

The Narrow Way

by J.C. Philpot

God's promise in Isaiah 30:21 is that He will guide His people and speak to them when they turn to the right or left, saying, 'This is the way, walk in it.'

Topics: "Eternal Life", "Godly Fear"

Description

J.C. Philpot preaches about the unchangeable nature of God's promises and the heavenly teaching that guides believers in the straight and narrow path to eternal life. He emphasizes man's weakness and waywardness, contrasting it with God's infallible teaching that corrects and leads His people back to the right way. Philpot delves into the various extremes believers may face, such as self-righteousness, dead assurance, neglect of God's precepts, and undue emphasis on ordinances, highlighting the importance of staying on the path of faith, hope, love, prayer, self-denial, and godly fear.

Transcript

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And your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, "This is the way, walk in it," when you turn to the right hand, and when you turn to the left. Isaiah 30:21

It is an infinite mercy for the church of God that the religion of Jesus Christ is not a religion of uncertainties. The way to heaven is not built upon 'possibilities'. All has been designed by infinite wisdom, infinite mercy, and infinite love; and what has been thus designed will be executed by infinite power. We indeed are ever fluctuating, as restless as the sea, as fickle as the wind, as changeable as the weather. But God changes not; He is "the same yesterday, and today, and forever" (Heb. 13:8); "the Father of lights, with whom there is no variableness, neither shadow of turning" (James 1:17). O what an inestimable mercy, so far as we are the children of God, that though we change, He changes not!

And His promises are as unchangeable as Himself. He is a God who cannot lie. "All the promises of God in Him" (Christ Jesus) "are yes and in Him Amen unto the glory of God by us" (2 Cor. 1: 20). One of these promises--as firm as the everlasting hills, as stable as the throne of the Almighty itself--is in the words before us, a promise blessedly adapted to our changeable and fickle minds: And your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, "This is the way, walk in it," when you turn to the right hand, and when you turn to the left.

Two things seem prominent in the words before us, which we may thus simply characterize: first, man's weakness and waywardness; and secondly, God's heavenly and infallible teaching. Man's weakness and waywardness we find pointed out by the expression, "When you turn to the right hand, and when you turn to the left;" implying that there is in the people of God a continual proneness to turn aside to the one hand or to the other. And God's heavenly and infallible teaching is pointed out in the words- Your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, "This is the way, walk in it."

I. Man's weakness and waywardness. God knows what is in the heart of man. It is said of the Lord Jesus Christ, He "needed not that any should testify of man; for He knew what was in man" (John 2:25). We read too, "Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in His sight; but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do" (Heb. 4:12). Thus, the Lord foresaw and foreknew all our weakness and all our waywardness. He knew, and that perfectly, that left to ourselves, we could do nothing but sin; and short of His divine teaching, we could do nothing but err.

But let us, as the Lord may enable, enter a little more closely and deeply into man's weakness and waywardness as here set forth; for I am sure that a true knowledge and just appreciation of the malady is indispensable to a true knowledge and just appreciation of the remedy. If we are so ignorant of our own hearts as not to know that there is that in us which continually turns us aside "to the right hand" or "to the left," we may prize, or seem to prize, such a promise as this, but it will be only with our lips. There will be no inward value set upon such a promise in our hearts, unless we are acquainted, deeply acquainted with our own waywardness, backslidings, and continual departings in heart, in lip, and in life from the living God.

"When you turn to the right hand, and when you turn to the left." What do these words imply? To my mind they imply this: that the way in which God would have us to walk is perfectly straight, without a single crook (bend or turn), or the slightest deviation from a right line. But when we, poor, fallen, feeble, ignorant, guilty, sinful wretches; when we would make some endeavors and feeble attempts, like a child learning to walk, in the straight and narrow path, we turn aside from the right line. And this turning aside is sometimes "to the right hand," and sometimes "to the left."

