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Handling a Matter Wisely

Sermon preached by Mr J W Walder at Galeed Chapel Brighton on 12th December 1986

“He that handleth a matter wisely shall find good: and whose trusteth in the Lord, happy is he.” Proverbs 16:20

The whole matter of experience in our text is totally and wholly of the free goodness and grace of God, for it is utterly impossible that any person should handle a matter wisely until God is pleased to make him wise. It is quite impossible that a man should do anything graciously until the Lord has given him grace, so that if there is any handling of a matter wisely, that is of the Lord; and he, first giving the grace and the wisdom, blesses and owns and honours his own work and wisdom and grace in that person's heart.

*If Solomon for wisdom prayed,
The Lord before had made him wise;
Else he another choice had made,
And asked for what the worldlings prize.*

(Gadsby's 692)

That is absolutely and universally true. God first gives the grace and then blesses for the grace given. The handling of the matter, as spoken of in our text, primarily concerns that which is of the greatest and most vital importance, the matter of our souls. Handling it wisely is by the rich, sovereign, sweet and precious grace of God and the mighty and saving and effectual work of the Holy Spirit within our hearts, or else we must live and act and die as the foolish do. To handle all matters with regard to both our souls and circumstances according to this wisdom, we must forsake the designs, schemes and purposes of the natural mind and heart. Man is born a fool from his first birth and until God be pleased to make him wise by quickening him into divine life and implanting his holy fear in his heart, which is the beginning of wisdom, he will act in all things foolishly. This is still the experience, case and condition of every one of the best of God's people, except they be delivered from themselves and God be pleased by his grace and wisdom to enable them to handle matters wisely.

Well, this text is principally on my mind to do with matters concerning our souls, for, my friends, this is the great thing which concerns me, and I hope concerns you. It is eternity, it is the soul that matters, and how things stand with our souls both now and for eternity.

In contrast to handling a matter wisely, I will attempt to set forth a few brief thoughts on what it is to act unwisely in regard to matters of the soul.

First the vain attempts to put a new patch on the old garment. This is natural to us: we are ever trying to patch things up, ever trying to improve that old garment, only to make it worse. We have such legal hearts through the fall, that that is constantly our design. If we are not given that wisdom which is from above we shall live and die Pharisees. But I am sure of this, absolutely sure from my own felt experience, that every man who is brought to know and feel the plague of his own heart and really feels his own sinfulness cannot be an Arminian. It is impossible for him if he really knows and really feels his lost, hopeless and ruined condition, and he will surely see the folly of trying to put new wine into old bottles or to patch the old garment.

Another thing in handling matters unwisely is seeking first the things of this life. The Word says, “Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.” (Matthew 6:33) There was a man whose ground and land brought forth plentifully, and he said: “What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? And he said, this will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods...” Ah, but what did God say? “Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be which thou hast provided?” (Luke 12:17-20) So then, according to God's Word, this is to handle matters unwisely and

foolishly. Being indifferent to the concerns of our souls and seeking the things of the earth and this life, is folly.

Again, what is it to handle unwisely matters concerning the soul? Why, it is to be satisfied like the unwise virgins with a mere profession. There seemed no difference outwardly. Who could tell any difference? They were all virgins, they all trimmed their lamps, and they all had lamps of the same profession. But the foolish had no oil *with* their lamps. It is God's Word; it is the Lord himself who calls them foolish. (Matthew 25:2-3) What a solemn thing to be left so unwise as to be satisfied with a mere profession and not to have possession! To have a profession and no life; to have all the outward form and not the inward grace; to have the history and not the mystery—that is to be foolish, to handle matters foolishly. How can we do any other or any better until the Lord is pleased to make us wise and to rid and deliver us from the native foolishness of our hearts? To live carelessly, formally, self-righteously, legally, the Lord condemns as so much foolishness of a man's heart.

One more thought. God declares: "He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool." (Proverbs 28:26) So that in any degree to trust in ourselves, our own wisdom, our own knowledge, or to lean on an arm of flesh, God calls foolishness.

