they rested in their tents. And when the cloud tarried long upon the tabernacle many days, then the children of Israel kept the charge of the Lord, and journeyed not. And so it was, when the cloud was a few days upon the tabernacle; according to the commandment of the Lord they abode in their tents, and according to the commandment of the Lord, and journeyed not. And so it was, when the cloud abode from even unto the morning, and that the cloud was taken up in the morning, then they journeyed; whether it was by day or by night that the cloud was taken up, they journeyed; or whether it were two days, or a month, or a year, that the cloud tarried upon the tabernacle, remaining thereon, the children of Israel abode in their tents and journeyed not, but when it was taken up they journeyed. At the commandment of the Lord they rested in their tents, and at the commandment of the Lord they journeyed: they kept the charge of the Lord at the commandment of the Lord by the hand of Moses" (Num. 9:15-23).

Here was divine guidance — a guidance, we may surely say, quite sufficient to render them independent of their own eyes, of Hobab's eyes, and the eyes of any other mortal. It is interesting to note that in the opening of the book of Numbers, it was arranged that the ark of the covenant was to find its place in the very bosom of the congregation; but in chapter 10 we are told that when "they departed from the mount of the Lord three days' journey, the ark of the covenant of the Lord *went before them*, in the three days' journey, to search out a resting-place for them." Instead of Jehovah finding a resting-place in the bosom of His redeemed people, He becomes their travelling Guide, and goes before them to seek out a resting-place for them. What touching grace is here! and what faithfulness! If Moses will ask Hobab to be their guide, and that, too, in the very face of God's provision — even the cloud and the silver trumpet, then will Jehovah leave His place in the centre of the tribes, and go before them to search them out a resting-place. And did not He know the wilderness well? Would not He be better for them than ten thousand Hobabs? Might they not fully trust Him? Assuredly. He would not lead them astray. If His grace had redeemed them from Egypt's bondage, and conducted them through the Red Sea, surely they might confide in the same grace to guide them across that great and terrible wilderness, and bring them safely into the land flowing with milk and honey.

But it must be borne in mind that, in order to profit by divine guidance, there must be the abandonment of our own will, and of all confidence in our own reasonings, as well as all confidence in the thoughts and reasonings of others. If I have Jehovah as my Guide, I do not want my own eyes or the eyes of a Hobab either. God is sufficient: I can trust Him. He knows all the way across the desert; and hence, if I keep my eye upon Him, I shall be guided aright.

But this leads us on to the second division of our subject, namely, How am I to find God's way? An all-important question, surely. Whither am I to turn to find God's pathway? If the vulture's eye, so keen, so powerful, so far-seeing, hath not seen it — if the young lion, so vigorous in movement, so majestic in mien, hath not trodden it — if man knoweth not the price of it, and if it is not to be found in the land of the living — if the depth saith, It is not in me, and the sea saith, It is not with me — if it cannot be gotten for gold or precious stones — if the wealth of the universe cannot equal it, and no wit of man discover it — then whither am I to turn? where shall I find it?

Shall I turn to those great standards of orthodoxy which rule the religious thought and feeling of millions throughout the length and breadth of the professing Church? Is this wondrous pathway of wisdom to be found with them? Do they form any exception to the great, broad, sweeping rule of Job 28? Assuredly not.

What, then, am I to do? I know there is a way. God, who cannot lie, declares this, and I believe it; but where am I to find it? "Whence, then, cometh wisdom? and where is the place of understanding? seeing it is hid from the eyes of all living, and kept close from the fowls of the air. Destruction and Death say, We have heard the fame thereof with our ears." Does it not seem like a hopeless case for any poor ignorant mortal to search for this wondrous pathway? No, blessed be God, it is by no means a hopeless case, for "He understandeth the way thereof, and He knoweth the place thereof. For He looketh to the ends of the earth, and seeth under the whole heaven; to make the weight for the winds; and He weigheth the waters by measure. When He made a decree for the rain, and a way for the lightning of the thunder, then did He see it and *declare* it; He prepared it, yea, and searched it out. And unto man He said, 'Behold, *the fear of the Lord*, that is wisdom; and *to depart from evil is understanding*.' "