I cannot, I shall not attempt to define accurately what the blessed Spirit meant by "the right hand," in contradistinction "to the left." There may be a particular mystical meaning in it which my weak mind cannot enter into. I shall, therefore, merely lay before you what I know and feel on the matter as distinct from any mere fanciful or mystical interpretation.

"The right hand" is opposed "to the left." By the words, therefore, we have two extremes marked out as distinct from a narrow straight line. If you look at professors generally, and if you look at what far more deeply and nearly concerns you, the movements of your own heart, you will find there is a perpetual deviation to the one side or the other; and you will observe that these deviations are, generally speaking, contrary and opposed to each other. Let me instance this in a few examples.

1. Sometimes there is a turning aside to self-righteousness. Pharisaism is bound up in our hearts. It is born with us, grows with our growth, and strengthens with our strength. There is, therefore, in our minds an inward propensity to self-righteousness, in some men's minds certainly more so than in others; but the same propensity exists, in a greater or less degree, in every man to self-righteousness, pharisaism, a leaning upon something to be done by the creature in contradistinction to the finished work of Jehovah Jesus.

But there is an extreme on "the left hand" into which we are just as prone to run--an antinomian licentiousness. Sometimes we think too highly of works, and lean upon them, as though actually there were some merit in them, on "the right hand"; and then, on "the left hand," we indulge in our minds--I do not say in outward action--but slip away in our thoughts into antinomian licentiousness, as though it did not matter whether there were any works at all; as though the fruits of the Spirit in the outward life were of no consequence; as though so long as we had experience in our souls, it did not signify what works attended it. Now, there is a turning "to the left," just as much as pharisaism and self-righteousness is a turning "to the right."

2. Again. There is in many professors, and to go no farther, within ourselves (for before our eyes let the mirror be held up; we have work enough to look at home), there is a tendency to turn aside after dead assurance, carnal ease, a resting upon the doctrines of God's Word without a vital experience of their life and power. In this snare how many hundreds are caught! O what a blight it is over the church of the living God! I have long marked, and do still mark and grieve over the effects of this dead, empty, notional carnal assurance, sweeping as it were over the land; and I see in it the death of all good. It so hardens the conscience; it makes sin so little cared for and thought of; it is such a barrier against everything tender, humble, broken and contrite; that I say again, wherever it comes it seems to be the death of all good. Yet we find it, I doubt not, in our hearts; a leaning to carnal security, a resting upon doctrines, a getting into an easy state, when the Lord is pleased to leave us unchastened, unafflicted.

But then there is a "left hand" in the matter, which is to be in that state where there is a resting in doubts and fears; where there are no deliverances, no bright prospects, no cheering words, no heavenly glimpses, no divine testimonies, nor any desires after them. Now this is a turning "to the left hand," as much as dead assurance is a turning "to the right."

3. Again. There is a turning aside "to the right hand" in making too much of God's precepts, as though nothing else were worth attending to. There are ministers who deal them out from the pulpit week after week, as though obeying the precepts and keeping the precepts were the all in all of religion; while the work of the Spirit on the soul, His inward teachings and enlightenings, are thought little or nothing of. Precept! precept! precept! Sunday after Sunday, as though keeping God's precepts were the sure way to glory.

But again, there is a turning aside "to the left"; a neglect of the precepts, a despising of them, a saying, "What have we to do with the precepts? It is all legality and self-righteousness. Let us have experience. Away with the precepts! we care nothing for them." Now this is just as much a turning aside "to the left hand" as making too much of the precepts is a turning aside "to the right."

4. But, further, there is a turning aside "to the right hand" by an undue setting up of ordinances, as though there were something in prayer, baptism, and the Lord's Supper apart from what God makes them to be; and as if the sum and substance of all true religion were "to walk in the ordinances of the Lord's house blameless."

But there is also a turning aside "to the left" in despising the ordinances, in pouring contempt upon baptism and the Lord's Supper, neglecting prayer and the preaching of the Word, and counting these divine appointments legal.

