

ZION'S WAYMARKS

Preached at North Street chapel, Stamford, on August 18, 1861, by J. C. Philpot

"Set up waymarks, make high heaps-set your heart toward the highway, even the way which you went-turn again, O virgin of Israel, turn again to these your cities. How long will you go about, O you backsliding daughter? for the Lord has created a new thing in the earth, A woman shall compass a man." [Jer 31:21-22](#).

"Set up road signs; put up guideposts. Take note of the highway, the road that you take. Return, O Virgin Israel, return to your towns. How long will you wander, O unfaithful daughter? The Lord will create a new thing on earth-a woman will surround a man." [Jer 31:21-22](#)

The Scripture in some respects much resembles the eyes of a well-painted portrait. Have you not observed how, in a picture of this kind, the eyes always seem to be looking upon you, and still to follow you in whatever direction you may go? Whether you stand before it or at either side of it, even if you retreat into some distant corner, whatever position you take in the room, the eyes of the picture still follow you at every change.

So the Scripture looks with its searching eyes upon and into your very heart, nor can you get into any spot or place where these eyes will not follow you; for as it is the word of the living God, it looks out as with his eyes upon the thoughts, words, and actions of men.

But the eyes of the best painted portrait are not living eyes. They are representations of the living eye, but in themselves, however beautifully painted, they are at best but lifeless imitations of nature's piercing glance. But assume such a case as this-impossible, I admit, but allowable as an illustration-that by some supernatural power and influence these eyes should all at once be animated into life; that living instead of dead eyes looked from the picture upon you as you stood before it. How different then would be the feelings of your mind! What a revulsion would at once take place in your thoughts! The dead eyes of the best painted portrait exercise no power or influence over your actions. You know it is but painted canvass as inanimate as the wall on which it hangs; but the living eyes of the living portrait following your every movement would at once control every action as witnessing them as much as if the person himself were actually inspecting them.

Now this is just the difference between the way in which Scripture looks upon those who are still in their unregeneracy, and those who are made alive unto God by regenerating grace. The Scripture looks out as with the eyes of God upon all men, for it condemns their actions; but all men do not tremble before its eyes. But let there be the communication of divine life to the soul, then those eyes of God in the word are seen not only to look upon the actions, but a power is felt in them whereby they penetrate into the deepest and darkest recesses of the heart itself.

Take another idea as an illustration, which may give you perhaps a little inlet into the authority of God's word as spoken with power to the heart. Assume that in this congregation there were now several foreigners present-French, Dutch, or German strangers, none of whom understood a word of the English language. Whatever I might speak would then have no power or influence upon their hearts. If I preached law or gospel, if I held out the curse or the blessing, it would equally fail to produce any effect upon their consciences, for this simple reason, that they would not understand a single word of what I spoke. But assume that a miracle could be suddenly wrought as on the day of Pentecost, when every man heard the apostles speak in his own language wherein each was born. Could such a miracle be at this moment wrought, then what before was a mere crowd of unmeaning sounds would fall upon their ears as intelligible words. Such is the difference between life and death; such is the distinction between the word

of God looking out with living eyes as the Lord looked through the pillar of fire and of the cloud unto the host of the Egyptians, and its looking upon men with dead eyes; such is the difference between the word of God speaking with power and authority, life and spirit, to men's consciences as quickened into life by his grace, and its falling upon their ears, as it falls upon most men's hearts, as an unintelligible sound.

Now apply these figures to the passage before us. God speaks in it to the Church, and says to her with a voice of authority and power, "Set up waymarks, make high heaps-set your heart toward the highway, even the way which you went-turn again, O virgin of Israel, turn again to these your cities." This direction from his lips being found in the word of truth, looks out as it were with the eyes of God upon his living family as in a certain state; this word of admonition, as being uttered by the mouth of the Lord to his bride, speaks with authority to those who, as united to him in wedding ties, have ears to listen to the voice of their Husband and Head. But if you have no divine life, no spiritual or experimental knowledge of Christ in your heart, these eyes have no life for you, and look upon you like the eyes of a dead portrait, which you see to look at you, yet which do not search the very depths of your soul. The words, though uttered by the lips of God, fall likewise as so many unmeaning sounds upon your ears, and do not enter into your heart as though they were being uttered by the glorious Majesty of heaven personally to you.

But hoping there are children of the living God here present to whom these words may speak as with the Lord's own mouth, I shall, with his blessing, endeavor from them,

I First, to show the character of the person who is here addressed, and, in explaining thus, I shall be guided by the special title which the Lord gives her, "O, virgin of Israel."

II Secondly, to open up the admonition which God addresses to her, and the name by which he calls her-"How long will you go about, O backsliding daughter?"

III Thirdly, to enforce the directions which God gives to this backsliding daughter-"Set up waymarks, make high heaps-set your heart toward the highway, even the way which you went-turn again, O virgin of Israel, turn again to these your cities."

IV Fourthly, to point out the foundation on which the whole of these gracious admonitions are based-"The Lord has created new thing in the earth-A woman shall compass a man."

I Observe, then, with me, first, the CHARACTER of the person addressed, and let us see if we can gather up, from the word of truth and from the experience of God's saints, who and what this character is. It is a female personage, and one evidently of great mark and likelihood. As, however, she is called "the virgin of Israel," and Israel is a typical name in the Scripture for the family of God, there can be no doubt that the Church is here addressed under that title. But why should the Church be called "the virgin of Israel," not only here but in many other places of Scripture? as, for instance, in this very chapter, "Again I will build you and you shall be built, O virgin of Israel;" {[Jer 31:4](#)} and again, where the Lord reproving her for her idolatries, says, "The virgin of Israel has done a very horrible thing." {[Jer 18:13](#)}

In a similar way the Church is called sometimes "the virgin, the daughter of Zion," as where the Lord says of her concerning Sennacherib, "The virgin, the daughter of Zion, has despised you and laughed you to scorn;" {[Isa 37:22](#)} and sometimes "the virgin, the daughter of Judah." "The Lord has trodden the virgin, the daughter of Judah, as in a wine press." {[La 1:15](#)} As it is clear from these passages that by the expression, "the virgin of Israel" is meant the Church of Christ, the virgin spouse of the Lord the Lamb, it will be desirable to explain why the term is used; and, in doing so, I think we may give it a twofold interpretation.