Well now, I want to come to the positive side of handling a matter wisely, for 'He that handleth a matter wisely shall find good.' What is it to handle matters wisely then, where our poor, needy, dependent and sinful selves are concerned? Why, the hymn writer puts it very wisely and sweetly:

*He that better knows than we,
Bids us now to Jesus flee;
Humbly take him at his word,
And your souls shall bless the Lord.*

(Gadsby's 789)

That is the very essence of handling a matter wisely! It is to relinquish all and to utterly abandon all hope in self, all relief in self, all strength, all righteousness, all goodness in and of ourselves and to flee to Christ as a helpless, wretched, ruined, lost sinner. That is to handle a matter wisely. If God the Spirit is pleased to teach and instruct us in these two things—to know truly our danger and to know our refuge—there will be a flying and a fleeing unto Christ.

*Thy inward teachings make us know,
Our danger and our refuge too.*

(Gadsby's 26)

What of handling the matter where our deep sense of guilt and sin is concerned? The Scripture says: "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper; but whose confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy." (Proverbs 28:13) What a blessed thing it is to have this matter of our guilt and our sin handled wisely. What shall we do with it? How shall we handle it wisely? Excuse it, smother it up, cover it, or blame someone else? Nay, our wisdom is to take it to the Saviour and seek for his blood to be applied to our poor conscience. I do not wish to speak of my own feelings and exercises, but I have been left to try and get rid of the feelings of sin in a wrong way. It is so easy, very easy, for a natural conscience presently to become indifferent and forget all about it and there is no experience, no mention of Christ and his blood. But what a precious and blessed thing to be ever fleeing to him! This is to handle it wisely, to take our guilt and sin and fall down before him, begging and pleading for his blood to be applied to our conscience. That is to handle it wisely; as we are enabled to do this. To be left like one in the Proverbs: "She eateth, and wipeth her mouth, and saith, I have done no wickedness," (Proverbs 30:20) is a solemn thing.

What can poor beggars in rags, ruin and nakedness do who see the filthiness of their own righteousness? Go to Christ with their case and need; to that precious Saviour and Redeemer who has a glorious robe of imputed righteousness to put on. This is to handle a matter wisely. O, the folly of those who think they can gain God's favour and smile by works of their own doing! It is the very height of folly, hypocrisy and ignorance. But O how suitable the precious righteousness which Christ has to bestow! To take our need to him is to handle the matter wisely.

What shall we do with our deep wounds, sickness and sores? Try to patch them up a little, find some superficial healing? O no, go to the good Physician; a Physician who is nigh and kind and able and who is willing to heal the sores of his sick people. What a wise course the leper took; he went to the Lord Jesus and fell down before him and sought cleansing and healing, and he found good. (Matthew 8:2) If we have to cover the upper lip and cry out, 'Unclean, unclean!' our wisdom is to take our case to the High Priest who is able to cleanse a filthy leper. This is to handle the matter wisely.

There are times when we may feel to be in much confusion of soul, times of darkness and temptation that bow us down greatly, so much so that we know what the Psalmist meant when he said: "My confusion is continually before me." (Psalm 44:15) He was bowed down greatly, and I am sure God's exercised people know what it is to feel heavily burdened, and the greatest of all their burdens is in themselves. They are bowed down under temptation and the workings of sin and the influence of that law in their members which warreth against the law of their mind. Now, is it our wisdom to try to support our infirmity? Try to support our burden and try to carry our own weight? No! What does the Word of God tell us? "Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and he shall sustain thee. He shall never suffer the righteous to be moved." (Psalm 55:22) This is to handle the matter wisely.

I do not wish to say much about myself, but as the instance comes into the mind I will use it as an illustration in regard to this particular. I suppose I was about eighteen at the time and under very heavy persecution and much reproach and brought exceedingly low under it. You know Satan is not slow in watching for an advantage and time to cast down further still if he might be able. Well, such was the burden upon my spirit and I was so torn and tossed within my soul I really thought I would sink under it. I laid my head on my arm and I said, 'I cannot bear any more, I shall sink, I must have some relief in this,' and those words came with power and caused relief: "Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and he shall sustain thee; he shall never suffer the righteous to be moved." God fulfilled the Word. He did sustain, and granted a blessed deliverance. Now this is our wisdom. The more we attempt a matter in our own strength, the more we try to deliver ourselves, the more entangled, tossed and cast down we become. To handle a matter wisely is to commit the way unto the Lord; *yes! commit it to him*. "Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass." (Psalm 37:5) "Fret not thyself because of evil doers." (Psalm 37:1) We do fret ourselves because of that evil doer the Devil: we fret ourselves on account of the evil doer in our old nature, our old man, who knows nothing else but to sin. But God says: "Fret not thyself because of evil doers." This is to handle matters wisely, to cast our souls, our burden upon the Lord in constant supplication, confession and unreserved and humble waiting of his pleasure.

