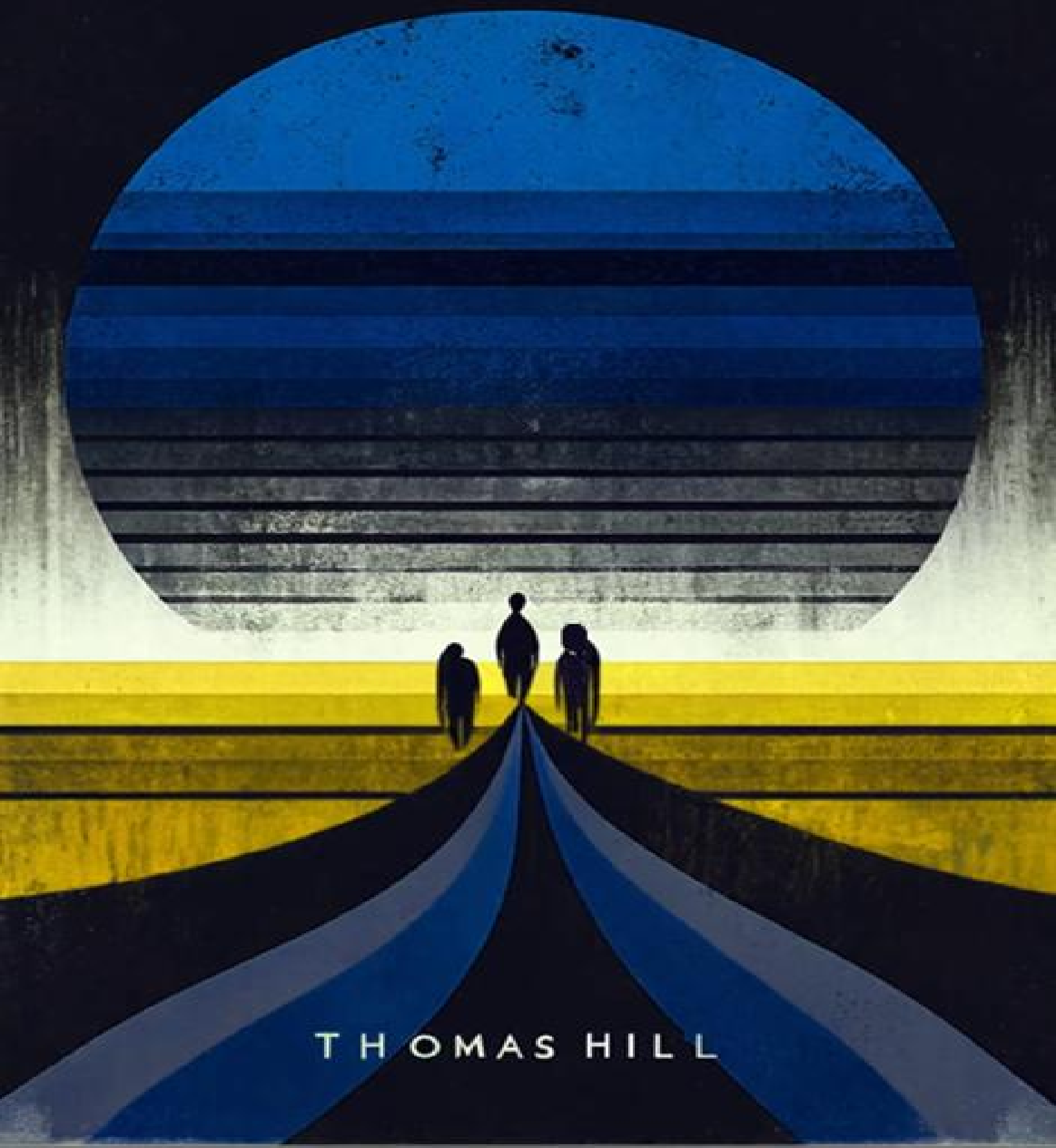


# THE GOOD OLD WAY

GOD'S WAY, TO SOUL REFRESHING REST



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## **God's Way, to Soul-Refreshing Rest:**

A Sermon Preached to the Right Honourable the Lord Mayor and Court of Aldermen of the City of London, at Their Anniversary Meeting on Wednesday in Easter Week at Christ Church, April 24, 1644, Being the Day of the Monthly Public Fast.

By **Thomas Hill, B.D., Pastor of Titchmarsh in Northamptonshire**

### **Proverbs 14:12**

*"There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death."*

### **Psalms 139:23-24**

*"Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my thoughts. See if there is any wickedness in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."*

### **Isaiah 2:3**

*"Many people shall go and say, 'Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob. He will teach us His ways, and we will walk in His paths.'"*

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**To the Right Honourable the Lord Mayor,  
and Court of Aldermen, with Other  
Citizens of the Renowned City of London**

I do not doubt that there are many among you, Right Honourable and Worthy Citizens, indeed, very many who sincerely set their faces towards Zion. The entire kingdom has abundantly tasted the excellent fruits of your genuine zeal in this good way.

Travellers are usually as glad of guides as they are of companions, especially in uncertain paths. And now, we find ourselves surrounded by many questioners and thick mists of strange doctrines, obscuring the true way so much that we desperately need clear direction—lest we quickly lose our way.

We hear of **Antinomians**, who deny that the law remains a rule of life for the saints.

We hear of **Socinians**, who, in effect, overthrow the Gospel by denying the satisfaction of Christ.

We hear of **Arminians**, who undermine the covenant of free grace to exalt free will.

We hear of **Anabaptists**, who withhold baptism—the seal of that covenant—from the infants of believing parents, even though they are in the covenant.

We hear of **others** who question the truth of our Church and our ministry, even though through it, thousands of souls have been born anew unto God.

Indeed, we even hear of some who have grown so bold that they claim there is no need for ministers or ordinances, flattering us with empty hopes of new apostles and glorious revelations.

Such errors mangle true religion, and well-meaning believers are deeply perplexed about which way to take. It is the work of ministers to warn against enemies, direct against errors, and carry the lantern and candle of God's Word before the people in the darkness so they may find the right path.

The small sparks of light that this plain sermon holds forth were at first kindled by your desire, and now, at your persistent request, they are published to keep burning. May the Lord of all grace, who does not despise the day of small beginnings, use this to stir your hearts

along the heavenly way. I shall rejoice greatly if your attention in hearing is followed by your intentional obedience to the counsel given from the Word of God. The best commendation of a sermon is to walk in its light and live in its warmth.

What may be lacking in the strength and clarity of this discourse may, in part, be supplied by its timeliness.

## **The Need for Reformation and a Right Way**

In these times of reformation, we must frequently be reminded to stand still, observe, and inquire. As in building, we are careful to avoid mistakes in the foundation; and as in medicine, we are cautious of errors in the first stages of digestion, for in both cases, mistakes can be dangerous and nearly impossible to correct.

Likewise, in our spiritual journey, we must watch wisely against wandering from the start—especially at a great turning point. If we mistake the right way at such a moment, we may never recover the right path.

How careful was Ezra in seeking from God a right way when he journeyed from Babylon to Jerusalem? He proclaimed a fast for that purpose at the River Ahava, with the solemn concern that the Lord would guide them (Ezra 8:21-22).

We in England are now engaged in councils of reformation, seeking to move further from Babylon and nearer to Jerusalem. By the good hand of God upon us, we are under His own ordinance—an assembly of ministers has been called to discover the true way of Scripture.

Such a great task requires great prayer. It is well worth our importunity in fasting and prayer that, having arrived at this great turning point, amidst such a grand change in the Church of England, we may clearly find the good old way.

## **The Battle for Truth**

We must expect that Satan—who stood at Joshua's right hand to resist him when he was engaged in temple work (Zechariah 3:1)—will now use all his methods to hinder and mislead us. He will seek to:

- **Confuse us with difficulties**
- **Entangle us in error**
- **Divide us with a multitude of opinions**

If he cannot turn us entirely away from the good path, he will try to scatter stumbling blocks upon it. He knows how to coax us into bad ways through fair pretences and smooth words.

New England provides us with a sad example of such deceit. A worthy divine of their own testifies how the Antinomians, Familists, and Libertines corrupted the churches there.

They exalted themselves and their opinions by gilding them over with appealing language, using phrases of free grace, glorious light, and gospel truths—proclaiming that they were holding forth Christ alone. Such rhetoric greatly deceived sincere and honest hearts, especially new converts.

Those recently delivered from the burden of sin and newly tasting the sweetness of free grace were eager to embrace anything that



appeared to exalt Christ and grace further—and so they drank in the deception readily.

Yet, I beseech you, do not be discouraged. Your wise and powerful Saviour holds the government upon His shoulders; He can easily rebuke Satan, knowing well how to confound errors, resolve doubts, and bring peace in disputes. He can overcome the greatest difficulties or remove them altogether, turning them to the advantage of His cause and for the good of your souls.

Do not despair, for God's counsels are ripening towards a time when you may find rest after long trials, stability after many shakings, and when you shall reap the harvest of all the prayers and labours you have sown. In due time, you will receive rich rewards for all the blood and treasure you have expended for the cause of the Gospel.

Who knows but that London, by the free grace of God, after all these dark and bloody storms, may yet have cause to mint coins, as they did in the days of the worthy Mr. Farel, who faced great opposition in reforming Geneva and other cities? The inscription on those coins read:<sup>a</sup>

- **On one side:** *Light after a long darkness.*
- **On the other:** *Our God fights for us.*

You have been strengthened not only by visible providences but also by precious promises, urging you to persevere in the good way. He has worked wonderfully for you and through you; may His good hand remain upon you until He brings you to everlasting rest.

May the Lord refresh London with the comfort of the gracious words He once spoke to Jerusalem:

"I will be to her a wall of fire around her, and I will be the glory in her midst." (Zechariah 2:5)

So prays, with a sincere heart,

Your servant, desiring to promote your souls in the good way,  
Thomas Hill

## **The Good Old Way, God's Way, to Soul-Refreshing Rest**

### **Jeremiah 6:16-19**

16 Thus says the Lord, *Stand in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths—where the good way is—and walk in it, and you shall find rest for your souls.* But they said, *"We will not walk in it."*

17 Also, I set watchmen over you, saying, *"Listen to the sound of the trumpet!"* But they said, *"We will not listen."*

18 Therefore, hear, O nations, and know, O congregation, what is among them.

Among all the objects upon which you focus your most serious thoughts and strongest affections, there is none—next to God Himself—so worthy of a large share as your immortal souls (*one soul is worth more than the whole world, Matthew 16:26*). And what

could be more desirable for the well-being of our souls—especially in stormy times—than to find rest, a haven of tranquillity, like the mountains of Ararat were to the tossed Ark (*Genesis 8:4*)?

Behold, here is rest for your souls! But who can guide poor pilgrims in the way to find this rest while they go up and down, seeking after God (*Acts 17:27*), all the while in darkness, stumbling over things they do not see (*Proverbs 4:19*)?

Surely, none can direct us so well as God Himself—He who is our haven, our happiness, and whose presence is heaven. He alone knows best which path leads to the enjoyment of Himself.

Thus says the Lord, *Stand in the way, and see, and ask for the old path—where the good way is—and walk in it, and you shall find rest for your souls.*

All of this calls for your sincere reception of the counsel and admonition that the Lord here gives, teaching pilgrims how they may reach their final destination. In these words, there is enough to persuade you to set open the doors of your souls and welcome this instruction as timely and needful.

Herein you have:

First, a gracious expression of God's indulgent dealings with a sinful and unworthy people—Judah. *Thus says the Lord: Stand, see, ask for the good way, etc.* He earnestly invites them to those ways which infallibly lead to their everlasting welfare (verses 16-17).

Secondly, Judah's ungracious and discourteous rejection of this wholesome counsel. Proud self-will—a most dangerous and malignant enemy within—formed such a strong faction against God

and their own souls that they repelled His kindness with this defiant answer: "*We will not walk in it*" (verse 16). "*We will not listen*" (verse 17).

Thirdly, the dangerous consequences of their wretched behaviour toward so good a God. The Lord, being deeply offended by such a high affront to His majesty, summons judgment against them (verses 18-19).

In the first general part, which concerns God's gracious dealings with His people Judah, there are several particulars to consider.

The speaker is God Himself: *Thus says the Lord*. There is good reason we should be attentive hearers when the preface to the sermon comes with such a commanding intimation from the Lord's own mouth.

Our wise and gracious God has always been careful to give His people reminders of the great regard He bears toward them. Thus, in the Ark of the Covenant, there was the pot of manna—an evidence of God's care to feed them; the rod of Aaron—a symbol of governance, showing that He would rule over them; and the tablets of the Law—a sign of His instruction and teaching.

Later, when He sent His prophets, the people were continually reminded that God Himself was their teacher. This was evident in the frequent repetition of *Thus says the Lord*—no fewer than fourteen times in a single chapter. Sometimes this phrase was used by way of command, sometimes for direction, at other times for confirmation, and often for all these purposes combined.

Consider also the language God speaks—the wholesome counsel He gives them. When Jehovah preaches, we can expect wise instruction

and excellent doctrine. Here, He gives four specific commands in just a few words.

First, "*Stand in the ways.*" The least you can do when God speaks is stand still and reflect. Fix your thoughts upon the ways before you. Consider, ponder them. Do not allow yourselves to be hurried away by heedless carelessness, which ruins many thousands.

Secondly, "*And see.*" Travellers must use their eyes. "*The wise man's eyes are in his head.*" Look around you with deliberation. Zacchaeus climbed up into a sycamore tree to get a clear sight of Christ. Likewise, take advantage of every opportunity to observe and discern the good way.

Thirdly, "*Ask for the old paths, where the good way is.*" It is possible that carnal affection may cloud your judgment, leading you astray into the error of the wicked. Therefore, do not only stand and see—though that is one point of wisdom—but also make a further discovery through serious inquiry. Consider for yourself. Seek counsel from others. As in matters of statecraft, so in matters of the soul, it is wise to knock on every door until you find the good way.