1. First, we may view it as descriptive of the character of the Church of Christ antecedently to the fall, and thus as expressing, in determinate language, what she was in the mind of God, as viewed in the Son of his love, before she fell in the Adam transgression. Nothing can be more plain from the word of truth than that the Church had a being in the mind of God before the foundation of the world, and that before time itself had birth she was given to the Son of God to be eternally his. Thus the apostle speaks of the saints at Ephesus as being "chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world;" {[Eph 1:4](#)} and our blessed Lord, in his intercessory prayer to his heavenly Father, says, "I have manifested your name unto the men which you gave me out of the world; yours they were and you gave them me;" and again, "I pray not for the world, but for those who you have given me, for they are yours; and all mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I am glorified in them." {[Joh 17:6,9-10](#)} Thus we see that the Church had a being in the mind of God before earth was, and as such was chosen in Christ and given to Christ.

Now the question arises whether the Church was thus chosen in Christ and given to him fallen or unfallen. Many good men have believed that she was chosen as fallen; but such is not my faith. I believe that she was chosen unfallen, in all her primitive beauty and purity, as viewed by the Father in all the glorious perfections of his dear Son. We can hardly think that our blessed Lord espoused the Church to himself in all her degradation, in all her guilt, filth, and ruin. As such she would hardly seem a fitting spouse for the Son of God; and I think that we have a striking representation of this in the direction given to the high priest under the law to take a fitting wife for him in his high office. "He shall take a wife in her virginity; a widow, or a divorced woman, or profane, or a harlot, these shall he not take; but he shall take a virgin of his own people to wife." {[Le 21:13-14](#)}

Now as the high priest under the law was a type of the great High Priest over the house of God, we may well see in that direction and in that prohibition an intimation that the Church was espoused to the Son of God in all her virgin purity, as she stood up in the mind of Jehovah in all her native innocence. Not that she ever stood separate from the Son of God, for God loved his people from eternity only in Him, and that with the same love, as the Lord himself declared, "And I have loved them as you have loved me." {[Joh 17:23](#)} She was therefore "blessed in him with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places," and "accepted in the beloved;" {[Eph 1:3,6](#)} and thus, as his chosen and accepted bride, the Church was presented to our blessed Lord in all that perfection, beauty, and glory with which she will shine forever in union with Him.

It is true that she fell, miserably fell, in the Adam fall. It is true that she sank, awfully sank, out of that state of purity in which she was viewed by the eye of Jehovah and wherein she was received into the arms of Jesus as his espoused bride. But because she fell from her state of native innocence, she did not fall out of his heart or arms. We therefore read, "Christ loved the Church and gave himself for it." Does not this expression show that he loved the Church before he gave himself for it? But when did he love the Church? Before or after the fall? Surely before the fall, for did not the Lord tell his heavenly Father that he loved his people as he loved him, and did he not say, "You have loved me before the foundation of the world?" {[Joh 17:24](#)} But further. Was not the union of Eve with Adam in Paradise a type of the union of the Church with Christ? for as Adam was a type of Christ when he was made a living soul, {[1Co 15:45](#)} so Eve was a type of the Church; and as Eve was brought and given to Adam in Paradise before the fall in all her native innocence, in all her virgin purity, so was the Church presented and given to Christ before she was contaminated by the Adam transgression. It was because he loved her, loved her before the fall, that he gave himself for her after she had become ruined by the fall. Thus though she awfully fell in the Adam transgression, and became defiled from head to foot through the sin in which she was then and there entangled, it did not break the eternal bond of union, did not snap the wedding tie with which she had been already espoused to the Son of God.

But now came in that wondrous scheme of eternal mercy and super-abounding grace whereby she was to be washed from all her sins in the atoning blood of the Lord the Lamb. Thus redemption came in as part

of God's eternal purpose to glorify his dear Son; for the Church being sunk into that dreadful state of sin and transgression through the Adam fall from which she could not redeem herself, there lay a necessity upon the Son of God that he must die for her, so that he might wash out all her sins in the fountain of his blood and present her without spot or wrinkle or any such thing before the eyes of infinite Purity. Being so deeply sunk in sin, how could she stand up in the courts of heavenly bliss except as washed in his blood and clothed in his righteousness? Thus she has a perfection in the Son of God not only antecedently to the fall but subsequently to it, as washed in his blood, clothed in his righteousness, sanctified by his Spirit, and conformed to his image.

2. But there is another sense in which the Lord may be considered as addressing the Church here by the name of "the virgin of Israel," which I may term an experimental sense. In this sense I understand it as referring to the experience of the first love of a virgin soul. We must ever bear in mind that the word of truth not only lays down doctrine in its clearest form, but blends it continually with the experience of the saints, and thus truth wears a twofold aspect-truth in the mind of God, truth in the heart of a believer. We find the Lord speaking to the church of Ephesus, "Nevertheless I have something against you, because you have left your first love." {[Re 2:4](#)} This "first love" we may call virgin love, as being the first pure love of the soul before it is contaminated by the sins of a backsliding heart, and thus the Lord says, "Go and cry in the ears of Jerusalem, saying, Thus says the Lord; I remember you, the kindness of your youth, the love of your espousals, when you went after me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown." {[Jer 2:2](#)}

What was the state of Israel then? "Israel was holiness unto the Lord." Such is the Lord's own testimony to those gracious feelings, holy affections, and pure desires which are ever found in the soul under the first manifestations of his dying love. The heart then is wholly his. Then the spouse can say, "Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth-for your love is better than wine. Because of the savor of your good ointments, your name is as ointment poured forth, therefore do the virgins love you." {[Song 1:2-3](#)} That in this sense the Church may be called the "Virgin of Israel" is plain from Paul's words, "For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy-for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ" {[2Co 11:2](#)} -that is, free from all the contaminating pollutions of evil and error.

