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God's Desire for Definiteness

by T. Austin-Sparks

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"And if it seem evil unto you to serve Jehovah, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord" (Josh. 24:15).

"And Elijah came near unto all the people, and said, How long go ye limping between the two sides? If the Lord be God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him" (1 Kings 18:21).

"When I therefore was thus minded, did I show fickleness? Or the things that I purpose, do I purpose according to the flesh, that with me there should be the yea yea and the nay nay? But as God is faithful, our word toward you is not yea and nay. For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by us... was not yea and nay, but in him is yea" (2 Cor. 1:17-19).

"Now after these things were ended, Paul purposed in the spirit, when he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, to go to Jerusalem, saying, After I have been there, I must also see Rome" (Acts 19:21).

"Let us therefore give diligence to enter into that rest, that no man fall after the same example of disobedience. For the word of God is living, and active, and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing even to the dividing of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and quick to discern the thoughts and intents of the heart" (Heb. 4:11-12).

"I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So because thou art lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spew thee out of my mouth" (Rev. 3:15-16).

Now, you may think that they are strange passages, but they are not chosen by me, that is, what they represent is not something that is the result of my trying to get something. I have only taken

the passages and gathered them together to give form to something that has been quite strongly borne in upon me.

It is that which is within all these passages that we need to see, not necessarily the particular situation to which they apply respectively, but their inner message. It is God's desire for definiteness. That lies at the heart of them all.

Sometimes it is very helpful to stand back from our Bibles and just allow the general effect of the Bible to come upon us, that is, to stand back from the detail, the minutiae, and ask in a general and broad way what the effect of the Bible is, what the main implications are, and to allow them to come upon us as an influence, and if you do that in this connection, you see what I mean.

The Bible seems throughout to have, among others, this continuous note of emphasis - Be strong! Be steadfast! Be unmovable! Go on! There is a tremendous amount along that line. And you ask about this, if from one point of view that is the whole Bible, what does it imply and what does it signify? Why should the Bible find it necessary to keep that emphasis all the way along, to maintain that note from start to finish? Well, quite obviously, the whole trend of things is in the opposite direction, to either turn us back, pull us back, hold us back, or in some way to keep us from an end. The things are countless which would seek to have that effect upon us, and they are always present in some form or another, and we shall never know a time or a position when we are entirely free from that which would, if it cannot turn us right back, keep us or hold us back. There will always be something, and, if we listen to it, if we take account of it, if we stop to be occupied with it and allow it to be the thing which affects us most, then we are going to stand still; we are going to stop, we are going to cease to go on. That is simple, but it is sometimes good to let the whole weight of the Bible come upon you, getting away from its detail and sitting back and getting its effect. When you view it in this particular connection, you see, wherever you look, in the Old or the New Testament, there is *this* coming from God: Go on! Be purposeful! Be definite! Be positive! There is everything in this universe to make you otherwise, and, unless you recognise it, reckon with it, you are not going to go on!

The Bible is then throughout one long mighty emphasis upon God's desire that His people should be definite, and we find Him coming out again and again in the strongest way against indefiniteness.

"How long limp ye between the two sides?" Those words were spoken at a very big hour in a nation's history, showing what God's mind was about things. Limping between the two sides. The Authorised Version has it - *"halting between two opinions"*, but I am afraid we have rather given the modern English sense to the word 'halt' - standing still between two things. It also means hopping from one to another, limping, just crippled by indecision. The Lord is against that. If there is any one stronger passage in the Bible on that matter, it is Rev. 3:15: *"Because thou art lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spew thee out of my mouth"* - God's desire to have definiteness in His people.

Then we have got to take account of this from the other side, the positive side, from that of God, and see that one of Satan's tactics against God's full purpose is to press or ensnare God's people into indecision and indefiniteness. And strangely enough, this is a peculiar peril of those who could not very easily be brought to turn right round on God in repudiation of Him, those who really do mean to go on with God, those who in their hearts want God's best, whom Satan would find very difficult subjects to get to forswear everything and say, "I have done with it all! I have washed my hands of God and everything connected with Him, I am finished!" Those whom Satan would find very difficult subjects to get to take this line, he does with them what he did through Balaam. He could not bring the direct result. So he got round the back door and secured the same effect by paralysing them.

