

# The Scriptures: The Only Guide in Matters of Religion.

by John Gill

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*The scriptures are the only external guide in matters of religion, and we should look to them for direction and guidance.*

**Scripture:** Jeremiah 6:16, Matthew 11:28

**Topics:** "Authority of Scripture", "Finding Rest in Christ"

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## Description

John Gill emphasizes that the Scriptures are the sole authoritative guide in matters of faith, urging believers to seek the 'old paths' for spiritual direction. He warns against relying on human traditions, customs, or the teachings of men, asserting that true understanding and doctrine must be derived from the Bible alone. Gill encourages individuals to examine the Scriptures diligently to find clarity on issues such as salvation, doctrine, and church practices, ultimately leading to rest for their souls in Christ. He concludes by affirming that true peace and rest can only be found in Jesus, the way, the truth, and the life.

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## Transcript

The Scriptures:

THE ONLY GUIDE IN MATTERS OF FAITH

Preached At The Baptism Of Several Persons In Barbican, November 2, 1750.

JEREMIAH 6:16.

Thus saith the Lord, Stand ye in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein; and ye shall find rest for your souls.

In this chapter the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians is threatened and foretold, and the causes of it assigned; in general, the great aboundings of sin and wickedness among the people; and in particular, their neglect and contempt of the word of God; the sin of covetousness, which prevailed among all sorts; the unfaithfulness of the prophets to the people, and the people's impenitence and hardness of heart; their want of shame, their disregard to all instructions and warnings from the Lord, by the mouth of his prophets, and their obstinate refusal of them; which last is expressed in the clause following the words read; and which, though an aggravation of it, shew the tender regard of the Lord to his people, and may be

considered as an instruction to such who had their doubts and difficulties in religious matters; who were halting between two opinions, and like men in bivio, who stand in a place where two or more ways meet, and know not which path to take; and in this light I shall consider them; and in them may be observed, I.

A direction to such persons what to do; to stand in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein. II. The encouragement to take this direction; and ye shall find rest for your souls. I. The direction given to stand in or on the ways, etc. to do as men do when they are come to a place where two or more ways meet, make a stand, and view the roads, and see which they should take; they look about them, and consider well what course they should steer; they look up to the way-marks, or way-posts, and read the inscriptions on them, which tell them whither such a road leads, and so judge for themselves which way they should go.

Now in religious matters, the way-marks or way-posts to guide and direct: men in the way, are the scriptures, the oracles of God, and they only. Not education-principles. It is right in parents to do as Abraham did, to teach their children to keep the way of the Lord (Gen. 18:19). The direction of the wise man is an exceeding good one; Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it (Prov. 22:6); that is, easily and ordinarily: and it becomes Christians under the gospel dispensation to bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord (Eph. 6:4); and a great mercy and blessing it is to have a religious education; but then, as wrong principles may be infused as well as right ones, into persons in their tender years, it becomes them, when come to years of maturity and discretion, to examine them, whether they are according to the word of God, and so judge for themselves, whether they are to be abode by or rejected.

I know it is a grievous thing with some persons to forsake the religion they have been brought up in; but upon this foot, a man that is born and brought up a Turk or a Jew, a Pagan or a Papist, must ever continue so. Sad would have been the case of the apostle Paul, if he had continued in the principles of his education; and what a shocking figure did he make whilst he abode by them? thinking, according to them, he ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus (Acts 22:3, 4; 26:9).

Nor are the customs of men a rule of judgment, or a direction which way men should take in matters of religion; for the customs of the people are for the most part vain (Jer. 20:3), and such as are not lawful for us, being Christians, to receive or observe (Acts 16:21); and concerning which we should say, We have no such custom, neither the churches of God (1 Cor. 11:16). Custom is a tyrant, and ought to be rebelled against, and its yoke thrown off. Nor are the traditions of men to be regarded; the Pharisees were very tenacious of the traditions of the elders, by which they transgressed the commandments of God, and made his word of no effect; and the apostle Paul, in his state of unregeneracy, was zealous of the same; but neither of them are to be imitated by us: it is right to observe the exhortation which the apostle gives, when a Christian (Col. 2:8); beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the traditions of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.

Take care you are not imposed upon, under the notion and pretense of an apostolical tradition; unwritten traditions are not the rule, only the word of God is the rule of our faith and practice. Nor do the decrees of popes and councils demand our attention and regard; it matters not what such a pope has determined, or what canons such a council under his influence has made; what have we to do with the man of sin, that exalts himself above all that is called God; who sits in the temple of God, shewing himself as if he was God? we know what will be his fate, and that of his followers (2 Thess. 2:4, 5; Rev. 20:30; 13:8; 14:11).

Nor are the examples of men, no not of the best of men, in all things to be copied after by us; we should indeed be followers of all good men as such, of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises; and especially of such, who are or have been spiritual guides and governors in the church; who have made the scriptures their study, and have labored in the word and doctrine; their faith we should follow, considering the end of their conversation; how that issues, and when it terminates in Christ, his person, truths and ordinances, the same to-day, yesterday and for ever (Heb. 6:12; 13:7): but then we are to follow them no further than they follow Christ; the apostle Paul desired no more than this of his Corinthians with respect to himself; and no more can be demanded of us; it should be no bias on our minds, that such and such a man of so much grace and excellent gifts thought and practiced so and so.