5. Again. An observing and reproofing of the faults of the children of God and an overlooking of their good qualities, having the eye continually fixed on their defects and infirmities; this is a turning aside on "the

right hand."

But then, on the other hand, to make light of sin, justify transgression, and consider it immaterial how the child of God acts or walks, is a turning aside "to the left."

Time would scarcely suffice to run through the various extremes into which we thus are from time to time continually driven. Left to itself, our nature can never do anything but sin. We may say, perhaps, and think ourselves very sincere in saying it, "I will never turn aside 'to the right' hand; I will never turn aside 'to the left'; I will keep the straight and narrow path." But how this shows our ignorance of self! If left to ourselves, without God's heavenly teaching in our soul, I am well convinced we can do nothing but sin and go astray. It is, therefore, an unspeakable mercy that God has recorded this special promise in the Word of life: Your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, "This is the way, walk in it," when you turn to the right hand, and when you turn to the left.

II. This leads me to enter upon the second part of our subject, to show God's heavenly and infallible teaching which preserves the soul, or brings it back when it turns aside "to the right hand" or "to the left."

"And your ears shall hear a word behind you." God does all things by His word. It was by His word, in the first instance, that He created all things. He had but to say, "Let there be light," and there was light. It is by His word that God is pleased to beget souls into spiritual life: "Of His own will He begat us with the word of truth" (James 1:18). It is by His word He is pleased, from time to time, to speak conviction to the soul; and it is by His word He is pleased to bring peace and consolation to the heart.

Now, referring to this power of God's word, the text declares: Your ears shall hear a WORD behind you, saying, "This is the way, walk in it." But God has various ways of speaking to the soul "when we turn to the right hand, and when we turn to the left."

1. Sometimes God speaks by His providence. God's providences have a voice in them where there is an ear to hear; but if there is no ear to hear, they are unmarked. Those to whom the promise is made have ears to hear; for the text declares, "Your ears shall hear a word behind you." God often, then, speaks in His providence. For instance, if we have turned aside "to the right hand," or "to the left," and our conscience begins to reproach us for getting out of the path, when God's providential hand in any measure goes out against us, it has a voice from the Lord reproving, rebuking, and sharply correcting us for having turned aside. When our conscience is made and kept alive and tender in God's fear, and begins to bleed under a sense of imputed guilt, God's providence will speak very loudly; and if we see the hand of God going out against us in providence, it will cut very deep. The voice within will re-echo the voice without, and conscience will so fall beneath the stroke of God in providence, that we shall see His chastening hand in circumstances where otherwise we should not have seen it at all.

2. But especially does God speak by the word of His grace in the court of conscience. It is not what God speaks in the Scriptures; for unless He applies it, what He speaks there is for the most part unnoticed by us. Nor is it what God may speak from the pulpit, because unless our ears are opened by the blessed Spirit, and our conscience made alive and tender in His fear, the most heart-searching ministry may leave us untouched. But it is what God speaks from the Scripture in the court of conscience; for what He speaks there, that we must hear; that will ever be deeply attended to, because it comes into our conscience as from the mouth of God Himself.

3. Sometimes the Lord speaks in rebukes and reproofs. For instance, we may be fallen into a state of carnal ease; we may be imbued, as I have known children of God to be, with the spirit of dead assurance, and be resting upon doctrines more than upon the manifestations of God's mercy to the soul. When we are in a smooth path, and all things are prosperous and easy, this dead assurance does very well. But when sickness and death begin to stare us in the face, when convictions of our sins begin powerfully to work, and when the Lord is pleased in a more special manner to deal with the conscience, what becomes of all this dead assurance? It fails us at the very moment when we need it most. We feel that it cannot take us safe into eternity, cannot give us peace with God, cannot remove the guilt of sin, cannot bring the smile of divine love into the soul; it is useless, absolutely useless, at the very time we need it most. This is the rebuke of God in our conscience to bring us out of, and bring us off, this dead assurance into which our souls may have been secretly slipping. We begin to fall down as guilty sinners at the footstool of mercy, and beg of God to pardon our sins, and speak a word of peace to our poor guilty conscience. Here is the "word behind" us, when we have turned aside from the right way, to bring us, once more into the straight and narrow path which leads to eternal life.

