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Sermon preached by Mr. J. Delves at "Ebenezer", Clapham on
Wednesday evening 25.2.52

Text: Psalm 143.10

"Teach me to do Thy will; for Thou art my God; Thy Spirit is
good; lead me into the land of uprightness."

This remarkable Psalm, like many others, expresses the feelings of the author - his distress, his desire and the attitude of his mind and spirit under what were, evidently, very oppressive circumstances. He was persecuted by enemies; also as we have read, he had to see those who had been his counsellors and advisers, turn against him and take sides with his conspirators. He met with grievous, heavy afflictions and trials in his family and in other ways, yet under them all he was enabled to wait on God and often under great pressure and urgency was enabled to commit his case into His hands.

How wonderful the Psalms are! How, at times, they speak the feelings of the heart, especially in some of the conflicts through which exercised people pass, when they have a deep consciousness of their sin and their need of the Lord's free mercy, and can believe that God will honour His own character and will, in His good time, appear for and deliver them. So it is here. The Psalmist makes no attempt to commend his own case, for he says, "In Thy sight shall no man living be justified". He does not go before God with any merit of his own as a ground of acceptance but would seek unto God to appear for him and to exercise judgment, to deal with his enemies and be with him under these afflictions.

So in this verse 10 is an expressive prayer - a prayer which, it may be, many of the Lord's people have prayed without realising what might be involved in it, if the Lord were to answer it; but His dear people have to go before Him in the simplicity of their hearts, knowing that God will not take advantage of their ignorance, although indeed at times, He has answered them "by terrible things in righteousness." Has there ever been a time in your life when you have prayed this? Do not suppose anything very easy, pleasant

or flesh-pleasing, but are there occasions when, looking at things you have been brought to this one point, "Teach me to do Thy will"? Perhaps a certain course may have presented itself to your mind and to your will, which can be attractive and desirable. It is sweet when the Lord's will rises above it and you can honestly say, "Teach me to do Thy will". Surely this is a wonderful place to be brought to! It is such a place that by faith being brought into lively exercise, you can see that the Lord's will must be like Himself, essentially good, although you may be quite at a loss to visualise what it may involve. I believe I have often mentioned what Rutherford said, "The will of the Lord is a soft bed to lie upon in a fire". Some of you^{who} have been through some heavy things and have been favoured in them can understand that possibly. I believe it was Mr Ashdown who, although he was in excruciating pain with sciatica, said he did not feel he could move a straw to remove it unless it were according to the Lord's will. I suppose he meant that he would rather bear the pain with grace to fall into the Lord's hands believing that to be the best.

There is a difference, possibly, between asking the Lord to teach us His will and asking Him to teach us to do it. There is much in the will of God that may confound us, much in His secret will, as we speak, which does not immediately concern us, and there may often be certain things in His revealed will in a general aspect that may greatly confuse us and sometimes distress us. Moreover there may be occasions when the Lord's people are brought to a great pass to know what His will is. Possibly some of you have, at times, felt a willingness to do His will, if only you could know what His will is. What can you do in such a case as that? You can but wait at His footstool for Him to reveal it to you. There is perhaps, something different between the general revelations of His will in His Word and His will concerning you or me in some particular circumstances in our lives; but I believe there are times when the Lord does clearly and definitely show His people what His will is and does then give them grace to do it.

It is not so much my point this evening to speak of the will of God in that particular way but to name one or two points wherein doing the will of God does concern us, that is to say the will of God as it has relation to certain things that will surely come into our soul's experience and also into our lives. For instance, the will of God has relation to suffering and I very much question whether any child of God can do the will of God without that will involving some degree of suffering in his experience and also in his life. The apostle Peter refers to this, "Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to Him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator." At times when doing, that is walking according to, His will may involve a painful cross and if you can see that before you, then this may not be such an easy prayer as it looks but rather you may have to say, 'Lord, give me grace to pray it. Thou knowest I would seek grace and strength to do Thy will, that is to say, to walk in this trial, to bear this cross, to suffer this pain, to endure this persecution, to drink this bitter cup.' It will involve something in the way of suffering, more or less. It did in Bible times and it does now.

So the apostle writing to the Hebrews said, "Ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise." What did they need patience for? Because there were certain trials that greatly tested their patience. Is it like that with you? Is there a trial that you have to walk in, and from which there may be no escape for the time being, a trial, it may be, from which you would gladly escape if you could, because of the suffering it involves and yet at the same time, as rightly exercised, you can see that it is according to the Lord's will that you should walk in it? What then? Why, it is just like this, "Teach me to do Thy will." That is, in other words, 'Give me strength to bear this cross, wisdom and grace to walk in this trial, painful as it may be.' "Teach me to do Thy will."