We are to call no man father or master on earth; we have but one father in heaven, and one master, which is Christ, whose doctrines, rules, and ordinances we should receive and observe. We are not to be influenced by men of learning and wealth; though there should be on the other side of the question, it should be no stumbling to us; had this been a rule to be attended to, Christianity had never got footing in the world: Have any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed on him?

But this people, who knoweth not the law, are cursed. (John 7:48, 49) It pleased the Lord, in the first times of the gospel, to hide the things of it from the wise and prudent, and reveal them unto babes; and to call by his grace, not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; but the foolish, weak, and base things of the world, and things that are not, to confound the wise and mighty, and bring to nought things that are; that no flesh should glory in his presence (Matthew 11:25, 26; 1 Cor. 1:26-29): nor should it concern us that the greatest number is on the opposite side; we are not to follow a multitude to do evil; the whole world once wondered after the beast; Christ's flock is but a little flock.

The scriptures are the only external guide in matters of religion; they are the way-posts we should look up unto, and take our direction from, and should steer our course accordingly: To the law and to the testimony: if men speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them (Isa. 8:20); we should not believe every spirit, but try them, whether they are of God (1 John 4:1); and the trial should be made according to the word of God; the scriptures should be searched, as they were by the noble Bereans, to see whether the things delivered to consideration are so or no; the inscriptions on these way-posts should be read, which are written so plain, that he that runs may read them; and they direct to a way, in which men, though fools, shall not err: if therefore the inquiry is, 1st, About the way of Salvation; if that is the affair the doubt is concerning, look up to the way-posts, look into the word of God, and read what that says; search the scriptures, for therein is the way of eternal life; life and immortality, or the way to an immortal life, is brought to light by the gospel.

The scriptures, under a divine influence, and with a divine blessing, are able to make a man wise unto salvation, and they do point unto men the way of it: it is not the light of nature, nor the law of Moses, but the gospel-part of the scriptures which direct to this; there will shew you, that God saves and calls men with an holy calling, not according to their works, but according to his purpose and grace; that it is not by works of righteousness done by men, but according to the mercy of God, that men are saved; and that it is not by works, but by grace, lest men should boast (2 Tim. 1:9; Titus 3:5; Eph. 2:8,9).

That it is a vain thing for men to expect salvation this way; that it is a dangerous one: such who encompass themselves with sparks of their own kindling shall lie down in sorrow: and that it is a very wicked thing; such sacrifice to their own net, and burn incense to their own drag. These will inform you that Christ is the way, the truth, and the life; that he is the only true way to eternal life; that there is salvation in

him, and in no other: the language of them is, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved: these words, Salvation alone by Christ, salvation alone by Christ, are written as with a sunbeam on them; just as the way-posts, set up in places where two or more ways met, to direct the manslayer when he was fleeing to one of the cities of refuge from the avenger of blood, had written on them in very legible characters, refuge, refuge.[1] 2dly, If the question is about any point of Doctrine; if there is any hesitation concerning any truth of the gospel, look up to the way-posts, look into the scriptures, search them, see and read what they say; for they are profitable for doctrine (2 Tim. 3:16); for finding it out, explaining, confirming, and defending it: there will tell you whether the thing in debate is so or no, and will direct you which side of the question to take; if you seek for knowledge and understanding in gospel-truths diligently and constantly, as you would for silver, and search after them as for hid treasures, then will you understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God (Prov. 2:4, 5).

Thus, for instance, If the inquiry is about the doctrine of the Trinity; as the light of nature and reason will tell you, that there is but one God, and which is confirmed by revelation; the scriptures will inform you, that there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the holy Spirit, and that these three are one (1 John 5:7); are the one God: look into the first page of the Bible, and you will see how just and right is that observation of the Psalmist (Ps. 33:6); by the word of the Lord were the heavens made, and all the host of them by the breath or spirit of his mouth; and that Jehovah, his word and spirit, were concerned in the creation of all things: you will learn from thence that God made the heavens and the earth; that the spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters, and brought the chaos into a beautiful order, as well as garnished the heavens; and that God the word said, Let there be light, and there was light; and that these three are the U S that made man after their image and likeness. (Gen. 1:1-3; 1:26) This doctrine is frequently suggested in the Old Testament, but clearly revealed in the New; and no where more clearly than in the commission for the administration of the ordinance of baptism; Go, teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the holy Ghost (Matthew 28:19); and in the administration of it itself to our Lord Jesus Christ, at which all the three persons appeared; the Father by a voice from heaven, declaring Christ his beloved Son; the Son in human nature, submitting to the ordinance; and the holy Ghost descending as a dove upon him (Matthew 3:16, 17); this was thought to be so clear a testimony for this doctrine, that it was usual with the ancients to say, "Go to Jordan, and there learn the doctrine of the trinity."

