

A Sermon Occasioned by the Death of Mrs. Mary Fall.

by John Gill

The word of God is a full and sure direction to the people of God, and Christ is the chief and principal way the word directs us to walk in.

Scripture: Psalm 119:105, Proverbs 4:18, Isaiah 30:21, John 14:6, Romans 1:16, Ephesians 1:7, Ephesians 2:18, Hebrews 10:20, 1 Peter 1:9, 2 Peter 1:19

Topics: "Assurance in Christ", "Guidance in Trials"

Description

John Gill preaches a sermon occasioned by the death of Mrs. Mary Fall, emphasizing the importance of following God's guidance in times of distress. He draws from Isaiah 30:21, illustrating how the Lord directs His people to walk in His ways, especially during trials. Gill reassures the congregation that God's word provides clear direction and comfort, encouraging them to trust in Christ as the only way to salvation and eternal life. He highlights the significance of spiritual nourishment through the word of God, which leads to peace and strength for believers. The sermon serves as a reminder of the hope and assurance found in Christ, even amidst sorrow and loss.

Transcript

OCCASIONED BY THE DEATH OF

MRS. MARY FALL,

Late Wife Of The Reverend Mr. James Fall Of Watford, Herts.

Preached April 13, 1739.

ISAIAH 30:21.

-- This is the way, walk ye in it --

THIS part of Isaiah's prophecy was delivered by him at a time when Sennacherib, king of Assyria, had invaded the land of Judea, and was about to besiege the city of Jerusalem; which struck the inhabitants with great consternation, and put them on contriving different methods for their security. Some of them thought of going down to Egypt, or of sending to that nation for assistance, in this their time of extremity:

for which they are sharply reprov'd in the beginning of this chapter: and are told, that their strength was to sit still, (Isaiah 30:7.) that is, to be quiet and easy, and abide in the city of Jerusalem; and not once think of betaking themselves elsewhere; when they might assure themselves of protection and safety: but this message from God, by the prophet, was slighted by them; For thus saith the Lord God, the holy one of Israel, In returning and rest shall ye be saved; in quietness and in confidence shall be your strength, and ye would not. (Isaiah 30:15.)

Wherefore they are threatened with swift ruin and destruction. But as the Lord always had a compassionate regard to his dear children, the remnant, according to the election of grace among that people; so he always took care to give out gracious promises for their relief and support in the worst of times. Accordingly it is said in the context; And therefore will the Lord wait, that he may be gracious unto you; and therefore will he be exalted, that he may have mercy upon you; (Isaiah 30:18.) he will defer the execution of his judgments; he will not stir up all his wrath; but when the set time is come, he will arise and have mercy on you; for the Lord is a God of judgment, who can do nothing but what is just and right, and everything well and wisely; who always acts according to justice, with judgment and wisdom, and also with clemency, goodness and mercy; in which sense the word judgment is sometimes used: as when the prophet says, O Lord, correct me, but with judgment; not in thine anger, lest thou bring me to nothing. (Jeremiah 10:24.)

And because the Lord is, in this sense, a God of judgment, it is a great encouragement to persons to wait for him, and trust in him; blessed are all they that wait for him, who place their hope and confidence in him, and not in men; who make use of no illicit methods, nor apply to others for help and assistance in time of distress; for the people shall dwell in Zion, at Jerusalem; that is, in safety, without fear of their enemies; thou shalt weep no more, or not long; he, God, will be very gracious to thee, at the voice of thy cry, prayer and supplication to him; when he shall hear it, he will answer thee, sooner or later, in his own time: and though the Lord give you the bread of adversity, and the water of affliction, either now, at this present time, or hereafter, in the Babylonish captivity; yet shall not thy teachers be removed into a corner any more; or as others[1] read the words, thy rain shall not be removed from thee; for one and the same word[2] signifies both rain and a teacher; because, doctrine from the mouth of the teacher, drops like rain upon the tender herb, and as showers on the grass; and is here to be understood of the rain of spiritual doctrine; so that the sense is much the same, and the meaning of the words this; that though the people of God should be attended with bodily afflictions, they should have spiritual consolation; and though they might have a famine of bread and water, yet not of hearing the word of the Lord.

Thine eyes shall see thy teachers, in their proper places, doing the proper work of their office; and thine ears shall hear a voice behind thee, saying; This is the way, walk ye in it. The Lord will open thine ears to discipline, and thine heart to attend to the things spoken by him in the word of the gospel; when thou turnest out of his way, to the right hand or the left. The word being said to be behind them, points out their declensions and backslidings, who had said to the prophets, get ye out of the way; turn aside out of the path; cause the holy one of Israel to cease from before us. (Isaiah 30:11.)

And it is thought by some,[3] to be an allusion to schoolmasters, who stand behind their scholars, or at their back, to guide, teach, and instruct them. Others[4] think, the reference is to shepherds following their flocks; who, when they observe any of the sheep going out of the way, call them back; or rather, the expression seems to be borrowed from travelers; who coming to a place where are several ways, and being at a loss which to take, are inclined to turn to the right hand, or the left, when they are called to by persons behind them, at a distance from them, directing them in the right way,[5] and such is this here

directed to.

The observation I make on the text is this: That the word of God, or gospel of Christ, is a full and sure direction to the people of God, as to the way in which they should walk. This is the more sure word of prophecy, whereunto ye do well that ye take heed. (2 Peter 1:19.) This is a lamp unto your feet, and a light unto your paths. (Psalm 119:105.) It is the rule of faith and practice; by which the whole walk and conversation of the saints, both in faith and holiness, is to be directed.