Now, if we are enabled, as he has made us wise, and given us grace to handle matters wisely, we shall find good.

Before I look at this good which is found, I want to try and look a little at other things which affect and concern us, which are most important—things concerning our position, conduct and conversation. The Lord says: "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." (Psalm 32:9) That is, be neither hasty nor stubborn; not like a horse that rushes into battle without thinking or the stubborn ass that is disobedient and rebellious. It is a narrow path between the two. "In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths." (Proverbs 3:6) We have to prove that the Lord greatly resents our not asking counsel of him; he resents our independence of him. Independence is a great affront to that good God who has promised that he will undertake for, direct, guide and counsel his people in their journey through life. To lean to our own understanding is dreadful idolatry. By it we imply that we are higher than God and therefore, instead of consulting him we consult ourselves, and lean to our own understanding. In this we shall find evil. But if we are enabled to bring every case, every cause, every need, every concern, unreservedly and alone unto the Lord and wait for him, then we shall find good. Of the children of Israel of old, the Lord said, they "asked not counsel at the mouth of the Lord." (Joshua 9:14) It is a precious thing to be caused to wait for his counsel. This is to handle a matter wisely.

Well, what are we in and of ourselves? What do some of us feel ourselves to be? At the very best but fools, in and of ourselves, nothing but worms; and our very best, what is it? But that which is sinful, selfish, self-centred and springs from self-love and self-conceit and, therefore, must begin and end in self. It is a wonderful thing, a great mercy, to be delivered from ourselves,

*Fond self-direction is a shelf;
Thy strength, thy wisdom flee;
When thou art nothing in thyself,
Thou then art close to me.*

(Gadsby's 708)

Pride and self must be brought down. To handle matters wisely is to invoke God's wisdom, his counsel, his direction, his strength and his help, and not for one moment attempt to manage those things which are laid upon us by him, in our own wisdom and strength. Our greatest seasons of true wisdom are when God makes us perfect fools in our own sight. Yes, he makes a man a fool that he may make him wise. I may have told you this before, but there was a season in my experience when I was brought into such a crisis and concern I did not know what to do and all seemed dark. It did not matter which way I looked, every path seemed as dark as another and my heart rose up in dreadful rebellion against God because I was not endued with that degree and measure of wisdom which I felt some had. I quarrelled with God because he had put me in such a position and not given me wisdom to deal with it, but left me to flounder and struggle in the dark. But then the thought came, supposing I possessed the wisdom of Solomon, what is that compared with the wisdom of God? Far better to be a perfect fool in myself and leave all to God to handle for me, for he is too wise to be mistaken, too good to be unkind.

It is far better for us not to put a little finger to matters, and a mercy to be brought to the end of our righteousness, that Christ might be all; to be bereft of our own power, that he might be our strength; to be utterly delivered from our own wisdom and understanding, that he might be our wisdom and understanding. If we are left in any degree to our own righteousness, wisdom and power in anything, we shall prove the folly of it. 'He that handleth a matter wisely shall find good.'

Now I must not take up time to mention all the different matters which may concern and exercise the heart of God's people relative to circumstantial and providential things; things to do with our families. How we have laboured and striven and struggled to try and put things right and have made things ten times worse! How we have tried to do something in our own strength—and I know a little of what I am talking about; there is no bigger fool here than myself, and I have been caused to prove over and over and over again what a fool I am. I wish I had learned it well enough not to lean to my own wisdom now in anything whatever, but to continually go unto my God that he might be my wisdom, righteousness, salvation and strength.

Now then let us try and look at this 'good' that is to be found.

Well, if we can handle the matter of our souls wisely by God's grace we shall find a good Saviour, who is almighty and all-sufficient, a precious and blessed Saviour who will save us to the end and to the uttermost in spite of ourselves. If we can but commit our poor souls into his blessed hands, we shall presently prove how good he is, how good his atonement is, how good his righteousness is, how good, how suitable, how sufficient his grace is; how blessedly suitable, precious and successful his intercession and advocacy are. We shall prove how deep and wonderful and blessed his love and wisdom are.