If the question is concerning the Deity of Christ, his eternal Sonship and distinct personality, look to your way-marks; inquire into the sacred records, and there you will find, that he is the mighty God, God over all, blessed for ever; the great God, the true God, and eternal life (Isa. 9:6; Rom. 9:5; Titus 2:13; 1 John 5:20); that all divine perfections are in him; that the fullness of the Godhead dwells in him; that he is the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person; to whom all divine works are ascribed, and all divine worship is given; that he is the only begotten of the Father, the firstborn of every creature; or was begotten before any creature was in being (Heb. 1:3; Col. 2:9; 1:15); of whom the Father says, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee (Ps .2:7); that he is the Word which was in the beginning with God; and must be distinct from him with whom he was; and in the fullness of time was made flesh; which neither the Father nor the Spirit were (John 1:1, 14); and the same sacred writings will satisfy you about the deity and personality, as well as the operations of the blessed Spirit.

If the doubt is about the doctrine of Election, read over the sacred volumes, and there you will find, that this is an eternal and sovereign act of God the Father, which was made in Christ before the foundation of the world; that it is to holiness here, and happiness hereafter; that the means are sanctification of the

Spirit, and belief of the truth; that it is irrespective of faith and good works, being before persons had done either good or evil; that faith and holiness flow from it, and that grace and glory are secured by it; Whom he did predestinate, then; he also called; and whom he called, them he also justified; and whom he justified, them he also glorified (Eph. 1:4; 2 Thess. 2:13; Rom. 9:21; 8:30).

If you have any hesitation about the doctrine of Original Sin, look into your Bible; there you will see, that the first man sinned, and all sinned in him; that judgment, through his offense, came upon all men to condemnation; and that by his disobedience many were made sinners; that men are conceived in sin, and shapen in iniquity; that they are transgressors from the womb, go astray from thence, speaking lies, and are by nature children of wrath (Rom. 5:12, 18, 19; Ps. 51:5; 58:3; Isa. 48:8, Eph. 2:3).

If the matter in debate is the Satisfaction of our Lord Jesus Christ, read over the epistles of his holy apostles, and they will inform you, that he was made under the law, and became the fulfilling end of it, in the room of his people; that he yielded perfect obedience to it, and bore the penalty of it, that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in them; that he was made sin for them, that they might be made the righteousness of God in him; and a curse for them, that he might redeem them from the curse of the law; that he offered himself a sacrifice for them, in their room and stead to God, for a sweet-smelling savor; that he suffered, the just for the unjust, to bring them nigh to God; and died for their sins according to the scriptures, and made reconciliation and atonement for them (Gal. 4:4; Rom. 8:3, 4; 10:4; 2 Cor. 5:21; Gal. 3:13; Eph. 5:2; 1 Pet. 3:18; 1 Cor. 15:3; Heb. 2:17).

If you are at a loss about the Extent of Christ's Death, and know not what part to take in the controversy about general and particular Redemption, look to your way-marks, the scriptures, and take your direction from thence; and there you will observe, that those whom Christ saves from their sins are his own people, for whose transgressions he was stricken; that he gave his life a ransom for many, for all sorts of persons, for all his elect, Jews and Gentiles; that they were his sheep he laid down his life for; that he loved the church, and gave himself for it; and that he tasted death for every one of his brethren, and of the children the Father gave him; that those that are redeemed by him, are redeemed out of every kindred, tongue, people, and nation (Matthew 1:21; 20:28; John 10:25; Eph. 5:25; Heb. 2:9-12; Rev. 5:9).

If the affair before you is the doctrine of Justification, and the query is, whether it is by works of righteousness done by you, or by the righteousness of Christ imputed to you, or about any thing relating to it, read over the sacred pages, and especially the epistles of the apostle Paul; and you will easily see, that a man cannot be justified in the sight of God by the works of the law, or by his own obedience to the law of works; that, if righteousness comes by the law, Christ is dead in vain; that men are justified by faith, without the works of the law; that is, by the righteousness of Christ, received by faith; that they are justified by the blood of Christ, and made righteous by his obedience; that this is the righteousness which God approves of, accepts, and imputes to his people, without works; and which being looked to, apprehended and received by faith, is productive of much spiritual peace and comfort in the soul (Rom. 3:20, 28; Gal. 2:16, 21; Rom. 5:1, 9, 19; 4:6).

If the dispute is about Free-will or Free-grace, the power of the one, and the efficacy of the other, in a sinner's regeneration and conversion; turn to your Bible, and from thence it will appear, that this work is not by the might, or power of man, but by the Spirit of the Lord of hosts; that men are born again, not of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God, his Spirit and grace; that it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy; that the work of faith is a work of power, of the operation of God, and is carried on by it, and is even according to the exceeding greatness of his power,

who works in man both to will and to do of his own good pleasure (Zech. 4:6; John 1:13; 3:5; Rom. 9:15, 16; Col. 2:12; 2 Thess. 1:11; Eph. 1:10; Phil. 2:13).