We are to follow God and not men; the Bible, and not the doctrines and inventions of men. Though a majority may be on one side of the question, we are not to follow a multitude to do evil. All the world wondered after the beast. (Revelation 13:3.) Nor are riches and learning to have any influence upon us, or weight with us, to incline us one way or another; were these a rule of judgment, our Lord must have been rejected as an impostor and deceiver. Have any of the rulers, the heads and governors of the people, civil or ecclesiastical, or of the Pharisees, that learned body of men, believed on him?

But this people, who knoweth not the law, are cursed; (John 7:48, 49.) a company of poor illiterate and contemptible persons. Not the traditions of men, the productions of carnal reason, natural schemes, or philosophical quirks, are to be regarded by us, but the word of Christ: Beware, lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit; after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ. (Colossians 2:8.) Nor are education-principles to be trusted to and depended upon, without examination; nor are we to be governed by the customs of the people, which are generally vain; (but to the law and to the testimony, if men speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them. (Isaiah 8:20.)

We should search the scriptures, (John 5:39, Acts 12:11.) as the noble Bereans did, to see whether the things spoken are so or no; for they are they which testify of Christ, of his person and offices, of his grace, blood, righteousness, sacrifice and satisfaction, and of the way of salvation by him; they are the standard to which all doctrines and practices are to be brought, and by which they are to be tried; and these contain full and sure directions with respect to both; they are profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works. (2 Timothy 3:16.)

If any are at a loss about the way in which they should walk; let them examine the way marks, the scriptures, the word of God, and gospel of Christ; let them stand in the ways, and see and ask for the old paths; Where is the good way, and walk therein. (Jeremiah 6:16.) The method I shall take in the prosecution of this subject, will be as follows: I. I shall give some further account of the word, said to be behind; which directs to the way in which the people of God should walk.

II. Show what that way is which this word directs to. III. Inquire what is meant by walking in the way which is exhorted to. And, IV. Observe some advantages which arise to persons walking in this way, and which may be considered as encouragements to them to walk in it. I. I shall give some further account of the word behind, which directs the saints to walk in the right way. And by this we are to understand, not the word spoken by angels; (Hebrews 2:2.) which is the law that was given to Moses, by the disposition of angels. (Acts 7:53.)

When God appeared on mount Sinai, it was with great solemnity and majesty; he came with ten thousands of saints, his holy ones, the angels; from his right hand went a fiery law; (Deuteronomy 33:2.) which was received by those ministering spirits, and was ordained, or disposed of by them, in the hand of

a mediator; (Galatians 3:19.) which mediator was Moses. But though a word spoken by them, and delivered out with so much solemnity, required the strictest attention and regard; yet this is not the word intended here; for that was a voice of words which they that heard, intreated that the word should not be spoken to them any more; for they could not endure that which was commanded: (Hebrews 12:19, 20.) it was a voice of terror, and devoid of mercy; it accused of sin; pronounced men guilty; cursed them on account of it, and was a ministration of condemnation and death.

But the word in our text, is the still small voice of the gospel, the voice of Christ; which his sheep hear, and are capable of distinguishing from the voice of a stranger: it is a word clothed with power, and is effectual to many great and wonderful purposes; it is a soul-shaking, and heart-breaking voice. What is said of the voice of the Lord, may, in some sense, be applied to this; The voice of the Lord is powerful; the voice of the Lord is full of majesty; the voice of the Lord breaks the cedars; the voice of the Lord shakes the wilderness. (Psalm 29:4, 5, 8.)

This is a means not only of awakening and convincing, but also of quickening sinners, dead in trespasses and sins: The hour is coming, and now is, says Christ, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God; and they that hear shall live; (John 5:25.) yea, it is a soul-comforting and reviving word to his people; it is the voice of the charmers, charming exceeding wisely; (Psalm 58:5.) it allures the hearts of believers; it ravishes their souls; it raises and engages their affections, and fills their minds with inexpressible delight and pleasure; it is a voice of love, grace and mercy.

This word may be considered as spoken and delivered by the ministers of Christ, who are ambassadors for him, and stand in his stead: when they preach his gospel, he speaks in them, and by them; so that he that hears them hears him; and he that despises them, despises him. Now this word, whether it be considered as lying in the Bible, or as spoken by Christ, or as delivered by his faithful ministers, is, 1. The word of God. It comes from him, was dictated by him, is the breath of the Almighty, was given forth by divine inspiration; the writers of it were moved by the holy Ghost; what is said by David of himself, is as true of all the rest of the penmen of the sacred scriptures; the spirit of the Lord spake by me, and his word was in my tongue: (2 Samuel 23:2.) so that what they wrote was not their own, but God's: yea, what our Lord Jesus Christ delivered, as the great prophet in Israel, was not his own, but his Father's: The word which you hear, says he, is not mine, but the Father's which sent me. (John 14:24.)

And so what the true and faithful ministers of Christ preach, agreeable to the scriptures of truth, and the gospel of Christ, is to be regarded and received, not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God. (1 Thessalonians 2:13.) And, indeed, the wonderful things which are done by it, and which can be ascribed to nothing else but the power of God going along with it, bear a testimony to it, and prove it to be his; such as quickening of dead sinners, opening blind eyes, unstopping deaf ears, softening hard hearts, subduing rebellious wills, reconciling minds which were enmity to God, to Christ, to his gospel, ordinances and people; and delivering souls out of the power of darkness, and translating them into the kingdom of God's dear Son. 2.

