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Sermon preached at Scaynes Hill by Mr J W Walder on Lord's Day morning 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 have no doubt but that everyone who is truly quickened into life, and taught of the Holy Spirit, will be very much exercised with regard to the right way to the promised land. It is their constant prayer and desire that they will one day be brought to the heavenly Canaan which God has promised to, and provided for, His people. But because of the treachery and deceitfulness of the heart, the darkness which often prevails, and the temptations, which oft-times are great, there is a fear lest they miss the right, good, and proper way which leads to eternal life. So the language of the hymn-writer is in the heart:

*Saviour of sinners, deign to shine
On this benighted soul of mine;
O show my wandering feet the way,
That leads to realms of endless day.*

It is the chief and great concern of the heart that they may be found in the right and good way, and eventually be brought to the desired haven. And not only so, but in their walk and conversation here below they are greatly concerned regarding their providential pathway as well.

In the text we have a word of direction and exhortation to every living soul who is rightly exercised in regard to the way. "The commandment is a lamp; and the law is light; and reproofs of instruction are the ways of life." Before I come to look more particularly at the subject-matter of these words, especially as it regards our souls and our salvation, and the only way that leads to eternal life, we see how the hymn-writer has so concisely expressed in the words of the hymn:

*Jesus is the way to God;
Jesus is the way to bliss;
In this way the church has trod,
Down from Adam's day to this.*

A precious Jesus Christ is the sum and substance of the whole gospel, and the sum and substance of our text: "The commandment is a lamp; and the law is light." I want to notice the persons who are addressed, and also the nature and spirit of this precious direction and gracious word to the exercised of God's people. "My son" is the person to whom the words are directed. So that we may readily conclude that those who are interested in these words are such as are the subjects of the quickening power of the Holy Spirit; they are those who are born again, such as have evidence and proof in their soul's exercise and feelings that they are partakers of divine life. They can go back to the time when they believe the Lord influenced His quickening power in their hearts, and first made them exercised about eternal things, gave them longings and desires to which they were strangers before. God's people are sons in His eternal purposes, but this is not manifest until the time comes when the Lord is pleased to send forth His Spirit into the heart.

I do not want to spend time in going into all the signs and evidences and proofs of this matter, neither to lift up such a high standard as to cause some to feel themselves out of the secret and out of the question. There is a great difference in being a son by adoption, and being given the assurance of it, so that one can say, "Abba Father," and have no fear in regard to that matter. I would speak to those exercised humble souls who are sons indeed by blessed adoption, and manifestly so by the new birth, but may not yet have got very far in the way. You have not obtained what you seek after, but do know something of the exercises of the child of God; you are possessor of the fear of God, and have longings after life and salvation, which is only found in the hearts of the living children of God; though indeed you cannot rise so high as to believe or say you are such, yet there is evidence of divine life in you.

Secondly, the commandment and the law spoken of in our text are the commandment and law of father and mother. "My son, keep thy father's commandment, and forsake not the law of thy mother." (verse 20) So that this injunction, this direction, is of the filial nature. The commandment, and law in our text, is not the ten commandments that were given on Sinai. It is not the commandment of a strict austere judge, or the commandment of a despotic tyrannic ruler, but the rule and law of father or mother. God is the Father of His quickened people in the covenant, the God of all grace, the Father of spirits, who has said concerning His people: "I will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be My sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty." So that the One here spoken of is the Everlasting Father, God who in His eternal purposes has condescended to adopt a people to be His own out of the dregs of Adam's fallen race. Out of rebels and sinners He makes children, by His sovereign grace. "Mother" here is Jerusalem which is from above. The apostle, writing to the Galatians, enlarges upon this point. He shows the great difference between Hagar's children who are the offspring of Jerusalem that now is, and with her children is in the bondage of Sinai, under sentence of death; and Jerusalem which is above, which is free, and the mother of us all that are born in Zion. For those that are from above are children of Abraham, and heirs, not by the law of works, but heirs by faith. So this word is spoken in a filial way: "My son, keep thy father's commandment, and forsake not the law of thy mother."