If the demur is about the final Perseverance of the Saints, read over the gracious promises and declarations in the word of God, and they will serve to confirm you in it; as that the righteous shall hold on his way, and he that hath clean hands shall grow stronger and stronger; that God will put his fear into the hearts of his people, and they shall not depart from him: that they are preferred in Christ Jesus, and in his hands, out of whose hands none can pluck them; who is able to keep them from falling, and will; and that they are, and shall be kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation (Job 17:9; Jer. 32:40; John 10:28, 29; Jude 1:24; 1 Pet. 1:5).

To observe no more: if the doctrines of the Resurrection of the dead, and a future Judgment, should be called in question, read the divine oracles, and there you are told, that there will be a resurrection both of the just and unjust; that the one shall come forth from their graves to the resurrection of life, and the other to the resurrection of damnation; that there is a judgment to come; that there is a righteous Judge appointed, and a day let when just judgment will be executed; and that all, small and great, good and bad, must appear before the judgment-seat of Christ, to receive for the things done in the body, whether they be good, or whether they be evil (Acts 24:16; John 5:28, 29; Acts 17:31; Rev. 20:12; 2 Cor. 5:10). 3dly, If the inquiry is about Worship, the scriptures will

direct you both as to the object and manner of it, and circumstances relating to it; they will inform you, that God only is to be worshipped, and not a creature; and that the Deity to be worshipped is not like to gold, or silver, or stone graven by art and man's device; that God is a spirit, and must be worshipped in spirit and in truth: you will there find the rules for the several parts of worship, for prayer to him, singing his praise, preaching his word, and administering his ordinances, and how every thing should be done decently, and in order (Rom. 1:25, Acts 17:29; John 4:24; 1 Cor. 14:40) 4thly, If the inquiry is about the nature of a Church, its government, officers, and discipline; look into the ancient records of the scripture, and there you will meet with a just and true

account of these things, the original of them, and rules concerning them; you will find that a church is a society of saints and faithful men in Christ Jesus, that are joined together in holy fellowship; that are incorporated into a visible church-state, and by agreement meet together in one place to carry on the worship of God, to glorify him, and edify one another (Eph. 1:1; 1 Cor. 11:20); that it is not national, provincial, or parochial, but congregational; that its offices or officers are only these two plain ones, Bishops, or Overseers or Elders, and Deacons (Phil. 1:1); where you will find nothing of the rabble of the Romish hierarchy; not a syllable of archbishops, archdeacons, deans, prebends, priests, chantors, rectors, vicars, curates, etc. there you will observe laws and rules

of Christ, the sole head of the church, his own appointing, for the better ordering and regulating affairs; rules about the reception and rejection of members, for the laying on or taking off censures, for admonitions and excommunications; all which are to be done by the joint suffrage of the church. 5thly, If the inquiry is about the Ordinances of the Gospel, stand in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths, in which the saints formerly trod; if it is about the ordinance of the Lord's-supper, the scriptures will inform you of the original institution of this ordinance by Christ, of the nature, use, and intent of it; that it is to shew forth the death of Christ till he come again; to commemorate his sufferings and sacrifice, to represent his body broken, and his blood shed for the

sins of his people; and that if any one is desirous of partaking of it, he should first examine himself whether he has true faith in Christ and is capable of discerning the Lord's body (Matthew 26:26-28).

If it is concerning the ordinance of baptism, by consulting the sacred oracles you will easily perceive that this is of God, and not of man; that it is to be done in water; that the form of administration is in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the holy Ghost; that the subjects of it are believers in Christ, and the mode by immersion; and that the whole is warranted by the commission and example of our Lord (Matthew 21:25; 3:6, 11, 16; 28:19) But, 1. If there is any doubt about the subjects of this ordinance, whether they are infants or adult persons, stand in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths not which fathers and councils have marked out, but which the scriptures point unto, and in which John the Baptist, Christ and his apostles, have trod.

We do not decline looking into the three first centuries of Christianity, commonly reckoned the purest ages of it; we readily allow, that Infant-baptism was talked of in the third century; it was then moved in the African churches but that it was practiced is not proved. I will not say it is improbable that any were then baptized; but this I affirm, it is not certain that any were; as yet, it has not been proved, and as for the writers of the two first centuries, not a word of it is mentioned by them.

And had it, had any thing dropped from their pens that looked like it, and could by artifice be wire-drawn to the countenance of it, we should not think ourselves obliged to embrace it on that account; what if Hermas, or Barnabas, or Ignatius, or Polycarp, or the two Clements of Rome and Alexandria, or Irenaeus, or Justin Martyr, or Tatian, or Theophilus of Antioch, or Athenagoras, or Minutius Felix declared it, any one or more of them, as their opinion, that infants ought to be baptized, (though none of them have) yet we should not think ourselves bound to receive it, any more than the many absurdities, weak reasonings, and silly notions these men gave into; and even could it be proved, (as it cannot) that it is an incontestable fact that Infant-baptism was administered by one or more of them, it would only serve to prove this sad truth, known by other instances, how soon corruptions in faith and practice got into the Christian churches, even presently after the times of the apostles; nay, the mystery of iniquity began to work in their days.