It is the word of truth. (Ephesians 1:13.) The scriptures, in which it lies, are the scriptures of truth; it comes from the God of truth: the sum and substance of it is Christ, who is the truth. It is opened and applied, and men are guided into it by the spirit of truth. It consists of a set and chain of truths which are inseparably connected together; the principal of which lies in those words; This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief. (1 Timothy 1:15.) 3.

It is the word of reconciliation. (2 Corinthians 5:19.) It gives the plan and model of reconciliation, as it was drawn in the divine mind and counsel from everlasting: it points out this as the work cut out for the Messiah before he came; and acquaints us, that he assumed human nature in order to do it; and that the elect of God, even while they were enemies, were reconciled to God by the death of his Son; and that he has actually, and completely, made peace for them by the blood of his cross; whence the gospel is called, The gospel of peace, and the word preaching peace by Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all. (Ephesians 6:15, Acts 10:36.) 4.

It is the word of righteousness; (Hebrews 5:13.) not only because it teaches and engages men to live righteously and soberly, but because therein is revealed the righteousness of God, from faith to faith; (Romans 1:17.) even that righteousness, which Christ, who is God over all, has wrought out for his people; which God is well pleased with, and graciously imputes unto them; his justice being satisfied with it, and his law magnified and made honorable by it; and which faith lays hold upon as a justifying righteousness; being pure, spotless, perfect and complete; and so by it, all that believe are justified from all things, from which they could not be justified by the law of Moses. (Acts 13:39.) 5.

It is the word of life. (Philippians 2:16.) It is the Spirit which giveth life; it is the means of giving and communicating spiritual life to dead sinners, when attended with the spirit and power of Christ; it is the favor of life unto life, and also the means of reviving and refreshing drooping believers; and moreover, shows the path of life, the way to eternal life and happiness by Christ; for life and immortality are brought to light, not by the light of nature, nor by the law of Moses, but through the gospel of Christ. (2 Timothy 1:10.) 6.

It is the word of salvation. (Acts 13:26.) It brings the news of salvation by Christ; it is a declaration of it; it gives an account both of the author and nature of it; it describes the persons interested in it; it encourages poor souls to look to Christ for it, and is the means of the application of it; it is the power of God unto salvation, to every one that believeth. (Romans 1:16.) Now such a word as this which comes from God, is clothed with his authority, has the signature of truth upon it, and is charged with matters of the greatest moment and concern; such as our reconciliation with God, our justification before him, and the way of life and salvation by Christ, ought to be attended to; and whatsoever that makes known unto us, enjoins on us, or directs us to, should be regarded by us; which brings me, II.

To show you what that way is which this word exhorts us to walk in. The grand and principal way is Christ; the lesser ones are the paths of doctrine and duty, and each of these we are directed to by the word behind us. 1. Christ is the chief and principal way the word directs us to walk in; yea, he himself says, I am the way. (John 14:6.) Under this head I shall endeavor to show you, (1.) What Christ is the way unto. (2.) What a way he is. (1.) What he is the way unto: he is the way to the Father; he is the way to the covenant of grace, and to a participation and enjoyment of all the blessings and promises of it.

He is the way of salvation, and to heaven, and eternal glory. [1.] He is the way to the Father; he is the Father's way to us, and our way to the Father. Jehovah the Father never took one step towards the salvation of his people out of Christ; his thoughts about it began with him; he possessed him in the beginning of his way of grace, before his works of old, (Proverbs 8:22.) of creation and providence; all his purposes, resolutions, and determinations concerning that matter, were in him; the whole scheme of it is according to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord: (Ephesians 3:11.) he drew the plan and model of reconciliation in him, in the counsel of peace that was held with him; he chose his elect in him, and blessed them with all spiritual blessings in him; grace was given to them in him before the

world began.

All fullness of grace was put into his hands as Mediator, that they might receive out of it, in all generations, grace for grace. The goings-forth of God, in the way of grace to his people, both in eternity and in time, have always been through Christ. And as he is the Father's way to us, he is our way to the Father: I am the way, says he, no man cometh unto the Father but by me; none of all the individuals of human nature can come to him in any other way; but through him both Jews and Gentiles have an access by one spirit unto the Father; (Ephesians 2:18.) hence he is said to be able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him. (Hebrews 7:25.)

There is no way to God upon the foot of the covenant of works. Man was made after the image, and in the likeness of God; was in a state of friendship and amity with God; was the favorite and darling of heaven; was placed in the most delightful and fruitful spot in all the globe, and had a power to eat of every tree in the garden, excepting one; all the creatures of the earth were subject to him, and he had all things about him for convenience and delight: But man being in honor abode not long; sin soon separated chief friends; man listened to the voice of the tempter, turned his back on God, and apostasized from him; upon which he was both ashamed and afraid to appear before God, when called by him, but was obliged to it; and after his arraignment, trial, and sentence, he was drove out of his earthly paradise; and cherubims and a flaming sword were placed at the east of the garden, to keep the way of the tree of life; intimating, that there was no coming to God, nor obtaining life, by the covenant of works.