Or say, we may have got, as I have described, into a dark and gloomy state of despondency and dejection, eaten up with doubts and fears, and well-near swallowed up in the depths of despair. All our past experience seems swept out of sight; not a single token remains, and we are full of everything that sinks the mind in gloom and fear. Now when the Lord is pleased to speak a word of promise to the soul, and His voice begins to sound once more in the heart, "This is the way--not your poor, guilty, miserable self, but Jesus is the way, His blood, His righteousness, and His love;" when our hearts begin to receive these glad tidings, and the blessed Spirit seals them home with divine unction, savor and power, there is a turning out of this "left hand" path in which our poor souls have been groping, and coming once more into the King's highway, the way of holiness, the way of atoning blood and justifying righteousness.

4. So again. We may have been drawn aside to see nothing but sin and imperfection in other men, and yet at the same time see nothing wrong in ourselves. But by and by the Lord begins to open up the depths of our wicked nature, or perhaps lets us slip and fall, not into outward sin to bring reproach upon the cause, but to walk upon the very brink of evil, and so withholds His preserving hand, that there is but one step between us and open disgrace. Now we see what we have been doing, finding fault with this man, and finding fault with that man; seeing nothing but infirmities and sins in all the Christians we have known. We begin then to see such horrid evils in ourselves, and feel such living witnesses to our own sinfulness and wickedness, that the stones fall out of our hands, our mouth is put in the dust, and we have not a word to say against the sins and infirmities of our fellow Christians; but fall down before God, with Job's language, "Behold, I am vile!"

5. Or again, as I said before, we may have been thinking too highly of the precepts, setting them up in such a wonderful way, as if nothing else were worth attending to. But, after a time, we find how lean our souls become! how little we are indulged with the manifestations of the Lord's mercy and love! and how barren, how cold, how legal, how dry our frame has become by setting up the precepts as the all in all of religion. Now we begin to long after heavenly visits and divine consolations, and to find there is something that we fall short of; that there is the life, love, and enjoyment of God; and that these are as valuable as the precepts themselves.

Or, we may have turned aside "to the left hand," and thought very little of God's precepts; and so long as we had a good experience it did not matter about anything else. But, perhaps, we have been entangled in some sin, and broken some of God's precepts; then, when conscience begins to lash, and the divine

rebukes are felt within, we see what blessed things the precepts are, and desire with all our heart and soul to obey them, and be found in the way of them.

6. Or, we may have been among those who despise the Lord's ordinances, treat baptism and the Lord's Supper with the greatest contempt, and call them poor legal observances. But another time may have come when we have seen such a solemnity and glory in baptism, as opening up the sufferings of the Lord; and seen such beauty in the Lord's Supper; that all our objections were removed in a moment, and the ordinances have risen in the estimation and affection of our souls.

Or, on the other hand, we may have thought too highly of God's ordinances, and esteemed them beyond their due position; but we may have come again and again to the ordinances, and felt our heart as hard as adamant, as cold and lifeless as winter's snow. Now we begin to see how we have been putting the ordinances above the Lord of the ordinances, and looking at the sign instead of the thing signified by it.

In all these various ways will the Lord's people "hear a word behind them." As they are walking along the road, their poor, wicked, carnal nature is continually turning them aside. Some darling idol, some besetting sin, some prevailing lust, some acting of pride draws them aside "to the right" hand or "to the left." But they "hear a word behind them;" the word sinks into their souls; the admonition falls into their heart; they are obliged to take heed to it; they cannot neglect it. It is thus by a word behind them they are brought back into the straight and narrow path that leads to glory.

