

A Journey of Discovery or Paralysis of Analysis

The church was standing with its back to the sunset searching a magnificent view. From behind, a still and tender voice describes to her ear the sunset's breathtaking beauty. The Voice whispers, "The view is this way. There is something extraordinary and special about Caribbean sunsets that I want to show you. Listen! The rainy season casts an orange mist above the horizon, lighting the sky as if by red, hot fire. The sun is like a large, orange fireball in the distance." Interrupting the Voice, the church, looking towards two different directions, asks, "Which way shall I go; to my right or to my left?" Once again, the Voice of an unseen guide is heard, "This is the way to the best view." "Prove it to me," the church replies. The Unseen Guide answers, "I cannot prove it to you. All you need to do is turn around! Just listen and walk! And it will prove itself to you."

There is nothing more depressing than to hear about doctrinal controversies in our church, because they involve complex issues that have the potential to divide us. The outcomes of such issues can change the lives of our church members forever. Right and wrong paths have not always been obvious; the Bible and the counsels of EGW do not always provide clear answers. And what about those times when there seem to be several good options or perhaps no good option at all? Heart-injuring decisions cause great anxiety. Is there a way to find out what God wants us to do? Once again, the church is engaged in seeking divine guidance to understand God's will. The church is committed to making the best of the decision process to please God and choose nothing other than His will.

Does God intend for us to be forever discouraged and overwhelmed? How do we sort through the confusion? Throughout Scripture we are assured that God promises help [James 1:5] once we recognize the need for divine intervention. Proverbs 3:5-6 declares that He will direct our paths. We need to believe that in the midst of all controversies, He is guiding His church and will keep her encouraged and

in faith as she journeys into the discovery of His will. We must forfeit our plans, our answers, our agendas, and our timetable, and permit God to impress our minds. In Psalm 139 we learn that God has examined us and knows everything about us. He knows the past, the present, and the future of His church. Our times of good and poor choices are known to Him. He promises to offer help to sort through good options and perhaps not so good options, and confidently helps us move ahead as we have done in the past. He will, in His own time and way, make sure that we understand what He has planned for us.

As committee members we are honored to form part of this process and we have come with a firm conviction that God has guided our church in the past and continues to do so today. At the same time we are required to have total confidence in God and a clear perception of how to know His will. To fulfill this expectation we are embarking on a journey of discovery. We are confident that the Bible is God's word and that prophetic guidance is a valuable source for understanding God's will and is also a unifying agent in our Bible study. The challenge for us is: will we be open to listen to what God, through His Spirit, is trying to say? If so, it will take an attitude of trust, surrender, prayer, courage, faith, and resting in God's promises.

Today, the church can learn from the way God's Spirit guided Judah in dealing with uncertainty in a bewildering situation. For centuries Israel and Judah had been caught between two great nations—Assyria and Egypt. This time it was Judah who was faced with a dilemma. What should they do? We read in Scripture that Hezekiah, king of Judah, was desperately trying to declare his country's independence from Assyria. He had options to reach his goals, yet the most encompassing ones were political agendas. Should Judah become allied with Egypt or with Assyria? Voices from everywhere were insisting on Hezekiah's attention.

Accepting the dominance of Assyria and paying an annual tribute to that nation was one option. Uniting with the strength and power of Egypt's armies was another. Should Judah continue to be submitted to Assyria? Or should they seek Egypt's allegiance? God warned Judah that turning to Egypt and other nations for help could not save them. In the midst of these confusing voices, God's prophet Isaiah is heard proclaiming: **TURN AROUND AND WALK!** Raymond Ortlund Jr. suggests, in the ESV Bible Commentary, that Isaiah understood the real threat to Judah, which was their unwillingness to hear God's word. Judah sought advice from everyone but God. The power and protection of worldly kings convinced them to give in to human solutions. Their practical trust in God was abandoned. However, God remains faithful even when His people are faithless. God's Spirit inspired the prophet Isaiah to utter God's message of guidance to Hezekiah in order to discover the divine will. God always makes Himself known to His people [Psalm 26:7]. The words of the prophet in Isaiah 30:21 to Judah were, "and your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, 'This is the way, walk in it,' when you turn to the right or when you turn to the left."