It is in grace as in nature. No natural love is so pure, so strong as virgin love, when the youthful heart expands itself like an opening rose, or like a climbing plant embraces with its tender yet firm tendrils the first object of its fond affection. So in grace. When the Lord is pleased for the first time to manifest himself after a season of soul trouble, of great guilt of conscience, of many doubts, fears, painful exercises, and distressing sensations under an apprehension of the wrath of God, he wins every affection of the heart, and in discovering himself as the King in his beauty, makes captive and takes possession of our first, our virgin love.

No sooner does he manifest himself we give him our heart, for he is worthy of it, and we love his Person and work, love, blood, and grace, than we love him with a pure heart fervently. This is the day of our espousals, when we go after the Lord in the wilderness, leaving the world, and abandoning everything in it for his sake. How little we care at that time for all its pleasures or all its profits, and how little we court its smiles or fear its frowns! Now at that time there is no room for the entrance of any other love. The love of Christ which passes knowledge takes and keeps full possession of the soul, and all other lovers are shut out. As in strong natural love, so in spiritual love, there can be but one object, and that one object kills the heart to everything and every person else.

But, alas, this pure virgin love does not abide very long in its power and purity. We carry in our bosom a vile nature; a backsliding, wandering, transgressing heart. We are surrounded also by innumerable snares, gins, and traps laid for our feet by a most unwearied adversary. There is in our carnal mind a dreadful

propensity to become entangled in them; and as these get possession of the thoughts and affections, we insensibly wander from the Lord and leave our first love.

I may perhaps illustrate this insensible wandering of affection by a case in nature, unhappily too common. Two young people are fondly attached to each other; they never have loved any other, and their love, therefore, is of the strongest, warmest, and most unbroken character. But through some unexpected circumstances, the man is compelled to go to a foreign land. Employment is so scarce, or trade and business so bad, that he can scarcely earn a living for himself in his own country, much less keep a wife, and therefore he feels compelled to emigrate, to see if he can better his condition in Australia, in the expectation that the woman whom he loves may eventually join him there or he return to her. They part with many lamentations, tears, and pledges of mutual fidelity, and for a time keep their vows with all strictness.

But time rolls on; by slow degrees the affections grow cool on one or both sides, and the consequence is that their vows are forgotten, their pledges vanish into thin air, and eventually other lovers come in and occupy the almost vacant heart. He marries another woman, she marries another man, and they see each other no more. I mention this not unusual occurrence merely as an illustration, for we well know that there is no such final separation between the Lord and the soul that believes in him, but to show what takes place sometimes in the heart of a child of God in the gradual declension of his spiritual affections.

When he is espoused to the Lord in the first manifestations of his love and grace, Jesus takes full possession of his heart; there is no room then for any other lover, and the soul binds itself with many protestations of continued faithfulness to this blessed bridegroom, to this gracious Head and Husband, who by a discovery of his beauty and blessedness, grace and glory, has won to himself every affection of the virgin heart. If ever we hate sin it is then; if ever we love holiness it is then; if ever we are spiritually minded, which is life and peace, it is then. I hope I can truly say, that when the Lord discovered himself to my soul in his person and work, such were the feelings and affections of my heart.

But sooner or later, for good and wise reasons, the Lord withdraws himself. He is like the householder spoken of in the parable, who is said to go "into a far country." {[Mt 22:33](#)} This withdrawing of the Lord, the bride speaks of where she says, "I opened to my beloved; but my beloved had withdrawn himself, and was gone-my soul failed when he spoke; I sought him but I could not find him; I called him but he gave me no answer." {[Song 5:6](#)} This withdrawing of the Lord's power and presence made David so often cry, "O Lord, be not far from me; forsake me not, O Lord." {[Ps 35:22; 38:21](#)} When he thus withdraws himself the soul may mourn over his absence and beg him to return; but he does not, at least for a time, grant this request.

But as his absence is less sensibly felt, room is soon made in the affections for other lovers. The various objects of time and sense, the allurements of the world, the lusting after evil things, with many carking cares, all gather up a power which was sensibly weakened and apparently destroyed when the Lord first made himself precious. The heart must have an object; the affections must be engaged, and therefore if faith, hope, and love are not in strong and sensible operation upon the Lord, there is as it were naturally and necessarily a leaving, a losing of the first love; a wandering in affection from Jesus; a straying after other lovers and other objects to amuse and entertain the mind. But this brings us to our second point, which is to open up-

II The keen yet tender ADMONITION which the Lord addresses to the church, and the NAME by which he calls her, "How long will you go about, O backsliding daughter?" She is still a daughter of God and addressed by him as such, though a backsliding one. She has not lost her title to be one of the family of God, though from the power of temptation, the strength of sin, and the subtlety of Satan, she has wandered from her first love, and become a backsliding daughter. The Lord, therefore, whose eyes have

ever been resting upon her to take notice of all her ways, meets her as a wanderer from his love, reproves her as having departed from him, and yet tenderly and affectionately asks her, how long she means to go about, roving and straying from her rightful head and husband. It is as if he asked her why she would not return, for his arms and heart were ready to receive her, and he was grieved that she should treat him so unkindly as to forget all his love and all her own vows and protestations, and leave him for other lovers.

Now if you know anything experimentally of having loved the Lord with a pure heart fervently, of being espoused to him in days past so as to give him all your affections; and yet, through the power of temptation, the strength of sin, the weakness of the flesh, and the subtlety of Satan, have left your first love and have backslidden, I do not mean openly, but secretly, from the power of that love once enjoyed; you will see and feel how aptly the Lord addresses to you these words of admonition, mingled with encouragement.

