

The Way of the Lord

by David Orton

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I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go;
I will guide you with My eye

Psalm 32:8

We had come to the end of Bible College, and as a class we had set a day aside to seek the Lord for our futures. As I waited quietly in his presence the Lord dropped into my mind the reference, “Psalm 32:8”. Not knowing what the verse was I looked it up and received assurance that all was in hand—he would guide me.

Little did I know that over the next thirty years this verse and the following one would become my life-message. Nor did I realise the full import of what the Lord was saying.

His promise to guide me was layered with meaning. The Hebrew for “guide” is the word *yaats*, meaning ‘to advise, counsel, consult.’

Wanting the movement, but not the mystery

However, over the years I have discovered we are far more inclined toward *guidance* from God, rather than his *counsel*. And yet the only way to truly receive guidance is to “*stand in the counsel of the Lord*” (Jer 23:18,22 NKJV). We only fulfil the *purpose* if we abide in the *person*. Even so, we want the *direction*, but not the *discipline*—the *movement*, but not the *mystery*. We focus on *guidance* to get *what we want*, whereas God focuses on *counsel* to change *who we are*. We want to know the next step: to resolve our crisis; to get direction for our ministry or life; to know the next step in achieving our goals. But God is infinitely more committed to our *character* than our *career*, in inner-life change rather than circumstantial change. We place *service* over *sonship* and *attainment* over *at-one-ment*, spurning the “*counsel of the Lord*” and the inward change that this demands. Distracted by the tyranny of the *temporal*, we are consigned to immaturity in the *eternal*.

This, in my estimation, is the reason we have lost our way. Why the church in the West is not moving in spiritual power. We have preached and believed that, “*Jesus is the Way*” (Jn 14:6); but have not understood the implications. We have understood that Jesus is the way to heaven; and that he is the way to recovery, to healing, to ministry success, and blessing. And so, we have reduced him to faith-formulas: the means, by which we get what we want forgetting he said, “I AM the way...”, that only as we abide in HIM are we truly people of the Way (Acts 9:2). The Way is a *person*, not a *program*, or a *principle* to achieve a purpose.

The Lord promised to “*counsel me with his eye*”

The Lord had promised in this word that he would, “*counsel me with his eye*”.

This implies personal relationship. Not only would he keep me in his “*sight*”, so that nothing would happen to me outside of his will, he would counsel me with his “*eye*”—with just a look. Wow! What intimacy! What sensitivity! With soul mates a mere look can be more eloquent than words. Peter had just denied Christ for the third time. And as the rooster crowed Jesus turned looking straight at him; immediately Peter’s heart broke—and he wept (Lk 22:61,62).

How sensitive are we to the “*counsel of the Lord*”—to just a look? When was the last time we stopped long enough for this to happen, for the Lord to look straight through us into the hidden recesses of our soul?

Like Peter, at our weakest moment, surrounded by the debris of our failure, all it takes is a glance.

This is why we are not broken, and why there is no conviction of sin. We have lost intimacy with the one who is the Way and who has promised to guide us in it. We have forgotten how to “*stand in the counsel of the Lord*”—in the wisdom and holiness

of God. We have refused to be instructed or taught.

Tested and found wanting

And we have, therefore, been turned over to our own ways—to what the Scripture calls a “*reprobate*” or “*debased*” mind:

And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done.

Romans 1:28 ESV

I used to see this scripture as referring exclusively to the unbeliever. But now I’m seeing that it is far broader: it, in fact, describes the whole human condition, including the church, and God’s response to it.

The word “reprobate” in the Greek is *adokimos*, signifying ‘not standing the test,’ and therefore meaning, ‘to be rejected’. It primarily refers to assaying metals, which was Jeremiah’s function as a prophet to the Old Testament church, Israel: he was in effect an assayer of metals as he tested the church’s ways (Jer 6:27).

Therefore, having been tested, the church has been found wanting. We have not maintained the primacy of knowing God and like an impure metal have been rejected.

Consigned to live out the *consequences* of our choices

Being ‘rejected’ or ‘handed over’ to our own desires is a serious thing. Paul explains that those who know God but who “*exchange the glory ... for images made to look like mortal man*” will be given over to the desires of their hearts and own lusts (Rom 1:21-28). In exchanging the glory for an image we have been consigned to live out the *consequences* of our choices.