Fourthly, "*And walk in it.*" Once you have found the good way, your work is not yet finished. The previous actions would be of little use unless you now walk in that way. This final step completes and perfects all the rest. You may stand, see, and inquire out of curiosity, yet remain unchanged. But it is walking in the good way that proves your sincerity and infallibly leads to your eternal happiness.

This movement—this obedient walking—is the true path to rest.

Consider the Lord's encouraging motive: "*And you shall find rest for your souls.*"

Here, God calls you to various actions that require serious attention and diligent effort. You must be industrious, inquisitive, and persevering travellers.

Keep your eyes on the end of the journey. Look homeward, look heavenward. Though the journey itself is long—from hell to heaven—and though the path is narrow and full of difficulties, sometimes hedged in with thorns, yet it leads to life (Matthew 7:14).

When a son is on his way to his loving father's house, or when a wife is travelling toward her beloved husband, though many discouragements arise along the way, the hope of a joyful welcome at the journey's end makes all the hardship worthwhile.

This is what sustained Christ Himself:

*"Who, for the joy set before Him, endured the cross, despising the shame" (Hebrews 12:2).*

And the same hope can strengthen and sustain you as well.

In the second general part, Judah's discourteous rejection of God's wholesome counsel, you may observe the rebellious nature of self-will— the worst of tyrants—working with great strength. The spring of corrupt nature is opened in this passage, as proud self rises above God. They speak the very language of all the sons of Adam when left to themselves: *"We will not."* The grand question at hand in the world is this: whose will shall prevail? Will God's will be done, or will we, as sinful creatures, have our own wills fulfilled?

Nothing is so frequently disputed, nothing more hotly debated; and when it comes to trial, people will deny themselves anything rather than their will. Indeed, they will even deny God Himself rather than

suffer their own desires to be opposed. We are all ready to echo that same unmannerly response found in *Jeremiah 44:16*, as they do here in *verse 16*: "*We will not walk.*" This is not only the language of dull sloth but of sheer impudence.

When God set watchmen over them—*speculatores*—priests and prophets, both ordinary and extraordinary, as Junius remarks (*O the admirable riches of God's patience toward such unthankful rebels!*), yet in *verse 17* they add obstinacy to their impudence, doubling their rebellion with a stubborn emphasis: "*We will not listen.*"

Who would have expected such an answer to be the response to such soul-refreshing counsel? Yet, they put off the great God, standing as enemies to Him and to their own souls, rejecting both Him and His law with resolute defiance.

No wonder, then, that according to the third general part, their wretched conduct toward God brings such dangerous consequences. In *verse 18*, the righteous God calls upon the congregation and the nations to take notice of what is among them—namely, their sins and the judgments upon them. This is a striking use of rhetoric, which God sometimes employs so that His justice may be publicly recognised. He will make a public appeal to others, demonstrating how just He is in His dealings with them.

They were not ashamed (*verse 15*), so now He will expose them to open shame. Then in *verse 19*, He calls upon the earth to behold the evil He is bringing upon them. When patience and indulgence are abused, they turn to fury. They shall learn that it is an evil and bitter thing to forsake God (*Jeremiah 2:19*).

God will be sanctified, either actively by their obedience or passively through His judgments upon them. If they will not honour Him

through righteousness for their own good, then He will accomplish His glory through their destruction. Some might misunderstand God's severity against them, wondering why those who had once been His cherished people, bound to Him in a national covenant, should now be crushed by His judgments. He will make it clear: the holiness of His justice now demands it.

There are times when a people's sins grow so great that they render themselves incapable of receiving mercy. *Jeremiah 5:7* speaks to this reality: "*How shall I pardon you for this?*" God is now resolved to give them the woeful consequences of their own thoughts. *Verse 19* declares that He will bring upon them *fructum cogitationum ipsorum*—the fruit of their own thoughts. As they have sown, so shall they reap.

*Proverbs 1:31* affirms this principle: "*They shall eat the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices.*" They may seek to cover their sins with pompous and outward displays of religion, bringing incense and other noble offerings from far-off lands. Yet, this will find no favour with God. *Verse 20* asks, "*To what purpose does incense come to Me from Sheba, and the sweet cane from a far country?*" Despite all these external gestures, God sees the corrupt fruit of their hearts and will judge them accordingly.

As *Jeremiah 17:10* states, "*I, the Lord, search the heart, I test the mind, even to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his doings.*"

Having given this general account of the passage, let us now inquire more particularly what genuine and timely observations it offers for our consideration. Since the Lord here calls upon them to stand in the way, see, and ask for the old paths—the good way—one truth is clear:



In matters concerning your souls, the Lord does not want you to be overly credulous, but rather to be diligent and discerning in seeking out the good old way.

Before I provide reasons to confirm this, I will first clarify the passage by addressing and resolving a question.

## **In What Ways Should You Stand and See?**

First, it is good to begin with yourselves. Fix your thoughts, at least for some time, on the ways in which you have walked. Religion, as well as reason, requires self-reflection and self-examination. In *Haggai 1:5,7*, the Lord declares: "*Consider your ways.*" The Hebrew text expresses this as setting your heart on your ways.

Read over your actions and compare them with God's rule so that you may discern your own errors. Let this lead you to a broken heart for them and a true turning away from them. Too many people focus more on their own comforts than on their duties and spend more time considering the ways of others to condemn them rather than examining their own to judge themselves rightly.

But you will never learn to be a faithful traveller in the way of heaven unless you sometimes look back, even with weeping eyes, upon your former ways. The prophet David found great benefit in this practice. *Psalms 119:59* states: "*I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto Thy testimonies.*" Serious self-examination is the scriptural path to true conversion. This is what Jeremiah commends to the people of God in *Lamentations 3:40*: "*Let us search and try our ways, and turn again to the Lord.*" We must first return into ourselves so that we may rightly return to the Lord.

Secondly, it is also necessary to stand in the ways of your forefathers, the faithful servants of God, so that you may follow in their footsteps. *Deuteronomy 32:7* instructs: "*Remember the days of old; consider the years of many generations. Ask your father, and he will show you; your elders, and they will tell you.*"

As you reflect on what God has done for His people in the paths of truth and righteousness, so also consider what you must do for Him in your ways of obedience and thankfulness. Even the ancient heathen philosophers advised their disciples to consider the lives of Socrates, Cato, and other refined moralists to learn from their example. But we have far better oracles to consult, far worthier patterns to imitate.

Enquire what Abraham did, who was a friend of God. Consider the ways of Jacob, who was mighty in prayer before the Lord. Look to the path of Caleb, a man of a different spirit, more excellent than the ordinary, who followed God fully. Ask what ways David walked in, the man after God's own heart, who fulfilled all His will.

Thirdly, and most importantly, stand in the various paths that God makes known to you—those that lead to the good way—and consider them seriously.

Jerome distinguishes between *many paths* and *one true way*. Similarly, Theodoret states that there are many prophets pointing to the same path, just as there is a king's highway leading to great cities but also many smaller roads from the villages that ultimately bring travellers onto that highway.

Hilary interprets these paths as the many commandments of God and the many prophets who direct us to Christ, the way, the truth, and the life (*John 14:6*).

According to Cyril, these paths are the wholesome writings of the prophets. If anyone diligently sets his mind on them, he will find the good way—Christ Jesus.

Doubtless, there is one sovereign, soul-saving way that leads to God, the centre of our happiness. The patriarchs and prophets have revealed this path throughout the ages, and our thoughts should be actively engaged in seeking it. In this pursuit, we must not take things upon trust too hastily, but rather approach the matter with great caution, carefully considering and inquiring after the truth. The necessity of this diligence will become evident through the following reasons.

The Lord would have you be **carefully inquisitive** about the good way because there are so many false and misleading paths in which you may go astray. *Matthew 7:13* records our Saviour's words: "*The gate is strait, and the way is narrow that leads to heaven, and few there be that find it.*" The passage is difficult, and the travellers upon it are few. But the way to hell is broad, with a deceitful latitude. By nature, we desire room for our lusts to flourish, and in this broad way, there are many by-paths and hidden turnings. Too many poor souls walk in them—far too many—wandering like lost sheep, turning aside into a thousand crooked paths until, at last, they are irretrievably entangled in a wilderness.

Learned men have observed that if the world were divided into thirty equal parts, nineteen of those thirty are still consumed with heathen idolatry. Of the remaining eleven, six are overtaken by **Mahometanism**. This leaves but five parts out of thirty where Christianity has gained ground. Among these so-called Christians, many are led astray by **Roman Catholicism**, entangled in errors and misguided devotion. And of the remaining Protestant party, how

few are truly Christians and Protestants in sincerity! Some hold a form of godliness but deny its power; others, though they take pride in the name of Christianity, scarcely exhibit even an outward appearance of piety. The majority still walk in a way that is not good.

This reality is illustrated in Christ's excellent parable of the sower. As recorded in the Gospels, a sower went out to scatter his seed upon four types of ground. Some seed fell by the wayside, symbolising those with profane and atheistical hearts, where the word made no impression. The truth sank no deeper into their souls than seed into a hardened path (*Matthew 13:19*). Some fell upon rocky ground; they received the word with joy (*verse 20*), yet, lacking deep humility and true sorrow over sin, they did not treasure Christ as their greatest joy. When persecution arose, they were offended and fell away (*verse 21*).

Some seed fell among thorns, representing those who profess faith for a time but allow the riches and cares of this world to choke the word, rendering them unfruitful. Prosperity becomes as great a snare to them as adversity was to those on the rocky ground.

The fourth type of ground, which is the good soil, comprises only a small portion. (*Would that it were so in every Christian congregation!*). Few receive the seed of God's word with honest and prepared hearts, bringing forth fruit to full maturity. This faithful portion is but a small remnant in comparison. Consider most families, most congregations—ordinarily, not even a fourth part can be said to resemble good ground, enclosed and cultivated to bear fruit for God. Rather, they resemble common wasteland, overrun with weeds, a wilderness *sine cultu, sine fructu, sine ornatu*—without cultivation, without fruit, without beauty.

Here is an abundance of false and perilous ways, wherein multitudes lose their God, their souls, their hopes, and their happiness. Therefore, you must be **carefully inquisitive** in seeking the good way.

There are many false guides as well as deceptive by-paths, cunningly seeking to mislead you into self-destructive courses. This alone should make you all the more **carefully inquisitive** about the good way.

The apostle Peter warns us that just as *"there were false prophets among the people, there shall also be false teachers among you, who shall secretly bring in destructive heresies"* (2 Peter 2:1). These deceivers mixed noisome weeds with the sweet flowers of truth, scattering poison among Gospel doctrines. In *verse 2*, he adds, *"many shall follow their pernicious ways,"* referring to their corrupt doctrines and evil examples. These deceivers loosen all restraint, allowing for fleshly indulgence under the guise of Christian liberty (*verse 18*). As a result, *"the way of truth shall be evil spoken of,"* and the Gospel will be reproached by its adversaries. Many will thus be turned away from the right path.

As long as the devil has a kingdom on earth, he will continue sending his agents to draw people into destructive ways.

How did the **man of sin**, the **Papacy**, rise from small beginnings to such great heights? Look into *1 Timothy 4:1*: *"The Spirit speaks expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits."*

The devil and the Pope have had many industrious servants who, boasting as if they were inspired and sent by God, pretended to be devoted to Him. Through subtle and persuasive rhetoric, they first

ingratiated themselves into men's consciences, then picked their pockets, and finally robbed them of their religion and their salvation. Once they had taken these, they plundered their estates and kingdoms to enlarge the Pope's dominion.

And all this was carried on *ἐν ὑποκρίσει ψευδολόγων*—through the hypocrisy of those who speak lies (*1 Timothy 4:2*). With the most cunning devices, they deluded countless souls, offering gilded errors in place of the truth.

Unless you are vigilant and diligent in your inquiry after the good way, you too may be led astray by such deceivers.

It is worth your observation, in *1 Kings 22:20*, that whenever the Lord intends to allow any poor creature to be deluded, you will find the devil is always at hand. No sooner did God speak these words in *verse 20*, "*The Lord said, 'Who shall persuade Ahab, that he may go up and fall at Ramoth-Gilead?'*" (God had a quarrel with Ahab and was resolved to let him engage in this war so that he might be undone there.)

But the question is, how should this be brought about? *Verse 21* states, "*Then there came forth a spirit and stood before the Lord, and said, 'I will persuade him.'*" No sooner does God express an intention to allow someone to be deceived than the devil is immediately ready to take up the task.

The Lord asks, "*How?*" In *verse 22*, he replies, "*I will go forth and be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets.*" And the Lord said, "*You shall persuade him and prevail also; go forth and do so.*"

The devil knew that Ahab had a company of mercenary, self-serving chaplains who would easily be persuaded to say anything to please

the king. So the devil undertook to work through them, knowing well how to manipulate them. He said, "*I will go and be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets.*" And thus, Ahab was seduced into the ways that led to his own destruction.

Unhappy king, that he should have such corrupt chaplains—false guides who misled him, and a devil ever ready to take advantage of them, so that they might misguide him. Such instruments the devil has always sent abroad in every age. They come like a *will-o'-the-wisp* to deceive poor souls in the dark, leading them astray until they stumble and fall—if not to the ruin of their salvation, at least to its great hazard. They dishonour God, harm themselves, and lay stumbling blocks before others.

Therefore, let us be diligent in seeing, observing, and taking counsel. Let us not accept things without careful inquiry, for many false guides are ready to mislead us into dangerous ways.

We all have within us a sinful nature that easily leads us astray, exposing us to deception and making us prone to follow false guides. This lays an even greater obligation upon us to be vigilant and inquisitive after the good way. Three things within us make us especially vulnerable to being misled.

