

At School

by C.H. Spurgeon

C.H. Spurgeon teaches that true Christian maturity involves a humble, obedient, and teachable heart that earnestly prays to be taught and empowered to do God's will in all aspects of life.

Scripture: Psalm 143:10, Psalm 143:2, Jonah 1:3, 1 Corinthians 13:1-3, John 13:14, 2 Timothy 2:6, Psalm 25:8

Topics: "Obedience", "Prayer", "Sanctification"

Description

In this devotional sermon, C.H. Spurgeon explores the heartfelt prayer of the Psalmist, 'Teach me to do Your will,' emphasizing the importance of humility, obedience, and dependence on God. Spurgeon encourages believers to seek not only knowledge of God's will but the grace and power to live it out daily. Through vivid illustrations and biblical insight, he calls Christians to a life of practical godliness, courage, and spiritual vitality, trusting in God's faithfulness to teach and guide.

Transcript

"Teach me to do Your will; for You are my God." Psalm 143:10.

THIS is a prayer about doing, but it is perfectly free from legal taint. The man who offered it had no idea of being saved by his doings, for in the second verse of the Psalm he had said, "Enter not into judgment with Your servant: for in Your sight shall no man living be justified." This is not the prayer of a sinner seeking salvation, for salvation is not by doing the will of God but by believing in Christ. It is the prayer of the man who is already saved and who, being saved, devotes himself to the service of God and wishes to be taught in the fear of the Lord. "Teach me to do Your will, O God." The connection leads us to make the remark that David looked upon the doing of God's will as his best escape from his enemies.

He speaks of his cruel persecutors. He declares that though he looked all around he could find none who would help him. Then he prays, "Teach me to do Your will; for You are my God." And depend upon it, the surest way to escape from harm is to do no ill. If you are surrounded by those who would slander you, your best defense is a blameless life! If many are watching for your halting and maliciously desiring your fall, your safety lies in holiness! The very best prayer you can pray for your own protection is, "Teach me to do Your will." If you do right, none can harm you. This prayer was suggested by the perplexity of the Psalmist's mind. He was overwhelmed and did not know what to do and, therefore, he cried, "Teach me to do Your will, O God,"

He had come to a place where many roads met and he did not know which path to take and so he prayed God to guide him in the way appointed. I commend this prayer to all who may be sorely puzzled and anxious. You have exercised your own judgment and you have, perhaps, consulted too much with friends and yet your way seems entirely blocked up—resort to God with this as your heart's prayer, "Teach me to do Your will; for You are my God." May the Spirit of God now bless us while we open up this short prayer that we may be helped to understand it and use it. First, we will speak upon the prayer. And then, secondly, upon its answer.

I. And, first, THE PRAYER ITSELF—let us notice its character. It is a holy prayer. "Teach me to do Your will." The man who utters this language desires to be free from sin, for sin can never be God's will. Under no circumstances, whatever, may I do wrong and fancy that I am doing God's will! I have read of an extremely poor man who needed fuel for the fire for his children and the text came to his mind, "All things are yours." Armed with this text, he thought he would take a little wood from his neighbor's woodpile but, very happily there came to his mind another text, "You shall not steal." He was quite clear about its meaning and so he left the wood alone. And he remembered, afterward, how that text had saved him from a great transgression.

Depend upon it, whatever circumstances or impressions may seem to say, it is never God's will that you should do wrong! There are devil's Providences as well as God's Providences. When Jonah wanted to go to Tarshish, he found a ship going there and I dare say he said, "How Providential!" Yes, but no Providence can ever be an excuse for sinning against God! We are to do right and, therefore, we pray, "Teach me to do Your will." It is a humble prayer—the prayer of a man of deep experience and yet, for all that and, perhaps, because of that, a man who felt that he needed teaching as to every step he should take. When you do not need teaching, Brothers and Sisters, it is because you are too stupid to learn—you may depend upon that.

It is only a very young lady fresh from a boarding school who has "finished her education." And it is only a great fool of a man who thinks that he can learn no more. Those who know themselves best and know the world best and know God best always have the lowest thoughts of themselves. They have no wisdom of their own except this—that they are wise enough to flee from their own wisdom and say to the Lord, "Teach me to do Your will." This is a holy prayer and a humble prayer and commends itself to every holy and humble heart.