Now let us try and come to look at the text. It says "commandment of father and mother." This filial commandment is a lamp, and the law is light. Just one more word in regard to it. No doubt the good man who was instrumental in writing these words had regard to the lighting of the lamp which was in the tabernacle. You remember how God commanded Moses to make a golden candlestick; it was to have seven lamps, it was to be supplied with beaten oil pure and precious, and the lamp should never go out. Everything to do with the tabernacle sets forth Christ Jesus, who is the fulfiller of it all, and the precious gospel of God's grace which is the way of salvation. The Lord Jesus Christ Himself said: "I am the light of the world." "I am come a light into the world." But alas, by nature men did then, and do still, love darkness rather than light. But those that feel and know their darkness, and long for the light to show them the way to the heavenly city, to them the commandment is a lamp, and the law is light – this precious light which now shines and gives light to all men that are come into the world.

Another thought in regard to the nature of this commandment and law. The apostle, writing to the Galatians, says this: "And this I say, that the covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the

promise of none effect." Or that by the law we should in any way be justified, or come to heaven, or have light. No indeed. What was the purpose for which the law was given on Sinai's mount? "It was added because of transgressions until the seed should come to whom the promise was made." The law of Sinai is holy, just, and spiritual. It is the nature of the law to condemn. No man by the deeds of the law can possibly obtain life. That is not the commandment in our text. It is the precious commandment of the gospel that is the lamp that leads poor sinners that are anxiously enquiring after eternal salvation.

Let us look then a little at this commandment which is a source of light, and shows the way. "Jesus is the way to bliss." Jesus is the way to life. What is the greatest commandment of this precious gospel? It is just this: "This is His commandment, that we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ." That is it, is it not? It is all comprehended in one word. It is just a matter of this: either we trust simply and wholly and alone in Jesus Christ and are saved, or we disbelieve and are lost. There is nothing between those two things. This is the commandment which is a lamp. The Lord Jesus spoke in way of reproof and rebuke to the proud, self-conceited, and self-righteous Pharisees, who thought to obtain salvation by and through their own righteousness and deeds. He said: "Except ye believe that I am He, ye shall die in your sins." So it is simply a matter of God-given faith enabling one to humbly trust in the Lord Jesus Christ alone for salvation, which is the way to eternal life.

"The commandment is a lamp." There are one or two things closely connected with this great commandment. The apostles, sent of God to preach in the primitive years of the declaration of the gospel, preached two principle things, and they were just these, repentance toward God, and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. I would notice to whom such words were addressed; they were those who were pricked in their hearts, and therefore cried out: "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" What was the gospel command? Did the apostles tell them to do this, that, and the other great work? Did they send them to this, that, and the other theological institution? Did they tell them to observe all kinds of devotions and works? No! "Believe, and thou shalt be saved." That was the great command – faith. "And the commandment is light." All such then as are truly pricked in their hearts, and sincerely seek after eternal life, are shown that the way is to believe in God, and in His dear Son.

I want to look more closely at what it is to believe and trust alone in Jesus Christ for salvation. I would remind you of the case of the young man who came to the Lord Jesus and said: "Master, what shall I do?" We find that, whenever a question was asked of the Lord Jesus by such a character, Jesus always sent them to the law that they might learn a little from that of their condition as lost and helpless. To the young man He said: "Thou knowest the commandments, Do not kill, Do not commit adultery, etc." What was the reply? "All these have I observed from my youth." What more is expected? The Lord Jesus said: "Sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, take up the cross, and follow Me." And he went away very sorrowful, for he was very rich – not merely in a natural way, but he thought he was rich spiritually. Jesus said: "How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God!" The apostle Peter said: "Lord, we have left all, and have followed Thee." Let us try and look at it then.

"The commandment is a lamp." Not the works of the law, not all that the young man thought he had done, not all that the Pharisees thought they had attained to, but the simple faith of the publican who had nothing at all – just an undone, lost, and ruined sinner who hoped in the Lord Jesus Christ.

"The commandment is a lamp." Are there any here who have sincere desires, and long to know how they shall obtain pardon for their sins, knowing and realising that without pardon there is no peace, no salvation, no heaven? You say, "How shall I get my sins removed? What is the way?"