And what does the "word" say? "This is the way." The word not merely reproves and rebukes when we turn aside from it, but it gives a direction, a clear, positive direction: "This is the way!" What "way"? Jesus, who said of Himself, "I am the Way" (John 14:6). There is no other way. Now every turning aside "to the right," and every turning aside "to the left," is a turning aside from Jesus. For instance, if we get into legality and pharisaism, is not that a turning aside from Jesus? If we get into a state of miserable dejection and gloom, and are unable to look to Him, is not that a turning away from Jesus? If we get into a dead assurance, and rest upon the doctrines instead of the sweet manifestations of Christ to our souls, is not that a turning aside from Jesus? If we get into carnal ease and security, is not that a turning aside from Jesus? If we get into the precepts as distinct from a vital experience of God's truth in the soul, is not that a turning aside from Jesus? And if we neglect the precepts He has given, is not that a turning away from Jesus? If we smite and wound the Lord's family, is not that a turning away from Jesus? And if we justify or make light of sin, is not that a turning aside from Jesus? Thus every turning aside "to the right hand," or "to the left," is a turning aside from Jesus, the only "Way" that leads to eternal life.

1. But how is Jesus the Way? In everything that He is to God's people He is the Way. His blood is the way to heaven, "for the whole path," as Deer speaks, "is lined with blood." By His precious blood shed upon Calvary's tree He has put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself, and opened up a way of access to God. His righteousness also is part of the way; for only so far as we stand clothed in His glorious righteousness have we any access unto, any acceptance with God the Father. And His love is the way; for if we walk in love, we walk in Him, for He is love. Every part of the way was devised and is executed by the love of His tender heart.

2. But the way also is the way of tribulation. Was not Jesus Himself the great Sufferer? And if He be the Way, the only Way, I must be conformed to His likeness in suffering. Not to know afflictions and tribulations is not to know Christ. He was "a Man of Sorrows, and acquainted with grief." And if so, to have no sorrow, to have no acquaintance with grief, and to know nothing of tribulation, is to proclaim to all with a

loud voice that we have no union and communion with the Lord Jesus Christ. But we are continually turning aside "to the right hand" or "to the left." There is that cowardice in the heart which cannot bear the cross; there is that slipping into carnal ease and fleshly security, so as to get away from under the painful cross of affliction and suffering.

But when we thus turn aside "to the right hand," or "to the left," the voice the Lord sends after us is, "This is the way"--the way of affliction, no other; the way of tribulation, the way of trial, the way of exercise. This is the way in which the King walked of old; and this is the way in which all His people have walked before Him and after Him; for this is the only path in which the footsteps of the flock can be found.

3. But again, it is the way of temptation. The Lord Jesus Christ was tempted in the wilderness by Satan. He said to His disciples, "You are those who have continued with Me in My temptations" (Luke 22:28). If we, then, are not acquainted with temptations, we know little of union to a tempted Lord. But we are very glad to get out of the way of temptation. It is a painful path to walk in. To be continually tempted by Satan, by our evil hearts, by "the world lying in wickedness," and have a conscience suffering and groaning under the weight of temptation, is no small burden. But the voice still sounds behind us, "This is the way, walk in it." It is indeed a way of temptation; but still the way of temptation is the way of deliverance, and the way of deliverance is the way of glory.

4. Again. It is the way of faith, for only by faith can we walk in the way. Nothing but faith can enable us to see the way before us, or to move a single step in the way. By faith we stand, by faith we walk, by faith we fight, and by faith we triumph. So that would we walk in the way, we can only walk in that way by living faith. And here is the distinction. It requires no faith to turn aside "to the right hand," or "to the left." Unbelief can lead us astray, sin can draw us aside; but to walk in the straight and narrow way--in Jesus, in the path of tribulation and affliction, in contradistinction to the general way of man--we can only walk in that way as God is pleased to raise up and keep alive living faith in our souls.