The earlier chapters of Jeremiah abound in such reproofs for departing from the Lord, and yet all are mingled with the most gracious invitations to return. Thus he says "My people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water." {[Jer 2:13](#)} And again-"What iniquity have your fathers found in me, that they are gone far from me, and have walked after vanity, and are become vain?" {[Jer 2:5](#)} So also-"And now what have you to do in the way of Egypt, to drink the waters of Sihor? or what have you to do in the way of Assyria, to drink the waters of the river?" {[Jer 2:18](#)} Thus, we see how earnestly and yet how tenderly the Lord remonstrates with his people for departing from him, "the fountain of living waters, and hewing out to themselves cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold no water."

After all he had done for them in his providence and in his grace, might he not justly ask them what they had to do in the way of Egypt to drink the waters of Sihor, that is, the Nile, or what had they to do in the way of Assyria, to drink of the waters of the river Euphrates? Could these turbid, could these foreign streams quench their thirst, and to get at them, must they not leave the waters of Shiloh that go softly? {[Isa 8:6](#)} What contempt is poured upon the past goodness and mercy of the Lord, when happiness is sought outside of him, who is the only true Fountain of delight, and at whose right hand there are pleasures for evermore!

But all this search after happiness in created objects proves useless and vain. Therefore the Lord says "First here, then there-you flit from one ally to another asking for help. But your new friends in Egypt will let you down, just as Assyria did before.;" {[Jer 2:36](#)} or as in the words of the text, "How long will you go about, O you backsliding daughter?" There is a going about; or as the word here means, a roving and wandering with restless desires, and yet never obtaining rest or peace. But how aptly this expression represents the way in which the backsliding daughter, when she has left her first love, goes about from object to object, to obtain something to satisfy her restless mind.

1. There is a going about, for instance, to set up a fleshly holiness. Those who have been rightly led of God, who have been chastened by him, and taught out of his law, so as to know its curse and bondage, do not usually afterwards go about to set up their own righteousness as before. They do not in this point resemble those of whom the Apostle speaks, "that they being ignorant of God's righteousness, go about to establish their own righteousness." {[Ro 10:3](#)} They have been driven out of this false refuge; but they still, as I have said, often go about to set up a fleshly holiness, by which I mean a holiness distinct from that which flows out of the communications of the Lord's Spirit and grace, power, and presence. They are divorced, in a sense, from the law of Moses, by knowing something of its curse and bondage, or they could never have been married to Christ. But from the legality of their self-righteous heart, they have some idea that there is a holiness in the creature which can be obtained by their own diligent exertions. Thus, when they have lost the presence and power of the Lord, they often seek to regain it by an unceasing round of duties, as if these would win him back,

or as if they could walk in Christ in any other way but as they first received him as in themselves without help or hope. Now all these attempts to set up a fleshly holiness distinct from that produced by the power and presence of the Lord are a going about, and a real departure in heart from him; for there is no holiness in the absence of Jesus; there is no spirituality of mind, no gracious affections, no delight in knowing his will and doing it where he is not felt in his power and in his love.

We may set up for ourselves a fleshly holiness, prescribe for our daily walk a round of self-imposed duties, and please ourselves with a vain imagination of our religious superiority to others; but all these thoughts and views are in reality the mere dregs of self-righteousness, for there is, there can be no real holiness of heart, no real sanctification of spirit except in the enjoyment of the Lord's manifested presence and the shedding abroad of his love. Is not Jesus "made unto us sanctification?" In his favor is there not life? In his presence is there not power? In union with him is there not fruit? In communion with him is there not a fellowship with his Spirit, for "he that is joined to the Lord is one spirit?" {[1Co 6:17](#)} Thus all this going about in the pursuit of fleshly holiness will end where it began-in vanity and vexation of spirit.

He would therefore remonstrate with his backsliding daughter, "How long will you go about to set up this fancied holiness of yours? Are you not lovely in my loveliness which I have put upon you; {[Eze 16:14](#)} perfect in my perfections and glorious as shining forth in the beauty of holiness which you have from union and communion with your Head and Husband? All holiness, except that produced by my Spirit and grace, is deception at the best. There is a worm at the root. It may seem, like Jonah's gourd, to shelter you awhile, but it will fade and die under the first hot beams of the sun of temptation." So we have found it. The assaults of Satan, the workings of deep and desperate corruption, the boilings up of rebellion, fretfulness, unbelief, infidelity, and a thousand other evils soon dried up this gourd that we were once so highly pleased with, and we found its root to be in the dust.

2. But take the words in another sense. There is a going about of the carnal mind, in the case of the backsliding daughter, a "gadding about," as Scripture emphatically calls it, to gather up pleasure and delight from earthly objects. How many paradises have you constructed in your ever-teeming imagination! How many lofty castles have you built in the air! How many objects has a fond and wandering imagination painted and is perhaps still painting before your eyes, from which you hoped to gather up something to amuse or entertain your carnal mind! What schemes of pleasure or profit, what speculations of wealth, what visions of happiness and comfort, what a swimming in a sea of fancied delight in wife or child, husband or home, house and independence, have been floating before your eyes like evening clouds all tinted with rays of purple and gold! But night came on, and where were they? Yet while so fondly and madly doing this, there was not merely a departing from the living God, but a hewing out of cisterns, broken cisterns, that hold no water; a gadding about to drink of the waters of Sihor or of the river of Assyria; for instead of being content with happiness in the Lord, there was a longing in your vain mind for some created object to make you happy, a stretching forth of your hands to embrace an earthly lover, a seeking of pleasure in some image created by your carnal heart as a source of delight, distinct from the manifested presence of the Lord.
3. But look at the words as descriptive of another wandering from the Lord. What a going about is often too painfully visible in some who we hope fear God, to enable themselves to rise in the world. What ambition to succeed in life, fires the minds of most; and some of the people of God are not free from this unholy fire. If the Lord seems in some way to smile in providence, how it feeds this unholy flame. Have you never been caught in the snare; and did you not sensibly feel the rise in pride, as the things of time and sense rose in your estimation, and as they came more closely within your grasp? If your business increases, if you are making money, if you are getting on prosperously in worldly circumstances, how this increase of wealth secretly feeds the pride of your heart, and what a scheme it

lays in your mind for the accumulation of earthly objects with which to please and entertain your carnal senses!