*"The more I strive against sin's power,
I sin and stumble but the more.*

"What is the way? Where shall I go with this load? Where shall I go to relieve myself of sin and guilt?" What does the commandment, which is a lamp, say to such a guilty sinner? Come to Christ. None but His precious blood can relieve you, or give you peace. Nothing but His substitutionary sacrifice can wash you clean from all your corruption and your sin. The more you labour and attempt to live according to the law of Sinai, the worse you will become. But this commandment of the gospel – sweet, blissful, precious instruction – is to look to Jesus alone, to fall at His feet in confession and repentance. My friends, that is the sinner's business. A sensible sinner knows he cannot possibly live according to the demands of the law; he constantly transgresses. All his life long he will be doing so. His only way is to fall at the feet of Jesus in confession and repentance. The Lord Jesus Christ in His teaching said: "Except ye repent ye shall all likewise perish." So you see the absolute necessity of this repentance. "God commandeth all men everywhere to repent." That does not in the least degree infer that there is any ability in ourselves to do it, or that it is our duty. But we find this, that when God produces it in our hearts through the influence of His Spirit, and the efficacy of the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, we feel it our great privilege. There is no greater blessing than repentance. It is not what some men make it out to be. It is a blessed and a sacred thing. And except we are partakers of it, we shall not enter the kingdom. It is not an attempt to keep the law that is the way; it is repentance toward God. It is not merely the lip service of one who has good doctrines in the head and nothing in the heart. It is not saying we are sorry. It is feeling and showing it in our life and conversion. This is the commandment which is a lamp: repentance toward God, and faith in Jesus Christ whose precious blood has atoned for sin.

Secondly, believing in Him by simple faith for righteousness. Why, surely there are those among us who are thoroughly convinced that if ever we are to stand before God at last we need a righteousness better than our own to stand in. "Our very best stained and dyed with sin, our all is nothing worth." Our garments: are rotten, torn, and filthy, we have nothing of our own but what is shameful, degrading, and abominable. If we are to have suitable robes we must have something better than our own to stand in. To whom shall we go to obtain the garment that is acceptable to God? None but Christ. He "has righteousness to sanctify us all." He has done for us what we could not do; He has gone to the end of the law for righteousness. And if any sincerely ask how they can be righteous before God, here is the direction: "The commandment is a lamp." We shall never find perfection but in Christ alone. There you will find it, for the Word says; "Ye are complete in Him."

There is another part of this precious word in regard to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, which the apostle speaks from his own experience as well as under the influence of the Holy Spirit. In his unregenerate days, Paul thought to come to heaven by his own works, but presently he found the commandment to be a lamp by which he was enlightened as to the only right and proper way. What does he say? "By grace ye are saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast." So then, it is by free and sovereign grace, the gift of simple faith in Christ.

This gracious direction of the law is a lamp to those who are brought to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation, and they will be found among those who, through the influence of the Spirit, are walking in the commandment, that is, believing in Jesus Christ alone. Such as are brought by experience constantly and continually to see there is hope in no other, and are brought to confess readily the words of the hymn-writer:

*There's not a man that's born of God,
But readily will say,
'If ever my poor soul be saved,
'Tis Christ must be the way.'*

Well, here then, is the effect which proves the cause: he is born of God. He would not know it otherwise. He has life, or he would not have learned this lesson: "If ever my poor soul be saved, 'tis Christ must be the way." So the soul that confesses such things has a simple trust, he has nothing else to rest upon, he can honestly say that unless the Lord saves him he is undone for ever. It is good teaching, for that is the truth, whether we receive it or not. "Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." It is this faith and repentance which is such a lamp to the exercised soul who wants to be found in the right way. Jesus is the only way to God, Jesus is the way to bliss, the way to heaven, and it is the precious commandment of the gospel which points out the way. My friends, do we not want to be found in the way of life, receiving reproofs of instruction, causing us to walk in it? I do not want to be left to be but a signpost! Solemn consideration: something which is dead, and never moves a step in the way, though it may point out every step of the way, shew the way and the distance, but never move in it. I do not want to be left to be only a lifeless signpost, but to walk in the way, experience the truth, know what it is to be a true possessor of repentance and faith, and to cease from my own works bad or good, and trust alone in Jesus' blood.