What I mean is this, that if Satan cannot get God's people to positively and definitely repudiate Him, go back on everything, he will make those people the very objects of his continuous activity to get them into a state of indecision or indefiniteness, a sort of in between the two positions. It is the peculiar peril of a certain type of believer, and the enemy works hard with them, and strangely enough, it is the very dealings of God with us which Satan takes hold of to use to his end, to this end.

God is dealing with us. God is removing our own natural strength, forcefulness and determination, that which in us naturally would cause us to be very positive in a natural way. God is undercutting that and leaving us without that natural strength and Satan takes hold of that very work of God to bring us into a state of paralysis through indefiniteness. Now it is such a situation that we have got to look at because it is very true. We began by seeing the terrible peril of indecision, how indecision is just as capable of robbing us of God's full purpose as an entire repudiation. That is what comes out in the Word. If God spews any people out of His mouth, you may take it for granted that they have missed God's end. If, for this indecision and indefiniteness, God has to say, "I cannot go on with you in My purposes!" well then, the end is just as certainly secured by the enemy in defeating God's purpose in us of fullness as though we would have nothing whatever to do with it.

We are staying to think of the extra values to Satan of having children of God always in indefiniteness. There are special values to him in that, but here is this tremendous peril of indecision, of an undecided position, something in between the two. There is this fact, that Satan works hard to get us there, to destroy everything by getting us in this neither-one-thing-nor-the-other position, always with one big question, that question hanging over us all the time never finally settled, never decided once and for all, in a state of a question mark, a note of interrogation. That is a condition of things which Satan is always trying to create and, when he has once created it, it is no easy thing to get out of it. He will hold us there as long as possible.

But then we must look at this matter. Do you notice that Hebrews 4:12 is connected with Israel in the wilderness? When you ask what is the meaning of this, you can go back and you get the answer in a Psalm. If you look at Psalm 78, you have got the explanation of Hebrews 4:12. Psalm 78:8 reads like this:-

"And might not be as their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation, a generation that set not their heart aright, and whose spirit was not steadfast with God."

A generation whose spirit was not steadfast with God. This is referred to as Israel in the wilderness. Now in Hebrews 4 we have - "Let us fear, let us take heed, let us give diligence, that none of us fall into the same disobedience, fail to enter into the rest, His rest." That is Israel in the wilderness. Then this immediately follows -

"For (what a significant 'for' that is) the word of God is living, and active, and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing even to the dividing of soul and spirit".

"Whose spirit was steadfast with God".

"Dividing of soul and spirit".

If you look at Israel's life and history in the wilderness during forty years, you will find it a life and history of indecision, of variableness. One day, of course, they are going on well. So far as their attitude is concerned, to all appearances, they mean to go on today. Why? Well, they have got some

encouragement, the situation is propitious and helpful. The influences bearing upon them today are such as to cause them to feel like that; for certain reasons they feel like that today. Bringing that down to smaller, narrower limits of individuals and little companies, well, today there has been a good message of inspiration and encouragement, a good 'stir-up'; today we have been in the company of some stronger influences, perhaps stronger personalities, and we are going on. Tomorrow we are away from all that. The stronger personalities are not present, the helpful influences from the outside are cut off. Then we begin to go over the thing and all sorts of things arise, reasonings. After all, you see, it was only the argument, only their way of putting it, their interpretation! - stronger personalities and influences and so on, and we are tomorrow not where we were the day before and we are not going on. Now, Israel's whole life was like that. Sometimes everything was pointing in that direction and helpful, and so they were going on. Now things are not so easy, there is nothing to help, and they are thinking of going back, wondering whether the whole thing has not been a mistake, whether Moses was not, after all, wrong, a false prophet, whether the old life was not better than this, all that sort of thing. "*Whose spirit was not steadfast with God*". Do you notice soul and spirit? Their history lay in that realm, being influenced by their own souls. Anybody who lives on the basis of their own souls will be a variable person. These souls of ours are not steadfast, they are influenced and affected by things, and we change, our moods change with the conditions in which we are. Living in the soul means that we shall be like Israel in the wilderness, never long of the same mind, the mind to go on.

