**THE EXPOSITION OF HOLY SCRIPTURE BY ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

**PSALMS-013**. **GUIDANCE IN JUDGMENT by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"8.* *Good and upright is the Lord; therefore will He teach sinners in the way. 9. The meek will He guide in judgment; and the meek will He teach His way."*

*Psalm 25:8-9*

The Psalmist prays in this psalm for three things: deliverance, guidance, and forgiveness. Of these three petitions the central one is that for guidance. Show me Thy ways, O Lord, he asks in a previous verse; where he means by Thy ways, not God's dealings with men, but men's conduct as prescribed by God. In my text he exchanges petition for contemplation; and gazes on the character of God, in order thereby to be helped to confidence in an answer to his prayer. Such alternations of petition and contemplation are the very heartbeats of devotion, now expanding in desire, now closing on its treasure in fruition. Either attitude is incomplete without the other. Do our prayers pass into such still contemplation of the face of God? Do our thoughts of His character break into such confident petition? My text contains a striking view of the divine character, a grand confidence built thereupon, and a condition appended on which the fulfilment of that confidence depends. Let us look at these in turn.

**I. First, then, we have here the Psalmist's thought of God. Good and upright is the Lord.**

Now it is clear that the former of these two epithets is here employed, not in its widest sense of moral perfectness, or else upright, which follows, would be mere tautology, but in the narrower sense, which is familiar too, to us, in our common speech, in which good is tantamount to kind, beneficent, or to say all in a word, loving. Upright needs no explanation; but the point to notice is the decisiveness with which the Psalmist binds together, in one thought, the two aspects of the divine nature which so many people find it hard to reconcile, and the separation of which has been the parent of unnumbered misconceptions and errors as to Him and to His dealings. Good and upright, loving and righteous is the Lord, says the Psalmist. He puts in no qualifying word such as, loving though righteous, righteous and yet loving. Such phrases express the general notions of the relation of these two attributes. But the Psalmist employs no such expressions. He binds the two qualities together, in the feeling of their profoundest harmony.

Now let me remind you that neither of these two resplendent aspects of the divine nature reaches its highest beauty and supremest power, except it be associated with the other. In the spectrum analysis of that great light there are the two lines; the one purest white of righteousness, and the other tinged with a ruddier glow, the line of love. The one adorns and sets off the other. Love without righteousness is flaccid, a mere gush of good-natured sentiment, impotent to confer blessing, powerless to evoke reverence. Righteousness without love is as white as snow, and as cold as ice; repellent, howsoever it may excite the sentiment of awe-struck distance. But we need that the righteousness shall be loving, and that the love shall be righteous, in order that the one may be apprehended in its tenderest tenderness and the other may be adored in its loftiest loftiness.

And yet we are always tempted to wrench the two apart, and to think that the operation of the one must sometimes, at all events on the outermost circumference of the spheres, impinge upon, and collide with, the operations of the other. Hence you get types of religion--yes! and two types of Christianity--in which the one or the other of these two harmonious attributes is emphasised to such a degree as almost to blot out the other. You get forms of religion in which the righteousness has swallowed up the love, and others in which the love has destroyed the righteousness. The effect is disastrous. In old days our fathers fell into the extreme on the one hand; and the pendulum has swung with a vengeance as far from the vertical line, to the other extreme, in these days as it ever did in the past. The religion which found its centre-point and its loftiest conception of the divine nature in the thought of His absolute righteousness made strong, if it made somewhat stern, men. And now we see renderings of the truth that God is love which degrade the lofty, noble, sovereign conception of the righteous God that loveth, into mere Indulgence on the throne of the universe. And what is the consequence? All the stern teachings of Scripture men recoil from, and try to explain away. The ill desert of sin, and the necessary iron nexus between sin and suffering--and as a consequence the sacrificial work of Jesus Christ, and the supreme glory of His mission in that He is the Redeemer of mankind--are all become unfashionable to preach and unfashionable to believe. God is Love. We cannot make too much of His love, unless by reason of it we make too little of His righteousness.

The Psalmist, in his childlike faith, saw deeper and more truly than many would-be theologians and thinkers of this day, when he proclaimed in one breath Good and upright is the Lord. Let us not forget that the Apostle, whose great message to the world was, as the last utterance completing the process of revelation, God is Love, had it also in charge to declare unto us that God is Light, and in Him is no darkness at all.

**II. And so, secondly, mark the calm confidence builded on this conception of the divine character.**

What a wonderful therefore that is!--the logic of faith and not of sense. Good and upright is the Lord; therefore will He teach sinners in the way. The coexistence of these two aspects in the perfect divine character is for us a guarantee that He cannot leave men, however guilty they may be, to grope in the dark, or keep His lips locked in silence. The Psalmist does not mean guidance as to practical advantages and worldly prosperity. That may also be looked for, in a modified degree. But what he means is guidance as to the one important thing, the sovereign conception of duty, the eternal law of right and wrong. God will not leave a man without adequate teaching as to that, just because He is loving and righteous.

For what is love, in its loftiest, purest, and therefore in its divine aspect? What is it except an infinite desire to impart, and that the object on which it falls shall be blessed. So because the Lord is good, and His tender mercies are over all His works, certainly He must desire, if one may so say, as His deepest desire, the blessedness of His creatures. He is a God whose nature and property it is to love, and His love is the infinite and ceaseless welling out of Himself, in all forms of beauty and blessedness, according to the capacity and contents of His recipient creatures. He is the giving God, as James in his epistle eloquently and wonderfully calls Him, whose very nature it is to give. And that is only to say, in other words, good is the Lord.