It is, dear Friends, a docile prayer—the prayer of a teachable man. "Teach me to do Your will." It is not merely, you see, "Teach me your will," but, "Teach me to do it." The person is so ignorant that he needs to be taught how to do anything and everything. You may tell a child how to walk, but it will not walk, for all that! You must teach it to walk. You must take it by the arms as God did Ephraim. He says, "I taught Ephraim, also, to go, taking them by their arms," just as a nurse teaches her little ones. "Teach me to do." Lord, it is not enough that You teach my head and teach my heart, but teach my hands and my feet. "Teach me to do Your will."

Such a suppliant is docile and ready to learn. It is an acquiescent prayer, also, which is a great thing in its favor. "Teach me to do Your will—not mine. I will put my will to the side." He does not say, "Lord, teach me to do part of Your will—that part which pleases me," but all Your will. If there is any part of Your will which I am not pleased with, for that very reason teach it to me until my whole soul shall be conformed to Your mind and I shall love Your will, not because it happens to be pleasing, but because it is Your will. It is a prayer of resignation and self-abnegation and is, perhaps, one of the highest that the Christian can pray,

though it may well befit the learner who stands for the first time at Wisdom's door.

And then notice that it is a believing prayer—"Teach me to do Your will; for You are my God." There is faith in God in this claim. "You are my God"—and there is faith in God's condescension that He will act as a Teacher. Brothers and Sisters, we have two faults. We do not think God to be as great as He is and we do not think God can be so little as He can be. We err on both sides and neither know His height of Glory nor His depth of Grace. We practically say, "This trial is too menial. I will bear it without Him." We forget that the same God who rules the stars condescends to be a Teacher and teaches us to do His will! We heard, once, of a president of a great nation who, nevertheless, taught in a Sunday school—it was thought to be great condescension—but what shall I say of Him who, while He sits amid the choirs of angels and accepts their praises, comes down to His little children and teaches them to do His will? The prayer before us is very precious, for it is holy, humble, docile, acquiescent and believing.

Let us now notice what the actual request is. In so many words it says, "Teach me to do Your will." So, Brothers and Sisters, it is a practical prayer. He does not say merely, "Teach me to know Your will"—a very excellent prayer, that— but there are a great many who stick fast in the knowing and do not go on to the doing! These are forgetful hearers deceiving themselves. An ounce of doing is worth a ton of knowing! The most orthodox faith in the world, if it is accompanied by an unholy life, will only increase a man's damnation. There must be the yielding up of the members and of the mind unto God in obedience, or else the more we know, the greater will be our condemnation!

The Psalmist does not say, "Lord, help me to talk about Your will," though it is a very proper thing to talk about and a very profitable thing to hear about. But still doing is better than talking. If t's were w's there would be more saints in the world than there are. That is to say, if those who talk uprightly would also walk uprightly, it would be well. But with many, the talk is better than the walk. Better a silent tongue than an unclean life! Practical godliness is preferable to the sweetest eloquence. The prayer is, "Teach me to do Your will."

There are some who long to be taught in all mysteries and, truly, to understand a mystery aright is a great privilege, but their main thought seems to be to know the deep doctrines, the mysterious points. Many go into prophecy and a nice muddle they make when they get there. We have had I do not know how many theories of prophecy, each one of them more absurd than the rest and so it will be, I fear, to the world's end. Truly, it would be a good thing to understand the prophecies and all knowledge, "and yet show I unto you a more excellent way"—and that excellent way is to live a life of humble, godly dependence and faith and to show forth in your life the love that was in Christ Jesus! Lord, I chiefly long to know Your will to do it—teach me that and I am content.

I have already said that this prayer asks that we may do God's will, not our own. Oh, how naturally our heart prays, "Lord, let me have my own way." That is the first prayer of human nature when it is left alone—"Who is the Lord that I should obey His voice? Let me have my own way!" That desire will sometimes enter the Christian's heart, though I hope it will not long remain there! We may be praying, "Lord, not my will, but Yours be done," and yet the wicked, rebellious heart may be saying inside, "But let it be my will, Lord! Let it be my will." Still do we cling to self! May the Lord deliver us from Lord Will-He-Will who is a terrible tyrant wherever he rules! And may this be our prayer, "Teach me to do Your will."