This commandment, then, is a lamp to every anxious enquirer. This is the way which is the way to heaven. Am I in it? Am I travelling in the right direction? or in the wrong way, though a religious way? This law, then, is the precious gospel of God's sovereign grace. The apostle Paul, writing to the Romans, calls it the law of faith. He says: "Boasting is excluded." But by what law is boasting Excluded? By the law of works? "Nay," not at all: "but by the law of faith." So this precious law of the gospel is the law of faith. It is the great and wonderful law of God, which is unalterable in its eternal purposes and covenant decrees, declaring the way in which God will provide and accomplish salvation for His people. From this law He will not deviate one iota, jot, or tittle in His purposes, or the manifestation of His glorious character in the salvation of His people. This is the law of God, the law of the gospel, the law of Christ, the rule of faith in the hearts of His people, by which faith works. My friends, we must rest absolutely sure of this, if God has given us faith, that faith will never work

nor act contrary to the gospel - never. That faith which is God-given will work by love. And this is another part of this precious law, for the whole of it, in the principle of it, is love. If you take that away you have nothing left. Except we do all things in love, we do all things in vain. If you take love out of religion it is absolutely false, fruitless, and vain. This precious law, then, is the law of faith. It is also called in the Word of God the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus. It is the precious gospel, and when the Holy Spirit is pleased to communicate, influence, operate grace and salvation in the heart of a poor sinner, it is the law of the spirit of life. The Holy Spirit is He whose glorious prerogative and gracious power it is to take of the things of Christ, the things of the gospel, and make them powerful and effective in the heart.

But thirdly, this law is also called by the apostle James, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, "the law of liberty." "Whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty and abideth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the word, this man shall be blessed in his deed." **Not for his deed, but in it** – no merit, but doing, being the precious evidence of being a partaker of the spirit and grace of the precious gospel of sovereign grace. There is a word there that is very important with regard to this law of liberty: "Being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer." "Faith without works is dead." And the Lord Jesus Christ in His close and clear teaching said this: "Whosoever cometh to Me, and heareth My sayings, and doeth them, I will show you to whom he is like: he is like a man which built his house upon a rock: and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock." But O, what of him that cometh to Him and heareth His words and doeth them not?

"Why call ye Me Lord, Lord, and do not the things that I say?" You see, it is obedience to the gospel, the obedience of faith that looketh into this law of liberty and abideth in it. This is the way to eternal life; the way of salvation is to such an one as possesses that God-given faith which proves to be real by its actions, and its works – not for life, but from life. This is the way. My friends, are we doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving ourselves? A great mercy, then, if this law is light to us.

Let us look at some of its features. It is the perfect law of liberty. Perfection is in the gospel; there is not a single flaw of deficiency. It is perfect in its doctrine, perfect in its promises, in its workings, in its invitations, in its injunctions, in its precepts, perfect to the end to which God has appointed it. Also it is perfect in the substance, circumference, and sum of its declaration of salvation by Christ crucified. It is also perfect in regard to those who have an interest in it; it is the perfect law of liberty. I want to look a little closer at this law of liberty. My friends, if you and I are saved, and have been given a hope of salvation, pardon, and righteousness in Jesus, if we do believe, hope, and trust He is our law-fulfiller, and that He has delivered us from curse and death, from eternal wrath, and from hell, this does not mean to say we are brought into a lawless condition. Liberty is not licentiousness. To be free is not to be brought into a lawless condition. If we are freed by this law of liberty, it is a light to us, a lamp to our feet.

Then we find this: we are not free **to** sin, but free **from** sin, which is a very different thing. We are not free to disobey, but we are brought into the liberty of the gospel, which will be a gracious influence. It will constrain us to run in the way which is right and good in the sight of God. This law of liberty is that which brings a soul into the state and condition of liberty, free from the dominion of

sin, delivering from its reigning power. Sin will still be in our old nature, and will often militate against reigning grace, and besmear the heart with its guilt and filth. But those who are brought into liberty are not servants of sin; they do not sin wilfully and with delight, but are delivered from its dominating and damning nature. They are brought to be free, at liberty from the curse and condemnation brought upon them through the Adam transgression, and the influence of the law, as the hymn says:

*If sin be pardoned, I'm secure;
Death has no sting beside;
The law gives sin its damning power,
But Christ, my Ransom, died.*

So this law of liberty does not make a person free to sin; it makes him free from it. You remember how the Antinomians in Paul's day accused him of preaching licentiousness, and said that, because he preached that the believer was free from sin, he was free to sin. They said such things as this: "Let us sin that grace may abound." Those that accused him of this knew nothing at all about the gospel of Jesus Christ. Those that are truly free from sin do hate it.