First, there is in us much **blindness of mind**, much ignorance of Jesus Christ and soul-saving truths. This alienates us from the life of God (*Ephesians 4:18*) and leaves us ever ready to go astray, "*not knowing God's ways*" (*Hebrews 3:10*). It also makes us more susceptible to deception by Satan (*Ephesians 6:12*).

It is easy to deceive a person in the dark; you may cheat him with copper instead of gold, with a counterfeit jewel instead of a real one. The devil knows how to take advantage of the darkness of our minds,

leading us into corrupt opinions and enticing us into licentious practices until, at last, he has plunged us into utter darkness.

Secondly, there is in us **the deceitfulness of the heart**, which makes us even more prone to be seduced from the good way. *Jeremiah 17:9* describes this vividly: "*The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked; who can know it?*"

There are many deceitful things in the world—false weights, false measures, counterfeit money, and fraudulent books—but none is more deceitful than the human heart. A deceitful heart is the greatest impostor of all. It has so many secret recesses, so many sly corners, turnings, and windings, that no one can fully discern it except God, who has an all-seeing, all-searching eye.

The ignorance of our minds fills us with self-conceit, while our sinful hearts are filled with self-deception. When a self-conceited mind and a self-deceiving heart come together, it is no wonder that people are led astray.

Thirdly, we harbour many **prejudices against the good way**, which make us even more susceptible to deception. This is one of the great engines by which the devil advances his designs (*2 Corinthians 10:4*).

Satan fills people with **false prejudices** against the ways of God. Some perceive them as **gloomy and joyless**, never considering that "*the ways of wisdom are pleasantness, and all her paths are peace*" (*Proverbs 3:17*). Others view them as **unprofitable**, ignoring *1 Timothy 4:8*: "*Godliness is profitable unto all things, having the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.*"



This false mindset leads many to say, as in *Malachi 3:14*, "*It is vain to serve God; and what profit is it that we have kept His ordinances?*"

Such thinking also misled people in Christ's time. *John 7:48* records their objection: "*Have any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed on Him?*" Later, when Paul preached Christ crucified, *1 Corinthians 1:23* tells us that to the Jews, "*He was a stumbling block*," and to the Gentiles, "*He was foolishness*."

The Jews stumbled because they did not see as many miracles under the Gospel as they did under Moses' ministry. The Gentiles rejected Christ because they were enamoured with philosophical subtleties and human eloquence and were offended by the apostolic simplicity of preaching Christ crucified.

As there are many false paths and misleading guides, and as our own corrupt nature makes us vulnerable to deception, it follows that the good way is not easily found.

Our blessed Saviour presses this truth in *Luke 13:24*: "*Strive to enter in at the strait gate; for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in and shall not be able.*"

This is a sobering statement if taken seriously: *Strive to enter in*. Strive to overcome yourself. Strive to overcome the devil. Strive to overcome the world. And even that will hardly be enough. "*Many shall seek to enter in and shall not be able.*"

The **civil hypocrite** seeks the kingdom by observing duties related to the second table of the law—duties concerning man. The **religious hypocrite** seeks it through external conformity to the

first table—duties concerning God. The **Papist** seeks it through superstitious devotion.

And indeed, all people in the world who have any sense of a deity or any awareness of the immortality of the soul seek after salvation in one way or another. But seeking alone will not suffice. Many seekers will never enter in.

Therefore, Christ does not merely say *seek*, but *strive*.

Two things increase the difficulty in finding the good way.

First, this good way lies deep; it is a hidden way. Religion is the greatest mystery in the world. In any ordinary trade, before a man can become acquainted with its secrets, he must serve an apprenticeship of six or seven years. Likewise, there are so many mysteries in religion that require the service of many years of learning to grasp them well. Religion often appears as a paradox, a riddle, and this is why so many people remain unchanged despite hearing countless sermons and outliving many ministers.

They may grow wiser in worldly matters, more prudent, and more politically astute for their own secular advantage, yet remain as estranged from the power of godliness as they were ten or twenty years ago. How does this happen? The way lies deep; nothing in true religion is without mystery.

Paul, when speaking of chastity, expresses it this way: "*That every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour*" (1 Thessalonians 4:4). There is both a virginal and a conjugal chastity, neither of which is easily learned. And he tells us in Philippians 4:12, "*I know both how to be abased, and I know how to*

*abound: everywhere and in all things I am instructed, both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need."*

There was a mystery in all this. To know how to avoid sin, resist temptation, and exercise grace in all these conditions was a lesson not easily learned. Paul therefore says, *μυέομαι* (*myeomai*)—"I am initiated in this mystery."

Just as "*without controversy, great is the mystery of godliness*" (1 Timothy 3:16), so too, practical godliness holds its own depth. Every duty in religion carries with it a mystery. To live by faith, to practice self-denial, to perform duties in such a way as to experience communion with God—these require a secret and heavenly skill.

Many people possess only the outward shell and husk of religious duty—a mere carcass of religion—lacking the kernel and soul that should give it life. To perform religious duties from religious principles, with religious motives, and for religious ends—so that one may both please God and profit oneself—is a secret that even some who have been hearers for twenty or thirty years remain unfamiliar with.

Secondly, as the good way lies deep, so even the best guides may be mistaken. The most able, learned, and godly ministers can, in some things, be deceived themselves and thereby deceive others.

It is noteworthy in 1 Corinthians 3:12 that ministers may build upon the right foundation and still be saved, being godly; yet their work may be lost because, though they build upon the right foundation, they build with hay, stubble, and wood—things that lack value. These errors, or empty speculations, stand in contrast to gold, silver, and precious stones, which represent wholesome and substantial heavenly truths.

Such ministers fail to consider that the foundation, being the strength of the building, should also be its rule. Every part of the superstructure should align perfectly with the foundation, corresponding entirely to the will, mind, and glory of Jesus Christ. Neither learning nor goodness exempts men from making such mistakes.

If you look into *1 Kings 13*, you will find a remarkable example of an old prophet who, though showing signs of piety (*verses 30-32*), seduces another prophet into error (*verse 18*). The younger prophet had been zealously active in God's cause, as seen earlier in the chapter, and it is a great pity that he was so greatly misled.

The old prophet, speaking like a father, says to him in *verse 18*: "*I am also a prophet as you are, and an angel spoke to me by the word of the Lord, saying, 'Bring him back with you to your house, that he may eat bread and drink water.'* But he lied to him."

He pretends to have received a revelation from God in order to persuade the younger prophet to act contrary to the clear instructions he had previously received from the Lord (*verse 9*).

It is possible, as you see, for even grave and respected ministers to cover their falsehoods with the appearance of divine revelation. In this case, the deception led the prophet astray, drawing him out of the good way and leading him into disobedience against God—a disobedience that ultimately cost him his life.

Indeed, soon after (*which is worth noting*), *1 Kings 13:21-22*, God reproves the prophet's disobedience through the very old prophet who had led him into error. We speak and act only as God is pleased to assist or withdraw. When God chooses to use a man, he becomes a

counsellor, a reprover; but when left to himself, even an old prophet may become a deceiver and a seducer.

It is no wonder, then, to see so many of our younger prophets and other Christians misled in these latter days when even old prophets may pretend to the highest authority, abusing God's name to justify their errors. The early church saw too many sorrowful examples of this, proving that even the greatest lights may be mixed with darkness.

Origen and Tertullian erred so grievously—one among the Greeks, the other among the Latins—that each was considered in their time to be *tentatio magna in ecclesiâ*—a severe temptation, a great stumbling block in the Church.

Augustine, on very weak grounds (*John 6:53*), firmly advocated for the administration of the Lord's Supper to infants—an error built upon a foundation of sand that nevertheless persisted in the Church for many centuries.

Jerome, though admired for his great learning, was excessively devoted to the idea of merit in virginity. It would be easy to expose the blemishes of others, yet why should we uncover our fathers' nakedness? Rather, let us learn from this: since even the greatest authorities in learning and piety may be deceived in some matters (*prophets and apostles alone, whose calling was extraordinary, had an infallible spirit*), good men may sometimes lead others out of the good way.

Therefore, all of this should further engage us to stand, see, and inquire what is the good old way, and not rashly take anything on trust in matters of such great consequence to our souls.

Does the Lord call you to be carefully inquisitive in matters concerning your soul? Then learn to be prudent, to be serious in examining every way before committing yourself to it. Surely the wise God—who never thinks or speaks in vain—would not have used so many words in calling us to *stand, see, and ask* unless the matter were of the utmost importance.

I wish Christians would take example from politicians: when dealing with other men like themselves, they are not quick to believe all they hear. *Non cito credere*—do not be too credulous.

The Bereans displayed a noble example of prudent piety in *Acts 17:11*: "*They received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so,*" even when Paul and Silas were the teachers. How vigilant, then, would they have been in these times, when so many suspicious doctrines are preached, and so many counterfeit paths are presented to well-meaning but ignorant hearers?

It is wise counsel given in *1 Thessalonians 5:21*: "*Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.*" Do not accept anything blindly, no matter who the teacher may be, unless you are sure it is from God Himself. If God speaks, there must be no hesitation—only obedience. But unless you know with certainty that it is from God, **test all things**—test all practices that are recommended to you, test all doctrines presented as rules for those practices, and even test all revelations that anyone claims to have received to support those doctrines.

For know this: the most dangerous errors are those confirmed by doctrine and upheld by false teachings.

If a man is led into a bad way suddenly, through thoughtlessness or temptation, he is more easily recovered. But if he is firmly settled in a false path by an unsound doctrine, that doctrine must be especially examined. And when someone claims to have received their belief through divine revelation, they become even harder to correct.

Montanus and other early heretics claimed their opinions were given to them by revelation, making their teachings irrefutable in their own minds.

If a man argues his opinion by reason, you may refute his reasoning and convince him of his error. But if he claims, *"I hold this opinion because I had a revelation,"* it is almost impossible to persuade him otherwise, for he will stubbornly cling to his supposed revelation and impose it upon others.

Therefore, these things must be tested: *"Try every spirit," 1 John 4:1.*

Recognise that there are false teachers in the world—people whom God never sent. *"Believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world."* True prophets are **sent by God** and called in His way. But false prophets go out of their own accord—they have neither commission nor instruction from God.

Since there are so many such false teachers abroad, it is only reasonable that people should test before they trust.

Consider how you handle matters of trade: when you receive money, you weigh it in a balance to test its purity. Kings have tasters to try their food, lest it be poisoned. Shall we not be as wise for our souls?

If you were lending a sum of money, you would make sure to have a legally binding contract, signed with witnesses. Why? Because you value your money, and you want to be secure.

If you were purchasing an estate, you would have the legal documents examined—perhaps reviewed by multiple counsellors—because you value your property and worldly wealth.

And yet, are not our **immortal souls** of greater concern than any of these things?

Therefore, in all matters that concern our eternal welfare, let us take this wise direction: **stand, see, and inquire.**

Here you may desire resolution in three particulars:

1. Who must inquire?
2. Where must we inquire, or from whom?
3. To what purpose must we inquire?

## **Question 1: Who Must Inquire?**

The Lord here directs His speech to all people. If you were to ask a Papist who is responsible for considering, testing, and examining religious matters, Bellarmine and his followers would have you believe that this responsibility belongs only to the bishops, doctors, and learned men. The people, they say, must be carried along by implicit faith, blindfolded, placing their trust entirely in their leaders—until at last, these poor souls are plunged into hell.

But God would have us be wiser. He expects every man to use his reason as carefully for the welfare of his soul as he does for the well-



being of his body. Do not swallow things credulously, but consider and examine them.

Whom does Paul exhort to "*test all things*" in *1 Thessalonians 5:21*? Not only ministers, but also those under their ministry. *Verses 12-13* speak of those who are to "*know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord.*" These were the people, private Christians, who were not to despise prophecies but were commanded to *test all things*.

Indeed, the supreme judgment belongs to the Head of the Church, the Lawgiver Jesus Christ. Ministerial judgment and examination belong to those who hold a public office from Christ for that purpose. However, when it comes to practical judgment—the judgment of discretion—every man and woman must exercise it. It is not safe for anyone to receive matters of religion without serious examination.

Even the Prelatical divines acknowledged this principle, despite their willingness to lead people captive under blind obedience. They admitted that if something commanded was indifferent, one might comply, but if unlawful, one must not obey. But how could individuals discern whether what their superiors enjoined was indifferent or unlawful unless they had the liberty to examine and test it?

Otherwise, how would Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego have known how to act when commanded to bow to the golden image? Had they obeyed Nebuchadnezzar's decree without consideration or trial, they would have committed idolatry to escape the fiery furnace. Many in later times have been similarly taken by surprise, endangering their souls in order to secure their bodies.

Just as in philosophy, so in divinity, credulity has bred many heretics and led many thousands into captivity. They believe simply as some learned man believes, without standing, seeing, and inquiring what is the good way.

## **Question 2: Where Should We Inquire, and From Whom?**

We need not run to Rome nor rely on the supposed infallibility of the Pope for resolution. Since the Papacy is the great apostasy from God's truth, that heavy judgment of *2 Thessalonians 2:10-11* lies upon them: "*They are given up to strong delusions, to the power of error,*" and thus, as the blind lead the blind, both will fall into the ditch.

Neither should we depend upon the authority of the Church to decide controversies and determine matters of religion. We must look higher.

It is true that the name of the Church has always been used with great pomp and reverence. Ask a Papist, and he will cry, "*The Church, the Church!*" though he means only the Pope himself. Among the Prelatical party, the cry was always, "*The Church must be obeyed!*"—though in their view, it meant only the bishops and prelates. And when the people, in their own way, begin to assert their liberties, they too cry, "*The Church, the Church!*" meaning only their own opinions and resolutions.

But whoever claims to be the Church, its authority alone is not sufficient. The Church can err. Therefore, we must go directly to the throne of Jesus Christ, the Head of the Church, for true resolution.