The words spoken by Isaiah are powerful and full of significance for any generation. We learn from Isaiah 30 that God mandates that the consequences of being a faithless people and relying on personal plans should be recorded for future generations, and it was. Isaiah's message to the people of his day relates well to our church, as she determines what God wants her to do. The Andrews Study Bible Commentary state that chapter 30 may refer to the maneuvering that shows more trust in human abilities than in God's ability to save (or guide). Ortlund adds that the Lord denounces all who may carry out their own plans rather than submitting to and carrying out the plans that God has revealed to His people [Isaiah 28:14; 15]. King

Hezekiah was very foolish in thinking Judah was competent enough to make wise choices without God's assistance –relying on human power and capabilities.

Unfortunately, they disregarded the words of the prophet.

In the midst of Judah's confusion the very first thing that God presents them through His servant, is their teacher—a Guide. This Guide is none other than God's Spirit [30:1], whose counsel they have despised. We learn from Jesus in John 14:6 that it is the Spirit who teaches us. He will speak to the understanding and responsive mind of God's people. It is from this Spirit that God wants His church to seek direction when they are paralyzed by indecision. God's Spirit is constantly seeking us, longing to reveal to us God's compassion and guide us amidst the confusion of the right and left way. He is seeking the hearts of our conscience and our understanding to press God's will home. He will also provide the church with specific instruction, personal directions and a sure approval of our choices. The Bible promises that the Spirit knows the deep things of God and reveals them to us. Furthermore, a blessing is in store for those who wait on the Lord's promise [30:18], trust Him, and are loyal in seeking His guidance.

The physical position of Judah provides insight and understanding of their spiritual condition. They were not facing God. Since the voice is heard from behind, it can be concluded that Judah had their back toward the Guiding Voice. God's people were walking their own way, taking God for granted and trusting human capabilities. They were following the steps of neighboring nations and relying on their supremacy. How does God's Spirit view our church today? Are we following Judah's footsteps? Is it possible, that we have drifted away, relying on exterior agendas, walking our own way, satisfying our own desires and carrying out our own plans? Are we looking the other way? Not facing God, not taking Him seriously,

doubting the goodness of His guidance and compromising with the neighboring churches, customs and cultures? If so, we are admonished that though the church may not be seeking after Him, God is eagerly appealing to His church. He wants to guide us to discover His will. It is when we come face to face with God that we are able to acknowledge and trust Him.

Throughout the Old Testament, the phrase “to the right or to the left” can be interpreted to mean straying from the right path. Isaiah identifies Judah as being in a state of indecisiveness, not knowing where to turn. They were paralyzed, confused, and not confident of the best option. Indecisiveness produces impatience and impatience destroys trust. Yet, trust is essential to discern, hear, and know God’s will.

Uncertainty can paralyze the church when it is suffering from auditory overload –hearing many voices. Hundreds of studies and articles are clamoring to be the way and the truth. These voices have clouded our minds to the point that even though the church has the capacity to hear and listen, it cannot. Many of these voices masquerade as legitimate. Some threaten ecclesiastical unity and others influence biblical interpretation through biblical presuppositions endangering the church by leading it down the wrong path. Like King Hezekiah, God’s church needs to distinguish between true voices and false ones. In order for the church to recover from the state of paralysis, she needs to become a selective hearer and strive to not hear the outside voices of even the ones from within that have the potential to divide us.

In the journey of discovering God’s will, obedience is imperative. Once the church distinguishes the true voice, it must walk in obedience to it. Why should God

guide the church in its search for his will on such an issue, if the church is reluctant to obey Him in other important areas? Or why should we expect God to show us the way, if we do not intend to obey Him but rather to follow our own paths? We acknowledge God when we demonstrate trust, practice surrender, give ourselves to prayer, and live in obedience to Him.

Not being able to hear the voice of the Unseen Guide could also indicate that there is confusion in our hearts. Attitudes and emotions regarding existing options on the issue entangle the mind so that it cannot think properly. God has always spoken to the church within an ethical context. Committees are formed to provide the church with an ethical decision-making paradigm of ethical conduct. How we relate to fellow believers is important in this process. We must model the values that distinguish us as a church. The unseen guidance is based on ethical principles; God always spells out what the rules are. No one is allowed to make up the rules to fit their own preferences. The Holy Spirit speaks to the hearts of the all in this process; no one in the church is left entirely to their own ecclesiastical and doctrinal interpretations.

God's voice spoke to Judah. It was a gentle call to repent and renounce their course. An understanding of God's provision comes from hearing, listening, and returning to "the Way." Christ testifies in John 14:6 that He is the Way. The call to Judah was to walk in the way. The call to the present church is to walk in Christ. Christ is the express image of God, and the revealer of life itself. He is our creator; everything works according to His will and in His way. The way is not just a path, it is a person; and when we love and trust that person we will fulfill all the principles embodied in Him and will discover His will [John 14:6]. Christ must be received. How do we do that? We need a renovated transformed mind. We need to fulfill

Paul's plea to the church of Philippi to obtain the mind of Christ [Philippians 2:5].