Wherefore, in order to get satisfaction in this point, Look over the accounts of the administration of the ordinance of baptism by John, the first administrator of it, and see if you can find that any infants were baptized by him. We are told, that there went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judea, and all the region round about Jordan; that is, the inhabitants of these places, great numbers of them; but surely these could not be infants, nor any among them, that went out to John to hear him preach, or be baptized by him: it is added, and were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins: these also could not be infants, but adult persons, who being made truly sensible of sin, and having true repentance for it, frankly and ingenuously confessed it; which infants are not capable of John preached the baptism of repentance, and required repentance previous to it, and even fruits meet for it, and evidential of it; and when the Pharisees and Sadducees came to his baptism, who also could not be infants, he objects to them, because not good men and penitent; and even though they were capable of pleading that they were the children of Abraham, and the seed of that great believer (Matthew 3:5-9).

And indeed the notion that is advanced in our day is a very idle one, that infants must be baptized, because the seed of believers. Are not all mankind the seed of believers? Has not God made of one man's blood all nations that are upon the face of the earth? Were not Adam and Eve believers in Christ, to whom the first promise and declaration of a Messiah were made? And do not all men spring from them? Or come we lower to Noah, the father of the new world, who was a perfect man, and found grace in the

sight of God; do not all men descend from him?

Turks, Jews, Pagans and Papists, are all the seed of believers, and at this rate ought to be baptized: and as for immediate believers and unbelievers, their feed by birth are upon an equal foot, and are in no wise better one than another, or have any preference the one to the other, or have by birth any claim to a gospel privilege or blessing the other has not; the truth of the matter is, that they are equally by nature children of wrath. Look farther into the account of baptism as administered by Christ, or rather by his orders, and see if you can find an infant there.

John's disciple come to him, and say, Rabbi, he that was with thee beyond Jordan, to whom thou bearest witness, behold the same baptizeth, and all men come to him (John 3:26). These also could not be infants that came to him and were baptized; and besides, who they were that were baptized by him, or by his orders, we are afterwards told, and their characters are given; Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John (John 4:1): first he made them disciples, and then baptized them, or ordered them to be baptized, and a disciple of Christ is one that has learnt him, and the way of salvation by him; who is taught to deny sinful, civil and righteous self for Christ; and such were the persons baptized in the times of Christ, who must be adult ones; and with this his practice agrees the commission he gave in Matthew 28:19 where he orders teaching before baptizing; and such teaching as issues in believing, with which compare Mark 16:16.

True indeed, he says (Matthew 19:14), suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not; but they were admitted to come to him, not to be baptized by him, of which there is not one syllable, nor the least intimation, but to lay his hands on them and pray, or be touched by him, very probably to heal them of diseases that might attend them. However, it seems reasonable to conclude, that the apostles knew nothing of any such practice as Infant baptism, enjoined, practiced, or countenanced by Christ, or they would never have forbid the bringing of infants to him; and our Lord laying nothing of it when such a fair opportunity offered, looks very darkly upon it.

Once more; look over the accounts of the administration of Baptism by the apostles of Christ, and observe who they were that were baptized by them. We read indeed of households baptized by them; but inasmuch as there are many families that have no infants in them, nothing can be concluded from hence in favor of Infant-baptism; it should be first proved that there were infants in these households, before any such consequence can be drawn from them: and besides, it will appear upon a review of them, that not infants but adult persons in the several instances are intended.

Lydia 's household consisted of brethren, whom the apostles comforted; who could not be infants, but adult persons; we have no account of any other, no other are named; if any other can, let them be named. The Jailor's household were such, to whom the word of God was spoken, who believed in God, and rejoiced with him. Stephanas' household, which is the only other that is mentioned, is thought by some to be the same with the Jailor's; but, if not, it is certain that it consisted of adult persons, such who addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints (Acts 16:15, 32-34, 40; 1 Cor. 1:26; 6:15).

It will be easy to observe, that the first persons that were baptized after our Lord's resurrection and ascension, were such as were pricked to the heart, repented of their sins, and gladly received the gospel; such were the three thousand who were baptized, and added to the church in one day. The Samaritans, hearing Philip preach the things concerning the kingdom of God, were baptized, both men and women. The instance of the Eunuch is notorious; this man was a Jewish proselyte, a serious and devout man, was

reading in the prophecy of Isaiah when Philip joined his chariot; Who, after conversation with him, desired baptism of him, to whom Philip replied, that if he believed with all his heart he might be baptized; intimating, that if he did not, notwithstanding his profession of religion, and external seriousness and devotion, he had no right to that ordinance; and upon professing his faith in Christ he was baptized.

