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Sermon preached at Scaynes Hill by Mr J W Walder on Lord's Day Afternoon Sept. 4th 1977

"For the commandment is a lamp; and the law is light; and reproofs of instruction are the way of life." Proverbs 6:23

I desire to continue where we left off this morning in considering these wonderful and instructive words as they apply particularly to the anxious soul who desires to know the way to eternal life, and would have constant revelations and assurances that they are in the right and proper way which will eventually lead them to the celestial city. The law in our text is the law of Christ, and the law of liberty in all the gracious direction and instruction with regard to Jesus Christ, who is the way to God, and the way to eternal life.

We noticed our great need of instruction on account of the total ignorance and absolute darkness of our hearts through the Adam fall, and the impossibility of any perception and understanding of anything spiritual, until quickened by the Spirit, for the natural man cannot understand nor receive the things of the Spirit because they are spiritually discerned. Now immediately the Holy Spirit imparts His anointing, which teaches all things, and instructs a soul through His power and teaching to take a low place under a sensible realisation of his ignorance, and produces a longing to be shown the way, and to be taught the truth, then there will be the reproofs of instruction given which will be the way of life to him.

I want to look first at the initial experience of those whom God has appointed to eternal life, and will instruct in the way of life by the various portions of the Word which have proved to be a word of instruction and reproof to God's people on many occasions. I will just notice first that which was used as a word of instruction and reproof to Saul of Tarsus. You see, we have no doubt but that he was sure and absolutely certain that he was in the right way when he was not. And it was the greatest mercy he ever knew in his life that the Lord opened his eyes and showed him he was wrong. I am sure he never ceased to be thankful for it. He being a Pharisee, thought he would get to heaven by his own works. It was the greatest mercy that the Lord reproofed him by His word, spoken with power and influence into his heart. It was the way of life to him. He showed him the right way. As he went down to Damascus, the Lord met with him, and there was a great light from heaven, above the light of the sun, and it not only shone about him, but shone into his heart. "Saul; Saul, why persecutest thou Me?" What a convincing word it was! Saul thought he was doing God service, but all the time he was persecuting, and kicking against the pricks, and did not know it. "Why persecutest thou Me?" It showed him where he was, where he was proceeding, and gave him effectual reproof. It was the reproof of a father. "My son, keep thy father's commandment, and forsake not the law of thy mother. Bind them continually upon thine heart, and tie them about thy neck." It was the apostle's mercy that he had this initial experience of his soul in the reproofs of instruction. I do not wish to stay too long here, but to notice a few other parts of the Word of God to the same end and effect.

Notice the words in the teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ: "Except your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye cannot enter the kingdom." This is sound instruction. That is a fact. It is the truth, and in this is instruction – that is, that it is utterly impossible for any to enter into the kingdom in that way; that we must have a righteousness above the righteousness of

the Pharisees. This teaching is also a reproof for all self-righteousness, fleshly pride and self conceit. It reproves all that are in the broad way to destruction – for such it is. In my own case, that word was used with power, influence, and reproof to my heart in my early youth. I thought I was doing well, but that knocked the bottom out of all my religion, and brought me before God as guilty, helpless, and undone – and I have not regretted it. My friends, it is a mercy to be instructed and reproved. For whom the Lord loveth He correcteth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth." Well, what a mercy, then, if we have some evidence that we are not bastards that escape these rods, but are made the son who is instructed and receives the reproofs of instruction.

Then again, another word of the Lord Jesus is instruction and reproof: "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you." Which instruction is the way of life, is it not? "Seek ye first." Well, such a word the Holy Spirit may influence in the heart to show and direct in the way of life; for may we not safely conclude that those in the broad way are left to seek things satisfying to the natural mind and to the flesh? They can rise no higher, and can seek nothing better.

That was a dreadful word spoken to the man whose goods increased. He said: "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years, eat, drink, and be merry." Yes, make the most of this life. But you see, the Lord said to him: "Thou fool, this night shall thy soul be required of thee: then whose shall those things be?" "What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" It is the reproof of instruction. It is good instruction, and blessed reproof, and it is that which is the way of life, pointing it out, bringing that one who is the subject of instruction and reproof to walk in the way of life. That is the narrow way, through the strait gate into the way which leads to the celestial city.

Again, we may receive reproof in regard to our over carefulness, surfeiting, and drunkenness with the cares of this life, and need instruction to be found in Mary's occupation, sitting at the feet of Jesus. The teaching of the Holy Spirit is that which alone can direct, and point out the right path in bringing the feet of our souls to that place which the Lord has promised to His people. And all instruction has reproof in it. The teaching will reprove for pride, self-conceit, carnality, and vanity, for self righteousness, and all the lusts and wanderings of nature. Well, it is those who receive reproofs of instruction, in whose hearts are the ways of life.