How this new prosperity seems to push you out of the circumstances in which God originally placed you! You might have moved once in a humble sphere, were born perhaps in the lap of poverty and struggled in youth with many difficulties. But now you seem to be climbing up the ladder of life—from being a servant that you have become a master; from being at everybody's beck and call, you have now those whom you can send where you please. As these things then work in your mind, pleasing and gratifying it, how pride works with them, and how instead of seeking your happiness in the love of God, and deriving all your pleasure from that pure stream of holy and heavenly delight, there is an indulging in those objects which merely feed the carnal mind in its enmity against God and godliness. Drawn aside more and more by these things, you are "going about" bewildered as regards any delight in heavenly blessings; and having lost sight of the sweet views you once had of the Lord, and being deprived of the enjoyment of his presence, you are almost now content to feed on the dust.

Or take the other side of the question; suppose that the Lord should not allow you to rise in the world as you could wish, for indeed there are very few of the Lord's people who do so rise; say that you are sinking instead of rising; that your farm, or shop, or business, instead of becoming more flourishing, gets more and more drooping. What then? Will those reverses carry your affections upwards? May you not be still a backsliding daughter? Yes; you may equally be "going about" full of carking cares, bowed down by a load of worldly troubles that seem to gnaw your very vitals, and sunk into such despondency as to the future as almost to forget there is a God of providence, or how he has appeared for your help and relief in times past.

Thus there is danger in riches, and danger in poverty; a snare in rising, a snare in sinking. There are temptations when business increases, and there are temptations when business diminishes; a neglect of God when providence smiles, and a forgetfulness of God when providence frowns. "Those who will be rich fall into temptation, and a snare, and into many foolish hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition." {[1Ti 6:9](#)} But poverty has its snares too, for it opens a door for despondency, fretfulness, unbelief, and the sorrow of the world which works death.

4. But apart from these peculiar temptations, what a variety of objects the carnal mind can entertain itself with when once the soul has left its first love! How each person has his favorite pursuit, his darling allurements; and how as this becomes an idol, which it often will do in the absence of the Lord. It will gradually occupy the mind and insensibly steal away the affections. From this heart-idolatry arises a "going about" of the backsliding daughter to entertain herself with her earthly lovers.

Now the Lord sees all this, and sees too into what a state of confusion and bewilderment his backsliding daughter gradually gets, when losing sight of him, she goes after her idols. When her affections were heavenly and her mind engaged on divine realities, she was walking in the strait and narrow path; her eyes were looking right on and her eyelids straight before her. {[Pr 4:25](#)} But leaving her first love, and her eyes looking away from the Lord, she has gotten entangled in some snares of Satan; and the consequence is that she has lost sight of the path, is wandering in a wilderness where she cannot make straight paths for her feet, and has become so bewildered that she scarcely knows where she is, who she is, or what she is.

She is like a person lost in a wild jungle; or out of the beaten track in a dreary desert, who the further he goes the more bewildered he becomes, and the more he tries the more difficult he finds it to recover the path. Now does not this exactly describe the case and state of some of you here? You cannot altogether give up the belief that God has done something in times past for your soul; you cannot abandon the hope that it was he who began the work, and gave you some testimony of your interest in the love and blood of

the Lamb. It may have been long ago; but it was a time never to be forgotten, when the Lord first broke in upon your soul with healing in his wings, and gave you a testimony that indeed he had bought you with his redeeming blood. Oh, how you loved him then and walked with him in sweet communion!

But where have you been since, and where are you now? How do you spend the greater part of your time, and what for the most part are the daily exercises of your mind? Perhaps, feeling little else but a wandering heart, ever departing from the Lord, ever hewing out broken cisterns; ever gadding about, first down to Egypt, then up to Assyria; trying if this pursuit can give you any pleasure, or if you can gather up any profit or amusement or benefit from this object. Is not this sad work for a living soul? Is not this a miserable declension from the right ways of the Lord? and does not conscience in your bosom often proclaim it is so, filling you with grief and compunction, and making you cry, "Oh that I were as in months past, as I was in the days of my youth, when the secret of God was upon my tabernacle?" {[Job 29:2,4](#)} But like a person who has wandered out of the road, you have gone every way but the right, and now scarcely know where you are or what you are, but often fear lest, like the man that wanders out of the way of understanding, you should be found at last in the congregation of the dead. {[Pr 21:16](#)}

Now what I would gladly impress upon your mind is that you should see how God looks out upon you in your present state from the eyes of the text, and how his voice speaks to you when he says in it, "How long will you go about, O backsliding daughter?" Are you not tired yet? What will be the end of all your wanderings? Will you still persevere in this wretched course? Will this make a happy death-bed for you? Will this roving, wandering desire after earthly good, put downy feathers into your pillow when the cold sweats of death stand upon your forehead? Will these schemes and speculations give you peace and ease at the last? You who have been scheming morning, noon, and night, who have been striving after gain or seeking after pleasure, and thus neglected the throne of grace and the footstool of mercy, to whom the Bible has been a sealed book; who have long been strangers to communion with the Lord Jesus Christ, and who are sunk into coldness and apathy, so as to know little either of spiritual joy and sorrow; what have you procured to yourselves by all the wandering desires, restless ambition, and eager speculations of your vain mind?