God is a consuming fire; there is no drawing nigh to an absolute God, to God out of Christ: Who can engage his heart to approach unto him? There is need of a day's-man to lay his hands on both: There is no access without a Mediator. Christ is the Mediator between God and man, typified by Jacob's ladder, which was set upon the earth, and its top reached to heaven; he has assumed human nature, fulfilled the law, and satisfied divine justice in it, and so has removed the obstacles which were in the way of a sinner's coming to God.

He takes his own people, as it were, by the hand, and leads them into his Father's presence, so that they have boldness, and access with confidence, by the faith of him: (Ephesians 3:12.) though they are black in themselves they are comely in him, through the perfect comeliness and righteousness he puts upon them; hence their persons are accepted in the beloved, (Ephesians 1:6.) and so likewise are their services; their prayers to God are odors of a sweet smelling favor, being presented to him perfumed with the incense of his mediation; their sacrifices of prayer and praise are acceptable to God through him; wherefore it is right that we should by him offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to his name; (Hebrews 13:16.) especially, since, [2.]

Christ is the way to the participation and enjoyment of the blessings of the covenant of grace. The covenant of grace was made with Christ from everlasting, as the head and representative of God's elect, and for, and on the behalf of them. It was ordered in all things for God's glory, and their good, being stored with all spiritual blessings suitable for them, and ensured to them; all which were put into the hands of Christ for them. Now, though all these blessings were originally provided, laid up, and secured in this covenant by the free grace of God, yet they all come to us through the blood of Christ; hence that is called the blood of the everlasting covenant. (Hebrews 13:20.)

Nor is there any coming at any of them but by him; thus, for instance, forgiveness of sin is a blessing of the covenant; I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, says God, and their sins and their iniquities will I

remember no more: (Hebrews 8:12.) but then this comes to us through the blood of Christ; there is no pardon to be had in any other way, none to be expected from an absolute God, from God out of Christ; in him we have redemption, through his blood, even the forgiveness of our sins, according to the riches of his grace. (Ephesians 1:7.)

Nor can we come at it, but by him, and by saying as the poor publican did, God be merciful, ilaqhti, be propitious to me a sinner; (Luke 18:13.) or, God be merciful to me a sinner, through the propitiatory sacrifice of his Son. Justification is owing to the free grace of God, as the impulsive and moving cause of it, but then it is also by the blood and righteousness of Christ, and through the redemption (Romans 3:24.) that is in him. Adoption is a blessing of grace, provided for, and bestowed upon the elect in the covenant of grace; but inasmuch as sin threw obstacles in the way of their actual and personal enjoyment of it, Christ came and redeemed them by his blood, that they might receive the adoption of children. (Galatians 4:4, 5.)

In a word, though eternal life was promised in the covenant, before the world began, by God that cannot lie, yet Christ came to procure it for us, and convey it to us; he came that we might have life, and have it more abundantly. (John 10:10.) [3.] Christ is the way of salvation which the word of God directs us to, and the ministers of it show unto us. He is the way of salvation which God has fixed, resolved, and determined on. God has appointed him to be his salvation unto the ends of the earth; and those which he has appointed not unto wrath, but to obtain salvation, he has appointed them to obtain it by Christ Jesus.

The Lord, as he is determined to save them, he is determined to save them in this, and in no other way: I will have mercy on the house of Judah, and will save them by the Lord their God; and will not save them by bow, nor by sword, nor by battle, by horses, nor by horsemen; (Hosea 1:7.) wherefore, though there may be many devices in a man's heart; one man may contrive one way of salvation, and another man another, nevertheless the counsel of the Lord that shall stand. (Proverbs 19:21.)

This is a way agreeable to all the divine perfections; the glory of them is great in this way of salvation; here mercy and truth are met together, righteousness and peace have kissed each other. (Psalm 85:10.) The rights and honors of God's justice and holiness are hereby secured, as well as the riches of his love, grace, and mercy, displayed. This is a way of salvation in which Satan is most grievously mortified; for it must be a great mortification to that proud spirit to have his head bruised, himself, and works destroyed, and for men to be saved by the seed of the woman; by Christ in human nature, the ruin of which nature he had contrived, and brought about.

A way in which the loftiness of man is bowed down; and the haughtiness of man is made low; (Isaiah 2:17.) the creature is debased, his works of righteousness laid aside, a blast is blown on all his goodliness, and the Lord alone is exalted. A way which is entirely suitable to a poor sinner's case, in which everything needful for him, pardon, and cleansing, righteousness, and holiness, grace of every kind, and also glory, are provided for him. Such a way of salvation is Christ, that the vilest and chiefest of sinners have no reason to despair of it; for whoever looks to him for it, and believes in him, shall not perish, but have everlasting life.

To say no more, it is a way in which the righteous, though they are said to be scarcely saved, (1 Peter 4:18.) by reason of their afflictions, trials, and temptations, yet they are, and will be certainly saved with an everlasting salvation. [4.] Christ is the way to heaven and eternal happiness. Having obtained by his blood eternal redemption for his people, he is entered into heaven as a forerunner, to take possession of it in

their name, and prepare it for them. He is the great captain of salvation, who brings many sons to glory, through the Spirit's work of grace upon their souls, and by virtue of his own blood and righteousness; by the one as their meetness, and by the other as their right to their heavenly inheritance, without which none will ever see or enter into the kingdom of heaven.