Whom shall we believe concerning God if not God Himself? Even if a council of the most learned doctors ever known were assembled, or if an assembly of angels convened to discuss religion and the good way, the final authority must still be: *"Thus saith the Lord."*

It is not a matter of *"What does Hilary say?"* or *"What does Augustine say?"* but *"What does the Lord say?"* Only He can resolve and satisfy the conscience. Of Him we must inquire.

### **Question 3: To What Purpose Must We Inquire?**

The purpose of our inquiry is that we may learn which is the good way in which we should walk. Something has already been said to encourage you to be inquisitive and to ensure that you knock at the right door. I hope you are now, in some measure, prepared to ask: Among all the various byways, how shall we discern which is the good way?

First, the good way is the way that comes from God, which He Himself has taught and prescribed in His holy Word. None knows the way to heaven better than the God of heaven. It is a most seasonable prayer in *Psalms 25:4*: *"Show me Thy ways, O Lord, teach me Thy paths."* We walk safely when we follow God's own teaching.

It is the very essence of the covenant of grace, by which He saves His people: *"They shall all be taught of God"* (*John 6:45*). Hence, He commands us to listen to His beloved Son, in whom He is well pleased: *"Hear Him"* (*Matthew 17:5*).

Where does Christ speak to us but in His Word and by His Spirit? The Holy Ghost is our Teacher, and the book in which He instructs His disciples is the Bible. Therefore, if you desire to know which is the right way, look to *the law and the testimony (Isaiah 8:20)*. Does the Word prescribe it, or not?

Judge, then, the goodness of the way by the rules of Holy Scripture, not merely by the seeming light of your own conscience. Conscience may mistakenly conclude that something is lawful when it is, in fact, unlawful. In such a case, it neither obligates you to act nor can it justify your actions.

Among the many dangerous errors that flourish in the Church in these lawless times, one of the most perilous is this: *"I am persuaded in my conscience that this is the right way, and therefore I may walk in it."*

But wait! Do you find this principle in Scripture—that your conscience is an adequate and sufficient rule for your actions? Not at all. Rather, your conscience, by the fall of Adam, has been defiled (*Titus 1:16*), and even in the regenerate, it is only partially sanctified and not wholly freed from darkness and error. Therefore, it cannot be a pure and perfect rule.

If you make your conscience your only guide, you will soon be misled into great offenses, as in *John 16:2* and *Acts 26:9*. Paul himself says, *"I truly thought with myself that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth."* Who will claim (*unless they are shamefully ignorant*) that Paul did well in this, even though he acted according to his present light? The light of conscience is too often but darkness.

If you were reasoning with a Papist and asked, "*Why do you pray to images? Why do you go to Mass?*"—would it be a satisfactory answer if he simply said, "*I am persuaded in my conscience that it is lawful to go to Mass, and therefore I may do it?*"

May the Lord expose and destroy such poisonous opinions! Surely, an erring conscience does not justify a sinful practice. Conscience is but a **subordinate rule** and a rule to be followed only insofar as it is informed by the Word of God.

When conscience remains in its proper place—acting in harmony with the precise instructions of God—then you may proceed with confidence and comfort. But while you are under the influence of an **erroneous conscience**, your duty is not to follow it blindly but rather to seek clearer and fuller information so that you may be delivered from your mistaken errors (*Romans 12:2*).

Learned divines observe that conscience is to be more strictly observed in **negatives** than in **affirmatives**. When conscience judges something to be unlawful, even if it is lawful in itself, we are not to do it (*Romans 14:23*). We may sometimes abstain from a lawful thing without sin, but we can never engage in an unlawful thing without sin—even if our conscience mistakenly permits it.

O that you and I, in this time when so many new and strange ways are being promoted, may form a right judgment concerning the good way!

Let us look beyond the examples of others, refusing to set our watches by their clocks. Let us look higher than the mere dictates of our own conscience. Let us appeal to the Holy Scripture as the perfect and ultimate rule of our actions. Let us submit all our

controversies to its authority, allowing it to arbitrate and decide all matters.

Here, let us remember the excellent rule of one of the ancients:

*"He is the best reader of Scripture who draws the meaning out of Scripture, not the one who forces his own meaning into it."*

On these terms, let every opinion and practice now in London, in England—yes, in the whole world—be tried by Scripture.

If we read God's Word with a sincere and humble desire to know the mind of Christ and listen impartially to what He speaks therein, we would much more readily learn the good way. But too often, people come with preconceived notions that they must either find in Scripture or else impose upon it.

Many of the prelates and their followers, in former days, sought to advance their corrupt ceremonies and innovations. But instead of consulting Scripture to learn what God had commanded, they first resolved what they would practice and then searched the Scriptures and the writings of the fathers for anything that might appear to support their cause.

Let us take warning from their example and avoid that which we once condemned in others. Whatever doctrinal system, form of church government, or method of practice we are currently inclined to, whether congregational or classical, whether this or that way, let us not study and dispute merely to bring Scripture down to our own sense, but rather strive to shape, frame, and conform all our opinions, desires, and practices to the true and genuine sense of Holy Scripture, according to the mind of Jesus Christ therein revealed.

This, and this alone, will prove to be **the good way**—the way that God Himself has made known.

Secondly, the good way is the path that leads directly to God Himself—to an interest in God, the service of God, and communion with God. The Lord created us for Himself, and our immortal souls will never find true satisfaction until they return to Him. It is the very essence of true religion—the good way—to bring the wandering soul back to its Maker. What is religion but coming to God in Christ, with an engaged heart that desires to remain with Him? And the more steps we take in this good way of pure religion, the nearer we come to God.

The **profane atheist** wallows in sin, prostituting his precious soul to the ignoble service of his lusts. This is his element. Yet all the while, *poor creature*, he remains *without God in the world* (*Ephesians 2:12*), at a great distance from both Him and his own salvation.

The **carnal worldling** would be content *uti Deo*—to use God—but only so long as he may still *frui creaturis*—enjoy the creatures. He serves God only insofar as it serves his own purposes, gratifying his carnal interests. In this way, he gives no real thought to fellowship with God.

The **lukewarm politician**, with his schemes of compromise, seeks to reconcile God and self, hoping to further his own designs. Yet, in the end, he too falls short of heaven, losing his God in his inordinate pursuit of carnal self-interest.

But the good way will lead us away from sin, above mere creature comforts, and out of ourselves unto God.

Some may take many steps toward God, so much so that it could be said of them, as of the scribe in *Mark 12:34*: "*Thou art not far from the kingdom of God.*" But the good way carries us further. It leads us to God Himself—to the path of well-pleasing service, to union and communion with Him.

It not only brings us to serve God but also to enjoy God in His ordinances; not only to obey Him in duty but also to find **sweet communion** with Him in the performance of that duty.

Thus, a saint travelling in this good way is not satisfied merely with attending sermons or offering up prayers. Rather, he examines what communion his soul has with Jesus Christ in these exercises. He considers what God requires of him, what influence he receives from heaven, and what holy impressions are made upon his spirit by these duties.

He understands that in this good way, God brings a taste of heaven into His people before He brings them into heaven itself. He has learned by experience that a day of humiliation may become a soul-melting day, a day of thanksgiving a soul-cheering day, a communion day a healing day. A Sabbath becomes a day of blessing and sanctification. Such is the nature of the good way—it leads directly to God.

### **Thirdly, The Good Way Comes from God, Leads to God, and is According to God**

This good way is according to the will of God, tending to His honour and magnifying His name. The best way, without question, is the way that leads to happiness by holiness (*Hebrews 12:14*). The soul-saving way is also a soul-sanctifying way.



In *2 Thessalonians 2:13*, Paul declares that God chose the Thessalonians "*to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth.*" In carrying out His eternal counsel, this is the divine order—no one may claim assurance of being chosen for salvation unless he also possesses within him the unmistakable pledge of God's electing love: the sanctifying Spirit.

Any way that claims to be a way of justification, yet is not also a way of sanctification, is not the good scriptural way to salvation.

It is a grave reproach to any so-called *new way*—however popular it may be—when people's opinions corrupt their practices. If, in contending for justification, they weaken the power of sanctification, or in professing the Gospel of Christ, they turn away the holy law of God from being the rule of life, then it is certain that theirs is not the good way.

No way can be called good in which people's spirits grow dry and barren, which opens a back door to Sabbath-breaking and other licentiousness.

Therefore, suspect yourselves and your ways, I beseech you, if your opinions cause practical Christianity to wither, if they make you formal and careless in the duties of your calling and relationships. The good way is a soul-improving, a spiritualising way.

In *1 Timothy 6:3*, Paul directs Timothy to judge teachers and their doctrines by this measure: whether they teach and consent to the wholesome words of Jesus Christ, and the doctrine that accords with godliness.

Here, the apostle clearly sets forth the test: Christ's words are wholesome and soul-saving. His doctrine purifies the heart, and it is

according to godliness.

This age is exceedingly fruitful in a multiplicity of opinions. If you desire to judge them rightly, then, alongside examining them by the Word of Truth, diligently observe what influence these opinions have upon people's spirits and their way of life.

Under the tyranny of the prelates, many congregations had nearly lost the power of religion beneath a burden of needless ceremonies. And now, in many places, the vigour of practical piety is much diminished (*to say no more*), weakened by endless disputes over opinions that might well be spared. This renders such ways highly suspicious, for they are no longer *according to godliness*.

I confess that if we were to judge people's ways by their words alone, many would appear righteous. Good words abound—many mouths are full of *Christ, Free Grace, Light, Liberty*, and other precious Gospel terms. God forbid that such sweet and sacred words should be abused to disguise *the darkness of error* or *the looseness of licentiousness*.

Yet, how many speak the highest Gospel language while living far below Gospel privileges and Gospel hopes!

The subtle devil knows well how to conceal his snares beneath the most *specious* language—even beneath Scripture itself.

Therefore, *test all things repeatedly; it concerns you greatly to do so*.

O that it might be evident that the way in which you walk is indeed *the good way*—a way that is *according to God* and that expresses *the true reality of godliness in your daily life*!

Having established these things for the awakening of your vigilance in seeking the good way, let us now consider what it means to *ask for the old paths*. In this, you shall imitate **wise travellers**, who consult with those who have gone before them and have discovered and walked in the good way.

The good way is *an old way*.

## **Ask, Then:**

**First, what is the good old way of doctrine?** What is *the old pattern of wholesome words*? *2 Timothy 1:13* instructs us to "*hold fast the pattern of sound words*."

Ask what truth Jesus Christ, who is "*the same yesterday, today, and forever*" (*Hebrews 13:8*), revealed to His servants, and, as verse 9 warns, "*be not carried about with diverse and strange doctrines*." Do not be drawn into new and uncouth teachings that were never commended to us by the apostles.

Paul exhorts Timothy in *1 Timothy 6:20*:

*"O Timothy, keep that which is committed to thy trust."*

The Latin fathers express it thus: *Depositum serva*—"Keep what has been entrusted to you."

That which has been committed to you, not that which you have invented; that which you have received, not that which you have discovered.

You are not called to be an *author*, but a *guardian*; not an *ordainer*, but a *disciple*; not a *guide*, but a *follower*.

What you have received in gold, deliver the same in gold.

He had this trust for the Church's benefit. Let us, then, diligently inquire after it, that we may be rightly guided by it.

**Secondly, what is the good old way of divine worship?** Here you must consult not with the precepts of men but with the Word of God, as it was revealed of old to His Church. Neglecting this ancient landmark has introduced many superstitious innovations into God's service and misled thousands of simple souls out of the good way.

A statesman of our own has observed various causes of superstition:

1. Pleasing and sensual rites and ceremonies.
2. Excessive outward and Pharisaical holiness.
3. An overreliance on traditions.
4. The prelates' schemes for ambition and personal gain.
5. The excessive indulgence of good intentions, which opens the door to vain imaginations and novelties.
6. The application of human reasoning to divine matters, leading to a mixture of imaginations.

In all these things, the holy will of God, the only rule of pure worship, has been neglected.

And all the while, poor souls labour much, yet to little purpose. *"In vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men"* (Matthew 15:9). They overlook God's will, so He overlooks their devices. Thus, their new way proves to be a bad and uncomfortable way.

If you desire to please God in His worship, you must inquire for the good old way.

### **Thirdly, what is the good old way of practical piety?**

The beauty of religion is most evident in the faithful discharge of our duties within our callings and relationships. To live, as Paul expressed in *2 Corinthians 1:12*, "*in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God*," would greatly commend the Gospel and fill us with rejoicing in the testimony of a good conscience.

Much of this practical godliness may be learned not only from Scripture precepts and examples but also from the writings of the ancient worthies.

Among other benefits, **the writings of the early Church Fathers** provide two great advantages:

- 1. They give light in points of faith.**
- 2. They bring warmth to practical godliness.**

I wish we were better acquainted with the old strains of piety that Origen, Chrysostom, and Basil urged upon their hearers—such as the sanctification of the Lord's Day, the reciting of sermons, and engaging in holy conversation. They had their *Mensarii Sermones*—their *table discourses*—to nourish their souls.

It would be a work worthy of a second Jewell to write an Apology for the strictness and purity of practical piety out of the **Ancient Fathers**, just as that learned bishop once defended our doctrine against the Papists.

Thus, we might better learn the good old way of sound Christianity.

**Fourthly, do not forget to inquire about the good old way of discipline.**

When you have found the good old way in doctrine, worship, and practical piety, you will need a hedge of discipline to protect it, lest dogs and swine creep in and pollute it with their defilements.

It is possible, indeed, to focus too much on the hedge and neglect the crop itself. Too many are ready to neglect the power of godliness in their excessive zeal for certain points of discipline.

Yet, I beseech you, do not allow good corn to be spoiled for want of a hedge.

Let us seriously consider the good old Scripture order.

Paul rejoiced when he beheld the order and the steadfastness of the faith of the Colossians (*Colossians 2:5*). May the Lord grant that, after all our inquiring, consulting, and debating, we may find that same good old order in the Churches of Christ among us.