What but present death and future sorrow? For if you are a child of God, you must be brought out of your present state, and it may be by terrible things in righteousness, or as the Lord speaks by the mouth of the prophet, "Your own wickedness will punish you. You will see what an evil, bitter thing it is to forsake the Lord your God, having no fear of him. I, the Lord, the Lord Almighty, have spoken!" {[Jer 2:19](#)}

Now when you begin to hear the reproofs of God in your conscience, and feel that it is an evil thing and bitter to have forsaken the Lord, when you mourn and sigh over your departings from him, and would gladly return, but scarcely know how, would willingly find your way back, but it seems too obscured to discover-then the eyes of the text look out upon you with favorable aspect, and the words that it speaks are words of encouragement to your soul; which brings me to my third point, that is-

III The DIRECTIONS which the Lord gives to his backsliding daughter, "Set up waymarks, make high heaps-set your heart toward the highway, even the way which you went-turn again, O virgin of Israel, turn again to these your cities."

The Lord here assumes that his backsliding daughter, but still the virgin of Israel, has lost her way, but would gladly find it; would return to him, but knows not how to get back into the road. If, therefore, you do not feel that you have lost your way, or have no desire to return to the Lord, these words are not spoken to you. But if you feel that you have indeed lost your way and would gladly find it again, that you might come back to your first love, as saying with the wife spoken of by Hosea, "It was better with me then than now," then these words may be considered as speaking to your conscience, and it is as if the Lord personally said, "Set up waymarks."

A. "Set up waymarks." Let us then look at this direction, and see if we can penetrate into its spiritual meaning. Just see for a moment where the person is to whom the words speak. He is represented as one who has lost his way and trying to find it, but unable; pressed, it may be, with hunger and thirst, and in danger of perishing. Now, how it would rejoice the heart of such a wanderer literally if just as he was sinking upon the sand to rise no more, his eyes caught sight of a distant waymark that just rose above the rest of the plain; if when he strained his eyes into the weary distance to take almost his last look for some indication of the road, he could just see upon the edge of the horizon a pillar or projecting stone, which he knew had been placed there by the side of the road to point out the right path. Would it not put strength into his weary limbs as giving him a sure mark of the right road? And would he not at once turn his steps to reach it that so he might escape from the desert in which he was pent in and all but lost? In this sense he might be said to set up a waymark; not that he himself set it up with his own hands, but with his own eyes; that he set it up in hope and expectation, in joyful anticipation of escape.

Apply this idea spiritually to the experience of the backsliding daughter. There are for her spiritual waymarks; that is, gracious indications of the right track. Of course you are well aware that in eastern countries they have no roads as we have, marked out by hedges and traveled over by a long succession of vehicles. Their ways, for the most part, lie over large plains, wide wildernesses, and dreary deserts, where the track is soon lost and with difficulty recovered, and this is generally pointed out by marks at various distances within sight of each other to guide the traveler.

So in grace there are certain waymarks whereby we may know whether we are in the way or not, and by which, if we get out of the road, we may be enabled to find the way back. But as the direction is given to Zion's backsliding daughter, to set up waymarks, let us see if we can show her what she may set up.

1. The first waymark is to have a clear testimony that God had called her by his grace. The first work of God upon the soul, the entrance of conviction into the heart, the application of the law to the conscience, and the first breaking in of that light which shows us that we are sinners and of that life which makes us feel our lost, ruined, undone state-this is the first waymark of the path of life, and therefore the first to be set up by the virgin of Israel. And bear this in mind that the more striking the beginning, the clearer the waymark. A little pillar, a slab two or three feet high, would be but a poor waymark in the wilderness. The higher, broader, and wider it is the better. Can you set up this waymark or anything like it? Can you look back to any time when the Lord began the work of grace upon your soul-when his word entered into your conscience to give light and life, when you were awakened out of your sleep of death, brought to cry for mercy, and had the Spirit of grace and supplication poured out upon you? Set up that waymark, if you can see it distinctly and clearly. It may be a blessed help to you to bring you back once more into the path from which you have wandered, as showing that you are still a virgin of Israel, though you must confess with shame and sorrow a backsliding daughter.
2. Now look at another waymark-the deliverance that God gave you from a burden of sin upon your conscience; the first manifestation in any measure of his pardoning love to your heart; the first gracious intimation of his mercy to your soul. Can you set up this waymark? Can you look back to any sweet time or blessed season when the Lord was first pleased to break in upon your soul with any intimation of his mercy, with any discovery of his pardoning love, with any application of atoning blood to your conscience? If you can, set it up, set it up; take it with both hands, plant it deeply and firmly in the path. These are the two most blessed waymarks, the two most conspicuous of all the rest. The first work of God upon the soul in the conviction of sin by the law, and the deliverance through a manifestation of pardoning love and mercy through the gospel; these are the two greatest waymarks that any soul can set up.

And if a backsliding daughter can set up these two waymarks, they will bring her back into the path from which she has wandered. But why? Because they give her a sure testimony that she belongs to the Lord. They are closely connected together, and mutually strengthen and support each other. For if the conscience was never convinced of sin, what room is there for a manifestation of mercy? and what is mercy as separated from a conviction of sin? A presumptuous notion.

3. Now look at another waymark. Has the Lord ever given you any evident answer to prayer? Were you ever in trouble of mind or distress of soul, or under any peculiar temptation, and made it a matter of special prayer, that the Lord would deliver you from it; and did you soon receive from him a blessed answer? I was once lying under a powerful temptation which made me sigh and groan before the Lord. I made it a matter of earnest prayer that he would deliver me from it; and in a day or two a letter came by the post which immediately opened up in a most unexpected manner a deliverance, and that so plainly that I could not but see in it the outstretched hand of God. Answer to prayer is a blessed waymark. Set it up-it will show you at times that you are in the way; for God never hears prayer unless indited by the blessed Spirit in the hearts of his people. It is true that he hears the young ravens that cry unto him and gives the stranger food and clothing-but it is spiritual prayers and spiritual answers of which I am speaking as divine waymarks to show the virgin of Israel that the Lord is her God.
4. But let us look along the edge of the desert to see whether we cannot find another waymark. Have you ever had any manifestations of Jesus to your soul, any views of the King in his beauty, any discovery of him to your heart as the Son of God? If you have, set it up; it is a most blessed waymark. Do we not learn from the pen of holy John that "whoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwells in him and he in God;" { [1Jo 4:15](#) } and does he not say, "He that believes on the Son of God has the witness in himself?" { [1Jo 5:10](#) } But how can any one either believe it or confess it unless it has been revealed to his soul by the power of God?
5. But can we not find another waymark? Was any promise ever applied to your soul with divine power when in trouble or distress? Did the Lord the Spirit ever bring any word home to your heart to relieve and comfort and encourage you under temptation or exercise? If ever he did, set it up; it is a most blessed waymark.