But I go on, (2.) To show what a way Christ is: he is the only way, a new and a living one, a plain and straight way, a narrow one indeed, but yet safe and sure. [1.] He is the only way. I am, says he, the way; emphatically and eminently so, the best and the only one: he is the only way to the Father; no sinful man ever did, or could, or can, or will come to the Father, but by him; there is but one Mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus. He is the only way to the covenant of grace, and the blessings of it; none ever enjoyed any of them, but in and by him: he is the alone Mediator, surety, and messenger of it; he is the only way of salvation; he is the head of the corner; neither is there salvation in any other, for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved. (Acts 4:11, 12.)

It is in vain to expect it from any other person or quarter, from hills and mountains of duties, services, and works of righteousness done by us; in him alone is the salvation of Israel. There never was, nor never will be, any other way of salvation to heaven, and eternal glory; for though there may be ways which seem right to men, the end thereof is death. (Proverbs 16:25.) [2.] Christ is a new way; (Hebrews 10:20.) not newly contrived or found out, for he was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was; (Proverbs 8:23.) nor newly discovered, for he was made known as the seed of the woman (Genesis 3:15.) to our first parents, immediately after the fall; nor newly made use of, for he was the lamb slain from the foundation of the world, (Revelation 8:8.) to whose blood, righteousness, and sacrifice all the Old-Testament saints looked, and by whose grace they were saved, as we are: but he is called the new way, in opposition to the old way, by the covenant of works, and because he is more clearly revealed as the way under the gospel-dispensation; the holy Ghost this signifying, that the way into the holiest of all was not yet made manifest, that is, so clearly, while the first tabernacle was yet standing. (Hebrews 9:8.)

Moreover, he may be called so, because he was lately slain, his blood was newly shed, and his sacrifice but a little while ago offered up; he is *odov profatov*, "the new slain way," as some^[6] render the phrase. Besides, he is the new way, because he is always new, and never old: he is Jesus, the way of salvation, the same to day, yesterday, and for ever. (Hebrews 8:8.) [3.] He is a living way. He is the living Mediator and Redeemer; our way to God lies not through the sacrifices of slain beasts, of dead carcasses, but through a living Savior, who is the author both of spiritual and eternal life.

He gives spiritual life to his people, to enable them to walk in himself, the way; for there are none but living persons walk here, and he maintains that life in them, so that none in this way ever die, and he gives unto them eternal life. He is the way, the truth, and the life; that is, the true way to eternal life; and he ever lives, and continues to be this way; though he was dead, he is alive for evermore, and has the keys of hell and death. (Revelation 1:18.) [4.] It is a plain and straight way; a plain way, that is, to them that know him to be the way of peace.

What wisdom says of her words, that they are all plain to him that understandeth, and right to them that find knowledge, (Proverbs 8:9.) is equally true of Christ, as the way; who is such an one, in which wayfaring men, though fools, men of mean capacities, shall not err. (Isaiah 35:8.) This is no round-about way; there are no mazes and labyrinths, no windings and turnings in it. Christ is a straight way to the Father, the direct way of salvation, a near way to heaven: let thine eyes lock right on, and let thine eye-lids look straight before thee, (Proverbs 4:25.) to Jesus the captain of salvation, the author and finisher of faith;

and so press on forward to the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in him. [5.]

Christ is indeed a narrow way, (Matthew 7:14.) teqlimenh h odov, "a pressed or afflicted "way;" a way strewed as it were with afflictions, attended with difficulties and distress: all that walk in this way, all that will live godly in Christ Jesus, shall suffer persecution, (2 Timothy 3:12.) in one shape or another. They must expect tribulation in it; Christ has foretold it; none have been without it: This is a path all walk in to heaven; we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.(Acts 14:22.)

But then, [6.] He is a safe and sure way; none ever perished, or ever will perish, in this way. It is said, no lion shall be there, nor any ravenous beast shall go up thereon; it shall not be found there, but the redeemed shall walk there; (Isaiah 35:9.) that is, in safety: for though Satan goes about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour, (1 Peter 5:8.) yet he cannot devour or destroy any that are walking in Christ the way; and though there may be many ravenous beasts of prey, such as principalities and powers, the rulers of the darkness of this world, spiritual wickedness in high places, which seek to oppress the redeemed that walk here; yet though they may disturb their outward peace, they can never take away their spiritual comforts, nor deprive them of their future happiness; for, as has been already observed, the righteous though they are scarcely saved, yet they are certainly saved at last. 2.

There are other lesser ways and paths of doctrine and duty, which agree and fall in with, and relate unto Christ the chief and principal way, which the word directs saints to walk in: He will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths. (Isaiah 2:3.) And, (1.) There is the path of doctrine, of evangelical truths, which are sometimes called the way of the Lord. Apollos, an eloquent man, and mighty in the scriptures, is said to be instructed in the way of the Lord; that is, in the doctrines and institutions of Christ, of which he had got some knowledge, though but small: wherefore Aquila and Priscilla, upon hearing of him, took him aside privately, and expounded to him the way of God more perfectly; (Acts 18:24-26.) that is, they led him more distinctly into the path of truth; by their means he became more acquainted with the doctrines of the gospel, and the truths of the christian religion.

This is a way which every good man desires to walk in; he makes choice of it, and takes delight and pleasure in it. I have chosen, says David, the way of truth. (Psalm 119:30.) Yea, it is a very agreeable and pleasing sight to such to see others walking in this path. The apostle John tells the elect lady, that he rejoiced greatly that he found of her children walking in truth;[7] not only uprightly, and with integrity, in their lives and conversations, but in the truth of the gospel.