This will be a great cause for rejoicing.

## **How Far May We Consult Antiquity in Seeking the Good Way?**

**Question:** But how far may we, in enquiring after the good way, consult with antiquity and observe the old paths wherein the ancient Fathers have trodden?

**Answer:** Though many make antiquity their Diana, adoring every fragment of the Ancients too much, without considering that some errors have gray hairs, for the mystery of iniquity was already at work even in the Apostles' time (2 Thessalonians 2:7); and though others—especially the Papists—use the Fathers as merchants use

their counters, sometimes counting them for pence, sometimes for pounds, depending on what is most convenient for their argument, yet doubtless, in searching after the good way, we may safely consult antiquity.

The newest philosophy may excel, having the advantage of new experiments, but the oldest divinity is the best. There can be no better way to heaven than that which the Ancient of Days has revealed. Without question, there were in the primitive Church many glorious lights whom the Lord entrusted with His Gospel secrets and used as special instruments to convey much precious truth to us.

For better direction, I will briefly suggest these few hints (*which in some assemblies I would greatly enlarge upon*):

1. **The most ancient and learned Fathers should be read as interpreters, not as lawgivers.**
2. **You must discern what books attributed to them are spurious and which are legitimate.**
3. **Diligently observe whether the Doctors you consult understood the original language of the Holy Scriptures** and whether the translation they followed was sound.
4. **Examine their agreement on particular doctrines.** Give preference to what they have spoken either unanimously or by the **greater part**, and that very manifestly, often, constantly, and assuredly.
5. **Above all, weigh everything they say in the balance of the Sanctuary—examined by the Scriptures, the truest and best antiquity.**

The reverend and learned Mr. Perkins gives a rational account of how it came to pass that the ancient Fathers often spoke

incommodiously, using unapt and unhappy expressions:

1. Sometimes, they were **carried into an extreme by the heat of disputation.**
2. In exhortations, they were sometimes **transported by the vehemence of rhetorical flourish**, not always as careful in the pulpit as they were in the academic chair.
3. Before controversies arose, they **spoke more loosely and less precisely on some points**, until the vigilance of an adversary quickened them to greater caution.
4. They **borrowed too many forms of speech from the people** and, speaking often *populariter* (in a popular manner), they sometimes gave too much credit to rumours, thereby misleading their readers.
5. At times, **they were swept away by the tide of the multitude, even into superstition.**
6. Often, they spoke of things *historically* rather than *dogmatically*—relating events rather than asserting truths.

Therefore, while consulting them, look through them, but also look above them—unto Christ Jesus in His holy Word, so that you may certainly find the good way.

## **Walking in the Good Way Brings Soul-Refreshing Rest**

Now, having addressed the first observation, I will join the motive and the duty together.

When you have found the good old way, walking therein is God's method for you to obtain soul-refreshing rest.



You have a great journey to take—from hell to heaven, from Egypt to Canaan, through the wilderness of this world. You need a good guide, and after such a long, wearisome, and conflicting passage, surely a resting place should be most welcome.

It is God's kindness to offer Himself as a refuge for weary travellers, allowing them this sovereign cordial in the way—that as they go on, they shall find rest for their souls.

There is rich encouragement in the Prophet's words:

"I have seen his ways, and will heal him: I will lead him also, and restore comfort to him" (Isaiah 57:18).

God presents Himself as a Guide, a Physician, and a Comforter.

The black clouds will pass, the storm will cease, and travellers toward Zion shall reach a haven of tranquillity.

Here I will consider three things:

1. The nature of this walking.
2. What rest is to be found here.
3. What evidence there is that walking in this good old way is God's method to soul-refreshing rest.

## **Walking in This Good Way**

First, walking in this good way presupposes that you have renounced your former evil ways and have now come into God's way, the good way. *Isaiah 55:7* says, "*Let the wicked man forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts.*" He must forsake both his wicked ways and his own thoughts.

There is no wicked man in the world who does not have *his own way* in which he walks. He also has his own stock of *carnal principles*, which serve as the lantern and candle to guide him in that way. You can never truly convert a man until you have confuted his principles and overturned his thoughts—then you may soon persuade him to forsake his ways. And both these things must take place before he can enter the good way.

Thus, in *Isaiah 65:2*, the Lord declares, "*I have spread out my hands all the day long to a rebellious people, that walk in a way that is not good, after their own thoughts.*"

There is not a man or woman in this congregation who has resisted the ministry all this time and persisted in their own wicked ways except that they walk after their own thoughts. Let the minister say what he will, they cling to their own conclusions and resolve to keep to their own principles.

But when you come to this resolution—*My own thoughts shall not guide me; my own way cannot save me; I will apply myself to God's way*—this is the first step towards walking in the good way.

Before you can walk in it, you must turn your back upon your own evil ways.

Secondly, walking implies moving forward—taking step after step, as travellers do, making progress. Though you may be in the right way, if you stand still, you are not walking.

But if you comply with God's commandments and move forward in obedience, maintaining a steady course in line with His will, then you are truly walking.

*Enoch walked with God (Genesis 5:24), and in Hebrews 11:5, we learn that he was translated because he pleased God. He went along with God in well-pleasing ways—whatever duty God prescribed, his spirit embraced it; whatever lesson God commended to him, he learned it and lived it.*

This is walking with God in the good way: continually improving by His ordinances, observing His daily providences, and obediently surrendering yourself to His commands, moving in harmony with them.

Thirdly, this walking must be voluntary and willing.

There is great significance in *Proverbs 20:7*: "*A righteous man walketh in his integrity.*" In the Hebrew, this phrase signifies that *he sets himself going*.

Every godly man has an inward principle—he is not like a terrified hypocrite who only moves from external pressures. He is not driven by fear, nor does he worship the *rising sun*, shifting with whatever way is most plausible or advantageous.

Many will embrace *reformation* only when it is a popular thing, but the godly man has a new nature. He has an internal principle, a divine motive within himself that moves him to walk in the good way. He is not forced or driven but moves freely and spontaneously.

This is what God expects. Therefore, you should inquire diligently about the good and right way and then walk in it.

God's people are a willing people, volunteers in His service. The very tenor of the covenant is this: God's people shall be a repenting people, a believing people, an obeying people.

- **By repentance, we seek the way.**
- **By faith, we find the way.**
- **By obedience, we keep the way.**

If these three cardinal and substantial graces are truly exercised in you—such repentance as to renounce your sins and seek God's way, such faith as to embrace God's way, and such obedience as to continue steadfast in the way—then you will indeed be one who walks with God.

And all this must be done with a willing mind, as David instructed Solomon in *1 Chronicles 28:9*: "*And thou, Solomon my son, know thou the God of thy father, and serve him with a perfect heart and a willing mind.*"

This is what it means to walk in the good way.

After considering the nature of this walking, the next question is: What rest is here offered?

Here is a remedy as broad as the wound, a satisfaction proportionate to the needs and necessities of poor travellers journeying toward Canaan.

## **Rest from the Terrors of Conscience**

First, here is rest from the terrors of conscience. At times, a servant of God lies under these torments, and they are deep and grievous troubles indeed. To be under the accusing and condemning power of conscience is no light affliction. There is no need to dispute where hell is, for those who know what terrors of conscience mean will tell you.

God can make a hell in a man's bosom, within his very heart. If but one spark of God's wrath falls upon the conscience, there is hell already.

Who, then, can give rest from these terrors?

God Himself.

Being satisfied through the blood of Christ, He can easily satisfy conscience. 1 John 3:20 tells us: "If our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart and knows all things."

Oh, how dreadful it is to live with a condemning conscience!

Our blind consciences see but little of the evil within us compared to what God sees. And if conscience already condemns us, what will God do—He who is infinitely greater than our conscience and knows all things?

On the other hand, "If our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God" (1 John 3:21).

Here, then, is heaven on earth. Here is sweet rest—walking in the good way with a good conscience.

Purity is the pathway to peace.

When your conscience does not condemn you but rather absolves you, approves you, and is sprinkled with the blood of Jesus Christ, then you have confidence toward God. Such a soul can come to prayer with boldness and approach the Lord's Table with assurance.

Such a soul does not fear death nor tremble at the thought of Judgment Day.

If all is well within, it is a sign that all is well in heaven.

If conscience is at peace upon good grounds, then you may be sure God is at peace with you.

Here is sweet rest indeed.

## **Rest from Scruples, Doubts, and Fears**

Secondly, as there is rest from the terrors of conscience, so there is also rest from scruples, doubts, and fears.

At times, though the soul is not weighed down by such hellish terrors, it may still suffer from a sad, dejected, scrupulous, and unsettled condition—not knowing what to do nor what course to take.

Conscience is a tender part.

A tiny stone inside a narrow shoe will pinch and trouble the foot, and in the same way, even a small scruple in conscience can bring great distress to the soul.

Scruples are, indeed, like thistles—though they are bad weeds, they indicate that the ground is good where they grow. Many honest hearts struggle with them.

Poor souls, they are often so miserably perplexed that they dare not pray or dare not come to the Lord's Table.

Where, then, shall they find rest?

The more they yield to scruples, the deeper they become entangled.

But the knowledge of the good way, revealed in Scripture—the doctrine of grace—establishes the heart in the midst of all doubts (Hebrews 13:9).

The more we walk in this way, the more we conquer scruples.

We must not yield to scruples against duty but rather do our duty even in opposition to our scruples.

This is not acting against conscience—but rather acting in accordance with a well-informed conscience.

By doing so, we shall find rest and sweet tranquillity of spirit.

When God's way—the good way—is walked in, the burden of scruples is lifted.

At times, a poor soul may come to prayer weary and drooping, but while engaged in prayer, God may suddenly break in upon him, transforming his spirit.

By the time he rises from prayer, it is as if he has stepped into another world.

God has given him rest.

God has met him walking in the good way and has confounded the scruples and fears that once troubled him.

And through habitual obedience, even conscience itself is strengthened and settled.

Thirdly, there is rest from the impetuosity of inordinate passions, from the buffetings of Satan, and from our own corruptions.

At times, a godly man or woman finds themselves like a troubled sea, carried away by passion or beset by lust. It may be that they feel a thorn in the flesh, as Paul himself did, to keep him humble (2 Corinthians 12:7).

This was indeed a thorn in his flesh, a messenger from Satan—the devil permitted to stir up and exasperate the corruption of nature within him, becoming a source of daily affliction. This was Paul's great trouble.

How did God give him rest?

With this answer from heaven: "My grace is sufficient for thee."

The God who quiets a terrified conscience, the God who satisfies a scrupulous mind, that same God can also subdue an unruly lust, moderate an inordinate affection, and support the soul under fierce temptation, according to His word.

Thus does He dispense His grace to those who walk in the good way—the way of obedience to Him and dependence on Him. Either He removes the affliction or gives them this refreshing promise under it: His grace shall be sufficient for them.

## **Rest from Tyrannical Enemies**

Fourthly, there is rest from tyrannical enemies.

The Church has many adversaries—many Canaanites who desire to be pricks in her eyes and thorns in her side.

Sometimes, it is the portion of God's servants to be hunted down like a partridge upon the mountains, persecuted from place to place, as



David, Paul, and other faithful worthies have been.

But God knows how to chain up enemies.

He knows how to sweeten the greatest troubles and to provide sufficient comfort to sustain the soul through all persecution—and in His time, He gives rest from them.

Consider that excellent passage, Psalm 81:13-15:

*"Oh that my people had hearkened unto me, and Israel had walked in my ways! I should soon have subdued their enemies, and turned my hand against their adversaries. The haters of the Lord should have submitted themselves unto him; but their time should have endured forever."*

England, as well as Israel, might obtain victory over cruel and bloodthirsty enemies—if only we could learn to walk in God's ways.

## **Rest in Heaven**

Fifthly, there is eternal rest in heaven.

In *Hebrews 4:9*, it is written: *"There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God."*

This chapter speaks of three types of rest:

1. **The rest of the holy Sabbath** (*verse 4*)—where many observe a **strong argument in the New Testament** for the institution of the Sabbath from the beginning.
2. **The rest of Canaan** (*verses 5 and 8*).

**3. The remaining rest—the divine and heavenly rest—**  
where God's people will live **wholly for God and with God**,  
free from all the troubles of this life.

This final rest is called "a rest from labours" (*Revelation 14:13*):

*"Blessed are they that die in the Lord, or die for the Lord; they shall rest from their labours, and their works shall follow them."*

Here, in this life, you must be soldiers.

You must serve out your generation in a life of conflict.

You must labour night and day, for God will have none of His servants idle.

But the time will come when you shall have rest from all your labours—and then, all your good works will follow you.

Many good works that you have done are now forgotten by you, but you shall hear of them again on the day of judgment—they will then be revealed.

Jesus Christ knows more good in His people than they do in themselves.

*"You visited Me; you refreshed Me when I was in prison; you fed Me when I was hungry."*

All these good works shall follow you.

Not one good work you have done, not one good word you have spoken, will be lost.

Here is the happy rest your soul shall find at your journey's end, having walked in this good way.

## **Walking in the Good Way Leads to Soul-Refreshing Rest**

It remains now to produce the evidence that walking in this good way is God's method for obtaining sweet, soul-refreshing rest.

### **Three Considerations**

First, the God who bids you to stand, see, and inquire after the good way is a God of peace (1 Thessalonians 5:23), who has made known an immovable covenant of peace (Isaiah 54:10), engaging Himself thereby to embrace all those who wait upon Him in His own way. Indeed, Isaiah 64:5 declares that the Lord meets those who rejoice in righteousness and remember Him in His ways. Walking in the good way undoubtedly leads to communion with God and a sweet enjoyment of Him. As seen in Luke 15:20, when the prodigal son was still a great way off, his father saw him, had compassion, ran to him, embraced him, and kissed him. This reveals what God is ready to do—to meet with the dearest embrace those who travel toward Him in the good way.