Now these which I have brought forward are distinguished waymarks which seem to tower above the rest; but you know that on a high road all the waymarks need not be of the same conspicuous character. There may be several broad and high in order to distinguish the road with greater clearness, and be more evident guides for the lost traveler; but between them there may be smaller waymarks. So it is in grace. We have set up some of the most conspicuous; now let us look at some of the smaller.

6. Has the Lord ever given you any love to his people? We must not overlook this waymark, for it is one of the Spirit's own giving. "We know," says John, "that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren."
7. Again, has the Lord ever melted your heart under the word of truth, given you a good hope through grace, a sweet intimation of his favor, a prospect of better days? And though you are following the Lord in chains, yet it is with weeping and supplications, and there is an expectation in your soul that he will in due time appear and bless you with pardon and peace. This is a waymark, for it is an opening in the valley of Achor of a door of hope.
8. Do you ever feel any softening of heart into godly sorrow on account of your backslidings, any contrition of spirit or any confession of your sins, so as to long to return to the Lord with a broken

heart and weeping eyes? This is a waymark; set it up; it is an indication that you are in the way, for this is "that repentance unto life" which Jesus is "exalted to give" as well as "remission of sins."

B. But let us pass on to another of the Lord's directions to the virgin of Israel-"Make high heaps." In Eastern countries, there being few other means to indicate the road, it was usual at various points to set up not only lofty waymarks, but heaps of stones by the wayside; and it still is the custom to do so, travelers often casting a stone upon the heap to add to its size. Now as the country was often very level, these heaps were sometimes made very high, to distinguish them from other objects. So in grace. The literal "waymarks" seemed to have been hewed pillars, with perhaps characters deeply sculptured upon them; but the "high heaps" were stones simply and crudely piled together without being hewn out with skill and care like the waymarks. As, then, these heaps consisted of stones, put together, we may view them spiritually as indicative of certain favorable marks of grace, not indeed so clear and conspicuous as the "waymarks," but no less signs of the road, from being brought together for that purpose. Thus, there are those among the family of God who have no very conspicuous waymarks, and yet have a number of gracious evidences, which all put together show that they are in the right path.

1. Take, for instance, any conspicuous appearance of Providence in answer to prayer. It has not the clearness of a blessed answer in grace, or a conspicuous deliverance, or a gracious manifestation, or a sweet promise applied to the soul; it does not bear upon its face the clear writing of the blessed Spirit as these "waymarks" do, but is still a heap of stones, and though the stones are not in themselves very large, and are put together confusedly, yet, when together, a good many little evidences may make up a good heap. Thus, if the Lord has appeared to you again and again in providence, you may put all together until you get a heap of them.
2. Or again, have you ever had any particular blessing in hearing the preached word, or in secret prayer, when you have been upon your knees? Has the Scripture ever been opened up to you with any life and power? Or has there ever been any discovery of the suitability of Jesus, or any sweetness enjoyed in his name, "as the ointment poured forth," which you have tasted, felt, and handled for yourself? You may take all these stones and put them together, the more you have got the better, and pile them up, and it may be you will find them to be a weighty heap.

Look at this heap in the light of the Spirit. View this good time of hearing, and that sweet season in prayer; that remarkable occasion when a word came with power, unction, and savor to your heart. Call to mind again this glimpse of Christ, or this gleam of mercy, or this ray of hope, or this sweet encouragement, or this token for good, or this comforting testimony. There has been this brokenness of heart; this humility of mind; this weeping over your sins; this self-loathing and self-abhorrence; this hatred of sin, this love of holiness; this separation from the world; this spirituality of mind; this spirit of prayer. Put together all these as so many stones upon stones until you get a high heap of them.

But why is the virgin of Israel directed to set up these waymarks, and make these high heaps, except that by these means she may be led clearly to see not only the way that leads to Zion, but how to guide her feet back into it? But what if you have no such waymarks, no such high heaps? Where, then, is there any indication that you are in the way, or even desirous to be in the way? Consider these things, and the Lord impress them with his own power upon your conscience.

C. But the Lord still goes on with his directions to his backsliding daughter-"Set your heart towards the highway, even the way which you went." There is a way that leads to Zion, of which we read, "A highway shall be there and a way, and it shall be called the way of holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it." {[Isa 35:8](#)} In this way of happiness and holiness the virgin daughter of Israel once walked, when she came up from the wilderness leaning upon her beloved; but, alas! in leaving her first love she declined from it; she has got out of the road, lost sight of it, and strayed away into the wilderness.

Now the Lord says to her, as she is longing to return, "Set your heart towards the highway, even the way which you went." Let your affections flow out towards that strait and narrow path in which you once walked, when your eyes as well as your feet were set upon Jesus; for is not he "the way" as well as the truth and the life? When you were walking in him as the way unto God, you were not gadding about after every vain imagination of your carnal heart. Now "set your heart towards the highway, even the way which you went." Is not Jesus the highway to God, for no man comes to the Father but by him? {[Joh 14:6](#)} Your heart was then set toward the highway, for it was fixed upon him.

Was it not well with you in those days? Look back, then, to that happy season, when you were prayerful, spiritually-minded, tender in conscience, watchful in spirit, circumspect in life, full of love and affection to the people of God, with sin subdued, the flesh crucified, and the world under your feet, and all because your heart was fully and firmly fixed upon the Lord of life and glory. Though it was a very strait and narrow way, for there was no room for sin, the flesh, and the world to walk with you in it, O what a good way it was to be found in! How it brought you out of the world; and what a blessed path it was, though bodily sickness, providential trials, sore afflictions, or hot persecution might have attended it!

