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D E E P A N D I N T I M A T E
K N O W L E D G E
O F
D I V I N E T R U T H ;

Delivered at an Association of Baptist Ministers and Churches,
at St. Alban's, Hertfordshire, June 1, 1796.

By ANDREW FULLER.

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S E R M O N, &c.

HEBREWS V. 12, 13, 14.

For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. For every one that useth milk, is unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.

THERE is nothing in which the kingdom of ~~Christ and the kingdom of Satan~~ are more opposed, than that the one is characterised by light, and the other by darkness. The cause of falsehood is itself a dark cause, and requires darkness to cover it: but truth is light, and cometh to the light, that it may be made manifest. Knowledge is every where encouraged in the bible; our best interests are interwoven with it; and the spirituality of our minds, and the real enjoyment of our lives depend upon its increase. *Grace and peace are multiplied through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord.* Nor is it necessary for our own sakes only, but for the sake of others. It is a great encouragement to Christian ministers, when those whom they teach possess a good understanding in the things of God. Indeed, none but those who are

engaged in the work of teaching can tell how much the ardor of the mind is damped by the contrary.—The truth of this remark is exemplified in the writer of this epistle. In the verses immediately preceding the text, you perceive him highly interested in his subject, and proceeding in a glorious career of reasoning; when, all on a sudden, he is stopped. He had many things to say of his Lord and Master, but which were *hard to be understood, seeing those to whom he wrote were dull of hearing*. It is on this occasion that he introduces the passage now before us; in which his object is to shame and provoke them, by comparing them with those who, as to years, were men, but, as to knowledge, children; and who, instead of having made advances in science, needed to be taught the alphabet over again. There are some things supposed and included in the passage, which require a little previous attention.

First—It is here supposed, that all divine knowledge is to be derived from *the oracles of God*. It is a proper term by which the sacred scriptures are here denominated, strongly expressive of their divine inspiration and infallibility: in them God speaks; and to them it becomes us to hearken. We may learn other things from other quarters; and things too that may subserve the knowledge of God; but the knowledge of God itself must here be sought, for here only it can be found.

Much has been said on faith and reason, and the question has often been agitated, whether the one, in any instance, can be contrary to the other? In the solution of this question, it is necessary, in the first place,

to determine what is meant by reason. There is a great difference between *reason* and *reasoning*. Nothing which God reveals can contradict the former; but this is more than can be said of the latter. It is impossible for God to reveal any thing repugnant to what is fit and right; but that which is fit and right in one man's estimation, is preposterous and absurd in the esteem of another; which clearly proves, that reason, as it exists in depraved creatures, is not a proper standard of truth; and hence arises the necessity of another and a better standard, *the oracles of God*. By studying these, a good man will gain more understanding than his teachers if they live in the neglect of them.

Secondly—It is supposed, that the oracles of God include a system of divine truth. They contain the *first principles*, or rudiments, of religion, the simple truths of the gospel, which require little or no investigation or order to their being understood: these are called *milk*. They also contain the deep things of God, things beyond the reach of a slight and cursory observation; and which require, if we would properly enter into them, close and repeated attention: this is *strong meat*. Those doctrines which the apostle enumerates in the following chapter, as things which he should *leave and go on unto perfection*, have been thought to refer to the leading principles of Judaism: and it may be so, for Judaism itself contained the first principles of Christianity: it was introductory to it; or, as it is elsewhere expressed, it was *our school-master to bring us to Christ*.

Thirdly—It is intimated that Christians should not

rest satisfied in having attained to a knowledge of the first principles of the doctrine of Christ, but should go on unto perfection; not only so as to obtain satisfaction for themselves, but that they may be able to *teach others*. It is true, *all are not to be teachers by office*; but in one form or other, all should aspire to communicate the knowledge of Christ. Every Christian is required to be ready to give a reason of the hope that is in him with meekness and fear: and if all the members of our churches did but possess this readiness, besides the advantages that would accrue to themselves and others, there would be less scarcity than there is of able and evangelical ministers.

The leading sentiment which runs through the passage, and comprises the whole, is, **THE IMPORTANCE OF A DEEP AND INTIMATE KNOWLEDGE OF DIVINE TRUTH**. To this subject, brethren, permit me to ~~call your attention~~. In discoursing upon it, I shall first enquire wherein it consists, and then endeavor to shew the importance of it.