And he expresses himself in much the same manner to Gaius; I rejoiced greatly, says he, when the brethren came and testified of the truth that is in thee, even as thou walkest in the truth. I have no greater joy, than to hear that my children walk in truth. (2 John 4.) Now it is the Spirit of God that is the guide of his people, and leads them into the way of truth: When he, the Spirit of truth, is come, says Christ, he will guide you, odhghsei umav, "he will lead you the way," into all truth; (John 16:13.) under whose guidance and direction, grace, influence and assistance, the saints are sometimes enabled to make considerable progress and advances in this way; for the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day. (Proverbs 4:18.) (2.)

There is the path of ordinances, the way of Christ's commandments; particularly the two gospel-institutions of Baptism and the Lord's Supper; which it is the will of Christ his people should attend unto, and walk in. Concerning which, the word gives plain directions. The ordinance of Baptism our Lord himself submitted to, and so recommended it by his own example: he also clothed it with his authority, and gave commission

to his disciples to practice it; who accordingly did administer it to proper subjects, and in a proper manner.

And if any persons have any doubt or hesitation in their minds about either the subjects, or mode of baptism, let them stand in the ways and see; look up to the way-marks, the scriptures of truth, and there inquire, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein. (Jeremiah 6:16.) Let them look over the accounts of the administration of this ordinance in the times of John, Christ, and his apostles: and as to the subjects of it, they will find that those who were baptized by John, the first administrator of this ordinance, were such as confessed their sins; (Matthew 3:6.) who being made sensible of their sins of heart and life, made an humble and ingenuous acknowledgment of them: That those who were baptized by Christ, or rather by his orders, for Jesus himself baptized not but his disciples, were such who were first made disciples by him; that is, they were instructed in the knowledge of themselves and salvation by him; they were taught to deny themselves, take up the cross, and follow him.

Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John; (John 4:1, 2.) he first made them disciples, and then baptized them, or ordered them to be baptized: That those to whom this ordinance was administered by the apostles of Christ, after his resurrection from the dead, and ascension to heaven, were such who received the holy Ghost as well as they, who repented of their sins, and believed in Christ, or at least professed to do so. The instance of the eunuch is a remarkable one, to whose chariot Philip was bid to join himself, when he found him reading a passage in the prophecy of Isaiah; from which scripture, being taken up into the chariot with him, he preached Christ to him, gave him an account of his person, offices, doctrines and ordinances, and particularly this of Baptism: and when they were come to a place of water convenient for the administration of it, the eunuch says to Philip, See, here is water, what doth hinder me to be baptized?

And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God: (Acts 8:36, 37.) upon which profession of his faith he baptized him. Now this man was a proselyte to the Jewish religion, a serious and devout man, and was employed in a religious way when Philip came up to him; and yet, notwithstanding all this, he had no right to this ordinance of Christ without faith in him, and a profession of it; nor would Philip administer it to him without it.

Look over all these accounts, I say, and you will find the persons now described to be the only proper subjects of baptism: nor will you be able to observe, that ever any one infant was baptized by John, by Christ, or his apostles; or that there is either a precept or a precedent for such a practice, in all the word of God. And as to the mode of administration of this ordinance, if you have any scruple about that, look over the same accounts, and you will find that the first subjects of it were baptized in rivers, in places where was a large confluence of water, and chose for that purpose; and that they were there baptized by immersion, or covering the whole body in water.

The first that were baptized by John, were baptized in the river Jordan; as was also our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom it is said, when he was baptized, he went up straightway out of the water; (Matthew 3:6, 16.) not from the waterside, but out of it; which shows that he must have been in it; where he was baptized, not by sprinkling, or pouring water on him, but by immersion into it; for that he should go into the river, in order to be baptized in any other way, is not only ridiculous, but incredible.

John also baptized in Aenon, near to Salim, because there was much water (John 3:23.) there; a large confluence of it, fit for his purpose, and his way of administration. When Philip baptized the eunuch, it is

said they went down both into the water; (Acts 8:36, 38, 39.) not the declivity of the earth, to the waterside, or bank of the river; for this little silly trifling criticism is destroyed by what the historian observes before, that they came unto a certain water, the river Eleutherus, as Beza[8] conjectures: They were come to the riverside, to the bank of it, when the eunuch desired Baptism; and it being agreed to, they went down into the water itself, and he baptized him; and when they were come up out of the water, the spirit of the Lord caught away Philip.

Which circumstances clearly show in what manner this ordinance was administered. Nor can any other mode but that of immersion answer to the primary signification of the word baptizw; nor to the types of Baptism, Noah's ark, and the passing of the Israelites under the cloud, and in the sea; nor the end of baptism, which is to represent the burial and resurrection of Christ; nor the metaphorical baptisms of Christ's sufferings, and the extraordinary donation of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost.

The Lord's Supper is another ordinance of Christ, which he himself instituted and administered to his disciples, and ordered them to observe in remembrance of him; and which they accordingly did. The first christians were instructed in it, and taught to attend to it; and it is taken notice of, to their honor, that they continued stedfastly in the apostles doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayer. (Acts 2:42.) This is an ordinance to be performed with faith and fervency, in commemoration of the sufferings and death, sacrifice and satisfaction of Christ; and that frequently, and to be continued until the coming of Christ.