This law, then, is a light; it is the precious rule. That brings another thought to my mind. We have no doubt met some, and read of others, who maintain that the Ten Commandments are the believer's rule. My friends, they are not. The gospel is the believer's rule of life, not the law. This precious law is of a different nature to Sinai; it reaches far deeper, and is more comprehensive, a much greater rule for the direction of the life of every true believer. Let me instance this for a moment. The Lord Jesus in His teaching said this to those who argued with Him in regard to their conduct and conversation: "Ye have heard that it was said of them of old time, Thou shalt not kill." That is the law: "Thou shalt not kill" – whatsoever. But Jesus said: "I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment." You see how much further and deeper that reaches. You see the difference in the spirit of it, the great comprehensiveness of it. Jesus also in His teaching said this: "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: but I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart." Now you see, that is the gospel, it reaches so much further and deeper, it is the rule of a believer's life. It is not just his outward conduct, it reaches to the inner intentions, thoughts, and motives of the heart, and by its gracious influence it will oft-times bring one in guilty before God, when no one else knows anything about it. And it brings a believer to repent over his thoughts and secret faults. This is the way: to be constantly seeking after peace and pardon; this is the way of life.

Just another thought in regard to this law of liberty which is such a lamp to the believer. That is: the preceptive part of the gospel. We are not left in any doubt at all in regard to the mind of God concerning us in every path and responsibility of life. It does not matter what we are, in there are clear, sweet, gracious words of counsel and direction as to the right way. The law is a light. How wonderfully comprehensive are the precepts of the gospel, the law of Christ, the law of liberty.

Just one more thought here in regard to walking in them. I am sure the Psalmist David was favoured much with the light of the precious law. He saw the sweetness and the profitableness of being favoured and enabled to walk in the path that was set before him therein, so that he pleaded with

God that He would enable him to walk in them. "O that my ways were directed to keep Thy statutes." "I will run the way of Thy commandments, when Thou shalt enlarge my heart. "Thy law is my delight. I meditate therein day and night." O the delight the Psalmist found in meditating upon, and walking in, the precious and sweet way of the precious law of liberty! My friends, the commandments of the Lord are not grievous when love motivates the heart; they are precious, they are sweet to one who is truly anxious, rightly exercised, and truly concerned as to the way they should walk in regard to the precepts of the law, the law of King Jesus, the way of liberty. "The law is a light." May the Lord cause it to shine with divine light into our hearts. You may be feeling like the hymn:

*Beset with snares on every hand,
In life's uncertain path I stand;
Saviour divine, diffuse Thy light,
To guide my doubtful footsteps right.*

You are anxious to be found in the right way. You would walk in the way that is right and pleasing in the sight of God. You would know and do His will, especially in regard to your soul's feelings and exercise. "For the commandment is a lamp: and the law is light."

Just a thought or two on the latter clause of the text in regard to the salvation of our souls. It says: "And reproofs of instruction are the way of life." I feel we have particularly set before us in this part the gracious work of the Holy Spirit as the divine teacher. And, my friends, what constant need we have of this instruction, and the reproof of instruction, which are the ways of life. By reason of the Adam fall we are as ignorant as we can possibly be, and this ignorance to a great extent remains with us, even if we are instructed to a degree. There are certain seasons when God's people feel themselves to be such terrible dunces, they feel they know nothing yet as they ought to know it. They feel to be so much in the dark, instead of being so full of knowledge and proficient therein. They feel so backward, and feel more and more their ignorance – at least, I do. Therefore there is need of instruction. Well, what is the precursory experience to receiving this? My friends, we are not always in a frame and condition to receive instruction. The greatest barrier to this is to think that we know. And our wretched heart being so full of pride and conceit, we are unteachable. I am sure of this, that no two things which you can put together are a greater hindrance than pride and ignorance. Yet that is our fallen nature, and we must be brought down from that condition of sinful lack of desire for understanding, and being made like a little child, ready to receive instruction. You remember how the Pharisees persecuted the man who had his eyes opened. They said to Jesus, "Are we blind also?" He said: "If ye were blind, ye should have no sin: but now ye say, We see; therefore your sin remaineth." If you knew your ignorance you would be teachable. What a wonderful thing, then, if you and I have been brought under the teaching of the Spirit to be in Christ's school, to sit at His feet. "What I see not, teach Thou me." The greater the ignorance, then usually, the greater pride in spiritual things. It is a wonderful thing to be a teachable soul. Therefore, being reprov'd by the instruction of the Spirit, we shall be found in the way of life. As the time is gone I will leave the subject there.

The Lord add His blessing.