I. *Let us enquire, what a deep and intimate knowledge of divine truth includes.*

That the oracles of God contain deep things, requires but little proof. The character of God; our own depravity; and that great mystery of godliness, God manifest in the flesh, &c. are deep and interesting subjects. The prophets had to *search* into the meaning of their own prophecies. 1 Peter i. 10.—The riches of Christ, with which the apostles were intrusted, were denominated *unsearchable*, Eph. iii. 8. and even the highest orders of created intelligences are described as *looking into these things* for their farther improvement. 1 Pet. i. 12.

It may seem presuming for any person, in the present imperfect state, to determine on subjects of such magnitude; or to talk of a deep and intimate knowledge of things which surpass the comprehension of the most exalted creatures. And if these terms were used either *absolutely*, to express the real conformity of our ideas of divine things to the full extent of the things themselves; or even *comparatively*, if the comparison respected saints on earth and saints in heaven, it would be presumption. But it is only in reference to one another in the present state, that these terms are intended to apply. Compared with the heavenly inhabitants all of us are babes: even an inspired apostle was no more. *When I was a child, said he, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see through a glass darkly, but then face to face: now I know in part, but then shall I know even as also I am known.* 1. Cor. xiii. 11, 12. There are such degrees however amongst good men in this life, as that, compared with each other, some may be said to possess only a superficial knowledge of divine truth, and others a more deep and intimate acquaintance with it.

It is the importance of the latter of these that I wish to have impressed upon our minds. To attain it, the following, amongst other things, require our attention.

I. *Though we must not stop at first principles, yet we must be well grounded in them.*

No person can drink deeply into any science without being well acquainted with its rudiments: these are the foundation on which the whole structure rests.

The first principles of the oracles of God, as specified by our apostle, are *repentance from dead works, faith towards God, the doctrine of baptisms, and the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment*. Whatever may be meant by some of these terms, whether they refer to things peculiar to Judaism, or to the early times of Christianity; it is clear from scripture, and the nature of things, that others of them are expressive of principles, which, in every age, are of the first importance. Though the apostle speaks of *leaving* them, yet he does not mean that we should give them up, or treat them with indifference, but *go on unto perfection*; as a builder leaves his foundation when he raises his walls, and advances towards the completion of his building.

Repentance was the first lesson inculcated by John the baptist, and Christ, and his apostles; and that not merely on profligate sinners, but on scribes and pharisees. All that they had hitherto learned, required, as it were, to be unlearned; and all that they had done, to be undone, and utterly relinquished.

The knowledge which carnal men acquire of divine things, puffs them up: and while they think they understand great things, they know nothing as they ought to know it. All the works too which have been wrought during a state of unregeneracy are *dead works*: and, instead of being in any degree pleasing to God, require to be lamented with shame and self-abhorrence. Repentance is a kind of self-emptying work: it includes a renunciation, not only of those things for which our own consciences at the time condemned us, but of what we have been

in the habit of reckoning wisdom and righteousness. Hence the propriety of the order in which the scriptures place it with regard to faith, *Repent and believe the gospel.* Mark i. 15. Acts ii. 38. xx. 21. 2 Tim. ii. 25. Renounce your own ways, and embrace his: *He that will be wise, must first become a fool that he may be wise.*

Faith towards God, or believing views of the being and glory of the divine character, are reckoned also amongst the first principles of the doctrines of Christ. If we have just ideas of this very important subject, we have the key to the whole system of gospel truth. He who beholds the glory of the divine holiness, will, in that glass, perceive his own polluted and perishing condition; and, when properly impressed with a sense of these things, he will naturally embrace the doctrine of a Saviour, yea, and of a *great one*. Salvation, by mere grace, through the atonement of Jesus, will appear the very object of his soul's desire. And, with these principles in his heart, other scripture doctrines will appear true, interesting, and harmonious. There are but few erroneous sentiments in the Christian world, which may not be traced to a spirit of self-admiration, which is the opposite of repentance, or to false conceptions of the divine character.

To these the apostle adds, *the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment*; or the doctrine of a future state of rewards and punishments, of endless duration. These are principles, which though they occupy almost an ultimate place in the sacred system, yet, as every other important truth respecting man

proceeds upon the supposition of their truth, they may properly enough be reckoned among the first principles of the oracles of God. If these principles were given up to the infidel, the spirit of whose creed amounts to this, *Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die*; or if the latter of them were given up to the universalist, who, though he admits of a judgment to come, yet not of an *eternal* one; we should soon find the whole fabric of truth fallen to the ground.

2. *We must not content ourselves with knowing what is truth, but must be acquainted with the evidence on which it rests.*

Christians are required to be always ready to give a *reason* for the hope that is in them, with meekness and fear: and this supposes not only that every part of religion admits of a rational defence, but that it is necessary for Christians to study, that they may be able to defend it; or at least, to feel the ground on which they rest their hope.