5. And as we walk in it by faith, so we walk in it by hope; hoping to the end for the glory of God, hoping that the Lord will appear in due time and cheer our souls, hoping for the day when all our cares shall be at an end and tears wiped away from our eyes; hoping in God's faithful word of promise, in His expected deliverance, in His promised mercy; hoping for nothing in self, but hoping for all in Him.

6. We walk in this path also in love; for only so far as we have some love to the Lord, love to His ways, love to His Word, and love to His people, can we be found walking in Him. He Himself is love; and when we have felt a little of His love in our souls, then we can love Him; and this is the language of our hearts, "Draw me, we will run after You" (Sol. Song 1:4). When we feel a little of the soft touches of love in the soul, then there is a running in the way of God's commandments, in that straight and narrow path that leads to eternal glory.

7. We walk in it, again, in the way of prayer. The Lord's family are continually sighing, crying, and pouring out their petitions to the Lord. "Lord, guide me, teach me, direct me; hold me up; keep me from error. Lord, visit and bless my soul; look down upon me in Your infinite mercy." O how these cries, sighs, and petitions are continually going up from broken hearts to the footstool of mercy! We cannot walk in the way except by these continual sighs, groans and cries after the Lord. A prayerless, reckless, hard heart never finds the way, and could not walk in the way, if found. The life we have to live is a life of faith and prayer; and the Lord will take care, I am well convinced, that we shall, as He declares of the elect, "cry unto Him day and night."

There shall be those conflicts, exercises, trials and temptations; those desires and those wishes, those pantings and longings; all combining and conspiring to keep up communion with the throne of mercy. Thus, as the Lord's people walk, they are led by supplications. He says, "With weeping and with supplications will I lead them" (Jer. 31:9). "I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplication; and they shall look upon Me whom they have pierced."

8. And this way also is a way of self-denial; grappling with the flesh, putting off the old man, and putting on the new--plucking out right eyes, and cutting off right hands, as the Lord may enable; "Whoever will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me" (Luke 9:23).

9. Again. It is the way of godly fear. We can only walk in this path aright as godly fear is from time to time springing up in our hearts; a fear to be wrong, a desire to be right, a tenderness of conscience lest we break the bounds, slip into error, or turn aside into evil. So that the Lord's people, in their passage home to glory, are continually fearing and trembling, knowing what fallen creatures they are, lest they make a mistake, be deceived or deluded, and turn aside on "the right hand" into some grievous error, or on "the left" into some dreadful deception of Satan. Therefore, they walk in self-suspicion, in godly fear, in holy desire, that the Lord would be their guide and keeper, and "lead them in the way everlasting."

Contrast this with the way in which dead professors walk, be they ever so high or ever so low. They have none of these jealous feelings over self; none of these suspicious thoughts over their own hearts; no fears lest they be wrong; no earnest desires to be right; no cries, groans, and sighs after the Spirit's leadings; no fear of error, no dread of evil; no listening with anxious ear to the voice that speaks behind them: "This is the way, walk in it. Turn not aside 'to the right hand,' nor 'to the left'--here is error, there is heresy; here is evil, there is sin; avoid this quicksand, beware of that sandbank; a precipice on one side, a quagmire on the other."

Thus the Lord's people go along trembling, fearing, crying, sighing, watching, praying, because they know they carry in their bosom a heart so "deceitful and desperately wicked," that turn aside they will, turn aside they must, except they hear the voice behind them, saying, "This is the way! This is the way, poor soul; walk in it; let your eyes look straight on before you; it is a safe path, it leads to endless glory; it will bring you right at last." You may have many doubts, many fears, many suspicions, many sighs and groans, and do you think you are altogether wrong because there is a turning aside to "the right hand," and a turning aside "to the left." But the promise still holds good; you "shall hear a voice behind you" sounding in your ears, "This is the way, walk in it."