And if any man has any doubt about the ordinance itself, let him consult the sacred oracles, they will direct him in this way; or about his right unto it, let him examine himself, and so let him eat. (1 Corinthians 11:28.) But besides these paths of particular ordinances, the word behind us directs us to, (3.) The way of divine worship in general, both public and private. The worship of God was first personal, and then was set up in a family, in Adam's family; but when men increased into families, and these grew numerous, they joined together in public social acts of worship, and began to call upon the name of the Lord (Genesis 4:26.) conjunctly, and in a public manner.

When Israel, the people of God's choice, became a distinct nation, a tabernacle was set up by divine order, at the door of which the whole congregation was at certain times to assemble; and when they were established in the land the Lord their God gave unto them, a temple was built, whither the several tribes went up to worship the Lord in his holy mountain. Prophecies were delivered out under the Old-Testament dispensation; that the saints under the New should call upon the name of the Lord to serve him with one consent; (Zephaniah 3:9.) which were remarkably fulfilled in the first christians, who met together to pray and hear the word, and were of one heart and of one soul; (Acts 4:31, 32.) nor ought we to forsake the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another, and so much the more, as we see the day approaching. (Hebrews 10:25.)

There is also private worship, which should be attended; the people of God ought to meet in private together, and pray with one another; build up one another in their most holy faith, and converse together about the things of God, and their own experience. There is a family worship, which should be kept up: we ought to read the scripture, and pray in and with, and for our families; and there is also a personal, closet, secret worship, which should not be neglected: When thou prayest, says Christ, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret, and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly. (Matthew 6:6.) (4.)

The path of duty, or the way of gospel conversation and holiness, is directed to by the word behind us. External holiness of life is what becomes the gospel of Christ, and ought to be followed by all the professors of it. The doctrine of the grace of God instructs them in it, and engages them to it: It teaches them how they should behave both in the world, and in the church; that they ought to walk in wisdom towards them that are without, circumspectly, not as fools but as wise; redeeming the time, because the days are evil; (Colossians 4:15, Ephesians 5:15, 16.) and it directs them to walk in love towards one another, with all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. (Ephesians 5:2 and 4:2, 3.)

III. I am now to show you what is meant by walking in this way which is here exhorted to. Walking, as it respects Christ the way, designs believing in him; to believe in the light, and to walk in the light, are one and the same thing. Believing in Christ, and walking in Christ, are terms synonymous. It is by faith believers walk in Christ: We walk by faith, says the apostle, not by sight. (2 Corinthians 5:7.) Faith is the eye of the soul which looks to Christ, and is the foot by which it goes to him, and walks in him, as it has received him. (Colossians 2:7.)

Walking, as it respects the other ways of doctrine and duty, signifies an embracing of them, and obedience to them; for as there is faith, and wherever it is in truth, there is and will be the obedience of faith; such as receive Christ and his gospel truly, obey from the heart the form of doctrine delivered to them; (Romans 6:17.) and are desirous of walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless. (Luke 1:6.) They make Christ the pattern and example, after whom they would copy, and would willingly walk, even as he walked. (1 John 2:6.)

Now walking in both these senses, 1. Supposes life. A dead man cannot walk, nor even stand upon his feet. Men in a state of nature are dead in trespasses and sins. (Ephesians 2:1, 1 Timothy 5:6.) Whoever lives in pleasure, in sinful lusts and pleasures, are dead while they live. There must be a principle of life implanted in them; the Spirit of life from Christ must enter into them; breath from the Almighty must come into them, as in the dry bones in Ezekiel's vision, ere they will stand upon their feet, walk in Christ and in his ways, believe in him, or obey him truly. 2.

This supposes strength as well as life. There may be life where there is no strength to walk; but there can be no strength where there is no life. Men in a state of unregeneracy, as they are destitute of life, they are without strength. (Romans 5:6.) In this condition are God's elect, whilst unregenerate, and so they were when Christ died for them: Nor can they do anything without him, though all things through him strengthening of them. In him are both their righteousness and strength; to him they look for both; and as they receive the one, so they do the other from him, whereby they are enabled to walk in him, and in his ways; and such only are capable thereof: Blessed is the man whose strength is in thee, in whose heart are the ways of them. (Psalm 84:5.) 3.

This requires wisdom and guidance as well as strength. It is said of the wicked, that there is no judgment in their goings: (Isaiah 59:8.) they are like children that have no discretion; cannot conduct themselves; they are without a true guide, rule and direction; they walk after the flesh, the dictates of carnal reason: and, indeed the way of man, even of a good man, is not in himself; it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps; (Jeremiah 10:23.) the Spirit of God is his guide and director; by him his steps are ordered; he holds him by his hand; he teaches him to go, and guides him with his counsel. 4.

Walking denotes a progression, a going on, and forwards. It is not taking a step or two that can properly be called walking. There are some persons who take but, as it were, a step or two in religion; in the way of God: they are no sooner in, but they out again; this cannot be said to be walking in the way; nor are such who have put their hand to the plough, and look back, fit for the kingdom of God. (Luke 9:62.) But true walkers in Christ are not of them who draw back unto perdition, but of them that believe, continue to believe, go on believing in Christ, walking in him, and in his truths and ordinances, to the saving of the soul; that is, until they receive the end of their faith, even the salvation of their souls. (Hebrews 10:39, 1 Peter 1:9.)