The truths contained in the oracles of God, may be distinguished into two kinds: these which approve themselves to our ideas of wisdom or fitness; and those which utterly surpass our understanding, but which require to be believed as matters of pure revelation. The former chiefly respect the counsels and works of God, which are exhibited to our understanding, that God in them may be made manifest: the latter more commonly respect the being and inconceivable glories of the Godhead, the reality of which we are concerned to know, but on their mode or manner are forbidden to gaze.

It is exceedingly desirable to trace the wisdom and:

harmony of evangelical truth: it is a source of enjoyment superior, perhaps, to any thing with which we are acquainted. All the *works of God are honorable and glorious, and sought out by all them that have pleasure therein*; but redemption is his *great work*, wherein appears *glory to himself in the highest, and on earth peace, and good will to men*: here, therefore, must needs be the highest enjoyment. Prior to the revelation of redemption, the holy angels shouted for joy over the works of nature; but having witnessed the incarnation, life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus, they *desired to look into other things*. Nothing tends more to establish the mind, and to interest the heart in any truth, than a perception that it is adapted at once to express the glory of the divine character, and to meet the necessities of guilty creatures. The more we think of truth, therefore, in this way, the more we shall be *rooted and grounded in it*.

But what *reason* have we to give for embracing those doctrines which we consider as above reason, of the fitness of which we consequently pretend to have no ideas. We answer, they are contained in the oracles of God. Nothing is more reasonable than to give implicit credit to HIM who cannot lie. On this ground we believe that *there are three who bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost; and that these three are one*. If God had revealed nothing but what would have come within the limits of our understanding, he must have told us little or nothing about himself, and nothing at all of his self-existence, eternity, and infinity; for we have no positive ideas of any of these things. Yet the revela-

tion of such truths may be as necessary as those which approach nearer to our comprehension. The latter afford food for *knowledge*; the former teach us *humility*, and furnish matter for *faith*.

3. *We must learn truth immediately from the oracles of God.*

Many religious people appear to be contented with seeing truth in the light in which some great and good author has placed it: but if ever we enter into the gospel to purpose, it must be by reading the word of God for ourselves, and by praying and meditating upon its sacred contents. It is *in God's light that we must see light*. By conversing with the sacred writers; we shall gradually imbibe their sentiments, and be insensibly assimilated into the same spirit.

The writings of great and good men are not to be despised any more than their preaching; only let them not be treated as oracular. The best of men, in this imperfect state, view things *partially*; and, therefore, are in danger of laying an improper stress upon some parts of scripture truth to the neglect of other parts, of equal, and sometimes of superior importance. Now where this is the case, imitation becomes dangerous. It is rarely known but that an original suffers in the hands of a copyist: if, therefore, the former be imperfect, what may be expected of the latter? We all come far short of truth and righteousness, let our model be ever so perfect; but if this be imperfect, we shall possess not only our own faults, but those of another.

If, as ministers, we go about to depict either the character of a bad man, or of a good man, a state of unregeneracy, or a work of grace; and, instead of

drawing from real life, only copy from some accounts which we have read or heard, of these matters, we shall neither convince the sinner, nor touch the case of the believer: all, to say the least, will be foreign and uninteresting.

If we adopt the principles of fallible men, without searching the scriptures for ourselves, and enquiring whether those things be so, or not, they will not avail us, even allowing them to be on the side of truth, as if we had learned them from a higher authority. Our faith, in such a case, will stand in the wisdom of man, and not in the power of God. There is a favour in truth when drawn from the words which the Holy Ghost teacheth, which is lost, or at least diminished, if it pass under the conceptions and expressions of men. Nor will it avail us when most needed; for he who receives his creed from men, may deliver it up to men again. Truth learned only at second-hand will be to us what Saul's armour was to David; we shall be at a loss how to use it in the day of trial.

4. If we would possess a great and intimate acquaintance with divine truth, *we must view it in its various connections, in the great system of redemption.*—Systematical divinity, or the studying of truth in a systematical form, has been, of late years, much decried. It has become almost general to consider it as the mark of a contracted mind, and the grand obstruction to free enquiry. If we imbibe a *false* system indeed, there is no doubt but it will prove injurious; if it be true in part, but very *defective*, it may impede our progress in divine knowledge; or if, in order to retain a system, we torture the scriptures to

make them accord with it, we shall pervert the truth instead of preserving it. These are things which make against false, defective, and anti-scriptural systems of faith; but not in the least against system itself. The best criterion of a good system is its concordance with the holy scriptures. That view of things, whether we have any of us fully attained it or not, which admits the most natural meaning to be put upon every part of God's word, is the right system of religious truth. And he whose belief consists of a number of positions arranged in such a connexion as to constitute a consistent whole, but who, from a sense of his imperfection, and a remembrance of past errors, holds himself ready to add or retrench as evidence shall require, is in a far more advantageous track for the attainment of truth, and a real enlargement of mind, than he who thinks without a system.