*Hereafter he will make me know,
And I shall surely find,
He was too wise to err, and O,
Too good to be unkind.*

(Gadsby's 7)

We shall find good. We shall find how good, how loving, how suitable and how sweet his much needed and sweet mercy is. We shall prove and find how good he is in his faithfulness and his power. Peter says, "Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you." (1 Peter 5:7)

*Now I see, whate'er betide,
All is well if Christ be mine;
He has promised to provide;
May he teach me to resign.*

(Gadsby's 277)

To find that this precious person, who is goodness itself, is to find good indeed. To be enabled to graciously lay claim to an interest in such a glorious person and precious Saviour as the Lord Jesus Christ—O, it is to find good. The Pharisees never found this good, the dead professors never found this good, the foolish virgins never found this good; but those who handle a matter wisely, who are brought to look to Christ alone, do find this blessed good.

In regard to those lesser and yet most important things that are to be handled wisely. In handling a matter wisely we shall find that God is good and that he does not fail; that he is unchangeable and faithful in the fulfilment of his own promise, he cannot possibly fail. If the Lord enables us to acknowledge him in all our ways then he will not fail to direct our paths. The deficiency, the faults, the short-comings are not in God—that can never be. They must be in us. That is where the deficiency is. There is the necessity of greater grace, more humility and that enabling of the Spirit to wait upon God, diligently seeking with our heart that he will fulfil his gracious Word. O, if we can but come unto this precious Christ with our burdens and all our griefs and temptations! He has said: “Come ... and I will give you rest.” (Matthew 11:28)

Yet I am sure there is nothing more attractive, precious and sweet than that rest which Christ has to give to the poor storm-battered, tempted, burdened sinner. That rest is good, and if we have ever found, tasted, experienced and handled it, we have proved how good God is. If we have come to the Lord Jesus for pardon and for purging of our consciences we shall find peace. What a precious thing peace is—real peace—the peace which Christ has to give! It is good. If we attempt in any way to excuse ourselves, or to smother things, or to silence our conscience in some matter, O what an evil thing that is! What folly! But to come to Christ and find his peace, his pardon, his rest—that is to find good indeed.

Those matters in which the exercised soul is caused unreservedly to commit their case, cause and concerns unto the Lord, they will find good, for he will manifest his wisdom, power and goodness in managing all by the way and to the end.

*‘Cast,’ he said, ‘on me thy care;
’Tis enough that I am nigh;
I will all thy burdens bear;
I will all thy needs supply.’*

*Only when the way is rough,
And the coward flesh would start,
Let thy promise and thy love,
Cheer and animate my heart.’*

(Gadsby’s 277)

That is to find good—when his promise and his love, cheer and animate our hearts.

A blessed thing then, to be enabled unreservedly to commit everything into the hands of that blessed God who has promised to undertake. “Let your conversation be without covetousness; but be content with such things as ye have.” (Hebrews 13:5) But, you say, I have not got anything, am absolutely destitute and have nothing to be content with, but to be content with Christ and nothing beside. O to be willing to be nothing that he might be all; to be happy that we have nothing in and of ourselves but to have all our trust in him; to be content to be empty, poor, low and nothing in self that Christ may be our riches! “And be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say, the Lord is my helper and I will not fear what man shall do unto me.” (Hebrews 13:5-6) Well then, to handle a matter wisely and to find good is to unreservedly commit all into his hands that we may be nothing in self but all in him.

Let us try and look at the words of the Spirit here: ‘And whoso trusteth in the Lord, happy is he.’ Oftentimes in the feelings and experience of a child of God there is something of an extremity. This is when we prove most of all the sufficiency and absolute suitability of the Lord in all that he is toward a poor needy sinner. I have been brought to an extremity in my own feelings and sometimes it has been just this: either trust or sink; either lean or else fall. O, it is a season of extremity! Cast upon the Lord, sink or swim, either be dependent upon him for everything or have nothing. So there is a bringing of the soul to trust in him. This is our mercy, for how solemnly true are the words, “He that trusteth in his own heart

is a fool.” (Proverbs 28:26) It is a wonderful mercy to be brought off all and kept trusting wholly and alone in the Lord, sensibly, feelingly, comfortably and with a sweet and precious confidence.