IV. The last thing proposed, is to consider the advantages which arise to persons who walk in the way directed to; and which may be looked upon as so many encouragements thereunto. And, 1. A man that walks in this way may be sure he is right; he has a sure way to walk in, a sure guide that goes before him, and directs him, and a sure word of prophecy, to which he does well to take heed. And if at any time doubts concerning the way arise, he has nothing more to do, than to look up to the way-marks; to consult the scriptures, which are ready at hand, and to hearken to the voice behind him, when he is about to turn to the right hand or the left.

As it is, on the one hand, very uncomfortable to travelers, when they know not whether they are in the right road or no; so on the other hand, it makes them go on more cheerfully, and their journey more easy and pleasant, when they are satisfied they are in the right way. 2. Such are well provided for that walk in the way the word direct unto; their bread is given them, and their waters are sure unto them. Though they pass through the valley of Baca, the valley of weeping, yet they find a well that supplies them with everything necessary.

Christ is a sun to warm, refresh, and comfort them, and a shield to protect them from all their enemies; he gives them grace, every needful supply of it by the way, and will, at last, give them glory; and in the meanwhile, withholds no good thing from them that walk uprightly in this way. (Psalm 84:6, 11.) 3. Such may expect to be strengthened yet more and more; to go from strength to strength, from one degree of it to another; since God has promised that the righteous shall hold on his way; and he that hath clean hands shall be stronger and stronger; and, that they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint; (Job 17:9, Isaiah 40:31.) yea, the way of the Lord itself is strength unto the upright. (Proverbs 10:29.)

What greater encouragement can there be to walk on in this way; and against those doubts and fears which are apt to possess the minds of poor weary travelers? 4. Wisdom's ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace. (Proverbs 2:17.) Christ himself, as the way, is pleasant to walk in, and so are all the lesser paths of doctrine and duty; none of his commandments are grievous, his yoke is easy, and his burden light; his tabernacles are amiable; a day in his courts is better than a thousand elsewhere.

When he sheds abroad his love, how cheerfully do believers run the way of his commandments? When he puts his Spirit within them, to enable them to walk in his statutes, with what pleasure do they observe them? And when he lifts up the light of his countenance, and affords his gracious presence, and fills them with joy unspeakable and full of glory; this produces an inward, settled, and perfect peace. 5. The presence of God and Christ may be looked for by such, since it is said, Thou meetest him that rejoiceth and worketh righteousness; those that remember thee in thy ways. (Isaiah 64:5.)

Where is God to be met with? Or, can it be expected that God should meet with us but in Christ the way? And where is the presence of Christ to be enjoyed, as in his house, his ordinances; and in those ways his word directs unto? 6. The Lord has promised to give walking places to such persons: Thus saith the Lord of hosts, If thou wilt walk in my ways, and if thou wilt keep my charge, then thou shalt also judge my house, and shalt also keep my courts, and I will give thee places to walk among these that stand by; (Zechariah 3:7.) meaning either among the angels or saints, and that both in this world, and in that which is to come; for they have fellowship with both, in either state: and the same shall also walk with Christ in white, (Revelation 3:4.) in the robe of his righteousness, and in the raiment of immortality; for they are worthy, not through their own, but the worthiness of Christ.

In a word, as many as walk in this way, and according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God. (Galatians 6:25.) I have now finished what I proposed, in considering this passage of scripture; which our deceased friend, in her life-time, desired might be the subject of her funeral discourse, and whose character might now be expected from me. She was, I understand, averse to encomiums on such occasions; and, for my own part, I never had any great inclination to such service, and may be very well now excused, since the deceased was an entire stranger to me; and had I been never so well acquainted with her, it would be needless to give her character among you; who so well knew her manner of life and conversation, how she behaved as a wife, a parent, friend, and neighbor; and those of you who had the happiness of a christian conversation with her, knew what an experience she had of the grace of God; what were her faith in Christ, love to him, and zeal for his cause and interest, his honor and glory.

Imperfections and infirmities belong to human nature; there is not a just man or woman that lives, and does good, and sinneth not. If anything of this kind has fallen under your observation, it ought to be buried in total silence, and in everlasting oblivion: and the uses you are to make of it, for yourselves, are humility, care, and caution. But, on the other hand, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things, and do them; and the God of peace shall be with you. (Philippians 4:8, 9.) FOOTNOTES:

[1] Calvin, Munster, etc.

[2] jrwm Joel 2:23. Quod si ibi significat pluviam, metaphoricè notabitur is, qui de coelo descendit & irrigat ad justitiam. Coccei Lexic. in Rad. hdy, p. 339.

[3] Deum vero hic paedagogo comparat, qui pueros sibi ante oculos statuit, ut eos melius formet atque regat. Calvin. in loc.

[4] Loquitur autem ad similitudinem pastoris; qui oves aberrantes a tergo inclamans ad viam revocat, & illae audita voce ejus in ordinem redeunt. Musculus in loc.

[5] So the Chaldee paraphrase explains the words, adh agqtd ajrwa, this is the right way; with which agree the comments of R. Sol. Jarchi, R. David Kimchi, and R. Aben Ezra, in loc. Though the Arabic version, following the Septuagint, represents them as the words of seducers, directing to a wrong way.

[6] Beza and Piscator, in Hebrews 10:20.

[7] 2 John, ver 4.

[8] In loc.

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