To be without system is nearly the same thing as to be without principle. Whatever principles we may have, while they continue in this disorganized state, they will answer but little purpose in the religious life. Like a tumultuous assembly in the day of battle, they may exist; but it will be without order, energy, or end.

No man could decry systematical knowledge in any thing but religion, without subjecting himself to the ridicule of thinking men: a philosopher, for instance, who, instead of improving facts which had fallen under his observation, that he might discover the general laws by which they were governed; and, instead of tracing things to their first principles, and pursuing them to their just consequences, should inveigh against all general laws, all system, all connexion and

dependence, and all uniform design in the variety of creation. What should we say of a *husbandman* who refused to arrange his observations under the respective branches of business to which they naturally belonged; who had no general scheme or plan of proceeding, but left the work of every day to the day itself, without forethought, contrivance, or design? Or what account should we make of a *merchant* or *tradesman*, who should exclude systematical knowledge from his affairs? He is constantly employed in buying and selling, but he must have no general system whereby to conduct either the one or the other; none for the regulation of his books; none for the assortment of his articles: all must be free, lest he sink into formality, and by being in the habit of doing things in order, should contract a narrowness of mind!

But is the bible written upon systematical principles? Does it contain a system? Or does it encourage us to form one?—By the bible being written on systematical principles, I suppose is meant a systematical arrangement of its contents: and there is no doubt but that the contrary of this is true. But then the same might be said of the book of nature. Though the different species of animals, vegetables, minerals, &c. are capable of being arranged under their respective *genera*, and so reduced to a system; yet in their actual position in creation, they assume no such appearance. It is wisely contrived, both in nature and scripture, that the objects of each should be scattered in lovely variety: but amidst all this variety, an observant eye will perceive unity, order, arrangement, and fulness of design.

God, in all his works, has proceeded by system: there is a beautiful connexion and harmony in every thing which he has wrought. We sometimes speak of a system of nature, a system of providence, and a system of redemption; and, as smaller systems are often included in greater, the language is not improper: in reality, however, they are all but one system; one grand piece of machinery, each part of which has a dependence on the other, and altogether form one glorious whole. Now if God proceed by system, it may be expected that the scriptures, being a transcript of his mind, should contain a system; and if we would study them to purpose, it must be so as to discover what that system is.

I never recollect to have heard any objection to systematical divinity with regard to *practice*. Let a Christian, utterly unacquainted with human writings, take his bible with a view to learn the mind of God upon any given subject, suppose it be *the duty of parents*, he will naturally collect all the passages in the sacred writings which relate to that subject, arrange them in order, and from the whole, thus taken together, regulate his conduct. For this no one would think of blaming him: yet this will be actually systematically.

Let him do the same with respect to every other duty, and he will be in possession of a body or system of practical divinity. And why should he stop here; why not collect the mind of God from the whole of scripture taken together, upon things to be believed, as well as things to be performed?

If the apostles had not considered divine truth in a systematical form, how came the writer of this epistle

to speak of *the first principles of the oracles of God?* This language supposes, as before observed, a scheme or system of faith: and if such a form of considering truth were disadvantageous to Christians, how came he to censure the Hebrews for their want of progress in it? In the epistle to the Romans, chap. xii. 6. we read of the *proportion or analogy of faith*, which supposes that the gospel is one proportionate or consistent whole.

Could a system of divinity be written, in which every sacred truth or duty should have a place assigned it, and such a place, both as to order and importance, as properly belonged to it, not invading the province of other truths or duties, but, on the contrary, subserving them, and itself appearing to the greatest advantage amongst them; such a performance would answer to what the apostle means by *the proportion of faith*. ~~But can we expect a work answering to this description from an uninspired pen?—~~ Perhaps not: the materials for such a model, however, exist in the holy scriptures, and though we cannot collect and arrange them to perfection, let us, as in all other things, *press towards the mark*.