But what a mercy it is to have this word sometimes sounding in our ears, and see that there is a "way" to heaven--a way independent of man, distinct from all the doings of the creature--God's own dear Son, "the Way, the Truth, and the Life!" that there is blood, precious blood, that cleanses from all sin; a righteousness, a glorious righteousness, to justify a needy, naked soul; love, dying love, as a sweet cord twined round a drooping, desponding spirit; and that the blessed Comforter, from time to time, shows us and gives us power to walk in the way of eternal life!

But has it not been, is it not sometimes with you, a matter of earnest consideration whether your feet are in the path? What makes it so? Because you find working in you so many things that seem utterly opposed to this path; so many trials, temptations and exercises, so many anxious questionings, and so much of the working of "a heart deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked." All these things combined, make you fear that you are not walking in the path. But what is all this but the blessed fruit of the "word behind

you"? You expect, perhaps, to see something, but that is not God's way. The word is "behind," not before you; dropped into your conscience, not held up to your eyes. Yet because it does not go before us to warn us beforehand, instead of coming to reprove us afterward, we often think that it is not the word of God at all. But I would say, what is it that has kept you who are the people of God, and desire to fear His name? what has kept you out of that dead assurance in which so many walk? Doubts and fears, the tremblings and suspicions of your anxious mind, have not these instrumentally kept us from this great evil? What has kept you from being altogether swallowed up in despair? Have there not been now and then some glimpses, tokens, testimonies, some shinings in of God's countenance, some dropping of His word into your heart? What has been all this but the "word behind you"?

When sin has been presented to you as a sweet honied drink, and you have almost grasped the cup, there has been some lash of conscience, some cutting conviction, that dashed the cup away before you drank the deadly draught; has not that been a "word behind you, saying, This is the way, walk in it"?

While you have been working and struggling, and thinking you would do something to please God, and got well-near stuck fast in the old pharisaical sandbank, a sweet light has broken in upon you, whereby you have seen Jesus, and turned aside from ruined self, and anchored within the veil; and has not this been "a voice behind you, saying, This is the way, walk in it"?

When your path has been little else but trouble, sorrow, and affliction, and you are almost ready to give all up, and say, "This religion has brought nothing but trouble with it;" still there has been a soft whisper in your conscience, "This is the way; turn aside, and you must perish; you have a soul to be saved or lost." This has been a gentle admonition, and you have still kept on. Has not this been "a voice behind you"?

When you have felt your heart prompted to break forth and pour out your petitions at the throne of mercy, and wrestle with God as for life and death, has not this been "a word behind you," sounding in your ears, "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you"? When some precious promise has come into your heart, and cheered up your downcast mind, when you were gladly to give up all for lost, what has this been but "a word behind you"?

But because the word does not always come before us, and we cannot see something with the bodily eye, we get confused and perplexed. But God has not promised we shall see anything with the bodily eye, or hear anything with the bodily ear. The word is to come "behind us," as a reproofing, rebuking, encouraging, or comforting word, as God sees fit. But, however it comes, as a rebuking or comforting word, it still sounds, "This is the way! this is the way!--Jesus, His blood, His righteousness, His Person. His perfect salvation--This is the way, walk in it. Turn not aside to the right hand, nor to the left; walk in Him, and by walking in Him you will obtain eternal life."

What a mercy it is that God has left such a promise on record! and O, what a greater mercy to have this promise fulfilled in our heart's experience! That is the mercy. This we know, if we know anything, that we are ever turning aside "to the right hand" or "to the left." If we do not know that, what do we know? We are shut up in ignorance, presumption and carnal security, if we do not know that. But then, on the other hand, what a mercy if God does not leave us to turn aside to be engulfed as thousands are in destruction and ruin; but deals with our conscience in mercy, and gives us a lash now and then; or a refreshing admonition, promise, or encouragement; or turn our eyes, as Jonah did, to look once more "toward His holy temple." Thus the Lord, sometimes in one way, sometimes in another, still encourages our poor, fainting souls to look to Him, and hope in His mercy; and still mercifully says to us, "This is the way, walk in

it!"

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/jc-philpot/the-narrow-way/>

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