Secondly, Jesus Christ is the Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6), and in the gospel of peace, He has seriously invited all who are weary and heavy-laden to come to Him, and He will give them rest (Matthew 11:28). Indeed, the soul that comes to Him in this good way finds peace and rest (Romans 5:1-2), a peace in His kingdom and under His government that shall have no end (Isaiah 9:7). First, the soul finds rest in Him by resting upon Him, and then, at last, rest with

Him for eternity. Christ declares this to His disciples with much sweetness, loving faithfulness, and assurance: "In my Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself, that where I am, there you may be also. And whither I go you know, and the way you know" (John 14:2-4). The good way He has prescribed will infallibly bring you to this glorious end. Now, some little joy enters into you by drops, but the time is coming when you shall enter into your Master's joy, dwelling in joy and rest forever. You are not so ready to come unto Christ as He is to come unto you.

Thirdly, walking in the good way, according to the very tenor of the gospel, will undoubtedly lead you into the new and living way (Hebrews 10:20), into Jesus Christ and communion with Him, who alone reconciles us to God and brings us to heaven itself. This way to eternal rest in the fruition of God's incarnation is indeed new. First, it is new in a comparative sense, regarding the clearer manifestation of the way to heaven under the gospel. Secondly, it is new because it does not grow old; it is now established, never to be altered. Moreover, it is a living way, for herein Jesus Christ is found, who is the fountain of life and lives forever to quicken the dying and refresh weary travellers. Those who walk in the good old way—by repentance, faith, and obedience—may, with boldness and liberty, expect thereby to enter into the holiest, into the place where God's holiness dwells, into the heavenly sanctuary. Jesus Christ came down from heaven to open this new and living way and to bring His people to glory.

## **Application**

Let us now consider how we may apply this truth in preparing for our journey toward Zion.

Behold, beloved brethren, and behold it with admiration—the rich advantage that poor sinners have by coming into this good way. It leads unto God Himself and to soul-refreshing rest in the enjoyment of Him. Whatever God is, whatever God has, whatever sweetness there is in God to satisfy a poor troubled soul, all this is to be expected if you come to God in His own way.

Therefore, doubtless, they are much their own enemies who remain distant from God, those who refuse to turn away from their old wicked ways, those haunts of sin in which they have walked all this while. They who reject these offers and disregard the admonitions God gives may one day find themselves filled with regret, mourning their own folly for not choosing the ways of God's fear. Consider the words of Wisdom and tremble: what if calamity comes upon you—who shall help you? God will laugh when your calamity comes and mock when destruction, desolation, and fear seize you. Why? Because you would have none of His counsel, you would have none of His reproof. You did not choose the fear of the Lord. I wish that each of you would now seriously examine your own hearts in the presence of God.

Is this true doctrine—that the good old way is the path that leads to the rest of my soul? Then what an enemy I have been to my own soul, enslaving myself to my lusts all this while, turning my back on God and His ways, refusing, despite every call—even from heaven itself—to be brought into this good way.

Many content themselves if they walk in ways that lead to their own profit and worldly pleasures. But what will be the outcome? Look to Judges 4:18-19. You will find that the other paths in which you have

walked are those that deceive, those that promise good welcome but betray in the end. They will deal with you just as Jael dealt with Sisera. She came out to him, saying in verse 18, "Turn in, my lord, turn in to me; fear not." Oh, how flattering is the language of the world's profits and pleasures, speaking to entice the young and to draw others into sin: "Turn in."

And when Sisera had entered, he said to her, "Give me, I pray thee, a little water to drink, for I am thirsty." She opened a bottle of milk, gave him drink, and covered him.

The world offers bottles of milk—sweet pleasures and satisfying contentments. Men may drink deeply from the breasts of the world and find much satisfaction for a time. But when you are wrapped warmly in worldly comforts and fall asleep in the arms of creaturely indulgence, what will be the outcome? See how Jael deals with Sisera in Judges 4:21. "She took a tent peg, grasped a hammer in her hand, went softly to him, drove the peg into his temple, and fastened it into the ground (for he was fast asleep and weary). So he died."

This is how worldly temptations treat many people. They will embrace you for a time, offer you milk, and seem to cover and protect you. But once you are lulled into a dead sleep, a nail is driven into your temples—and there is the end of a worldly-minded man. There is the end of a deluded sinner who refused to enter God's ways, choosing instead to gratify the devil and persist in soul-deceiving paths.

I would rather that there were many among you today with Joshua's heroic resolution. For a day of humiliation is a day to renew your resolutions and covenant with your God. May you say, in defiance of all bad examples, with holy singularity, "Whatever others may do, I and my house will serve the Lord." Joshua did not merely say, "I

must serve the Lord," as a terrified hypocrite would, nor did he say, "I ought to serve the Lord," as a dull hearer might occasionally acknowledge. He did not even say, "I would serve the Lord," as a lazy professor might claim, reluctant and uncertain. But Joshua declared, "Whatever others do—if they will go to hell, let them go for all I care—I am resolved, I and my house will serve the Lord."

Come, then, I beseech you, into this way of God—this good way. I would be glad if the Lord would so prosper my weak and unworthy endeavours as to persuade even one soul, who has thus far been a stranger to these ways, to come and begin to try them. Perhaps you have served three or four apprenticeships in wickedness and followed the devil and your deceitful heart for twenty or thirty years. Will you now heed the counsel of a minister of Jesus Christ? Will you come and try? Venture some effort, take some steps in this way of God. Perhaps you may find such sweetness and benefit in the path that, once you have tasted it, you would not for ten thousand worlds turn your back on it again.

It is a good day's work simply to set your face toward God and begin to seek this good way. Do not let worldly profit, personal advantage, or selfish ease distract you. Let this be your great concern. You have an immortal soul, capable of an eternal condition, destined either to triumph eternally in heaven or to suffer everlastingly in hell. You cannot say that God has not sent His word from heaven this day to call you—to stop, consider, and make provision for your soul.

Do not listen only to what worldly profit or secular advantage might say. Listen to what God says for the good of your soul. If you were now to make your last will and testament, some of you—who are wealthy—would allocate hundreds to a child, a portion to your wife, and legacies to friends. But what of your poor soul? You might

bequeath your body to the grave and assign money for charitable purposes, and in the end, declare that you give your soul to God. But what if God will not accept your soul? Then you are utterly and eternally undone.

This is a truth you should seriously consider. The first meeting between God and the soul must take place here on earth, in this good way. Those who delay repentance and presume upon a last-minute mercy run a desperate risk. They gamble their immortal souls and their hope of heaven on a last-minute plea for mercy—"Lord, have mercy upon me"—at the final hour. But do they know whether God will then accept them? Do they know if He will embrace and own their souls?

Oh, how tragic it is to think that we might offer God nothing but the dregs of our old age! After our souls have been steeped in profanity, covetousness, and ungodly pursuits for forty or fifty years, do we imagine that He will own our prayers and welcome us as securely into heaven as the most devout believer? Do not deceive yourself with such uncertainty. If you desire the right method of obtaining rest for your soul, come into God's way—and the sooner, the better. Whatever stands between you and eternal salvation, let it be set aside. Resolve first and foremost to seek the rest of your soul.

There is a story of a soldier named Marinus, who had the prospect of promotion but, being a Christian, was told that he must forsake his faith before he could receive his advancement. The temptation was strong, and he began to waver between his preferment and his Christianity. But by God's providence, a man named Theodistus came to him, led him into the temple, and placed before him a sword and the Gospel. The sword symbolised his worldly rank and



advancement; the Gospel, his eternal hope. Theodistus asked him, "Which will you choose—the Bible or the sword?"

After serious consideration, God gave Marinus the strength to choose rightly. He took the Gospel and let go of the sword, his preferment, his ambitions, and all worldly pomp, that he might save his soul.

Oh, that there were many in this congregation today who would rise to this heroic resolution! Whatever the competition may be—whether position, promotion, or office—place the Testament beside it and ask yourself:

If I would save my soul, must I let go of my worldly ambitions? Must I deny myself these fleeting gains rather than lose my share in the Gospel, which grants me a title to eternal happiness?

Let your soul be more dear and precious to you than all else. Let the enjoyment of God and the pursuit of communion with Him outweigh every other blessing in this world.

It was a rare and admirable disposition, worthy of imitation, in that great soldier Terentius. When he had the opportunity to ask whatever he wished from the Emperor, his only request was for a temple for the Orthodox Christians during the time when the Arian persecution was so prevalent. When the Emperor denied his petition on behalf of the Christians, Terentius refused to ask for anything for himself. Here was a man who valued religion and the good of souls above all else, regardless of what became of his own preferment and dignity.

Let us also say, "Let religion flourish. Let the gospel of Christ run and be glorified in all its power and purity, no matter what becomes of our personal advancement." Truly, if you knew the excellence,

sweetness, and goodness of walking in the ways of God, you would not be like lukewarm reconcilers and moderators, willing to accept reformation on any terms just to secure your own advantages or promote your own designs. There are many like Cassander, eager to play the role of mediator, attempting to arbitrate between God and man so long as they can further their own interests. Such men are willing to compromise in matters of religion to serve their carnal purposes.

But let us not be so foolish—penny wise and pound foolish—neglecting the call to enter into God's way. This is the only path that leads to the great advantage of soul-refreshing rest.

If walking in the good way is God's method for finding rest for the soul, then prove yourselves to be good travellers. Be certain that you are truly walking in this way. Do not merely take satisfaction in knowing the way, but rather, as it is written in Micah 4:5, "Everyone will walk in the name of his god; come, we will walk in the name of our God forever and ever." You must be walking, stirring, moving forward.

Many people, if they acquire a little knowledge and learn to speak with the language of the gospel, imagining they can discourse on religion, believe they have made great progress in it. But true wisdom is only as deep as its practice. Only those are true scholars in Christ's school who have learned to turn knowledge into action, to transform precepts into practice, to draw confidence from promises, and to take imitation from good examples.

Neither is it enough simply to come into the way when it is known and then stand still.

Many, once they have conformed to a religious form, being accounted as professors of faith, continue in the same track of duty year after year without growth. If you were to paint a portrait of them now and compare it to one taken seven years ago, you would see no increase in light, no growth in zeal, no more spiritual vigour than they had before. This is not walking in God's way.

What progress do you make? What increase do you add to your stock of graces? What fruit do you bring forth? The Apostle gives this counsel in 2 Peter 1:5: "Add to your faith, virtue," and so on.

First, indeed, if you would be good Christians, you must have faith—faith for the justification of your souls, faith for the warranting of your duties, and faith to carry you to Christ to receive strength to enable you in your obedience. But then, add to your faith virtue. There must be grace conforming the duty to the rule of God's Word; perform it in a gracious manner, with virtue.

Add to your virtue knowledge. You must rightly consider the circumstances of your actions, ensuring they are done in the right manner, at the right time, and in the right spirit. Add to your knowledge temperance. You must be sober and temperate in the exercise of your gifts and in the enjoyment of comforts. Add to your temperance patience. As you must have moderation in the use of comforts, so you must have endurance in your trials.

Add to your patience godliness. Do not cultivate a sullen, Stoic patience—be patient in affliction, yet impatient with sin. Therefore, to your patience, add godliness. And beyond this, add to your godliness brotherly kindness. Oh, love all the members of Jesus Christ! As 1 Peter 2:17 says, "Love the brotherhood," the corporation, the society of saints.

But must you have no love for those who are not yet saints? No, add to your brotherly kindness charity. You have a love of delight and fellowship with those who are saints, but you must also have a love of pity for those who are without. What if they scoff at you? Pray for them. What if they cannot afford you a kind word? Mourn over them. And if possible, through earnest prayers, strive to recover their sinking souls. This is what it means to be a true Christian—add to your brotherly love charity. Do not reserve all your love for the saints. While you rightly delight in the people of God and the household of faith, still, pity those who go astray. Be charitable toward them and seek every opportunity to win them over and bring them into the good way.

Christianity is sometimes called a way, and at other times, it is called a race. As it is written in Hebrews 12:1, "Let us run with patience the race that is set before us." A Christian should move with such speed and diligence that he is not merely walking but running—making swift progress and walking with purpose.

The Lord knows how many, even among those who would be accounted good Christians, remain spiritual dwarfs—still novices in the faith, children tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine. Many, who think their faith is sound and strong, are revealed to be but lifeless and hypocritical, for they do not grow. A picture, though it may be painted with great skill and look full of life, does not grow—it remains the same. So it is with many formal professors; they show, by their lack of spiritual progress, that they are but images, not living Christians. They do not grow in grace, they do not overcome their old corruptions, nor rise above their past passions, nor gain victory over common temptations.

If you would prove yourselves to be good travellers on the way to Zion, you must be walking. It would be an excellent practice, as we now have monthly sacraments and monthly days of humiliation, to draw spiritual pictures of yourselves—to compare your present condition with your former state. Observe how much more humble and broken-hearted you have become. See if you are more weaned from the world and how fruitful your walk has been after so many heavenly showers of grace have fallen upon you.

Thousands in England would be glad to receive even the crumbs of the gospel comforts you enjoy. How sad will be your account if, when the Lord calls you to answer for your many years of soul-quickenings liberties, it is found that neither the Sabbath, nor the sacraments, nor days of humiliation, nor days of thanksgiving have engaged your hearts to walk in this good way.

May the Lord persuade your hearts that, in holy revenge against your former negligence, you might now mend your pace and double your diligence in Zion's way. Yes, and more than that—may you not only quicken your own souls but also encourage one another. As it is written in Jeremiah 50:5, "Come, and let us join ourselves to the Lord in a perpetual covenant that shall not be forgotten." Let us strive, as those who desire to dwell in heaven together, to walk hand in hand, making constant progress in this good way.

## Questions and Answers

**Question.** Is there but one good way to soul-refreshing rest? Must all travellers towards Zion come into the very same way?