We are not to ask to do other people's will, though some persons are always slaves to the wills of others. Whatever their company is, that is what they are. In Rome they do as Rome does—they try to

accommodate themselves to their family—they cannot take a stand, or be decided. They are ruled and governed, poor slaves that they are, by their connections. They fear the frown of man! Oh that they would rise to something nobler and pray, "Lord, teach me to do Your will, whether it is the will of the great ones of the earth, or the will of my influential friends, or the will of my loud talking neighbors or not! Help me to do Your will, to take my stand and say, 'As for me and my house, we will serve the

Lord.'"

It is a blessed prayer. The more we look at it the more we see in it. What does he mean by doing God's will? Does he not mean, "Help me to do as Your Word bids me"? For the will of God is put before us very plainly in His Law and, especially, in that Law as viewed in the hands of Christ. "This is the will of God, even our sanctification." To serve Him devoutly and to love our neighbor as ourselves—this is the will of God. May His Spirit help us. "Teach me to do Your will, O God." That will also takes the form of Providence. Out of two courses equally right, we sometimes have to ask the question, "Lord, what is Your will here?" There is nothing immoral in either the one or the other and, therefore, our difficulty. And so we go to the Lord and say, "Here is a case in which Your Law does not guide me, otherwise I should decide at once, but will You now show me what You will have me to do?"

In another case the will of God may be suggested by opportunity. Dear Friend, the will of God is that you should speak to that friend sitting near you about soul matters. The will of God is that your unconverted servant should have your prayers and your instruction. God puts men in our way on purpose that we may do them good. I have no doubt whatever that many a Christian is made to go where he would not choose to go and to associate with persons that he would not wish to associate with on purpose—that he may be the means of taking light into dark places and of carrying life from God to dead souls. So if you pray this prayer, "Teach me to do Your will," and carry it out, you will watch for opportunities of serving the Lord.

The prayer seems, to me, to have all that compass and much more. But I would answer another enquiry. What is the intention of the prayer as to manner? It does not say, "Lord, enable me to do Your will," but, "Teach me to do Your will," as if there were some peculiar way of doing it that had to be taught. As when a young man goes apprentice to acquire a trade. Lord, I would put myself under indenture to Your Grace that You may teach me the art and mystery of doing Your will. How, then, ought God's will to be done? It should be done thoughtfully. A great many Christians are not half as considerate as they should be. We should go through life not flippantly like the butterfly that flits from flower to flower, but like the bee that stays and sucks honey and gathers sweet store for the hive.

We should be seriously in earnest and one point of earnestness should be—

"With holy trembling, holy fear, To make my calling sure, Your utmost counsel to fulfill, And suffer all Your righteous will, And to the end endure."

Lord, help me to do Your will, seriously bending all my soul to the doing of it, not trifling in Your courts, nor making life a play, but loving You with all my understanding! The Lord's will should be done immediately. As soon as a command is known, it should be obeyed. Lord, suffer me not to consult with flesh and blood. Make me prompt and quick of understanding in the fear of God. Teach me to do Your will as angels do, who no sooner hear Your word than they fly like flames of fire to fulfill Your wishes!

His will should be done cheerfully. Jehovah seeks not slaves to grace His Throne. He would have us delight to do His will, yes, His Law should be in our heart. Oh, Brothers and Sisters, you need to pray

this—"Teach me to do Your will," or else you will miss the mark. Teach me to do it constantly. Let me not sometimes be Your servant and then run away from You. Keep me to it. Let me never weary. When the morning wakes me, may it find me ready and when the evening bids me rest, may I be serving You until I fall asleep. Teach me to do it also, Lord, universally, not some part of it, but all of it—not one of Your commands being neglected—nor one single part of my daily task being left undone. I am Your servant.

Make me to be what a good servant is to her mistress, neglecting none of the cares of the household. May I be watchful in all points. Teach me to do Your will spiritually, not making the outside of cups and platters clean, but obeying

You within my soul. May what I do be done with all my heart. If I pray, help me to pray in the Spirit. If I sing, let my heart make music unto You. When I am talking to others about Your name and trying to spread the savor of Jesus, let me not do it in my own strength, or in a wrong spirit, but may the Holy Spirit be upon me. Teach me to do Your will intensely. Let the zeal of Your house eat me up. Oh that I might throw my whole self into it! This little prayer grows, does it not? Pray it, Brothers and Sisters and may the Lord answer you.

