

THE CONDITONS

Trust in the Lord with all thine heart

Here is the first condition. The Hebrew word (בטח) translated *trust* means *rely upon, or place confidence in*. If you would be led by God, you must rest in God. Our temptation is to place our confidence in things other than the Lord. The Scriptures warn us not to place our trust in riches (Prov. 11:28), men (Jer. 17:5), or ourselves (Prov. 28:26). But how do you trust in the Lord? You trust him with your heart. The heart refers to the whole inner man including the intellect, emotions, and will. You must cast your whole being upon the Lord. This can only be done as you exercise faith in the promises of God.

*How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord
Is laid for your faith in his excellent Word!
What more could he say than to you he hath said
To you who for refuge to Jesus have fled?*

Your heart must come to find rest in the written Word of God, regardless of your circumstances or prospects. Furthermore, you must trust in the Lord with **all** your heart. God demands that you put the full weight of your confidence upon his Word. You are to trust him whole-heartedly, unreservedly and single-mindedly, in every circumstance (cf. James 1:8).

So what does it look like when one trusts in the Lord with all the heart? The Scriptures teach that those who trust in the Lord (1) call upon him (Ps. 22:4-5); (2) have inward peace and are not afraid (Is. 12:2; 26:3-4); and (3) rejoice and praise him (Ps. 28:7).

Therefore, prayerlessness, worry, fear, frustration, anger, and complaining betray a heart that is not fully trusting in the Lord.

Lean not unto thine own understanding

The second condition is the converse of the first. The word *lean* (שען) is a synonym of *trust* (בטח) and is sometimes used in parallel with it (Is. 30:12; 31:1). To lean on your understanding is to rest on it and place your confidence in it. This is the antithesis of trusting in the Lord. You cannot trust in the Lord and trust in your understanding. For our thoughts are not only infinitely below God's thoughts, they are also often opposed to them (Is. 55:6-9).

Perhaps someone will say: *Here is proof that Christians must forsake reason in order to have their religion*. But of course that is not at all what Solomon is saying here. On the contrary, we are not called to forsake reason or logic, as if trusting in the Lord were unreasonable, foolish and opposed to all good sense. Is it unreasonable for a child to trust his father when he doesn't completely understand his father's plan? Is it irrational for a patient to trust a doctor when he doesn't fully comprehend the remedy? How could it be unreasonable for an ignorant, foolish man to trust his all-wise, all-knowing, all-powerful Creator? We are not being called to forsake our reason, but rather to humbly acknowledge its limits.

In all thy ways acknowledge him

The third condition is parallel to the first. We might slightly reword it to show this:

*Trust in the Lord with all thine heart
Acknowledge the Lord in all thy ways*

The first condition has to do with thoughts (*heart*); the third with actions, choices, and words (*ways*) – those things which proceed from thoughts. We observe that in both conditions there are no exceptions. The Lord, in every instance, is to be the object of our trust and the inspiration of our actions. The word *acknowledge* (ירע) is a word usually translated *to know*. We are *to know* the Lord in all our ways. This is far more than merely a recognition of God's authority over us. All of our ways are to be directed with a view to drawing near to God and giving him glory.

Meeting the Conditions

Someone might say: *It is impossible for anyone to meet these conditions!* But I would be quick to point out that not only is it possible for the Christian to meet these conditions, it is imperative that he do so. I know of no other way to come to this place of trust and obedience than through prayer (Heb. 10:22; James 4:6-10). It is at the mercy seat that we learn daily to trust him and yield our wills to his. Indeed sometimes we wrestle like Jacob (Gen. 32), but we must in every circumstance come to trust in and submit to God. We are to bring every thought into obedience (2 Cor. 10:5). These conditions teach us that we should spend less time planning our day and more time praying about our day; less time trying to solve our problems and more time preparing our hearts before the Lord . . . because the promise is only for those who meet the conditions!

THE PROMISE

He shall direct thy paths

Before we positively expound the promise, let us observe what it does not mean. First of all, **this is not merely a reference to God's providence.** There are no conditions to God's providence (Prov. 16:9). All men, without exception, are subject to God's sovereign will. Secondly, **this is not merely a reference to God's guidance of his children.** All Christians are led by the Spirit (Rom. 8:14), but not all Christians acknowledge God in all their ways. True believers can often be stubborn before the Lord (cf. Ps. 32:9). Finally, **this is not a promise of mystical guidance.** The passage does not say: *He shall give you signs and visions or He shall audibly tell you what to do.* True faith seeks to meet the conditions then waits on the Lord with quiet confidence, looking to the Scriptures for wisdom, and observing God's providential workings. God has a way of clarifying the path without direct revelation (cf. Prov. 4:18). Mystical approaches to God's will (e.g. *God told me*) always lead away from true faith, because they cause the individual to rest on their experience rather than on the written Word.

We will now consider what this promise does mean. The verb translated *direct* (יָשַׁר) means *to be smooth or straight*. It can be used literally of roads or figuratively of ethical behavior. Here it is in a causative form, so that the idea is to **make smooth** or **straight**. A better translation would be: *He shall make your paths smooth (or straight)*. The emphasis here seems to be on the

condition of our daily path. He will make it smooth and straight (cf. Is. 40:3; Ps. 5:8), like a highway. If you have ever driven on a bumpy dirt road filled with ruts and holes, you know that it is a most unpleasant experience. It also makes for rather slow going. What a contrast when you get on a smooth and straight highway where the speed limit is 70 mph! This is the picture in this promise. You will have a clearly marked, smooth and straight highway to travel. This is not a promise of a trouble-free, easy life (cf. 2 Tim. 3:12). Rather, based on the context of Proverbs, this promise seems to include several things: **(1) Assurance of eternal life** (3:21-23; 4:18) – instead of a constant barrage of doubts, this life is characterized by confidence in God; **(2) Uprightness of character** (2:10-20; 3:23) – instead of continually stumbling into sin, this life is marked by a constancy of godliness; **(3) Clarity of direction** (4:18; 15:19) – instead of a perpetual fog, this life is blessed with ever-increasing light; and **(4) Smoothness of the way** (3:17; 15:19) – instead of being overwhelmed, this life abounds in peace, joy, and thanksgiving. No matter how difficult, God's way is always the best way and the most pleasant to travel. Horatius Bonar wrote:

*Thy way not mine, O Lord, however dark it be!
Lead me by thine own hand, choose out the
path for me;
Smooth let it be or rough, it will be still the best;
Winding or straight, it leads right onward
to thy rest.*

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THE CONDITIONS OF GOD'S GUIDANCE

By Dean Good

Many people claim to be led by God. Most people seek for assurance that God is watching over them and guiding their steps. Indeed, a desire for a sense of God's direction seems to be basic to man's nature. Certainly this desire is at the root of many of the superstitions that have always plagued mankind. People through the ages have sought for signs, claimed premonitions, consulted fortune-tellers, and looked to the stars for direction. Even the atheist will speak of fate as if it were some guiding force. However, only the Christian has the promise of God's guidance (Rom. 8:14). This promise appears throughout the Scriptures and is exemplified in the lives of all the saints contained therein.

In this brief treatise, we will consider just one of these promises – **Proverbs 3:5-6: *Trust in the Lord with all thine heart and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him and he shall direct thy paths.*** In this oft memorized passage the promise appears at the end: *he shall direct thy paths.* But it is important to note that it is a conditional promise. In other words, the promise is given only to those who meet certain, clearly stated conditions; it is void unless those prerequisites are met. Let us first look at the conditions, and then we will consider the promise.