Let that system of religion, which we embrace, be but, in the main, the right one, and so far from contracting the mind, it is easy to perceive that it will abundantly enlarge it. For example, let the fact of Joseph's being sold into Egypt be viewed without its connexion with God's designs, and it will appear a melancholy instance of human depravity; we shall see nothing very remarkable in it; and it will seem calculated only to afford a disgusting picture of fami-

ly jealousies and intrigues, enough to break the heart of an aged parent. But let the same fact be viewed systematically, as a link in a chain, or as a part of a whole, and it will assume a very different appearance. Thus viewed, it is an event pregnant with glory. He must needs go down into Egypt that much people might be preserved alive; that Jacob's family might follow him; that they might there be preserved, for a season, till, in due time, having become a great nation, they should be led forth with a high hand; that they might be placed in Canaan, and might set up the worship of the true God; that the Messiah might be born among them; and that his kingdom might be extended over the whole earth. Without a system, the patriarch reflected, *All these things are against me*: but with a system, or rather with only the discovery of a very small part of it, he exclaimed, *It is enough: Joseph, my son, is yet alive: I will go down, and see him before I die.*

In addition to this event in providence, let us offer a few examples on matters of doctrine.

Would you contemplate the great *evil of sin*, you must view it in its connections, tendencies, and consequences. For a poor finite creature, whose life is but a vapour, to gratify a vicious inclination, may appear a trifle: but when its tendencies and mischievous consequences are taken into the account, it wears a different aspect. Jeroboam said in his heart, *if this people go up to sacrifice at Jerusalem, then shall the kingdom return unto David.* Hence he set up idolatry; and hence the nation was corrupted more and more, till at length it was given up to utter destruc-

tion. Considering ourselves as links in the great chain of moral government, every transgression is of vast importance, because it affects the whole system. If the government of God be once violated, an example is set, which, if followed, would ruin the universe.

Farther, if we contemplate *the death of Christ* without any relation to system, we shall only see a suffering person at Jerusalem, and feel that pity and disgust which is ordinarily excited by injustice and cruelty. But let us view it as connected with the moral government of God; as a glorious expedient to secure its honors; *a propitiation wherein God declared his righteousness for the remission of sins*, Rom. iii. 25. and we shall have a new set of feelings. While the apostles continued to view this event unconnectedly, their minds were contracted, and sorrow filled their hearts; but when their eyes were opened to see it in its connections and consequences, their sorrow was turned into joy. Those very persons who, but a few weeks before, could not bear to think of their Lord's departure, after they had witnessed his ascension to glory, *returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and continued daily in the temple, praising and blessing God.* Luke xxiv. 52, 53.

Once more, if we view the doctrine of *election* as unconnected with other things, it may appear to us to be a kind of fondness without reason or wisdom. A charge of caprice would hereby be brought against the Almighty; and professors, like the carnal Jews, on account of the distinguishing favors conferred on their nation, would be fostered in self-conceit. But if it be considered in connection with the great sys-

tem of religious truth, it will appear in a very different light. It will represent the Divine Being in his true character; not as acting without design, and subjecting himself to endless disappointments; but as accomplishing all his works in pursuance of an eternal purpose. And as salvation, from first to last, is of mere grace, and every son and daughter of Adam is absolutely at the divine discretion, it tends powerfully to impress this idea both upon saints and sinners. While it leads the former to acknowledge, that by the grace of God they are what they are, it teaches the latter to relinquish their vain hopes, and to fall into the arms of sovereign mercy.

As the righteousness of God's elect is not the ground of their election, so neither is their felicity its ultimate end. God righteously hides the things of the gospel from the wise and prudent, and reveals them unto babes, because *so it seemeth good in his sight*: it tends most to display the glory of his character, and to promote the general good of creation. These things, if properly considered, are of a humbling tendency.

If the Jews had considered that they were not chosen, or put in possession of the good land, *for their righteousness, or for the uprightness of their hearts*; and that though it was an instance of great love to them, yet it was not ultimately for their sake, or to accomplish their happiness, but that God *might fulfil his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob*, Deut. ix. 5. in whom, and whose seed *all nations of the earth were to be blessed*; and if they had considered the salvation of the world as the end of their national existence, and themselves as *God's witnesses*,

till the times of reformation; instead of valuing themselves, and despising other nations, they would have reckoned themselves *their servants for Jehovah's sake.*

In short, by considering principles in their various connexions, *far greater advances will be made in divine knowledge than by any other means.* The discovery of one important truth will lead on to a hundred more. Let a Christian but realize, for example, the glory of the divine character as the moral governor of the world; and he will, at once, perceive the equity and goodness of the moral law, which requires us to love him with all the heart. In this glass he will see his own depravity: and possessed of these views, the grace of the gospel will appear to him to be grace indeed. Every blessing it contains will be endearing; and the medium through which all is conveyed, superlatively precious. A train of thought like this has frequently proved more interesting than the labors of those, who, having discovered a vein of silver or gold, dig deeply into the bowels of the enriching mine.