Once again, there are necessary qualities which we must seek if we would sincerely pray this prayer, "Teach me to do Your will." You must have decision of character, for some never do God's will though they wish they did and they regret, they say, that they cannot—they resolve that they will and there it ends. O you spongy souls! Some of you are sadly squeezable! Whatever hand grips you can shape you. Decision is needed, for you cannot do God's will unless you know how to say, "No," and to put your foot down and declare that whatever may happen, you will not turn aside from the service of your God! If the Lord shall teach you to do His will, you will also need courage. The prayer virtually says, "When my enemies ridicule me, teach me to do Your will. When they threaten me, teach me to do Your will. When they tempt me, teach me to do Your will. When they slander me, teach me to do Your will—to be brave with the bravery which resolves to do the right and leaves the issues with God." "Teach me to do Your will."

It means—Give me resignation, kill in me my self-hood. Put down, I pray You, my pride. Make me willing to be anything or to do anything You will. It is a prayer that necessitates humility. No man can pray it unless he is willing to stoop and wash the saints' feet. "Teach me to do Your will." Let me be a dishwasher in Your kitchen if so I may glorify You. I have no choice but that You be All in All. It is a prayer, too, for spiritual life and much of it, for a dead man cannot do God's will. Shall the dead praise Him? Shall they that go down to the Pit give Him thanks? Oh, no, Brothers and Sisters! You must be full of life if you are to do God's will!

Some professors are not quickened one-third of the way yet. I hope they have a measure of quickening, but it does not seem to have reached the extremities. There may be a little quickening in the heart, but it has not quickened the tongue to confess Christ, nor quickened the hands to give to Christ, or to work for Christ. They seem to be half-dead. O Lord, fill me with life from the sole of my feet to the crown of my head, for how can I do Your will unless Your Spirit saturates me through and through, till every pulse is consecrated? I would be wholly Yours. "Teach me to do Your will."

II. I will not detain you many minutes over the second part of our sermon in which we are to say a little upon ITS ANSWER. There is the prayer, "Teach me to do Your will." Will it get an answer? Yes, Brothers and Sisters, it will assuredly obtain an answer of peace. For, first, there is a reason for expecting it. "You are my God." Oh, yes, if we were asking this of someone else, we might fear, but, "You are my God" is a

blessed argument because the greater supposes the less! If God has given us Himself, He will give us teaching!

It is also God's way to teach—"Good and upright is the Lord, therefore will He teach transgressors in the way." It is a quality of a good man to wish to make others good. It is supremely the quality of the good God to make others good. When I think of what the Lord is, I am certain that He will be willing to teach me to do His will. Moreover, He has promised to do it. "I will instruct you and teach you in the way that you shall go. I will guide you with My eyes." And, again, He is glorified by so doing, for it brings Glory to God when His people do His will. Therefore I may expect, for all these reasons, that He will teach me to do His will.

Again, dear Friends, it needs to be answered. "Teach me to do Your will. Lord, there is nobody who can ever teach me Your will unless You do it. I shall never learn it by myself. This scholarship I shall never pick up by chance. Lord, unless You hold me fast and teach me with Your supreme art, I shall never learn to do Your will as I desire to learn it." You see, he turns away from every other teacher to his God. He puts himself to school with God alone. And there is the prayer, "Teach me to do Your will; for You are my God." Brothers and Sisters, you must have this teaching, or else you will never do God's will. No strength of nature, no wit of nature can ever suffice to serve the Lord aright—you must be taught from above!

There are many ways in which God gives His answer to this prayer, "Teach me to do Your will." We have received one wonderful answer to it already. He has given Jesus Christ to be our Example. There is no teaching like actual example! If you want to know the will of God, study the life of Christ! The Lord is pleased to give us fainter copies of that same will of His in His saints. Read the sacred biographies of the Scriptures. Watch the holy lives of those who are among you, who live near to God, and follow them so far as they follow Christ. They are not complete copies—there are blots

and blunders—still, the Lord does teach young people by the godly lives of their parents and He instructs all of us by the biographies of devoted men and women.