Cornelius and his family, and those in his house, to whom Peter preached, and on whom the holy Ghost fell, were ordered by him to be baptized, having received the holy Ghost, and for that reason. And the Corinthians, hearing the apostle Paul, and believing in Christ he preached, were baptized (Acts 2:37, 41, 42; 8:12, 37, 38; 10:47; 18:8): from all which instances it appears, that not infants but adult persons were the only ones baptized by the apostles of Christ. Now, though we might justly demand a precept or command of Christ to be shewn, expressly enjoining the baptism of infants, before we can go into such a practice, since it is used as a part of religious worship; for which we ought to have a thus saith the Lord: yet if but one single precedent could be given us, one instance produced; or if it could be proved that any one infant was ever baptized by John the Baptist, by Christ, or by his orders, or by his apostles, we should think ourselves obliged to follow such an example; let this be shewn us, and we have done; we will shut up the controversy, and say no more.

Strange! that in the space of sixty or seventy years, for such a course of time ran out from the first administration of baptism to the close of the canon of the scripture, that in all the accounts of baptism in it, not a single instance of infant baptism can be given! upon the whole, we must be allowed to say, and if not, we must and will take the liberty to say, that Infant-baptism is an unscriptural practice; and that there is neither precept nor precedent for it in all the word of God. 2.

If the doubt is concerning the Mode of baptism, whether it is to be performed by immersion of the whole body, or by sprinkling or pouring a little water on the face; take the same course as before, ask for the old paths; inquire how this ordinance was anciently administered in the times of John, Christ, and his apostles. I shall not appeal unto, nor send you to inquire the signification of the Greek word; though all men of learning and sense have acknowledged, that the primary meaning of the word is to dip or plunge; but this ordinance was appointed not for men of learning only, but for men and women also of the meaner capacities, and of the most plain and simple understandings: wherefore let all inquiring persons consult.

The scriptural instances of baptism; read over the accounts of baptism as administered by John, and you will find that he baptized in Jordan: ask yourselves why a river was chose, when a bason of water would have done, had it been performed by sprinkling or pouring; try if you can bring yourselves to believe that John was not in the river Jordan, only on the banks of it, from whence he took water, and poured or sprinkled it; and if you can seriously and in good earnest conclude (with a grave divine) that if he was in the river, he had in his hand a scoop, or some such instrument, and with it threw the water over the people as they stood on the banks of the river on both sides of him, and so baptized them in shoals.

Look over the baptism of Christ by John, and see if you can persuade yourselves that Christ went ankle deep, or a little more, into the river Jordan, and John stood upon a bank and poured a little water on his head, as messieurs painter and engraver have described them; or whether the most easy and natural sense of the whole is not this, that they both went into the river Jordan, and John baptized our Lord by immersion; which when done, he straightway came up out of the water, which supposes him to have been in it; and then the Spirit descended on him as a dove, and a voice was heard from his Father, laying, This is my beloved Son (Matthew 3:6, 16, 17).

Carefully read over those words of the evangelist (John 3:23), and John also was baptizing in Aenon near to Salim, because there was much water there; and try if you can make much water to signify little; or many waters, as the words may be literally rendered, only a little rill, or some small rivulets of water, not sufficient to cover a man's body; though the phrase is used even of the waters of the great sea;<sup>[2]</sup> and persuade yourselves, if you can, that the reason of the choice of this place, because of much water in it, was not for baptism, as says the text, but for the convenience of men, their camels and asses on which they came to hear John; of which it says not one word.

To which add the instance of the eunuch's baptism, in which we are told (Acts 8:38, 39), that both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water; and that when baptism was administered, they came up out of the water: now try whether you can really believe that this great man, who left his chariot, went down with Philip into the water, ankle or knee deep, only to have a little water sprinkled and poured upon him, and then came out of it, when in this way the ordinance might as well have been administered in his chariot; or whether it is not most reasonable to believe, from the bare narrative, from the very letter of the text, that their going down into the water was in order that the ordinance might be administered by immersion; and that when Philip had baptized the Eunuch this way, they both came up out of the water: as for that poor weak criticism, that this is to be understood of going to and from the water-side; it may be asked what they should go thither for, what reason was there for it, if done by sprinkling?

Besides, it is entirely destroyed by the observation the historian makes before this, that they came unto a certain water;<sup>[3]</sup> to the water-side; and therefore when they went down, it must be into the water itself; it could not with any propriety be said, that when they were come to the water-side, after that they went to the water-side. But to proceed, Consider the figurative or metaphorical baptisms mentioned in scripture. Baptism is said (1 Pet. 3:20, 21) to be a like figure to Noah's ark, in which eight souls were saved by water; there is a likeness, an agreement between the one and the other; now see if you can make out any likeness between the ark upon the waters and baptism, as performed by sprinkling; whereas it soon appears as performed by immersion, in which persons are covered in water, as Noah and his family in the ark were, when the fountains of the great deep were broke up under them, and the windows of heaven were opened above them: think with yourselves, whether sprinkling or immersion best agrees with this, that baptism should be called the antitype to it; to which may be added, that Noah and his family, when shut up in the ark, were, as it were, buried there; and baptism by immersion is a representation of a burial.