But what does it mean to “*exchange the glory*”? Like ancient Israel, it is worshipping the work of our hands—gods made in our own image. We have worshipped our ministry, our theology, our movements, our methods and achievements; and have, therefore, exchanged the *presence* for a *programme*. There is a way of doing church that seems right to man, but the end is death (Prov 14:12; 16:25); a way that is broad but leads to destruction (Mtt 7:13); a wisdom of this age, which considers the way of the cross as foolishness; and a natural mindedness devoid of the Spirit. This has opened the church to diverse lusts, including false theologies, immorality, and particularly homosexuality. It explains the sexual abuse and impurity currently surfacing in the church. Sexual sin is always a bedfellow of idolatry.

But why does God hand us over to our own lusts? To fill us with our own ways: “*The backslider in heart will be filled with his own ways ...*” (Prov 14:14); “*they will eat the fruit of their ways and be filled with the fruit of their schemes*” (Prov 1:31). And so, the church is full of her own ways; with human contrivance and device; with no end of human creativity and activity. And yet our best efforts are stillborn. Sure, we may *simulate renewal* for a season, but we cannot *stimulate revival*. Because we have been unteachable, refusing instruction and counsel, the Lord gives us our head until we are filled with the consequences of our own cleverness, with our own devices and schemes. We have been sated with our celebrities and our conferences, with our summits and seminars, with our counselling and courses.

But where is God? We have “*sown the wind and we are reaping a whirlwind*” (Hos 8:7). We are reaping the harvest of our own ways: exposure of sexual sins in the ministry; the loss of influence in the world; and, in the West, a shrinking constituency and alarming rates of ministerial failure; problems and pressures because we have refused his counsel.

This was the case in Jeremiah’s day:

3 O LORD, do not your eyes look for truth? You have struck them down, but they felt no anguish; you have consumed them, but they refused to take correction. They have made their faces harder than rock; they have refused to repent. 4 Then I said, “These are only the poor; they have no sense; for they do not know the way of the LORD, the justice of their God. 5 I will go to the great and will speak to them, for they know the way of the LORD, the justice of their God.” But they all alike had broken the yoke; they had burst the bonds. 6 Therefore a lion from the forest shall strike

them down; a wolf from the desert shall devastate them. A leopard is watching their cities; everyone who goes out of them shall be torn in pieces, because their transgressions are many, their apostasies are great.

Jeremiah 5:3–6 ESV

Neither the people nor the leaders knew the way of the Lord—they refused his counsel and correction. And so, they were exposed to the discipline of further misfortune, the fruit of their own ways.

This relates to the second part of the promise the Lord gave me that day. In fact, it was a command:

Be not like a horse or a mule, without understanding, which must be curbed with bit and bridle, or it will not stay near you.

Psalms 32:9 ESV

This is the flip-side of refusing his counsel. Like the bridled horse or mule, God will use external force – the fruit of our own ways – to bring us back to him. But this kind of guidance is not the high calling of God – it is not his “*good and perfect will*” – rather it is his ‘permissive will’ and, in reality, is a remedial discipline.

This need not be so. We were created for intimacy and obedience – to abide in him and obey his voice, even in the minutiae of life – to be “*counselled in the way*”. This is an issue of the heart. Israel, the old covenant church, did not know the ways of God because they had first gone astray in their hearts (see Heb 3:7-11).

As the prophet declared: “*We all ... have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way*” (Isa 53:6). Every one of us in various ways and degrees has turned to our own way—to our own plans, schemes, and strength to do the work of God.

And so, let us forsake our way and our thoughts and seek him while he is near. Our own thinking has blinded us. His ways and thoughts are so much higher than ours; as high as the heavens above the earth (see Isa 55:6-9).

So, how will our eyes be opened? How do we discover his ways and his thoughts? By abiding in HIM—his way is in the sanctuary (Ps 77:13 NKJV).

Now is the time to enter.

And if we do, he promises:

And I will lead the blind in a way that they do not know, in paths that they have not known, I will guide them. I will turn the darkness before them into light, the rough places into level ground. These are the things I do, and I do not forsake them.

Isaiah 42:16 ESV

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