We know in our own history, the many times in which - yes, we were going on! We are going in for this, nothing will ever turn us back again. How many times since have we been right back, questioning everything. We get down into the soul, and perhaps even that decision was a soul decision because of external influences bearing upon us. We have not been able to discriminate between soul and spirit, and here it is "*whose spirit was not steadfast with God*".

Now, the wilderness is a suitable place for such training, for such discrimination. In the wilderness the soul really has not got very much as a solid and abiding foundation. The soul requires very tangible proof, very solid evidences, and usually the soul must have something to lay hold of and usually something to do, for you know, if we can only be doing something that has a semblance of being worthwhile, we get a sort of certainty, we are a little more positive. Now in the wilderness with Israel there are lots of things that were perfectly useless. A plough was a useless thing in the wilderness; any kind of expert knowledge of how to build houses and so on was a useless thing in the wilderness. You come into the wilderness, a sandy desert and you rule out a lot of things. They are no good here. Wonderful things in a city or in a land where everything is developed and established, but in a wilderness, what can you do? Well, everything is flimsy. Your dwelling place is only a bit of canvas and you cannot sit there very long or you will die. There is nothing much to do in a wilderness. The whole of our natural life is undercut in a wilderness. Everything is uncertain and indefinite in the wilderness.

That is the realm of discovering whether you are living in your soul or in your spirit. The only thing possible in a wilderness as an alternative to dying there is to go on and go on and go on. That is all. Israel perished in the wilderness because they did not go on. Spiritually, they got into a wilderness state themselves instead of being a denial of the wilderness. They were not only in the wilderness, but the wilderness was in them.

Now, when you come later, you have Joshua and Caleb. They went back with that generation into the wilderness for another nearly forty years, but Joshua and Caleb had no wilderness in them. They wholly followed the Lord. They were a contradiction of the wilderness. Death was raging all around them in the whole nation. Joshua and Caleb were a contradiction to death itself and lived triumphant

over death. The wilderness was then taking the toll which that generation in Israel had given it the right to do by the attitude of their spirits. Joshua and Caleb lived as a contradiction to the wilderness. Their spirits were steadfast in spirit, they were refusing the influence of the wilderness and holding on to the land. The wilderness is the place to train us to be strong in spirit. The Lord puts us into a wilderness condition and situation where we have nothing whatever of positiveness and definiteness; so far as our souls are concerned, we can be simply swayed by every emotion, every feeling, every suggestion that comes along and never get anywhere. That is a phase of spiritual experience and the idea of the Lord in allowing us to have such an experience is not just to undercut our soul life, but positively to teach us the difference between soul and spirit, and to get our spirits to be steadfast toward God.

It is not always a matter of how much we can do that proves spiritual strength, spiritual positiveness. A lot of people seem to think that their spiritual strength and positiveness is demonstrated by the number of things they do, and it is not that. Spiritual strength and positiveness is more proved by our endurance or by a holding on to our position than by what we do. The Lord may take away from us all the doing side in order to develop the strength of holding to a position. The Lord does not say, Those who continue doing a lot of things to the end shall be saved! He says, "*He that endures to the end, the same shall be saved*" (Matt. 10:22). The Lord puts a tremendous amount upon this matter of endurance and steadfastness.