But then good and upright--that combination determines the form which His blessings shall assume, the channel in which by preference they will flow. If we had only to say, good is the Lord, then our happiness, as we call it, the satisfaction of our physical needs and of lower cravings, might be the adequate expression of His love. But if God be righteous, then because Himself is so, it must be His deepest desire for us that we should be like Him. Not our happiness but our rectitude is God's end in all that He does with us. It is worth His while to make us, in the lower sense of the word, happy, but the purpose of joy as of sorrow is to make us pure and righteous. We shall never come to understand the meaning of our own lives, and will always be blindly puzzling over the mysteries of the providences that beset us, until we learn that not enjoyment and not sorrow is His ultimate end concerning us, but that we may be partakers of His holiness. Since He is righteous, the dearest desire of His loving heart, and that to which all His dealings with us are directed; and that, therefore, to which all our desires and efforts should be directed likewise, is to make us righteous also.

Therefore will He teach sinners in the way. If the righteousness existed without the love it must come with a rod, and the sinners who are out of the way must incontinently be crushed where they have wandered. But since righteousness is blended with love, therefore He comes, and must desire to bring all wanderers back into the paths which are His own.

I need not do more than in a word remind you how strong a presumption there lies in this combination of aspects of the divine nature, in favour of an actual revelation. It seems to me that, notwithstanding all the objections that are made to a supernatural and objective revelation, there is nothing half so monstrous as it would be to believe, with the pure deist or theist, that God, being what He is, righteous and loving, had never rent His heavens to say one word to man to lead him in the paths of righteousness. I can understand Atheism, and I can understand a revealing God, but not a God that dwells in the thick darkness, and is yet Love and Righteousness, and looks down upon this world and never puts out a finger to point the path of duty. A silent God seems to me no God but an Almighty Devil. Revelation is the plain conclusion from the premisses that good and upright is the Lord! I speak not, for there is no time to do so, of the various manners in which this divine desire to bring sinners into the way fulfils itself. There are our consciences; there are His providences; there is the objective revelation of His word; there are the whispers of His Spirit in men's hearts. I do not know what you believe, but I believe that God can find His way to my heart and infuse there illumination, and move affections, and make my eye clear to discern what is right. He that formed the eye, shall He not see? He that formed the eye, shall He not send light to it? Are we to shut out God, in obedience to the dictates of an arbitrary psychology, from access to His own creature; and to say, Thou hast made me, and Thou canst not speak to me. My soul is Thine by creation, but its doors are close barred against Thee; and Thou canst not lay Thy hand upon it? Good and upright is the Lord, therefore will He teach sinners in the way.

**III. Now notice, again, the condition on which the fulfilment of this confidence depends.**

The meek will He guide in judgment, and the meek will He teach His way. The fact of our being sinful only makes it the more imperative that God should speak to us. But the condition of our hearing and profiting by the guidance is meekness. By meekness the Psalmist means, I suppose, little else than what we might call docility, of which the prime element is the submission of my own will to God's. The reason why we go wrong about our duties is mainly that we do not supremely want to go right, but rather to gratify inclinations, tastes, or passions. God is speaking to us, but if we make such a riot with the yelpings of our own kennelled desires and lusts, and listen to the rattle and noise of the street and the babble of tongues, He

Can but listen at the gate,

And hear the household jar within.

The meek will He guide in judgment; the meek will He teach His way. Some of us put our heads down like bulls charging a gate. Some of us drive on full speed, and will not shut off steam though the signals are against us, and the end of that can only be one thing. Some of us do not wish to know what God wishes us to do. Some of us cannot bear suspense of judgment, or of decision, and are always in a hurry to be in action, and think the time lost that is spent in waiting to know what God the Lord will speak. If you do not clearly see what to do, then clearly you may see that you are to do nothing.

The ark was to go half a mile in front of the camp before the foremost files lifted a foot to follow, in order that there should be no mistake as to the road. Wait till God points the path, and wish Him to point it, and hush the noises that prevent your hearing His voice, and keep your wills in absolute submission; and above all, be sure that you act out your convictions, and that you have no knowledge of duty which is not expressed in your practice, and you will get all the light which you need; sometimes being taught by errors no doubt, often being left to make mistakes as to what is expedient in regard to worldly prosperity, but being infallibly guided as to the path of duty, and the path of peace and righteousness.

And now, before I close, let me just remind you of the great fact which transcends the Psalmist's confidence whilst it warrants it.

Because God is Love, and God is Righteousness, He cannot but speak. But this Psalmist did not know how wonderfully God was going to speak by that Word who has called Himself the Light of men; and who has said, He that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life. He teaches sinners in the way, by Jesus Christ; for we have Him for our Pattern and Example. We have His love for our impelling motive. We have His Spirit to speak in our hearts, and to guide us into all truth. And this Shepherd, when He putteth forth His own sheep, goeth before them; and the sheep follow Him and know His voice. The Psalmist's confidence, bright as it is, is but the glow of the morning twilight. The full sunshine of the transcendent fact to which God's righteous love impelled and bound Him is Christ, who makes us know the will of the Father. But we want more than knowledge. For we all know our duty a great deal better than any of us do it. What is the use of a guide to a lame man? But our Guide says to us, Arise and walk, and if we clasp His hand we receive strength, and the lame man leaps as a hart.

So, dear brethren! let us all cleave to Him, the Guide, the Way, and the Life which enables us to walk in the way. If we thus cleave, then be sure that He will lead us in the paths of righteousness, which are paths of peace. He is the Way; He is the Leader of the march; He gives power to walk in the light, and His one command, Follow Me, unfolds into all duty and includes all direction, companionship, perfection, and blessedness.