

Chapter 13. THE HEART AND THE UNDERSTANDING.

"Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding;"

– **Proverbs 3:5**

The main aim of the Book of Proverbs is to teach knowledge and understanding. To understand righteousness, to understand the fear of the Lord, to find good understanding, it is to this the Proverbs want to guide us. But it gives a warning in pursuit of this knowledge and understanding, to distinguish between trusting our own understanding, and intellect, and seeking spiritual understanding, given by God, an understanding of the heart.

"Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding." In all our seeking after knowledge and wisdom, in all our planning in life, or studying the Word, we have these two powers – the understanding or intellect, which knows things from without, by nature and conceptions we form, and the heart, which knows them by experience as it takes them up into the will and affection.

I am deeply persuaded that one of the main reasons why so much Bible teaching and Bible knowledge is comparatively fruitless, one of the main causes of the lack of holiness, and devotion, and power in the Church, is to be found here – trusting in our own understanding in religion. I beg my readers to give me patient hearing here.

Many argue: But surely God gave us our intellect, and without it there is no possibility of knowing God's Word. Very true; but listen. By the Fall our whole human nature was disordered. The will became enslaved, the affections were perverted, the understanding was darkened.

Everyone admits the ruin of the Fall in the former two, but practically deny it in the latter. They admit that even the believer has not in himself the power of a holy will and needs the daily renewing grace of Jesus Christ. They admit that they do not have the power of holy affection, loving God, and his neighbour, except as it is unceasingly worked in them by the Holy Spirit. But they do not notice that the intellect is just as much spiritually ruined and impotent, and incapable of apprehending spiritual truth. It was especially the desire for knowledge, in a way and at a time God had forbidden it, that led Eve astray, as the outcome of the

temptation. To think that we can take the knowledge of God's truth out of His Word for ourselves as we will, is still our greatest danger. We need a deep conviction of the impotence of our understanding to really know the truth; and of the terrible danger of self-confidence and self-deception in doing so, to see the need of the word, "*Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding.*"

It is with the heart man believes. It is with all the heart we are to seek, and serve, and love God. It is only with the heart that we can know God, or worship God, in spirit and in truth. It is in the heart, therefore, that the Divine Word does the work. It is into our heart that God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son. It is the heart, the inward life of desire and love and will and surrender, that the Holy Spirit guides into all the truth.

In Bible study, "*Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding.*"

Trust not, wholly distrust, your own understanding. It can only give you thoughts and conceptions of Divine things without the reality. It will deceive you with the thought that the truth, if received into the mind, will somehow surely enter the heart. And so, it will blind you to the terrible experience which is universal, that humans daily read, and every Sunday delight to hear God's Word, and yet are not made humble, nor holy, nor heavenly-minded by it.

Instead of trusting the understanding, come with your heart to the Bible. Instead of trusting the understanding, trust in the Lord, and that with all your heart. Let not the understanding, but the whole heart, set upon the living God as the Teacher, be the main thing when you enter your prayer closet. Then you will find good understanding. God will give you an understanding heart, a spiritual understanding.

You may ask me, as I have been often asked, "But what am I to do? How am I to study my Bible? I cannot see any way to do it but by using my understanding."

Perfectly right. But do not use it for what it cannot do. Remember two things. One is, that it can only give you a picture or thought of spiritual things. The moment it has done this, go with your heart to the Lord to make His Word life and truth in you.

The other is, remember that pride of intellect, the danger of leaning on your own understanding is unceasing, and that nothing, not even the most determined purpose, can save you from this, but only the continual dependence of the heart on the Holy Spirit's teaching. It is alone through the Holy Spirit that gives life to the Word in the heart, in the dispositions and affections, that He can guide the intellect. *"He will guide the meek in judgment; He will show the meek his way." "The fear of the Lord" – (a frame of mind/mindset) – "is the beginning of wisdom."*

With every thought from the Word the understanding grasps, bow before God in dependence and trust. Believe with your whole heart that God can and will make it true. Ask for the Holy Spirit to make it work effectually in the heart. Then the Word becomes the strength of our life.

Persevere in this, and the time will come when the Holy Spirit, dwelling in the heart and life, will subject the understanding, and let His holy light shine through it.

Prayer: Father God, I bow before You. I surrender my will, my intellect, my emotions, my thoughts, and my heart to You. I believe that You can make the Word truth and life within me. Let the Holy Spirit make the Word work effectually in my heart. Please remove from my heart and mind all pride of intellect and knowledge, and fill me with a humble, teachable spirit. Amen.