Well, we have got to have a starting-point in this matter. We must have a crisis, a crisis in which - may I put it this way? - our compass is made true. What do I mean by our compass? I mean this - our heart union with the Lord. You know, when Lord Kelvin, the inventor of the magnetic compass, was at work on his research in providing ships with compasses, he used to go right out into mid-ocean as far away from land as he could get, and there, for days or weeks on a ship alone, he worked away at his compasses to get them absolutely true, right away from every land influence, and when he came back, he had got his true compass and every ship was provided with a Kelvin compass. Now it had got something it could trust. But now we know of a certain necessary procedure of adjusting the compass. What has happened? Well, I was on the bridge of a ship once when it came into harbour and when it went out from harbour. As we approached through the estuary of that harbour, I had been for some time there watching and listening to the navigation orders, all from the compass, and the orders were all given according to the compass day by day and night by night with their technical repetition by the navigating officer. Very carefully, very precisely, the very words of the captain are repeated by the navigating officer to make sure that he has got it right. But, as we came into the estuary and were going up into the harbour, no more compass instructions were given. Instructions were given, but nothing by the compass. I said to the captain, "What are you navigating by?" He said, "The compass is no use here; there are too many influences around. You see all those factories over there, you see those chimneys, you see that steelworks - they are all upsetting my compass! I now have to get my bearings by certain points in the town. I get that church spire in a line with that steeple there, and I know then my channel is clear, but the compass is too upset by local interference. When I get out again I shall have to have my compass adjusted because these magnetic artificial influences from the land have upset it. I will have to get clear of them again and get adjusted".

There is that initial adjustment of the compass - it is not right to say adjustment because that means an after thing - but having the compass made true at the beginning in the life of a child of God. That is, you and I have got to come at some time to a place where we cut clear of every kind of natural influence once and for all. We say, "This is the end of being influenced by other people's judgments, by earthly considerations, by personal interests, by anything that belongs to the old creation! I am dead to that, and now by the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of the anointing, I am wholly governed by the

Lord's interests, the will of God! The Holy Spirit linked with my spirit is the compass always pointing dead true in the direction of God's will; the Holy Spirit will always swing to that magnetic north of God's will. *'He that is joined to the Lord is one spirit'* (1 Cor. 6:17). My crisis means that I am under His government, no other influences are going to affect me. From the beginning right here I have this thing settled". We have got to get there as a crisis.

A lot of people really do not get a thoroughgoing crisis of that kind. Even in salvation, they are largely influenced by the personal benefits, forgiveness, peace with God, assurance of salvation and how it affects them very largely. When it comes to the matter of the Lord having the first and only place in all things, that is another matter. Years after they come to that in what they call 'full consecration', but in between there is no real going right on to God's full end. You and I, sooner or later, have got to have this crisis where we once and for all ask the Lord that, by the Cross, He will effect in us that we are really joined to the Lord one spirit, and are henceforth only influenced and affected by what the Holy Spirit is after, by the direction that He is taking in us - and that becomes the dominant thing. It has got to be a crisis, and we can just be limping as paralysed cripples, indefinite, undecided, until that is settled as a radical thing. It has got to be very, very definite and positive. Then we are finished with this limping life, this life of uncertainty and indecision, of question all the time, reason, argument, and all kinds of influences which are other than the settled mind of the Spirit. We have got to come down with both feet upon that - a cutting right off of everything but the Lord Himself in His full will for us, and to be altogether unaffected by any other consideration. It has got to be very definite and settled.

But even after a crisis, as we go on through the years, we shall find that, while the original position may not be destroyed, there will arise things which affect us. We may sometimes come into port. I mean we may from time to time find that our compass is being a little disturbed. Things are beginning to weigh a bit with us, affect us, influence us, and we are finding that we are losing a bit of our certainty because we are taking on something again from the outside. Well, that may be, probably will be. It is almost the general experience of believers. Very few, if any, get right through the course without being affected on the way. It may not destroy the thing that the Lord did deeply in us, but trials, difficulties, adversities, dark patches, perplexities, they have a way of making us begin to ask questions. Satan tries his game again of forcing us, pressing us, so that we do not know where we are, and we can get no dead reckoning and the compass seems to be a little disturbed. At such times you and I will have to stand back, get out to sea again where we are free from these influences and get adjusted.