**Answer.** Without doubt, Jesus Christ is the one way, as He Himself declares in John 14:6. By His blood, that one new and living way has

been opened (Hebrews 10:20). There is but one way of repentance for our sins, one way of faith in God's promises, and one way of obedience to His commands, in which all Christians should walk. This is the only path that leads to communion with Jesus Christ and, through Him, to heavenly rest.

It concerns all Christians, of every rank and condition, to come into this one way and to walk in it with unity of heart. In itself, this is a most desirable mercy, that we might enjoy the blessed fulfilment of the promise in its full extent, as spoken in Jeremiah 32:39: *"I will give them one heart and one way."* Since this is part of God's covenant, it should ever be before our eyes, the subject of our prayers, and the object of our earnest endeavours.

The blessed union of purity and unity, as described in Zephaniah 3:9, was a sign that God was restoring His people: *"Then I will purify the lips of the peoples, that all of them may call on the name of the Lord and serve Him shoulder to shoulder."* In the Hebrew, it reads *a pure lip and one shoulder*. How beautiful it is to see the people of God having a pure tongue in worship and a united shoulder in doing His work.

This unity greatly advanced the rebuilding of the temple after the exile, when *"the people gathered themselves together as one man to Jerusalem"* (Ezra 3:1). Likewise, it was the glory of the early Church that there was such harmony of spirit among the Christians of that time (Acts 2:1).

A learned divine has observed, from 1 Kings 6:7—where it is recorded that while the temple was being built, *"neither hammer, nor axe, nor any tool of iron was heard in the house"*—that we ought to learn, in Church matters and religious affairs, to manage all things with peace and unity. There should be no noise of contentions and

schisms, as he puts it. Oh, that God would grant us this mercy, that in His house we might all think and speak the same thing!

But what a blemish it was to the Church of Corinth that, though it ought to have preserved unity within itself, it broke into factions and divisions. Some claimed to follow Paul, others Apollos, others Cephas (1 Corinthians 1:12). Yet Paul urges them with strong reasoning in verse 13: *"Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?"* How unseemly, then, are such divisions among believers!

Paul was most serious and affectionate in his warning in Romans 16:17-18: *"I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which you have learned, and avoid them. For they serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple."*

Church divisions weaken friends and strengthen enemies. They bring such dishonour to religion that they discourage those who might otherwise be drawn to the faith. Some who are on the threshold of embracing Christianity are driven away, while others, seeing the many factions and divisions, resolve to follow no religion at all.

It is worth rivers of tears if only we could obtain this mercy from God—that these differences among us might be reconciled, and that all in London who inquire after the good way might, at last, walk together in the same path.

**Question.** Though unity joined with purity is highly desirable, what if there were a toleration of diverse ways in a church or a kingdom? Why not?

**Answer.** First, we must wisely distinguish between opinions and practices. It cannot be expected that all good men will ever hold the same opinion on every matter. Not all truths are of equal importance or concern to us, and there are varying degrees of necessity in religious matters, allowing for differences of opinion in some areas.

1. Some truths are always and absolutely necessary, as they are essential means and causes of salvation. Such is the case with faith in the Trinity.
2. Other truths are necessary as requisite conditions, without which a person cannot be saved. This includes conversion from sin to God.
3. Some truths are necessary only in that they are commanded by God or can be rightly deduced from His Word. These must be obeyed according to the knowledge a person has or may attain. Among these, particularly those of the lowest degree—not being fundamental—godly and learned divines may hold differing opinions.

Additionally, these opinions may either be kept private or made public. When they are not publicly taught or promoted in a way that disturbs others, much indulgence may be shown to dissenting brethren who peaceably hold their own views. Just as certain truths allow for some latitude, so also do some practices that arise from those truths. In both, differences may sometimes be tolerated.

It has been observed that Paul and Barnabas disagreed, yet both preached the gospel. Cyprian and Cornelius differed in judgment, yet both were pillars of the Christian faith. Chrysostom and Epiphanius had disputes, yet both stood as enemies to the Arians.



However, if men insist on openly declaring and propagating their own ideas—often being consumed with them and eager to be heard—thus unsettling and confusing others, the situation changes. This makes them less capable of being tolerated, particularly when their opinions lead to practices that undermine the power of godliness or the peace of the church. Christ rebuked the church of Pergamos for tolerating such individuals, as recorded in Revelation 2:14. He condemned them for holding doctrines that placed stumbling blocks before others.

**Question.** May magistrates use compulsion to draw people into the one good way?

**Answer.** Most able, godly, and sober divines conclude that, in some cases, power may lawfully and appropriately be employed in matters of religion.

1. Authority must endeavour to prevent the blaspheming of true religion and suppress the spread of false religion. Consider Deuteronomy 13—those who enticed others to idolatry were to be stoned to death, and that, doubtless, in a judicial manner.
2. Though men cannot be compelled to profess the true faith, authority may lawfully require them to attend upon the means of knowing God and the good way that leads to Him.

Consider the example of zealous Josiah in 2 Chronicles 34:33. If you cannot persuade men to be good Protestants, yet strive to prevent them from acting in accordance with Popery. Bring them into the light of the Sun of Righteousness, and perhaps they will learn to abhor the darkness of Popery.

Now, especially when we have so solemnly covenanted for the extirpation of Popery, let it be far from any to argue for its toleration or to embrace principles that would naturally lead to such a concession.

**Question.** What then shall we do with all those in England who follow different ways, both in regard to their opinions and their practices?

**Answer.** It should humble us to the dust and melt us into tears that so many distractions trouble the Church because of our divisions. One extreme has bred another. Many, desiring to run far from Popery and Prelacy—which formerly oppressed their spirits—have, before they realised it, wandered into the very quarters of the Arminians and Socinians. They have joined with them in undermining civil magistracy, questioning the calling and power of the ministry, weakening the sacraments, and even disputing the immortality of the soul.

Witness, for example, a dangerous book recently written, which argues for the mortality of the soul—a doctrine that, if embraced, would open the floodgates of profaneness. Poor souls are thus in danger of losing the good way.

Yet how they burden themselves and discourage others, as though the Reformers in Parliament and the Assembly were acting like the horns in Zechariah 1:21, scattering Judah and Jerusalem. They utter such mournful expressions: *"We shall not be tolerated. We must be banished. The persecution is likely to be as severe as under the Prelates!"* And so they further inflame the present troubles.

I will briefly suggest two considerations to help resolve this great difficulty, which troubles so many.

First, before we speak or think of tolerating or banishing, let both ministers and people labour to bring back into the good way those who have gone astray in error. Too many weary themselves and others with speculations about what shall become of people who follow this or that way. Rather, let our most serious thoughts be devoted to recovering those who have been misled.

James 5:19-20 tells us that to turn a sinner from the error of his way is a high act of mercy. *"He shall save a soul from death and shall cover a multitude of sins."* Do all you can to save them, as Jude directs in verses 22-23.

Secondly, let us not only seek to bring some out of their gross errors into the good way, but also work towards reconciling lesser differences among those who already walk in it. Brethren who hope to spend eternity in heaven together should strive to walk peaceably and lovingly in this good way.

Consider what latitude in opinion and practice the Scriptures allow—no good Christian will desire more. The apostles commanded some things as necessary, commended and advised other things as expedient, and left certain matters indifferent, without any violation of the Church's liberty. *"Let every one of us please his neighbour for his good to edification"* (Romans 15:2).

Oh, that we might all strive to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace! Paul urges this upon us with seven strong reasons in three short verses (Ephesians 4:4-6), and he seeks to engage us in this duty with the most tender and affectionate expressions in Philippians 2:1-2:

*"If there be any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies, fulfil ye my joy,*

*that ye be like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind."*

The work of bringing some into the good way, leading them to soul-refreshing rest, and resolving differences among those who already walk in it will answer this question far better than toleration, which some desire, or banishment, which others fear.

Give me leave, Right Honourable and beloved, to urge upon you the necessity of using your wisdom and zeal, your influence and authority, to advance this soul-refreshing work. Do not be satisfied merely that God has brought you into the good way. It is indeed an admirable mercy, worthy of everlasting praise, that when your faces were turned towards the devil and hell, He has turned so many of them towards Christ and heaven. I trust you love the souls of your children, friends, servants, and people so well that you will be easily persuaded to exert yourselves earnestly in bringing those who still go astray—through ignorance, profanity, or carelessness—into the good way, so that they too may find rest therein.

It will stand as an eternal record of honour for this renowned city, all that you have done since these public troubles began—for the good of the Church and the welfare of the State. You have given much to quench the sparks before they could break out into devouring flames. And I do not doubt that, whenever the chronicles of these times shall be written, the zeal, fidelity, self-denial, courage, and diligence of this famous city will fill entire pages with your just and due commendation. Not only families, but houses of Parliament; not only counties, but whole kingdoms, are aware of your forwardness and daily bless God for it.

Well then, give me leave now, as a poor minister of Jesus Christ, to press one thing more upon you—that you would erect some further

monument proportionate to all you have already done, something worthy of this religious and renowned city. That you would lay the groundwork for the recovery of poor souls who have gone astray, and for bringing them into the good way that leads to eternal rest. I count it my privilege to have the opportunity to speak in such an assembly upon such an argument.

We must take due notice of the great expense and effort this past year in maintaining the four hospitals of this city and in caring for the large number of poor children and others. I need not recount every particular, for they have been read again and again to your honour. Many whose wounds have been healed by you are blessing God for you. Many hungry souls whom you have fed are magnifying His name. And I hope that many children are learning to bless the name of the Lord, who has put it into your hearts to do so much good for them. I am confident that you will hear of this with great comfort on the Day of Judgment.

Yet, for all that has been done, there remains the need for further care in guiding souls into the good way that leads to eternal rest. To this end, let me humbly offer a few suggestions.

First, lay the foundation for the education of youth in the knowledge of this good way and for the multiplication of faithful guides who will both discover and lead others into it. It was one of Luther's great pieces of counsel that, if ever there was to be a lasting reformation, great attention must be given to the education of children. You clothe their bodies and feed them, which is mercifully done and a worthy fruit of the gospel. Such charity is truly Christian. But I beseech you, take care also for their precious souls. Acquaint them early with God's ways.

And you, who govern this famous city, take particular care of your city schools. Ensure that the principles of religion, as well as learning, are laid, sown, and instilled among these young generations. In this way, you will truly establish a foundation for bringing their souls into the good way.

Furthermore, provide that there may be more faithful guides to direct them in this path. Such an endeavour would be most worthy of a city like this. Let us not be ashamed to learn from the Jesuits what may rightly be learned from them. They are most diligent in this work, going about to observe which youths are most promising—who may become strong disputants, who may excel in state affairs, and who may prove eloquent orators. They then select a number of these and, at public expense, train them so that their gifts and abilities may be developed to the greatest advantage for themselves and for the commonwealth.

I do not doubt that this city might honour God and itself by following such a course. In all your hospitals and schools, let those who are capable observe and discern the proper talents, dispositions, and abilities of young men. Where there are any of special gifts—who have not only the seeds of piety but also singular natural endowments—let them be nurtured.

And though I would be loath to burden this already generous city with further financial obligations beyond the vast charges you have already undertaken, yet I earnestly wish that some public funds could be raised in the most suitable manner. These could be used to support such gifted youths, consecrating them to the study of learning. Let them be sent to the universities so that, in their time, they may become faithful guides in this good way, leading many souls to eternal rest.

God has been pleased already to shine upon us in the hopeful beginning of the reformation of universities. Every one of us, in our own way and place, is called to further that work, in which we are all, more or less, especially concerned. This will be most successfully accomplished by sending such persons there as are most capable of improvement—those who will not, for lack of ability, be discouraged from pursuing the studies required of them. Otherwise, lacking proper engagement in their studies, they may fall into such vicious courses that they come to regret the day they ever entered.

The rule by which parents have formerly decided to make their children scholars has often been based on their own background—they themselves may have been scholars, and therefore assume that their sons, regardless of aptitude, must also become so. Others have done so for less noble reasons. Gentlemen, if they have many children, often send the youngest into the path of scholarship more as a convenience than a true calling, treating it as a means to secure a worldly subsistence rather than a way to serve the Church and commonwealth.

What I commend to your wisdom, in the matter of public education, is to be guided by a different consideration—namely, the natural ability and aptitude of the child. If those with promising talents and capacities are encouraged and promoted in learning, they may, by God's blessing, become able guides to bring others into the good way.

Secondly, look to the state of religion in your families. Just as schools serve as a preparation for universities, so too do families serve as the foundation for schools. The reformation of one will not be effective without the reformation of the other. And both are ultimately subordinate to the Church.

To this end, let masters and parents—oh, that husbands and wives would so love each other's souls as to quicken and help one another forward in this good way!—let them, I say, catechise their children and servants, instructing them in the principles of religion. This, doubtless, is the surest way to make them fit to be useful members of the Church.

You expect the minister to do everything, but the work will never be fully accomplished unless there is harmony between the different means of grace. When a minister preaches, catechises, and instructs in public, and when a father, upon returning home, engages privately with his children—calling them to account for their understanding of the sermon and the spiritual nourishment they have received—then the harmony of these efforts will lay an even better foundation for recovering those who go astray.

It is a most unhappy thing when a master and mistress come to church themselves, while their servants, in the meantime, are wandering through taverns and alehouses, loitering about in some corner of the suburbs. Worse yet, many never even question them at the end of the day as to where they have been or what they have learned from the sermon preached. What spiritual sustenance—what manna—have they gathered that day? If you truly desire to lead your servants' souls into rest, if you would have them walk in this good way, then love them enough to prepare them with religious instruction.

Do not deal with your servants as you do with your horses—working them until their strength and spirits are spent, only to cast them aside when they have served their purpose. What becomes of their souls and eternal condition, many of you care very little. Yet you should consider that you are as much entrusted with their souls as



they are with your estates. Perhaps some of your servants' sins will stand upon your account—some may even now be in the torments of hell for sins they learned from you or that you encouraged in them.