Having considered a few of the means necessary for the attainment of a deep and intimate knowledge of truth: I shall

II. Attempt to establish the IMPORTANCE of such a knowledge.

As the power of created beings are limited, and no one can expect to understand every thing, it is the province of wisdom to select those kinds of knowledge as the objects of our pursuit, which are most valuable, and of the greatest utility. There are some depths, of which it is our honor and felicity to be ig-

ignorant; Rev. ii. 24. and even in things which are lawful, we may, in numberless instances, very well be excused, if not in wholly neglecting, yet in possessing only a general acquaintance with them. But divine truth requires not only to be known, but well known: it is not only necessary that we have sentiments, and right sentiments, but that we enter deeply into them. Every thing pertaining to God is great, and requires all our powers. In whatever we indulge indifference, there is no room for it here: God requires not only *all our heart*, but *all our mind and strength*.

The importance of a deep and intimate acquaintance with divine truth, will more particularly appear from the following considerations:

I. A neglect of God's word is represented as a *heinous sin*: but we shall not be able to escape this sin, if we content ourselves with a superficial acquaintance with truth. Revelation, in every stage, demands our serious attention; but the revelation of eternal life, through Jesus Christ, requires attention in the highest degree. This is that *great salvation* which we are charged not to neglect. Heb. ii. 3. The dignity of its author, its sublime and interesting nature, with the accumulated evidence which God hath condescended to afford us of its divine original, combine to require of us the most careful and cordial examination into its contents. A neglect of this is either total or partial: the former would denominate us unbelievers, and expose us to utter destruction: the latter, though it may exist in sincere Christians, is nevertheless a sin, and a sin more than a little offensive to the God of truth.

To be contented with a superficial acquaintance with divine things, implies *disrespect* to HIM who has revealed them. A letter from a distant friend, to whom we are cordially attached, is viewed as such, and every sentence of it carefully inspected, and on many occasions committed to memory. Why should not the word of God be productive of the same effects? Indeed it is: for in proportion as we love God, his word will *dwell richly in us*. It will be our bosom companion, to which we shall have recourse on every occasion; especially in seasons of leisure, when the mind, like a spring from which a pressure is removed, rises to its natural position. Hence the following language, *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might: and these words which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart, and thou shalt teach them diligently to thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.* Deut. vi. 5, 6, 7.

To be contented with a superficial acquaintance with divine things, implies also a *want of affection to the things themselves*. A Will, or Testament, in which we were deeply interested, would be procured with eagerness, and read with avidity; and if any difficulty remained as to the meaning of a particular passage, we should have no rest till by some means or other we had obtained a solution of it. I need not apply this remark. Nothing is more evident, than that whatever is uppermost in our affections, will form the grand current of our thoughts. And where our thoughts are

directed to a subject with intenceness and perseverance, it will become familiar to us; and unless it be owing to the want of natural capacity, or other necessary means, ~~we shall~~, of course, enter deeply into it.

I have been much struck ~~with the ardent affection~~ which David discovered to the Holy Scriptures, and every part of their sacred contents. The whole cxix. Psalm is a continued encomium upon them. There we have such language as the following:—*O, how I love thy law. My soul breaketh for the longing that it hath unto thy judgments at all times. Thy statutes have been my song in the house of my pilgrimage. The law of thy mouth is better to me than thousands of gold and silver.* Now, all the Scriptures which were then extant, amounted to little more than the writings of Moses. What additions have we since enjoyed!—Besides the Book of Psalms, and the Prophecies which followed, we have the whole New Testament—*full of grace and truth*—wherein the invisible God hath, as it were, rendered himself visible.—*HIM, whom no man hath seen at any time, the only begotten SON, who dwelt in his bosom, hath declared.* John i. 17, 18.—How is it that such a price should be in our hands to get wisdom, and yet that we should have so little heart for it.

2. The word of God is represented as *a mean of sanctification*: but no effect of this kind can be produced beyond the degree in which we imbibe it. One great object of our Lord's intercession with the Father on our behalf was, *that we might be sanctified through the truth, even by his word, which is truth.* The Gospel is continually held up, not only as a dec-

trine according to godliness, but as having a powerful influence in producing it. *It teacheth us that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world. It worketh effectually in those who believe.* It was by the doctrine of the Cross that the world became crucified to the Apostle, and he unto the world! So universal and so manifest were the effects of divine truth upon the practice of the Primitive Christians, that the sacred writers could appeal to fact on their behalf, that they, and they only were successful combatants against the world's temptations:—*Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?* John xvii. 17. Tit. ii. 12. 1 Thess. ii. 13. Gal. vi. 14. 1 John v. 4, 5.