But not only does the will of God have relation to suffering it has also relation to following. This is what the Lord said to

Peter when he asked, "What shall this man do?" "If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? follow thou Me." The Lord has made it very clear in His Word that it is His will that His people should follow Him and this will have to link up with the suffering, because you see there cannot be following without suffering, neither can there be any fellowship with a suffering Christ without some suffering in us in certain ways. As to this following, it may lie hard upon your spirit at times, because it will mean taking up the cross. "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me." That is how His people have always had to follow Him, more or less. Can you look at that and feel a willingness to take it up? Can you feel to have grace, possibly, in some of your cases to say, "Lord, I am willing to walk this path, I am willing to bear this humiliating cross, I am willing to suffer this which does so maul my pride?" If it be indeed something to maul your pride, then you will need grace to say, "Teach me to do Thy will." In all probability it will be something to maul your pride, because one design of the cross is to humble us and to bring us to the Lord's feet in confession of our sin and of our need. Still, under all these considerations, it is very sweet when we can honestly pray after this manner, "Teach me to do Thy will."

Ah! you know our poor, old nature is a very active thing and will always go against the gospel. What grace we need then, to go opposite to nature because the way of faith is opposite to nature. Believers walk by faith and not by sight and we have to come to this, perhaps after many defeats, many an inward battle, much shame and many confessions of our vileness and weakness and of the power of sin in us, "Lord, teach me to do Thy will." There may be times when you may hear the Lord's voice speaking in your heart by His Spirit and sometimes speaking a word that nature does not want to hear. It is not often that the Lord speaks words that are pleasing to our proud old nature, is it? No, on the contrary, but if He speaks in your heart a word that nature does not like, what can you do then? You have a battle and it may be plenty of inward revolting, until He

brings you by the sweet subduing power of His grace in your heart to say, "Teach me to do Thy will."

Not only does the will of God have relation to following but also to praying. The apostle John refers to this, "This is the confidence that we have in Him, that, if we ask any thing according to His will, he heareth us: And if we know that He hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of Him." There is something very profound about this. It cannot be said that the Lord's dear people, with all their sincerity, do always pray according to the Lord's will, because although some things may seem so desirable to us, they may not be desirable in the Lord's account and this may bring a very sharp conflict and some very heavy temptations, sometimes, too; but it will bring you to this, "Teach me to do Thy will." What is it then? Is it not to fall into His hands, leaving to Him the way your prayer should be dealt with and answered - or not answered - according to His will?

Then there is another thing with regard to the spiritual experience of His people. His will is that none of His dear children shall have anything of their own to recommend them before God or any vestige of merit, as ground on which they may stand for the salvation of their souls. This is His will as expressed by the apostle Paul, "Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord:" "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ." Have you ever prayed for the Lord to teach you to do His will in that? Nothing is more mortifying because this is to deny self. This is His will.

"Nothing in my hand I bring;
Simply to Thy cross I cling"

"Teach me to do Thy will; for Thou art my God:" This is a strong argument, is it not? David, when he prayed after this manner prayed to his God. He prayed under a confirming sense and an assurance of covenant interest in God. Surely nothing will help you to do His will more than that! If you can comfortably and warrantably feel - not just by some deduction - but feel in your soul some comfortable

testimony that the Lord is your God, then that will help you to fall into His hands and to say, "Teach me to do Thy will." His honour is before you then, not your own advancement or something that you may naturally desire to attain to - but the honour of God and surely that is a great thing! Has there ever been a time when you felt you could say, 'Lord, if it is more for Thy honour and my profit, to bear this cross, to walk in this trial, to carry this burden, then "Teach me to do Thy will"? We need teaching every day, every moment, we shall never get beyond it.

"Thou art my God"; my God to take up my case. Thou art my God to handle my matters for me, my God to save me. This is according to His Word is it not? "Look unto Me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I AM God, and there is none else." "Thou art my God". O the strength of this! It will level a mountain, it will raise a valley, if you can feel it. "Thou art my God." It is very sweet to be able to pray under a sacred sense of personal relationship with God and interest in Him. Have you ever felt able to do that? Have you felt at times you could say, 'Lord, Thou art my God; I believe it, I have proved it, I have the witness of it, I feel the assurance of it. Thou art my God, and Thy will must be good toward me; then teach me to do it - that is to obey it, to walk in it, to follow it and when necessary to suffer by it. Thou art my God, to guide me through this wilderness world. Lord, the way is dark and I am often like a poor fool who roams and wanders about like a wayfaring man; I know not where I am, I cannot see anything lying straight; all seems in confusion'? Yet is there just this rising, as it were, out of this thick black cloud of conflicting things, "Thou art my God, teach me to do Thy will"?

"Thou art my God": to guide me - to guide me in the darkness, to guide me when I cannot see my way, to bring me forth by a way I knew not. "Thou art my God." Can you hold Him to that? When God addressed Jacob He told him He was his God and the God of his fathers. What a mercy it is when we can feel that the God of our fathers is our God, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob! "Thou art my God."

O the strength of this! It can lift the trial, it can remove all opposition, it can bring sweet, holy submission. We cannot do the will of God, can we, without submitting to it? And this can be one of the sweetest spots in your life; although, as I have hinted before, it may involve painful things.