Again, the Lord teaches us by every line of His Word and oftentimes when that Word is heard, or carefully read, it comes home with great power to the soul and guides us in the way of life. Moreover the Lord has a way of teaching us by His own Spirit. The Holy Spirit speaks in secret whispers to those who are able to hear Him. It is not every professing Christian that has the visitations of the Spirit of God in personal monitions, but there are saints who hear a voice behind them saying, "This is the way, walk in it." God guides us with His eyes as well as by His Word. Opened eyes can see, in a moment, what the Lord means. He has gentle means. His daily dealings in loving tenderness are guides to us. Every mercy is a star to pilot us to Heaven.

When we are not willing to be guided so easily, He will teach us by rough means. The Lord has a bit and a whip for those who need them. He will restrain us by affliction and infirmity and sometimes chasten us very sorely with losses, bereavements, depression of spirit and the like—in some way or other He will hear the prayer for teaching, for it is a Covenant promise—"All your children shall be taught of the Lord." Blessed are they to whom the teaching comes sweetly and softly! It can be so if we are willing to have it so, but surely if we will not be tenderly guided, God will make us do His will as men compel the bullock to do their will when it is rebellions under the yoke and must be broken in. The Lord will hear our prayer for instruction, but it may not be quite in the way we would have chosen.

One thing more. I trust we have, all of us who know the Lord, prayed the prayer, "Teach me to do Your will; for You are my God." Now mind, my dear Friends, mind that you do it sincerely and know what you

are doing because after offering such a petition as this, you dare not go into sin! You cannot say, "Teach me to do Your will," and then go off to frivolous amusements, or spend your evenings in vain and giddy society. That would be an insolent mockery of God! "Teach me to do Your will," you say, and then get up and do what you know to be clean contrary to His mind and will—what defiant profanity is this! Again, do not offer this prayer with a reserve. Do not say, or mean, "Teach me to do Your will in all points but one. There is a point in which I pray You have me excused."

I am afraid that certain Believers do not want to learn too much. I have known them not like to read special passages of Scripture. Perhaps they trouble them doctrinally, or as to the ordinances of the Christian faith, or as to matters of Church discipline. If they do not paste those pages together to hide the obnoxious passage, yet they do not like them opened too much. They would rather read a verse which looks more to their mind. But, Brothers and Sisters, if you and a text have a quarrel, make up with it at once! You must not alter the text—alter your creed, alter your life, alter your thought, God the Holy Spirit helping you—for the text is right and you are in the wrong!

"Teach me to do Your will," means, if we pray it honestly, "I will search God's Word to know what His mind is." Why, there are numbers of you who join the Church you were brought up in, whatever it is! You do not take the trouble to examine as to whether your Church is Scriptural or not. This is a blind way of acting! This is not obeying the will of God. Know what God's Book teaches. Search the Scriptures! Many Christians believe what their minister preaches because he preaches it. Do not believe a word of what I preach unless you can find it in the Word of God. "To the Law and to the Testimony! If we speak not according to this Word it is because there is no light in us." We are all fallible and though we teach as best we can and hope that God teaches you much by us, yet we are not inspired and do not pretend to

be!

Search the Book of God on your own account and abide by what you find there and by nothing else. Where the Bible leads, you are bound to follow and following its guidance you shall not walk in darkness. Seek to know the will of God and when you know it, carry it out and pray the Holy Spirit to take away the dearest idol you have known—the thought that pleases you best—out of your mind if it is contrary to the supreme will of the eternal God! The Lord grant we may thus pray and thus be heard.

Alas, unconverted people cannot pray after the fashion of my text. They have, first of all, to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ before they can do the will of the Lord. May you all be led to believe in the Savior and when you have done so, then may the Holy Spirit lead you to pray, "Teach me to do Your will; for You are may God." The Lord bless you, for Christ's sake. Amen.

LETTER FROM MR. SPURGEON

DEAR FRIENDS—I had joyfully expected to set out for home next Monday, but flights of letters have come to warn me against returning while an Arctic temperature freezes our native land. Many matters make me anxious to see my dear home and Church, but I submit to the loving advice of my Deacons, which has just reached me by telegram, and I shall abide in this warm retreat for another week, hoping for a change of weather.

Yours heartily,

Mentone, January 31, 1880

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