Oh, be entreated to watch over your families. Too many of them resemble the devil's chapels rather than houses devoted to God. Instead, give diligence that they may be as little churches, consecrated to the service of the great God. How sweet will that eternal rest be, if, after your prayers and the diligent use of all good means, your children are found to be God's children, your servants His servants, all walking in the good way—so that parents and children, masters and servants, may dwell together eternally in heaven?

Thirdly, encourage your faithful ministers, not only in preaching but also in short catechising and brief expounding of the Scriptures. Such exercises might prove a very effective method for leading many into the good way. Though able ministers strive to preach plainly, ordinary hearers are not always able at first to grasp the full discourse of a sermon unless they are first prepared by learning the fundamental principles of Christianity. They must be taught, line upon line, precept upon precept, in a simple and familiar manner.

If the Lord is pleased to bless us with this fruit of reformation—where the reading of long liturgies is replaced by the brief and practical expounding of Scripture in public assemblies—then by means of short explanations to clarify difficult passages and pressing home the most relevant truths to the hearers, many might be drawn to the good way and others greatly edified in it. Many parts of England have already tasted the sweetness of this exchange.

I know no place better suited to receive this blessing than this city, where you have so many able teachers who rightly divide the Word of

truth. Why should you not have such morning exercises in London as have recently been set up in your neighbouring city? Here, your learned scribes might open their treasures, bringing forth things both new and old, to enrich your souls. By this means, you might redeem much precious time from the hands of sleep and slothfulness. Without causing any great interruption to your daily employments, you could enjoy a good Gospel breakfast to nourish your hearts in the morning.

You would conduct your business more profitably throughout the day if you first engaged in trade with Christ. Indeed, by receiving the sincere milk of God's Word drop by drop from your soul-nurses, you would be better prepared for stronger spiritual nourishment and enabled to walk more actively in the good way.

Fourthly, do not forget to remove stumbling blocks from the good way. If you truly desire to bring souls into this path, then let religion be represented as something lovely and beautiful, that it may be commended to the hearts and consciences of those among whom you live. This alone might win many to the good way.

People judge religion by what they observe. You may spend many hours in your closet in prayer, yet they will not see it. You may devote many days to public fasting, yet they will not immediately perceive its effect. But if your religion makes you just, merciful, kind to your neighbours, and faithful in your relationships—whether as landlords, employers, or friends—then all who deal with you will taste the fruit of your faith.

On the other hand, if a man hears many sermons and a lord or lady frequently attends days of fasting, yet remains as hard-hearted, proud, censorious, and vain as before, then they cast a stumbling block in the path of religion.

Oh, that this might be the true adornment of every Christian's faith! The more you profess the Gospel, the more you should strive to walk with precision and integrity, demonstrating a life consistent with its teaching. It is a great scandal to the Gospel when a man who claims to be godly is not a good husband to his wife, or when a woman professing faith is not a good wife to her husband. Likewise, when a good man is called to leadership and fails to govern justly, or when a Christian servant does not fulfil his duty faithfully, it brings reproach upon the name of Christ.

Every role in life has its own corresponding graces—there are virtues for marriage, a spirit for leadership, and a ministerial heart for those who preach. I commend this to you, that as you seek to honour religion and bring it into good repute, you would remove every stumbling block from the way. Strive to express such a gracious and upright demeanour as befits your position and calling.

In Colossians 3:12-13, the Apostle links together a beautiful chain of graces: "*Put on, as the elect of God, bowels of mercy.*" It would be a most excellent thing for all good Christians to have a merciful disposition. Oh, pity the wounded! Pity the blind souls who wander astray!

As you are called to have tender compassion, so also let kindness be added to it. Do not merely pity others—show them kindness by your actions. Yet, if you are able to do good to them, do not allow pride to creep in; therefore, add *humbleness of mind*. If you are kind, and yet they are ungrateful, add *meekness*. And what if they are even injurious toward you? Then *long-suffering* must be added to your patience.

Here is true Christianity: to have mercy, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. To be merciful without boasting of it, to be

kind without pride, to endure ingratitude with meekness, and to suffer injury with long-suffering.

And do not forget the rest: *"Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any, even as Christ forgave you."* You may say you will forbear for a time, but though you forgive, you will not forget—you will still watch for an opportunity to retaliate. But Christ calls you not only to forbear but also to forgive.

Live in such a way that it may be said of your household: *"Here dwells a people who are renowned for their religion, who are just, merciful, meek, patient, and not rash, censorious, or reckless."*

Surely this will do much to draw poor souls into the good way.

Fifthly, there is another matter that must not be forgotten—improve your power. You who are magistrates and governors in families, and others in positions of authority, use your influence to uphold the honour of the Lord's Day, our Christian Sabbath.

Blessed be God, who has put it into the hearts of the great counsellors in the High Court of Parliament to set forth an ordinance for the strict and solemn observance of the Lord's Day. I trust you will act upon it. Indeed, if ever you would maintain religion in a place, you must maintain the Lord's Day and the holy and reverent observance of it.

God has given special emphasis to this commandment, saying, *"Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy"* (Exodus 20:8). He requires all His commandments to be remembered, no doubt, but He knows how prone we are to forget this one in particular. It is of great consequence that it be kept in mind.

It is a day of blessing and sanctification. If you desire the hearts of your people to be sanctified, then train them to sanctify God's Day and to attend upon His ordinances. Perhaps, in doing so, He may drop the grace of sanctification into their souls.

Let the fear of God and a conscientious observance of this sacred ordinance set all the wheels of authority in motion so that the Lord's Day may be more carefully upheld. Do not permit, as so many governors do, the buying and selling, the sporting and playing on that day, which hardens so many in profane and ungodly ways. If you uphold the honour of the Sabbath, you will find the comfort of it. Religion will make visible progress, for God delights to manifest Himself to His people on that day.

Therefore, do what you can to engage others in attending public worship on the Lord's Day. Without doubt, many souls may be brought into the good way if this practice is wisely observed.

Lastly, remember your solemn covenant, by which you are bound to personal and public reformation—reformation that would lead many into the way that brings rest. We are happily brought under the bond of this covenant, and through it, the three kingdoms have been united among themselves and to their God.

Oh, be as careful to keep it as you were cheerful in taking it. Rest is the precious fruit of the covenant, as recorded in 2 Chronicles 15:15: *"They took the covenant cheerfully, and God gave them rest."*

Let us not only take it but also keep it and seek to engage others in it as well. Let us all be true covenanters, walking in the good way of obedience to God, so that this covenant may be to us a covenant of peace and a covenant of rest—a covenant of rest to our souls, a

covenant of rest to the Church, a covenant of rest to the kingdom, and indeed to all the three kingdoms that are united in it.

I should now come to the third observation, drawn from verses 18 and 19, which form the final section of the text—the woeful fruit of their wretched self-will. *“We will not,”* say they. *“We will not hearken.”*

But what does God say? He calls upon the nations, He calls upon the whole earth to take notice of what He will do against them: *“Behold, I will bring evil upon this people, even the fruit of their own thoughts, because they have not hearkened unto my words, nor to my law, but have rejected it.”*

The wilful rejection of God’s gracious admonitions is a most provoking sin, one that delivers a people into the hands of heavy judgments.

The greater the manifestation of God in any admonition or in any of His dealings with us, the more glorious His works appear. Likewise, the more our own self-will is exalted in our conduct, the more odious and abominable it is in the sight of God.

When our proud spirits rise to such a height of defiance against Him, as they did here, the Lord, seeing Himself so grievously dishonoured, is compelled to vindicate His glory by bringing severe judgment upon them.

God has three divine prerogatives which He will not surrender:

1. **Judgment belongs to Him**—He does not permit us to judge one another.

**2. Vengeance belongs to Him**—He does not allow us to avenge ourselves.

**3. Glory belongs to Him**—He will not share it with another.

Whenever anyone, in pride, attempts to usurp these royal prerogatives, God will make it evident that He “*resists the proud*” by bringing some great calamity upon them, as seen in Exodus 18:11.

One final word, and it is most fitting for this day. This truth justifies God in all the judgments and calamities that now lie upon sinful England. A day of humiliation should be a day of self-abasement and a day of justifying our God. When we consider how God's gracious admonitions have been slighted, how unworthily they have been received in England, and how ill we have repaid His gracious offers and invitations, we may all go home mourning. We may lament the sorrowful consequences of our own wretched behaviour, now weighing heavily upon us. Yet, through it all, we must acknowledge this: *The Lord is most righteous*.

It is only by God's mercy that England has not already been brought to the same ruin as Ireland. How many gracious and loving admonitions have been rejected, and that with such high affronts! When God has sent His prophets to us, when He has called upon us, when He has sent us merciful ambassadors, when He has spoken from heaven through His judgments—still we have repeatedly given Him a defiant refusal. Again and again, we have answered Him, “*We will not.*”

It seems to me that if God were to deal with us as we deserve, England might well be in the same condition as Jerusalem in the days of its destruction. We might even weep over poor England as our Saviour wept over that city, saying: “*Because they were not mindful of the day of their visitation, and did not consider the*

*things that belonged to their peace, now they are hidden from their eyes. Behold, your house shall be left unto you desolate.”*

It is a miracle of patience and goodness that God has borne with us so long, despite the great affronts He has endured. His own name, His dear Son, His blessed Spirit, His covenant, the ministers of His covenant, the seals of His covenant—these have all been dishonoured and despised in England. And yet, despite our disregard for the day of our visitation, our cities and our country have not yet been utterly laid waste.

Consider Ezekiel 24:13-14: *“In your filthiness is lewdness. Because I have purged you and you were not purged, you shall not be purged from your filthiness anymore, until I have caused my fury to rest upon you.”*

How this should grieve our hearts! Oh, if this were to be the fate of sinful England—that because of its continued wickedness and refusal to be purified, God should finally reject it! God has placed us in the furnace to see if we would let go of our dross, but the Lord knows we have not been purged.

What if God were to cast England away, to give us up to Popery and slavery, and to hand us over as prey to bloodthirsty men? What if He were to cause His fury to rest upon us? Even then, we must justify Him in these fearful displays of His displeasure. For we have stubbornly, out of proud and rebellious self-will, refused to submit to Him, to humble ourselves before Him, and to walk in His good way when He has called us to it.

This city has been an ark for this poor kingdom, and many of God’s faithful servants have found shelter within it. You have sent out—indeed, it is true—you have sent out your doves, regiment after



regiment, messenger after messenger. And though God has brought them back again with songs of preservation, victory, and deliverance, yet still they have not brought back the olive branch of peace. We have not yet heard that welcome news.

It seems we may take up the mournful cry of Psalm 74:9: *“We see not our signs; there is no more any prophet; neither is there among us any that knows how long.”*

It would perplex even the wisest prophets in England to tell us when these unnatural conflicts will cease, when God will recall the commission He has given to the sword, and when the execution of His judgments will be complete. Still, there are abroad many Nimrods—sons of violence—who drive forward with fury, pursuing cruelty as if it were a noble cause. They follow after the barbarity of Hannibal, who, when he saw a pit filled with human blood, cried out, *“Oh, what a beautiful sight!”*

May the Lord, if it be His will, restrain those who are so barbarously cruel. Yet, however much the malice and fury of men may rage, we must still justify God in all that comes to pass.

And let us begin with ourselves. Let us lay our hands upon our own hearts and confess: *O my own self-will, my rebellion against my God, my resistance to the motions of His Spirit, my neglect of His gracious invitations! I have gathered sticks to kindle this fire.*

The fire in the North, the fire in the West, and the fires that have blazed across various parts of the kingdom—there is not a man or woman here present who has not, in some way, contributed fuel to those fires through their own self-will.

Oh, let us now abase and humble ourselves, honouring our God by justifying Him. Let us accept the punishment of our iniquities, that the Lord may remember His covenant and have mercy upon the land.

It is true, the Lord has shown us various dispensations. He has called upon us, pleaded with us, and earnestly urged England to walk in the good way.

At times, He has given us medicine—many potions. We have endured much strong physic; He has made us sick at heart, and there have been many great shakings. He has not only given us potent draughts, but He has also drawn blood. He has opened many veins, and we have lost noble blood—precious blood—the blood of our gentry, of our city, and of our country.

Yet, as God has given us physic and has bled us, so also has He given us cordials. We have seen good success, as witnessed in our solemn days of thanksgiving. God has visibly owned His cause in times of need. Though we are not yet ripe for mercy, still He will not allow us to be utterly destroyed. He grants us victories—such victories as will at least preserve us.

Oh, let us take heed that we do not provoke our God to withdraw His lovingkindness from us. If He should draw more blood, so that both city and country alike should swim in it, what a fearful judgment that would be! Let us rather stir up ourselves, and one another, that we might enter into such deep humiliation and reformation this day—each for himself in particular, while also begging the same mercy for all the congregations of England—that we may see the Lord turning His gracious hand upon us.

May He fulfil His promise, as declared in Isaiah 1:25-27:

*"I will turn my hand upon thee, and purely purge away all thy dross, and take away all thy tin. And I will restore thy judges as at the first, and thy counsellors as at the beginning. Afterward, thou shalt be called the City of Righteousness, the Faithful City. Zion shall be redeemed with judgment, and her converts with righteousness."*

Would this not be worth rivers of tears? Would it not be worth many more days of humiliation and seeking our God?

Oh, that the Lord would be merciful to this country, merciful to our armies, merciful to our counsellors, and merciful to this city! That He would so purge us that it might be a sign of our redemption—that this great city of London might become a *City of Righteousness*, a *Faithful City*!

If it were made righteous and faithful, then surely it would also be a *City of Peace*—both within itself and toward all who seek peace with her. Then would she be a terror to the enemies of the Church and their adherents, but a friend and support to all who love the truth as it is in Jesus.

And to this, I trust, you will all say, *Amen*.

**FINIS.**

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## MONERGISM BOOKS

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