I might ask this question: Where is our trust for eternity? You say, ‘Well, I do hope that when the day comes I shall be found among the redeemed and that I shall go to heaven.’ What is that hope resting on? Where is your trust? One may say, ‘I hope to get to heaven,’ but upon what ground? What is the foundation of that trust? My friends, it is very well for us at times to have a thorough searching; it has never done me any harm. It is good at times to be brought to the point: what do I believe, and why do I believe it? What is the reason, ground and foundation of my belief and my trust? Where do I stand in regard to this? Can we honestly and truly say—

*My hope is built on nothing less
Than Jesus' blood and righteousness;
I dare not trust the sweetest frame,
But wholly lean on Jesus' name.*

(Gadsby's 1106)

There is nothing between my poor soul and a deserved hell but Jesus and his precious blood. There is my only trust. It is a blessed person who can really say it, and who truly is brought to trust in the Lord.

Now there is one thing of which we might be fully assured—He is worthy to be trusted. Of that we can have no doubt at all! But what a wonderful mercy to be brought to trust in him, to trust only in the merit of Jesus Christ, to trust only in the precious effect and fruit of his finished work on sinner's account and behalf. Trust in his High Priestly person and office, trust in his righteousness and advocacy, trust in his immutable, unfathomable, eternal love, and that as revealed and made known and felt in our poor hearts, impressed upon them by the precious power and influence of the Holy Spirit.

O to trust in this precious person for our strength! The more we are brought to know and feel our absolute impotence, spiritual impotence, the more we shall be constrained to lean upon him and trust in him for strength, and that not only in our poor needy souls, but in regard to everyday needs, and times and seasons of special need.

*Let not thy heart despond and say,
How shall I stand the trying day?
He has engaged by firm decree,
That as thy days, thy strength shall be.*

(Gadsby's 328)

To do anything in our own strength will prove vanity and weakness, but that which we are caused and enabled to do in the strength of the Lord will be our happiness. Gideon must be brought down, down. He must be brought to the end of all help and hope in the creature, he must be left with a few fearful and troubled men—and what did the Lord say? “Go in this thy might.” (Judges 6:14) Not in his own might, nay, but in the strength of the Lord which he gave him in his time of need. That strength will make the feeble strong, it will make the trembling bold, it will cause a poor sinner, one who is trembling, distressed and cast down, to be an overcomer.

*And Satan trembles when he sees
The weakest saint upon his knees.*

(Gadsby's 394)

Now to trust in the Lord's strength is the happiness of the impotent sinner. To trust in his precious promises too, for it is a blessed fact that the Lord is pleased to speak to the hearts of his own people, and he never fails. O that word which he is pleased to convey with divine power into the heart and to indelibly inscribe upon the heart! What a wonderful mercy if we can humbly lay claim to any promise that God has been pleased to give to us. Your mind may go at this very moment to some place and spot where you really believe the Lord spoke to your poor heart. He is to be trusted, he will not fail his Word, he will never do that. “God is not a man that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it?” (Numbers 23:19) Yes, indeed, he will try our faith, he will prove us, we may have to pass through many years of temptation and exercise, darkness and affliction, but the Lord

is to be trusted in regard to his faithfulness to his Word. O, happy is the man that trusteth in him! 'And whoso trusteth in the Lord, happy is he.'

A number of times I have said how sweet that word is in the Word of God, 'whosoever.' It does not exclude any, whatever their path or condition or circumstance. It is, 'Whoso trusteth in the Lord, happy is he.' He only is happy and he will be happy, for, "Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the Lord his God." (Psalm 146:5) He is a happy man because it is only by the grace of God, only by the teaching of the Holy Spirit, only by that blessed work of God upon the heart that any poor sinner is brought to trust in the Lord. It is God's own work. "He makes the believer, and gives him his crown." (*Gadsby's* 804)

He is only a happy man when he trusts in the Lord, and will be happy too in that the Lord will honour the faith of his own giving and manifest himself to the poor, trusting sinner as a good, gracious, faithful, merciful God. The Lord has never failed one who was brought to put their trust in him for time and for eternity. He will not fail us if we are among those who are enabled to put their trust in him. 'He that handleth a matter wisely shall find good; and whoso trusteth in the Lord, happy is he.'

May we prove the truth of it and the Lord be pleased to forgive anything amiss.

Amen.

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