We need to sincerely commit our minds, to follow the Way and not ours. Our doctrinal questions will never be resolved without a renewed and transformed mind; that is the mind of Christ. Decisions are often necessary as our faith is tested. To discover what God wants us to do and find delight in pleasing Him, we should consider the following:

1. **First:** We need to take an honest look at our options. To do this we need an attitude adjustment. We need to assess our attitudes toward God's church, toward our brethren, and toward our leadership. Without genuine uprightness our attitudes will keep us from a good, honest evaluation of all the options. We must take our religious and theological sandals off and acknowledge that we are standing on holy ground. Doctrinal issues have to do with divine sovereignty and omniscience, not finite notions, opinions, convictions, or intellectual backgrounds. We must come to the point where there are no hindrances or barriers between God and us. Only then will we reach the pinnacle of our faith.
2. **Second:** We need to make sure that our words and actions correspond with the principles personified in Christ. Christ in us, living out His life. Jesus is the full expression of every truth, for He is the Principle and the Truth. To discover truth without seeking Him, who is the Truth, is absurd. Christ yearns for us to come to Him and He is the answer. Is He waiting on us? Unfortunately we will be tempted to defend our way. Emotional attachments are formed to what we consider the best options, and as time goes by, in our attempt to justify them, our ideas and presuppositions accumulate and

multiply. If our way does not follow Christ's principles of love, forgiveness, patience, and kindness we need to change routes. We could be heading to a precipice. We may be tempted to turn around partially, but we need to be prepared to honestly turn around and change completely. If we decide on basis of principles, leaving the results to God, to take care of, then we will be on sure ground.

3. **Third:** We must surrender all to Christ. It is once yet continuous. Surrender means to give up our right to our way. We will not depend on our own understanding [Proverbs 3:25]. Willingly we must forfeit what we consider to be correct knowledge, correct experiences and correct theological postures. Jesus needs us to realize that He is our only true guide and His way works. The passionate voice of God's Spirit will bring us face to face with Himself and His voice will lead us to a closer relationship with Christ.
4. **Fourth:** We need to cease the struggling for God. It is not God's plan that we struggle for Him, that we be used by Him in His struggles. We can't try to prove that our notions prove God's position; if it is His truth, it will prove itself. He is in control of all life [Ef.1:11]. As we seek His will, He will work out His plan through us [Phil.2:13].
5. **Fifth:** We need to cultivate authentic faith. The times when God has been silent have always proven themselves to be times of teaching and learning for His church. God permits such circumstances in order to educate and mature our faith. God wants to show us what faith really is. Faith in Scripture as

God's word is faith that goes against everything that contradicts His will.

Faith will become as natural as breathing when we stand face to face with Jesus Christ. In every controversy there is a truth, a revelation of God, to be discovered and a great opportunity to prove a collective experience of what we believe God's will to be.

6. *Sixth*: We must take the Spirit of "the Way" into everything we do. We need to let God have His way, and that is the way of the Son. If not we will become a deterrent instead of being a help to God's church. Where there are points of friction, we need to talk over the issues objectively. We need to see things from the standpoint of others. We need to come together in a collective spiritual quest at prayer time, with a common purpose and a common mind. In Christ we become one. If we are going to be fair in this journey of discovery together, we need to let down the walls of self defense and fear and make of the trip a collective adventure. Controversies may be seen as windows that God is opening, providing ways for church discipline, growth, and fellowship. Ellen White states, "The Lord leaves in darkness no man who has ears to hear and a heart to understand" *The Upward Look*, p.110. Through Jeremiah 24:7 God declares: "I will give them a heart to know that I am the Lord, and they shall be my people and I will be their God, for they **shall return** to me with their whole heart."

Finding the answers or making the right choices is finding Jesus Himself. It is the church with a teachable and humble attitude that decides to put its feet upon the Way to discover the answer. Once the church places her feet upon the Way, the Spirit within us will whisper the answer to our ears, more certain than certainty, warmer

than wholehearted, and totally satisfying, so deep a fulfillment that only Christ could provide it. This, my friends, is the single-minded devotion that God has originally willed for His church, a devotion that will hold us together because we were made with an inner structure for unity. We need to take this scriptural promise very seriously, because to reject the voice is to reject God himself. Let us recapture the excitement for what God will do through this process, in our lives and in the lives of our church members.