Even David, you see in the chapter that we read this evening, [2 Samuel 15] was able to submit to the Lord's will concerning whether or not he should be restored to the city. "Carry back the ark of God into the city: if I shall find favour in the eyes of the Lord, He will bring me again, and shew me both it, and His habitation: But if He thus say, I have no delight in thee: behold, here am I, let Him do to me as seemeth good unto Him." So Eli said, when he heard of the prophecy of the death of his sons, "It is the Lord: let Him do what seemeth Him good." Doing the will of God then is falling under it, submitting ourselves to it and following it according to the purposes of God in those things that may concern us both in the experience of our souls and in our providences.

"Thou art my God." Thou art my God to sustain me. O how many times His people, and some of you, have had to ask Him to hold you up! How expressive are some of the Psalms with regard to this! "As for me my steps had well nigh slipped." They would have quite slipped, but Thou art my God to sustain me. He has all needful grace, strength and wisdom, grace to sustain, strength to hold us up and wisdom to guide us. "Thou art my God."

"Thy Spirit is good; lead me into the land of uprightness."
"Thy Spirit is good." That is the Spirit of God, the Holy Ghost, a Person in the glorious and eternal Trinity, upon Whom we depend for all gracious, effectual teaching. Can you believe that? "Thy Spirit is good." I know it is a palpable truth, but that is a different thing from really feeling the unction of it and being able, as it were, to say it before the Lord. "Thy Spirit is good." It is just opposite to our own often. The Spirit of God is essentially good, because God Himself is good - underivatively good - but the point

that concerns us is, the goodness of this Spirit in His dealings with us. Can you believe that? Can you look at this and that particular instance of divine dealing, the dealing of God in your soul, and say, Thy Spirit has been good in this? He is good! It is a good work that He performs in the soul. "He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ." It is a good work that He accomplishes in quickening a sinner into divine life. He is good in His convicting power in bringing one consciously under a sense of guilt, of his lost condition and in revealing the holy character of God and showing him where he stands. In all this wholesome, merciful, saving teaching, His Spirit is so good, perfectly good.

He is good in His indwelling, because it is that indwelling that sanctifies the whole person. Said the apostle, "Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?" O this indwelling! Perhaps you say, How can I know if I have this indwelling or if I possess His good Spirit? By His operations in your soul's experience, in bringing you under a sense of your own sin, inditing prayer, leading you to a Throne of Grace and helping your infirmities. This is where you prove His Spirit is good in your soul's leadings, "As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God." O, it is a close word the apostle Paul has about this. "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His." Does that seem to cut some of us off? It is not good for us to turn away and say, Well, I think I have something good in me. Not at all. Can you look that in the face and under self-examination and searching of your case, feel that you possess His Spirit? "Thy Spirit is good."

He is good also in His revealing power; He reveals Christ. You can never behold the Lamb of God without this good Spirit; He lifts the veil, He presents to faith the beauties of Emmanuel. He moves and softens your soul's affections and brings into your heart the days of your espousals when He touches you with the love of Christ and melts you under a sweet sense of it. "Thy Spirit is good."

He is good also in His witnessing, for this is how one may know he has the Spirit of Christ. "He beareth witness with our spirit that we are the children of God." O, some of you may say, If I could but know that, it would be worth the world to me. O how can you know that then? It is like this, "As many as are led by the Spirit of God" - there is the witness in the leading. Do you ever get any leading in your soul in confession of sin, in prayer, leading, waiting, watching, wrestling? This leading is not a leading into sin but a leading to Christ; that is where this Spirit leads poor sinners. He leads them to "the Fountain opened... for sin and for uncleanness." "Thy Spirit is good", perfectly good.

"Lead me into the land of uprightness". Where is the land of uprightness? It does not seem to be in this poor, sin-defiled world. The land of uprightness in a proper sense considered, must surely be heaven; for though indeed here, the Psalmist may pray to be delivered from his persecutors and those who had dealt treacherously with him and to be favoured with the company and society of those who might be faithful in their dealings with him, yet this poor world in which we live, is marred by sin. The land of uprightness is that better land which those pilgrims were seeking. In the 11th of Hebrews we read, "Now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly;" that is the better land, the land of uprightness. "Wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God." They "looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God." Surely that is the land of uprightness, that heavenly land.

"Heaven is that holy, happy place,
Where sin no more defiles;
Where God unveils His blissful face,
And looks, and loves, and smiles;"

That is the land of uprightness and when this good Spirit sanctifies your heart unto the Lord and makes "Him your fear and your dread" there will be an attraction in this. O to contemplate a state that cannot be marred by sin or defilement. It is that happy land, that land of pure delight where the Lord is, and where His dear,

redeemed, ransomed people are before the Throne. It is an eternal inheritance, "that fadeth not away". The way to it is as John Bunyan describes in "The Pilgrim's Progress". It is no easy way; there are many difficulties, disappointments, trials, perplexing things, temptations, all these in this wilderness; and yet the Lord leads His people through it as He led His people through that wilderness "wherein were fiery serpents and scorpions", where He brought them forth water out of the rock.

May the Lord help us to do His Will and give us to feel persuaded He is our God, grant us the teaching of His good Spirit and eventually bring us "into the land of uprightness."

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