Here, then, is the divine secret of wisdom: "The fear of the Lord." This sets the conscience directly in the presence of God, which is its only true place. The object of Satan is to keep the conscience out of this place — to bring it under the power and authority of man — to lead it into subjection to the commandments and doctrines of men — to thrust in something between the conscience and the authority of Christ the Lord, it matters not what it is; it may be a creed or a confession containing a quantity of truth — it may be the opinion of a man or a set of men — the judgment of some favourite teacher — anything, in short, to come in and usurp, in the heart, the place which belongs to God's Word alone. This is a terrible snare, and a stumbling-block — a most serious hindrance to our progress in the ways of the Lord. God's Word must rule me — God's pure and simple Word, not man's interpretation thereof. No doubt, God may use a man to unfold that Word to my soul; but then it is not man's unfolding of God's Word that rules me, but God's Word by man unfolded. This is of all importance.

We must be exclusively taught and exclusively governed by the Word of the living God. Nothing else will keep us straight, or give solidity and consistency to our character and course as Christians. There is a strong tendency within and around us to be ruled by the thoughts and opinions of men — by those great standards of doctrine which men have set up.

Those standards and opinions may have a large amount of truth in them — they may be all true so far as they go; that is not the point in question now. What we want to impress upon the Christian reader is, that he is not to be governed by the thoughts of his fellow-man, but simply and solely by the Word of God. It is of no value to hold a truth from man; I must hold it directly from God Himself. God may use a man to communicate His truth; but unless I hold it as from God, it has no divine power over my heart and conscience; it does not bring me into living contact with God, but actually hinders that contact by bringing in something between my soul and His holy authority.

We should greatly like to enlarge upon and enforce this great principle; but we must forbear, just now, in order to unfold to the reader one or two solemn and practical points set forth in the eleventh chapter of Luke, points which, if entered into, will enable us to understand a little better how to find God's way. We shall quote the passage at length. "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."

Here, then, we are furnished. with the true secret of discerning God's way. It may seem very difficult, in the midst of the troubled sea of Christendom to steer one's course aright. So many conflicting voices fall on the ear. So many opposing views solicit our attention, men of God differ so in judgment, shades of opinion are so multiplied, that it seems impossible to reach a sound conclusion. We go to one man who, so far as we can judge, seems to have a single eye, and he tells us one thing; we go to another man who also seems to have a single eye, and he tells the very reverse. What, then, are we to think?

Well, one thing is certain, that our own eye is not single when we are running, in uncertainty and perplexity, from one man to another. The single eye is fixed on Christ alone, and thus the body is filled with light. The Israelite of old had not to run hither and thither to consult with his fellow as to the right way. Each had the same divine guide, namely, the pillar of cloud by day, and the pillar of fire by night. In a word, Jehovah Himself was the infallible Guide of each member of the congregation. They were not left to the guidance of the most intelligent, sagacious, or experienced man in the assembly; neither were they left to follow their own way; each was to follow the Lord. The silver trumpet announced to all alike the mind of God; and no one whose ear was open and attentive was left at any loss. The eye and the ear of each were to be directed to God *alone*, and not to a fellow-mortal. This was the secret of guidance in the trackless desert of old, and this is the secret of guidance in the vast moral wilderness through which God's redeemed are passing now. One man may say, Listen to me; and another may say, Listen to me; and a third may say, Let each one take his own way. The obedient heart says, in opposition to all, I must follow my Lord.

This makes all so simple. It will not, by any means, tend to foster a spirit of haughty independence; quite the reverse. The more I am taught to lean on God alone for guidance, the more I shall distrust and look off from myself; and this, assuredly, is not independence. True, it will deliver me from servile following of any man, but giving me to feel my responsibility to Christ alone; but this is precisely what is so much needed at the present moment. The more closely we examine the elements that are abroad in the professing Church, the more we shall be convinced of our personal need of this entire subjection to divine authority, which is only another name for "the fear of the Lord," or, "a single eye."