I want to come now to the subsequent experience of the children of God, those (shall I say) who have found the way, as the hymn-writer expresses it:

*This is the way I long have sought,
And mourned because I found it not;
Till late I heard my Saviour say,
'Come hither, soul, I AM THE WAY.'*

The soul has responded in the words of the hymn-writer:

*Lo! glad I come; and Thou, blest Lamb,
Shalt take me to Thee as I am;
Nothing but sin I Thee can give;
Nothing but love shall I receive.*

This is the way, and such a soul can declare with Cennick, as well as others, the way they have found.

*Then will I tell to sinners round,
What a dear Saviour I have found;
I'll point to Thy redeeming blood,
And say, 'Behold the way to God.'*

This soul has found the way, has received the reproofs of instruction, the feet have been set in the way of life, and now there remains the continuation of the earthly pilgrimage in the way which leads to eternal life. But on account of the treachery and deceitfulness of the heart, how many wanderings there may be, how often they turn into By-path Meadow, how often they turn aside from the simplicity of the gospel, the sweet law of liberty, as the Galatians did. The apostle gave them the reproofs of instruction. He said: "Ye did run well; who did hinder you that ye should not obey the truth?" Ye Galatians, who have known the liberty of the gospel, will ye turn again to the weak and beggarly elements? What potent arguments the apostle uses! If we be saved by faith, and are children of promise, why turn again to the weak and beggarly elements? Why look to the law and come again to be in bondage to it? It is necessary and needful for such a character to be continually the subject of instruction that they may be in the way of life.

The word in my mind, in connection with this is what the apostle writes to one of the churches: "As ye have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in Him." Let us look at that a little. Have we received Him? We are on either one side or the other of the Word; we have either rejected, or else we have received; either doubt Him, or believe Him. We cannot half believe; it is either one or the other. "He came unto His own, and His own received Him not. But as many as received Him, to them gave He power (right or privilege) to become the sons of God."

Let us look at the receiving, and then the walking. My friends, if we have received Him at all, we have received Him into our heart in the love of Him, as being exceedingly desirable and precious to us, as our only hope, our only peace, our only salvation, our only righteousness. Christ has been made precious to us in the want of Him, through the revelation of the Spirit. There have been earnest desires after Him first, and then we have received Him. We have embraced Him as our own in love, and in faith, taking Him up in the arms of faith and love, just as Simeon did, who picked up the babe Jesus, and saw in Him his salvation, the Christ of God, the Saviour of sinners. He embraced Him and said: "Mine eyes have seen Thy salvation." The effect was evidently the fear of death removed, sins forgiven, and peace with God, when he saw in Christ the way to everlasting life and bliss. He embraced Him in the arms of love and faith. He also received Him into a broken heart. This is so, I am sure, of that. No person has ever seen the Lord Jesus Christ the Saviour but he has received Him into a broken and contrite heart. Sinners, sensible sinners, broken hearted over their sins, have received Him as the only Saviour of one who was lost, ruined, and undeserving. That is how they receive Him. As a sinner they receive Him as a Saviour, their only hope for heaven.

It says, "So" – after the same manner. Reproof of instruction is so constantly needed that we may so walk in Him, continually, in the same way. Do not be deceived into thinking you will ever be any different or better than you are. There is not anything you can do to influence Him toward you, nor can you come to Him with anything in your hand. The way to proceed is the same as at the commencement. The hymn says this about the time when Jesus is received in love:

*What conjugal truth didst thou vow?
With Him was there anything mixed?
Then what wouldst thou mix with Him now?*

And what would **you** mix with Him now? In that day He was all in all, no divided heart, no divided trust, but a simple falling into His arms and casting the soul upon Him for eternity. That is the way to walk. "Reproofs of instruction are the ways of life."

Now let me ask a question of any who hope and trust they are among true believers. My friends, what are you or I at this moment trusting in for God's favour? If it is any other than Christ and His merit, we need to be reprov'd and instructed. If we are leaning on anyone else, or trusting in anything else than His blood and righteousness, we need instruction, we need reproof, for that is not the way. The way is Christ. It is a great mercy if, as we proceed, go along day by day, month by month, we are brought to this point: that we are more and more sensible that we are nothing in ourselves, and Christ is more and more – everything to us – or I am sure of this: He is jealous of His glory, and will not give it to another. If we come to bliss, we shall put the crown on His head. It will not be part Christ, and part our own works. **All the glory** will be ascribed to the Saviour. I am sure of this: if we are in the way, the Holy Spirit will be our teacher, and when He teaches He speaks of none but Christ. He speaks not of Himself. "When He (the Spirit of Truth, the Comforter) is come" – that is, individually or collectively – "when He is come, He will reprove the world of sin." What sin? The sin of unbelief. "Of sin, because they believe not on Me; of righteousness, because I go to My Father, and ye see Me no more; of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged."