The passage of the Israelites through the Red sea is called a being baptized in the cloud and in the sea (1 Cor. 10:1, 2); but why should it be so called? what is there in that account that looks like sprinkling? There is that resembles immersion; for when the waters of the sea stood up on both sides of them, as a wall, and a cloud covered them, they were as people immersed in water; and besides, their going down into the sea, and parting through it, and coming up out of it on the other side; if it may not be literally called an immersion, it was very much like an immersion into water, and an immersion out of it; and both that and baptism represent a burial and resurrection.

The sufferings of our Lord, are called a baptism; you would do well to consider whether only sprinkling a few drops of water on the face, or an immersion into it, belt represents the abundance and greatness of our Lord's sorrows and sufferings, for which reason they are called a baptism; and the rather, since they are signified by the waters coming into his soul, and by his coming into deep waters, where the floods overflowed him (Luke 12:50; Ps. 69:1, 2). Once more, the extraordinary donation of the holy Ghost on the day of Pentecost is called a baptism, or a being baptized with the holy Ghost, and with fire; which was done when the house in which the apostles were, was filled with a mighty wind, and cloven tongues, as of

fire, sat upon them (Matthew 3:11; Acts 1:5; 2:1-3): it deserves your consideration, whether this wonderful affair, and this large abundance of the Spirit, is not better expressed by baptism, as administered in a large quantity of water, than with a little.

To add no more; Consider the nature, use, and end of baptism; it is a burial; and the use and end of it are, to represent the burial and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ; hence the phrase of being buried with him in baptism (Rom. 6:4; Col. 2:12) see if you can make any thing like a burial when this ordinance is administered by sprinkling; can you persuade yourselves, that a corpse is properly buried, when only a little dust is sprinkled on its face? on the other hand, you will easily perceive a lively representation of a burial, when the ordinance is performed by immersion; a person is then covered with water, and when he comes out of it, it clearly represents our Lord's resurrection, and the believer's rising again to newness of life.

Upon the whole, having asked for the good old paths, and found them, walk herein, abide by this ancient practice of baptism by immersion; a practice which continued for the space of thirteen hundred years at least, without any exception, unless a few bed-ridden people in the times of Cyprian,[4] who received baptism on their sick and death-beds, fancying there was no atonement for sins after baptism, and therefore deferred it till such time. But after all, let me advise you in the words of our text to inquire where is the good way, or the better way; for though the ordinance of baptism, and every other, is a good way, there is a better way.

This is a way of duty, but not of life and salvation; it is a command of Christ, to be obeyed by all believers in him, but not to be trusted in and depended on; it is essential to church-communion, but not to salvation; it is indeed no indifferent thing whether it is performed or no; this ought not to be laid or thought of any ordinance of Christ; or whether in this or the other manner, or administered to this or the other subject. It ought to be done as Christ has directed it should; but when it is best done, it is no saving ordinance: this I rather mention, to remove from us a wicked and a foolish imputation, that we make an idol of this ordinance, and place our confidence and dependence on it, and put it in the room of the Savior.

I call it wicked, because false; and foolish, because contrary to an avowed and well-known principle on which we proceed, namely, that faith in Christ alone for salvation is a prerequisite to baptism: can any man in his senses think that we depend on this ordinance for salvation, when we require that a person should believe in Christ, and profess that he believes in Christ alone for salvation, before he is baptized; or otherwise we judge he is not a fit subject? but on the other hand, those that insinuate such a notion as this, would do well to consider, if their own conduct does not bespeak something of this kind; or otherwise what means the stir and hustle that is made, when a child is ill, and not yet sprinkled? what means such language as this, "run, fetch the minister to baptize the child, the child's a-dying?"

Does it not look as if this was thought to be a saving business, or as if a child could not be fared unless it is sprinkled; and which, when done, they are quite easy and satisfied about its state? But to leave this, and as the apostle says, yet shew I unto you a mere excellent way (1 Cor. 12:31), which is Jesus Christ, the way, the truth, and the life. Christ is the way of salvation, which the gospel, and the ministers of it, point out to men; and he is the only way of salvation, there is salvation in him, and in no other; this is what the whole Bible centers in; this is the sum and substance of it; this is the faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance. that Christ came into the world to save the chief of sinners.

He is the way of access to the Father, nor can any come to God but by him; he is the mediator between God and man, and through him there is access with confidence by the faith of him. He is the way of acceptance with God: we have nothing to render us acceptable unto God; we are black in ourselves with original and actual sin, and are only comely in Christ; our acceptance is in the beloved. God is well pleased with him, and with all that are considered in him; their persons and their sacrifices are acceptable to God through him.

He is the way of conveyance of all grace, and the blessings of it to us. All was given originally to him, and to us in him; and from him, and through him we receive it, even out of his fullness, grace for grace; all spiritual blessings are with him, and come to us from him; all grace passes through his hands; the first we have, and all the after-supplies of it; yea, the gift of God, eternal life, is through Jesus Christ our Lord And he is the way to heaven and eternal happiness; he has entered into it with his own blood already, and has opened a way by it for his people, into the holiest of all; he is gone beforehand as their forerunner, and has taken possession of heaven for them; he is now preparing a place for them there, and will come again and take them to himself, and introduce them into his kingdom and glory.