There is one brief sentence, in the opening of the Acts of the Apostles, which furnishes a perfect antidote to the self-will and the servile fear of man so rife around us, and that is, "We must obey God." What an utterance! "We must *obey*." This is the cure for self-will. "We must obey God." This is the cure for servile subjection to the commandments and doctrines of men. There must be obedience; but obedience to what? To God's authority, and to that alone. Thus the soul is preserved from the influence of infidelity on the one hand, and superstition on the other. Infidelity says, Do as you like. Superstition says, Do as man tells you. Faith says, "We must obey God."

Here is the holy balance of the soul in the midst of the conflicting and confounding influences around us in this our day. As a servant, I am to obey my Lord; as a child, I am to hearken to my Father's commandments. Nor am I the less to do this although my fellow-servants and my brethren may not understand me. I must remember that the immediate business of my soul is with God Himself.

He before whom the elders bow,
With Him is *all* my business now.

It is my privilege to be as sure that I have my Master's mind as to my path as that I have His Word for the security of my soul. If not, where am I? Is it not my privilege to have a single eye? Yes, surely. And what then? "A body full of light." Now, if my body is full of light, can my mind be full of perplexity? Impossible. The two things are wholly incompatible; and hence, when one is plunged "in dark uncertainty," it is very plain his eye is not single. He may seem very sincere, he may be very anxious to be guided aright; but he may rest assured there is the lack of a single eye — that indispensable prerequisite to divine guidance. The Word is plain, "If thine eye is single, thy whole body also is full of light."

God will ever guide the obedient, humble soul; but, on the other hand, if we do not walk according to the light communicated, we shall get into darkness. Light not acted upon becomes darkness, and oh, "how great is that darkness"! Nothing is more dangerous than tampering with the light which God gives. It must, sooner or later, lead to the most disastrous consequences. "Take heed, therefore, that the light which is in thee be not darkness." "Hear, ye, and give ear: be not proud; for the Lord hath spoken. Give glory to the Lord your God, before *He* cause darkness, and before your feet stumble on the dark mountains, and while ye look for light, He turn it into the shadow of death, and make it gross darkness" (Jer. 13:15-16).

This is deeply solemn. What a contrast between a man having a single eye, and a man not acting on the light which God has given him! The one has his body full of light; the other has his body full of darkness: the one has no part dark; the other is plunged in gross darkness: the one is a light-bearer for others; the other is a stumbling-block in the way. We know nothing more solemn than the judicial acting of God, in actually turning our light into darkness, because we have refused to act on the light which He has been pleased to impart.

Christian reader, art thou acting up to thy light? Has God sent a ray of light into thy soul? Has He shown thee something wrong in thy ways or associations? Art thou persisting in any line of action which conscience tells thee is not in full accordance with thy Master's will? Search and see. "Give glory to the Lord thy God." Act on the light. Do not hesitate. Think not of consequences. Obey, we beseech thee, the Word of thy Lord. This very moment, as thine eye scans these lines, let the purpose of thy soul be to depart from iniquity wherever thou findest it. Say not, Whither shall I go? What shall I do next? There is evil everywhere. It is only escaping from one evil to plunge into another. Say not these things; do not argue or reason; do not look at results; think not of what the world or the world-church will say of thee; rise above all these things, and tread the path of light — that path which shineth more and more unto the perfect day of glory.

Remember, God never gives light for two steps at a time. If He has given thee light for one step, then, in the fear and love of His Name, take that one step, and thou wilt assuredly get more light — yes, "more and more." But if there be the refusal to act, the light which is in thee will become gross darkness, thy feet will stumble on the dark mountains of error which lie on either side of the straight and narrow path of obedience; and thou wilt become a stumbling-block in the path of others.

Some of the most grievous stumbling-blocks that lie, at this moment, in the pathway of anxious inquirers are found in the persons of those who once seemed to possess the truth, but have turned from it. The light which was in them has become darkness, and oh, how great and how appalling is that darkness! How sad it is to see those who ought to be light-bearers, acting as a positive hindrance to young and earnest Christians! But let not young Christians be hindered by them. The way is plain. "The fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding." Let each one hear and obey for himself the voice of the Lord. "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me."

The Lord be praised for this precious Word! It puts each one in the place of direct responsibility to Christ Himself; it tells us plainly what is *God's way*, and, just as plainly, *how to find it*.