Now I want to leave that aspect of our subject which regards the teaching and instruction of the soul in the way that leads to life, and is a lamp and a light to the enquiring and anxious soul, respecting the way he is proceeding, and what path he is pursuing, and what the end shall be, and come to look at this word as spoken to God's own people, in regard to their walk and conversation.

First, as to their profession. "The commandment is a lamp; and the law is light; and reproofs of instruction are the way of life." My friends, we are not left in any doubt whatever in God's holy law as to what His will is in regard to every one who is His child, who is a true believer, who is taught to love Him, and follow Him. I need not enlarge, only to remind you of the Word of God, the precious precepts of His holy gospel, and the teaching of Jesus Christ, which the Holy Spirit will make effective in the hearts of His people, when it is His sovereign will and purpose to constrain them in His ways. The Lord Jesus said this: "If ye love Me keep My commandments." Nothing could be more simple, and more to the point: "If ye love Me keep My commandments." I am sure that will affect those who are aware of the will of God. They know that the Holy Spirit has manifested to them the love of Christ, and they love Him in return. If such disobey, they will be the subject of chastisement. I say this not only from the authority of the Word of God, but from my own experience. My friends, I know this: "The rebellious dwell in a dry land," and the disobedient will walk in darkness, and they that know the Lord's will and do it not will be the subject of stripes. I know it because I have felt it; I have walked the path. So I would kindly say to those that know the Lord's will and are disobedient, do seek the Lord to constrain you by His love, and give grace and strength to do His will. Are you sincere in your desires? Do you want the Lord to shine upon your path? "Reproofs of instruction are the way of life." "Why call ye Me Lord, Lord, and do not the things that I say?"

Then, to proceed in regard to our walk, conduct, and conversation before God in the pathway that is appointed for us, in which we must walk through this wilderness. Our providential pathway appointed by God, that which is unchangeably fixed in His eternal mind and purpose before the world began, your circumstances, my circumstance, fixed, nothing haphazard, no "fictitious power of chance," nothing brought about by the influence of second causes, but by the first great cause, the sovereign and eternal will of God. There may be many positions and many conditions into which we are brought, paths we have not walked heretofore, circumstances we have never encountered in our pathway, and we being in the dark, the feeling of our heart may be this: "Lord, I have never been in such a place before. What shall I do? What is Thy will for me? Which way shall I take?"

*O where shall I find a guide to direct,
Right skilful and kind and brave to protect?
To lovely Mount Zion my heart is now bound,
But many a lion is in the way found.
'Tis Jesus can teach the way ye should go,
And out His arm reach to help you on too.*

Let us try and look, then, a little more closely at this word of gracious instruction to every one who is brought to a stand, brought to a halt – and there are real exercises in the heart to be found walking in the way the Lord would have them go. My friends, may we be kept in that place where we are more fearful of ourselves than anything else in the world, dread being left to our own understanding, or to take a step according to our own inclination, or act according to the cogitations of our own darkened understanding. May we ever be in the fear of the Lord regarding the way He would have us take.

Well now, "The commandment is a lamp." Let us look at some of those words which are so blessedly applicable to this case and this condition. One is this: "Be ye not as the horse, or as the mule, which have no understanding: whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle, lest they come near unto thee." Not like the horse that rushes without understanding into the battle, hasty, unthinking,, impetuous. Nor as the mule, disobedient, stubborn. Both of those things are in our nature, and the Word says, "Be not as them, as the horse or as the mule," but "In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths." What a precious commandment that is! I am sure of this: that those who trust in Him, and do believe that He is, would desire to walk according to that word: "acknowledge Him." What is entailed in the acknowledging of Him? It is not merely a lip acknowledgment, but acknowledgment by our walk, that we do believe He is wise, and cannot make a mistake; whereas we are foolish, and always making mistakes; that God is omniscient, and therefore knows the future as well as the present; whereas we know not even the present, let alone the future. God is faithful to His name, He is faithful to His promise, and if this acknowledging is true, there will be a falling before Him in the acknowledgment of it, and trusting Him for it. There will also be an acknowledging that He is a sovereign, an absolute sovereign, and therefore there will be an acknowledgment of it in a submitting to, and falling under, the sovereign will of God. "In all thy way acknowledge Him." I am quite convinced of this: if we are enabled to walk according to that commandment, and if it is a lamp and a light to us, and we acknowledge Him, He will direct. God will not deceive. He does not say one thing and mean another. If we acknowledge Him, He will direct our path. If you seek direction and do not eventually receive it, the only thing we can say is,

you have not rightly acknowledged Him. You may think you have. But have you? For if we do acknowledge Him, He will direct.