And he is a plain, pleasant, and safe way; plain to him that understands, and has a spiritual knowledge of him, even though but of a very mean capacity; for this is a way in which men, though fools, shall not err; and it is a very delightful one; what more delightful than to live by faith on Christ, or to walk by faith in him, as he hath been received. And a very save one, it must needs be; none ever perished that believed in Christ; he is the living way, all in this way live, none in this way die; though it is a strait gate and narrow way, yet it surely and rarely leads to eternal life; and though it is sometimes called a new way, yet not because newly contrived, for it is as ancient in this respect as the counsel and covenant of peace; nor newly revealed, for it was made known to Adam immediately after the fall; nor newly made use of, for all the Old Testament saints were directed in this way, and walked in it, and were rived by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lamb rain from the foundation of the world, as well as we; but because it is more clearly manifested now, and more largely and frequently walked in: otherwise it is the good old path to be asked for; there never was any other way of salvation, or ever will be.

I go on, II. To consider the encouragement given to take the direction, and make the inquiry as above; and in this I shall be very brief; it lies in this clause, and ye shall find rest for your souls. There is a rest for souls to be enjoyed in ordinances, when men are arrived to satisfaction about them, and submit unto them in a becoming manner; when a man has carefully and conscientiously searched the scriptures, and is come to a point about an ordinance, his mind is easy, which before was distracted and confused; and he is the more easy in that he has acted the faithful part to himself and truth; and I cannot see how persons can have rest in their minds, who have not stood in the ways and looked about them, searched the scriptures, and inquired for the good old paths; and in consequence of an honest inquiry, walk therein; to such, wisdom's ways are ways of pleasantness, and her paths of peace; there is great peace enjoyed in them, though not from them; a believer comes to an ordinance, being upon inquiry satisfied about it, as for instance, the ordinance of baptism; he, I say, comes to it with delight, passes through it with pleasure, and goes away from it as the eunuch did, rejoicing.

There is rest for souls to be enjoyed in doctrines, which a man does enjoy, when upon a diligent search after truth, he finds it, and is at a point about it; a man that is tossed to and fro with every wind of doctrine, is like a wave of the sea, always restless and uneasy; a double-minded man, that halts between two opinions, and sometimes inclines to one, and sometimes to the other, is unstable in all his ways, and has no true rest in his mind; a man that is carried about with divers and strange doctrines, is like a meteor in

the air, sometimes here, and sometimes there; a good thing it is to have the heart established in and with the doctrines of grace; and the way to this is to search the scriptures, to see whether these things be so or no; which when seriously and faithfully done, the issue is peace of conscience, rest in the mind.

But above all, true rest for the soul is to be had in Christ, and such who ask for the good and better way find it in him, nor is it to be found in any other; Christ is that to believers, as Noah 's ark was to the dove, which could find no rest for the sole of its feet, till it returned thither: there is rest in Christ, and no where else, and he invites weary souls to come to him for it; his words are (Matthew 11:28, 29), Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest; take my yoke upon you, and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls; which last clause is the same with this in our text, and the Lord seems to have had respect unto it, and to have took his language from it: and what peace and rest do weary souls find in Christ, when their faith is led to his person, fullness, blood, sacrifice and righteousness? and such who are made partakers of spiritual rest here, shall enjoy an eternal one hereafter, for still there remains a rest to the people of God (Heb. 4:9).

To conclude; let us bless God for the scriptures, that we have such a way-mark to ditch us, and point out unto us the way in which we should go; let us make use of them; let us search the scriptures daily and diligently, and the rather, since they testify of Christ, of his person, offices, of his doctrines and ordinances. There are the more sure word of prophecy, to which we do well to take heed, as to a light shining in a dark place; these are a lamp unto our feet, and a light unto our paths, both with respect to the way of salvation, and to the way of our duty.

These guide us to the old paths, and shew us where is the good way in which we should walk; and when we are tempted to turn to the right hand, or the left, it is best to hearken to the voice of the word behind us, saying, This is the way, walk in it (John 5:39; 2 Pet. 1:19; Ps. 119:105; Isa. 30:21). The Bible has the best claim to antiquity of any book in the world; and the gospel, and the truths of it, have the greatest marks and evidences of it upon them. Error is old, but truth is more ancient than that; the gospel is the everlasting gospel; it was even ordained before the world unto our glory (Rev. 14:6; 1 Cor. 2:7); and the ordinances of it, as administered in the times of Christ and his apostles, should be received and submitted to, as there delivered; and we should walk in them as we have Christ and his apostles for an example: but above all things, our concern should be to walk in Him, the way; there is no way better, nor any so good as he; seek rest for your souls in him, and no where else; not in the law, and the works of it, there is none there; not in the world, and the things of it, this is not your rest, it is polluted (Micah 2:10); but seek it in Christ, where you will find it here, and more fully enjoy it with him hereafter. ENDNOTES:

[1] T. Hierof. Maccot. fol. 31. 4.

[2] Septuagint in Psalm 77:19 and Psalm 107:23.

[3] Verse 36.

[4] Clinici.

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