Now, in order that the Gospel may be productive of these effects, it is necessary that it be understood.—Without this, how should it interest or affect the heart? We must *believe the truth* 'ere it will work effectually: we must *know* it, or it will not make us free. That we may serve God acceptably, and with godly fear, we must have *grace*; and grace is multiplied *through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord.*

Knowledge and affection have a mutual influence on each other. That the love of truth will prompt us to labor after a more perfect acquaintance with its contents, has been already observed: and that such an acquaintance will promote an encreasing love of truth in return, is equally evident. We cannot love an unknown gospel any more than an unknown God. Affection is fed by knowledge, being thereby furnish-

ed with grounds or reasons for its operations. By the expansion of the mind the heart is supplied with objects which fill it with delight. It is thus that it becomes enlarged, and that we feel ourselves sweetly induced to *run in the way of the divine commandments*.

How was it that the apostle became dead to the world, by the cross of Christ! I suppose on much the same principle; that the light of the stars is eclipsed by that of the sun; or that a man having drunk old wine, ceases to desire new, for he saith, the old is better. It is by drinking deeply into religion, that we become disaffected to carnal objects.

3. The word of God is represented as the *great source of Christian enjoyment*; but no effect of this kind can be produced any farther than we imbibe the truth. The same way in which divine truth operates as a medium of sanctification, it becomes a source of enjoyment; namely, by interesting and affecting the heart. That which, by its superior lustre, eclipses the pleasures of sense, and crucifies us to the world, at the same time kindles a joy in the heart which is unspeakable and full of glory. The habitual joy, which was possessed by the Apostles and primitive Christians, chiefly arose from a knowledge and belief of the gospel. It was *the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus his Lord*, that induced the apostle to *count all things but loss and dung*. Phil. iii. 8. Those in whom *the word of Christ dwelt richly, in all wisdom*, were supposed to be so enlivened by it, that it became natural to them to *teach and admonish one another in psalms and hymns, and spiritual songs, singing with grace in their hearts to the Lord*. Col. iii. 16. The

object for which the apostle *bowed his knees to the Father of glory*, in behalf of the Ephesians, was, that by means of a *comprehensive knowledge of the breadth, and length, and depth, and height of the redeeming love of Christ*, they might be filled with all the fulness of God. Ephes. iii. 18, 19. The wells of salvation are deep; and he that lacketh knowledge is as one that hath nothing to draw with.

The prejudice of many Christians against doctrinal preaching, as being, in their esteem, *dry and uninteresting*; and the preference which is given to that which is more descriptive of their feelings, and which is therefore termed *experimental*, is worthy of attention. If the doctrine which we preach be not the unadulterated gospel of Christ, it will indeed be dry; or, if instead of entering into the spirit of truth, we are employed in a fruitless discussion of terms, or things on which the scriptures forbear to decide, it must needs be uninteresting, and even disgusting to a holy mind. But if the pure gospel of Jesus, well understood by the preacher, and communicated from the fulness of his heart, do not interest us, there must be some lamentable disorder in the state of our minds. If the manna that comes down from heaven be loathed, it is a sign that things are not with us as they ought to be. The doctrine of Moses, and surely much more that of Jesus, *dropped as the rain, and distilled as the dew, upon the tender herb*.

Christian *experience*, (or what is generally understood by that term, the painful and pleasurable feelings of good men) will be found, if genuine, to arise, from the influence of truth upon the mind. If we be

strangers to the glory of God's moral character, and the great evil of sin, we shall be strangers to all the feelings of godly sorrow on account of it. And what ground is there for *joy and peace*, but *in believing*? Take away the deity and atonement of Christ, and they are annihilated. To this may be added, give up the doctrines of the resurrection and a future life, and what becomes of hope? From these instances, out of many others, you will easily perceive, that doctrinal and experimental preaching are not so remote from each other as some persons have imagined; and that to extol the latter at the expense of the former, is to act like him who wishes the fountain to be destroyed because he prefers the stream.