"The commandment is a lamp." Another precious word that is a lamp to God's people who are truly exercised and anxious: "Commit Thy way unto the Lord; trust also in Him; and He shall bring it to pass." I wonder how many times you, as well as I, have tried to put our own hand to things, meddled with them; and then what a mess we have made of things eventually. Instead of committing unreservedly our way to the Lord and trusting in Him, we have attempted either to hinder or to further things. But what has been the result of this? To bring us into darkness and, sorrow. "Commit thy way unto the Lord" entirely, unreservedly, submissively, obediently. In this committing there will be a leaving it with Him. Not in a state of indifference, but a gracious exercise in watching His hand.

"For the commandment is a lamp; and the law is light; and reproofs of instruction are the ways of life." This precious gospel the law of liberty in all its sweetness and wonderful instruction, direction, statutes and precepts, is a light to God's people as they walk through the wilderness. As I have already said, the precious principle that will move our willing feet in the way of those precepts is love. I want to look at that a moment. I have more than once in my life asked myself in regard to a particular move, or matter, either to get out of something or into it, to possess, or get rid of something: "Now, is this move in perfect harmony, and compatible with, love to Jesus Christ?" Now, you look at this rule of life in the spirit of the gospel, and ask yourself this question: "Should I be here? Should I be doing this thing, if I really loved the Lord Jesus? Is this compatible with love to Him?" If we walk in love, we walk in light. The precious law of liberty is a precious light. It is well to be enabled to seek this, that we may walk in the path in which we desire and hope to enjoy His presence. *"The way I walk cannot be wrong, if Jesus be but there."* That is a blessed criterion. If we can keep close to Him, and are not leaning on our own understanding, or walking according to our own mind and wisdom, then we shall enjoy His presence and His help with us.

"The law is light." Well now, I want to go a little further here to notice one or two examples in the Word of God that are encouraging to us in this. You will notice the psalmist David, for one, sought to be instructed, to receive light on his path as to how to do a certain thing at a certain time. There is one outstanding incidence in his life comes to my mind. That is when he was beset and surrounded by his enemies, desiring of the Lord to show him what to do. He said: "Lord, shall I go up against the Philistines? Wilt Thou deliver them into mine hand?" The Lord said to him, Go up; for I will deliver them into thine hand." David did not suspect the instruction, or question about it, or think he was wiser than God, or think there could be something better to do than this. He manifested the obedience of faith, and went up and did according to God's word, and so was a conqueror. After a time, the same people came up again, and David was threatened a second time by this mighty host. And what did he do? He did not say: "Well, it was the right thing to do last time, to go up and fight them; I will do the same again." No, he did not do any such thing; he did not lean on his own understanding, but said: "Lord, here I am again in the same circumstances, the same people are come up against me; what shall do this time?" The Lord said: "Go not up." Just the opposite! What wisdom that was in the heart of David, to seek the instruction and direction of his God.

"The commandment is a lamp; and the law is light; and reproofs of instruction are the way of life." Well now, the Lord gave David instruction. What a mercy if you and I are enabled to seek the Lord's will in the lower things, the providences, the concerns of the church, or of something in our life, occupation, or any other thing that concerns us. Let us not, for one moment, look at coinciding circumstances. We may be solemnly mistaken. They are not directions in and of themselves. We need God's voice. Never say that it looks clear what I have to do, because of this and the other circumstance. The thing is, what is the Lord's will?

"And the reproofs of instruction are the way of life." Let us look at this in regard to our providential pathway. The first that comes to my mind is the case of Elijah. He was a godly man, a man of great grace, great faith, but subject to passions like as we are. Such were the distressing things which perplexed his heart that he sought to run away from the path of obedience. Elijah fled; he sat under the juniper tree, utterly dismayed. Then he goes into the wilderness and hides in a cave. My friends, if any of you are in a position like this, you know the way the Lord would have you walk in, the path He has put you in; but you do not like it, and are determined to get out of it; you feel you cannot go on any longer, and are ready to run away, like Elijah; and you are in the cave. Well, let us look at it a moment. There was a great and strong wind that rent the mountains, an earthquake, and a fire; but the Lord was not in them. No. You see, there may be all the thunderings and lightnings of the law, but they only harden you.