What I mean is this, that we stand back and ask ourselves some primary questions. I have become a little uncertain, I have been getting questions in my mind, I have been allowing things so to affect me so that I wonder whether I have been right all the way along! What is my alternative? I face my alternative. My alternative to going straight on, even though I cannot see, cannot understand, going right on with God with a steadfast spirit, my alternative is to go right back on my past, upon everything. Can I do that? Where will that land me? Has my past been so devoid of God that I can throw it all away like that? Ah, begin to face your alternative and you will very soon find out that that is a way back to death. That is how you adjust your compass. You come under influences, it is a realm perhaps of a bit of uncertainty, indecision again. Are you going to stay there? No, face the implications of that, your alternatives. What are they? Adjust your compass by your alternatives. You say, "I could not go back there; if I died here, it would be better than going back there, I cannot repudiate all that, and say that there was nothing of the Lord in that! What then? I am going on! I cannot stay here". *"Whose spirit was not steadfast with God"*.

Now this brings in quite a lot of detail which we will not go into, but here are these two passages

from the life of Paul, in Acts and 2 Corinthians it says, "*Paul purposed in the spirit*". Yes, but when you purpose in the spirit, that does not settle the whole matter. When you come to 2 Corinthians 1, you find that Paul purposed in the spirit right enough, but he did not carry it out, and the Corinthians snapped at that. They were predisposed by now to criticise Paul, and something had happened which made them predisposed to watch him carefully with a view to finding some weakness or flaw in him. "Paul said that he was going to see us, to visit us, he wrote and told us he was coming and he did not come - therefore Paul is a yea and nay man, says one thing but does another!" Yet Paul purposed in the spirit. How are you going to reconcile those things?

Ah yes, you may purpose in the spirit and yet you may be delayed. You may have your intentions for the time being upset, but that is no argument why you should never purpose a thing. Paul's answer is this - "It is quite true I said I was going to do something. I said I would come and see you and it is quite true that I did not come when I said I would come, but that does not make me a man of fickleness. That cannot be interpreted that I was fickle, that I did not mean it, that I was careless about what I said! I am still a man who is a yea man, I am not a yea and nay man!" That is his answer. "You cannot lay the charge of being a yea and nay man at my door simply because something interferes with things and I was delayed and was not able, at the time that I said I would do a thing, to carry it out!" The point is that God wants yea people. Yea people may not always be able at the time when they thought they would do a thing, to do it. Yea people may not always be able to carry out things as they thought to do, but that is very different from being a yea and a nay person, that is, someone upon whom you can never rely.

Now all this is only just talking round one point. God wants us to be definite. God wants us to be positive. Satan is always trying to force, press or jockey us into a position of indefiniteness. You can be positive when you do not know. You do not know the thing, but you know your God. You may have to say about ten things, "I do not know!" But when you have said that the next thing is - "But I trust God! All that does not mean I am uncertain of God! I am going on!" It is not by things alone that we are rendered indefinite. Indefiniteness comes in when it is our relationship with God. You can be a person in the dark and not know a thing, what God means or is doing, or where you are going, but you can be a positive person, and once you are struck at the roots of your positiveness, your hold on the Lord and determination with God, then you are paralysed at once. It is not that people are able to do so many things and have a clear programme. It is that their spirit is steadfast with God, and they are not allowing things to so affect them that they are all over the place. Steadfast toward God!

So we have to learn again the difference between soul and spirit as a basis upon which to live, seeing that, in the realm of the soul there is nothing stable, nothing sure. In the realm of the spirit, there is positiveness, definiteness, and this I think is what comes out of 1 Kings 18: "*How long go ye limping between the two sides?*" Settle, not things, but if God be God and you believe God, then come down with both feet on God's side. So Joshua's great statement comes in - "*Choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord*"; we are going on with God.