Now, if you would get back to that spot, the first thing to do is to set your heart toward it, that, sick of sin, the world, and yourself, you may desire once more to walk in that strait and narrow path. There it is, though you had forgotten it. "But how shall I find it?" says the soul. "Set up waymarks, make high heaps," the Lord answers. Look at his dealings with your soul in times past; and as you get encouragement from them it will revive your hope, strengthen your faith, and draw out your love. Jesus, as the way, is worthy of all your affections. Set your heart, therefore, toward him, for in finding him you will find the highway, even the way which you went in days gone by. If your heart is really and truly toward it, your eyes will soon discover it and your feet will quickly find it.

For why is your way now so dark and obscure? Because the old veil of darkness has come back over your heart. But if you turn to the Lord with all your heart, the veil shall once more be taken away. {[2Co 3:16](#)}

Are you not weary of your sins? Are you not willing to suffer almost anything and everything sooner than be deceived in what regards your eternal peace? Do you not desire to be found at last in the path of life, and die under the sweet smiles of God? Then set your heart toward the highway, even the way which you went in days of old, when, in all the tenderness, purity, and warmth of virgin love, you cleaved to the Lord with full purpose of heart, and all your delight was to serve, please, and obey him.

D. But the Lord gives his backsliding daughter another direction. "Turn again, O virgin of Israel, turn again to these your cities." By "cities" we may here understand places of fixed abode as opposed to wandering in the wilderness. Zion's cities, here called "your cities," may, then, be viewed as places where the virgin of Israel had found salvation and rest. Thus we read, "We have a strong city; salvation God will appoint for walls and bulwarks;" {[Isa 26:1](#)} and thus the ancient worthies are spoken of as "looking for a city which has foundations whose builder and maker is God." {[Heb 11:10](#)} In these cities the virgin of Israel had found a sure habitation, and therefore the Lord says to her, "Turn again to these your cities;" that is, viewed spiritually and experimentally, seek once more that rest and peace, that sure shelter which you had when you could rest within those walls and bulwarks which God has appointed for salvation, and where you were secure from the perils of the wilderness. Turn again to those your cities, for the gates are still open that "the righteous nation which keeps the truth may enter in;" and if you keep the truth firmly and warmly in your heart, those gates will again be opened unto you.

IV Now for our last point, the STRONG FOUNDATION upon which those directions rest. The soul might say, "Lord, how can I do all this? how can I find my way back, for have I not wandered so far as to preclude all hope of return?" "No!" he answers; "The Lord has created a new thing in the earth; a woman

shall compass a man." Here we have a clear intimation of that miraculous incarnation of the Son of God which was to take place at the appointed time, and which is the strong, the only foundation on which salvation, with all salvation's blessings, rests. Salvation from death and hell, the full pardon of sin, the righteousness which perfectly justifies, the super-aboundings of the free, sovereign grace of God, all stand on this one foundation, that the Son of God has become man and that not by natural generation, but by a supernatural and miraculous way, here intimated by the expression, "The Lord has created a new thing in the earth." This is a delicate foreshadowing of the miraculous conception of the pure humanity of the Son of God in the womb of the Virgin Mary. In that sense it was true that "a woman should compass a man," for when a pure virgin compassed in her womb the sacred manhood of the Lord Jesus Christ and embraced him in her arms when brought forth, she "compassed a man" as conceiving and bringing forth a perfect man by the sole influence and operation of the perfect Spirit.

Now is not this the stone, the tried stone, the precious corner stone which God has laid in Zion for a sure foundation? An incarnate God, the Son of God in our nature, his eternal Deity in union with his humanity, in which he suffered, bled, died, rose again, ascended up on high, and is glorified at the right hand of the Father-is not this the foundation of the whole salvation of the Church? And as it is the foundation of all salvation from sin, so it is the foundation of all restoration from spiritual declension. This, therefore, is the foundation of all the directions and admonitions of God to his backsliding daughter when he bids her set up her waymarks, make her high heaps, and speaks as in her ears, "Turn again, O virgin of Israel, turn again to these your cities. How long will you go about, O you backsliding daughter?" You are a virgin of Israel, though a backsliding daughter; and because the Lord has created this new thing, this mighty miracle in the earth, therefore mercy can once more reach your soul; therefore grace can still superabound over the aboundings of sin.

See what a door of hope this opens in the valley of Achor, and what assurance it gives, that souls are pardoned and blessed by the sole virtue of the atoning blood of the Son of God. Do you see the connection between the incarnation of the Son of God and pardoned sin; between atoning blood and the healing of all backslidings? Is it not a beautiful connection? How blessed it is to see and feel that because the Lord has created this new thing upon the earth in the incarnation of his dear Son; that because "to us a child is born, unto us a Son is given," that "the government shall be upon his shoulder, and that of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end." {[Isa 9:6-7](#)}

Therefore, O virgin of Israel, "Set up waymarks, make high heaps-set your heart toward the highway, even the way which you went." There is hope for you, help for you, mercy for you, grace for you-and why all this? Because the Son of God has become flesh for you; because mercy, grace, and peace flow through the channel of a Savior's blood, and God can be just, infinitely, inflexibly just, and yet the justifier of him which believes in Jesus.

Thus there is a blessed reason why the virgin of Israel, though a backsliding daughter, may yet set up her waymarks and make her high heaps, and set her heart towards the highway; for there is mercy for her in a bleeding Lamb; there is salvation for her through the blood-shedding, obedience, and death of the Son of God. There is no reason then why any sensible sinner should sit down in despair; there is no cause why any poor backsliding child of God should say, "There is no hope, therefore after my idols will I go." There is room to return for every poor wanderer; there is mercy in the bosom of God; there is salvation in the blood of Christ; and there is grace super-abounding over the aboundings of sin in the pierced side and bleeding wounds of a once suffering but now glorified Immanuel.