*Law and terrors do but harden,
All the while they work alone.*

They only cause you to be more rebellious and obstinate than ever. That is all they can do. The threatenings of the law, or of hell, will not move you. The Lord was not in the earthquake, nor in the fire. There was the strong wind, or the tempest, but it did not affect him. But eventually there was the gospel, the Lord's mercy, tender mercy, and His love in the still small voice. And what was the effect of the still small voice? Elijah comes to the mouth of the cave, a humble man, with his face wrapped in a mantle; he is humble before his God. And in this still small voice a question: "What doest thou here, Elijah?" Has God ever spoken to you like that, and made you realise you are not in your right place, but have run away? You have sought to escape, and are not where He would have you be? There is instruction here. The Lord gave him fresh instruction to do His will, and to do that which He had appointed him for. That was one reproof of instruction which was "the way of life" where Elijah was concerned.

Again, there may be times and seasons when the Lord will use the word in Isaiah's prophecy: "Thy teachers shall not be removed into a corner any more, but thine eyes shall see thy teachers, and thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it." I will look at that for a moment, for it is reproof of instruction which is the way of life. The word was used in my own experience some years ago, and therefore I would speak of it in the way it was used in my case, and in which it came to me. I would not criticise or find fault with anyone who puts a different interpretation upon it, but I must speak of it in the way I experienced it. It says: "Thine ears shall hear a word behind thee...when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left." It is evident the one who was spoken to had turned either to the right hand or to the left. They were out of the way; they had turned out of it. That is how it came to me; I was out of the way. As if the Lord said: "You are not in the way I would have you be in. Not that, but **this** is the way. 2

The word we have in John's gospel says: "When He putteth forth His own sheep, He goeth before them, and the sheep follow Him: for they know His voice." Well now, if you are following in the right way, the voice will be before, and not behind. The word says: "Thine ears shall hear a word **behind** thee, saying." Why, if this be so, my friends, we are not following, we have got in front, we are out of the way. That was instruction to me. What a good thing if, in all our wanderings, He instructs and reproves, causing us to hear the word behind us, giving the reproofs of instruction which are "the way of life", and that our teachers are "not removed into a corner any more." I wonder how many times we have come into anxiety and distress, had crosses and disappointments, and there has been this instruction for our souls; and in it how many times our teachers have been in a corner, and we have not seen our teachers. It is a solemn thing, my friends, to come into trouble, pass through it, and not learn a lesson, or be instructed. It is a solemn thing to be no better than the world in their troubles. What I long for is this: to see in everything that concerns me the Lord's purpose, and to be humble enough for the Lord to instruct me.

"The reproofs of instruction are the way of life," that we might be led in the path He has appointed or us, to feel Him to be with us in it. What life, or happiness, or peace, what instruction is there to a true child of God without the Lord's presence? I can truly say:

*Lord, it is not life to live,
If Thy presence Thou deny.
Source and Giver of repose,
Singly from Thy smile it flows.*

Is it possible anyone can expect to enjoy the presence of the Lord in a path of disobedience? If we are walking contrary to the Lord, can we expect to have Him with us sensibly and feelingly? If we rebel and persist in our way, shall we not walk in darkness, and have His frown, and the suspension of His sweet and supporting presence? Am I speaking a word now to any who may be in that path? You are mourning, grieving, and groaning. You say: "I am in the dark; my heart is no hard; I am full of fear; I am constantly troubled and tempted; I am in a path which is so difficult, hard, and trying." May I advise you to do this: Ask the Lord to show you where you are wrong. Ask Him to give you repentance over your waywardness. Seek that He would pardon your sin and heart wanderings, and restore sweet and close communion. Who are we to blame? Are we going to blame God for it? I am sure, if we are rightly exercised, we shall blame ourselves. Somehow or other we have grieved Him. My friends, what a mercy if He reproves us, speaks a word of correction to us to instruct in the ways of life, that His presence may through our journey shine, and crown our journey's end!

There is a great difference between being in the Covenant, and a subject of the salvation of God, and of the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ, and enjoying that. It is one thing to be saved, another to have the joy of salvation. It is one thing to have Christ as our Saviour, another to walk with Him in a pathway of close and sweet union and communion. May the Holy Spirit make the word effectual –

*Apply the word that rules must give,
And teach us lessons how to live,
And firmly to believe.*

The Lord add His blessing.