4. It is a great object in the Christian life, according to our capacities and opportunities, to diffuse the light of the gospel around us: but we cannot communicate any thing beyond the degree in which we possess it. The communication of gospel truth is not confined to ministers. Every Christian moves in a sphere of some extent; and is expected so to occupy it, as to embrace every occasion which may offer to make known the way of eternal life to those about him. The primitive churches were schools of heavenly instruction, as the words of the text, to go no farther, plainly intimate; and the apostle reproves some of their members for having made no greater proficiency. Though it would be vain for every one to aspire at being a public teacher of Christianity, yet, as hath been already observed, every one should be concerned that he may be able to *give a reason for the hope that is in him*, and to teach the good and the

right way to those with whom he is immediately connected. The duties of a parent, and a master, include in them the instruction of those who are committed to their care. Many opportunities arise, in which Christians might communicate the knowledge of Christ to their neighbors; those in a state of servitude to their fellow-servants; and, provided it were done on proper occasions, and, according to the apostolic rule, *in meekness and fear*, persons in inferior stations might suggest a useful hint even to their superiors.

When the family of Elimelech went to sojourn in Moab, they carried their religion with them; so recommended the God of Israel to those with whom they formed connections, that one of them was induced to leave her country, her kindred, and her gods, and to put her trust under the shadow of his wings. Ruth i. And even a *little maid* of the land of Israel, who had been carried captive into Syria, by speaking to her mistress, on a favorable opportunity, was instrumental in her master's being healed of his leprosy, and in his being brought to acknowledge and adore the true God. 2 Kings v. Such cases are recorded to encourage us to communicate the good knowledge of God on all proper occasions: but, in order to do this, we must first possess it, and that in a greater degree than merely to denominate us Christians.

Perhaps one of the most favorable opportunities for Christians to suggest important truth to their neighbors and connections, is when any of them are under a threatening affliction. To visit them at such a time would be kindly taken: even the worst of characters are commonly accessible when they apprehend eter-

nity to be drawing nigh. You may now freely converse and pray with them; and if your circumstances will admit, and theirs require it, a communication of your worldly substance would convince them of your good will, give weight to your instructions, and correspond with the conduct of him who went about doing good to the bodies and souls of men. But such a practice requires an intimate acquaintance with divine truth. It is an important matter to converse with men who are just on the borders of an eternal world: it requires not only tenderness, faithfulness, and prudence; but an ability to expose those false refuges, and detect those delusive hopes, to which, at such seasons, they are generally disposed to fly; and to direct them to the *only name under heaven, given amongst men, whereby they must be saved.**

5. In time of apostacy from the truth, Christians are exhorted to be steadfast: 2 Pet. iii. 17. but a steadfast adherence to truth, requires that we be rooted and grounded in it. The wisdom of God sees meet, in order to prove mankind, and especially his professing people, to suffer other gospels, besides the true one, to obtain footing amongst us. I am aware that it has

* Of the numerous liberal institutions which, at this time, adorn the metropolis, none appear to me more deserving of encouragement than those societies which have lately been formed for *visiting, relieving, and conversing with the afflicted poor*. If they continue to be conducted with propriety; if, in particular, suitable persons are selected as visitors, I hope they will prove a blessing of magnitude. May God almighty bless those young people who are thus employed, and may they never want support from a benevolent public.

become customary, in these times, to make a jest of heresy, and to deride, as illiberal, narrow-minded bigots, all those who consider any religious sentiments as endangering the salvation of men. But I hope we shall not, on this account, be deterred from such an attachment to truth as the scriptures encourage. It is granted that the term heresy has been wretchedly abused; and that it becomes Christians to beware of applying it to every departure from even truth itself: yet there is such a thing in being. There were heresies in the apostles' times; and it was predicted that there should, in after times, be persons who would *bring in even damnable heresies*. 2 Pet. ii. 1. Let no one be startled at the use of these terms: I did not coin them, and am not accountable for them; but seeing they occupy a place in the holy scriptures, I think myself concerned to understand them. Whatever difficulty there may be in ascertaining their precise object, they undoubtedly teach us that men's souls may be destroyed by mental, as well as by sensual lusts; even the souls of professing Christians; for the words are not intended to describe open infidels, but such as should bear the Christian name, yea, and who should be teachers of Christianity.

The circulation of doctrines pleasing to corrupt nature will prove men to be what they are. They are the fan in Christ's hand, by which he will thoroughly purge his floor. That light minded professors of religion should be carried away with them is no more a matter of surprise than that the chaff should be carried away by the wind: but how is it that those of whom we would hope better things, are often shaken?

If a minister, in almost any of our congregations, should relinquish truth, and fall into the grossest errors; unless he has so conducted himself as to have gained little or no esteem amongst the people, he is seldom known to go off alone: sometimes half a congregation, and sometimes more, have been known to follow him, or at least to be greatly unhinged for a considerable time. If a writer start up in almost any connection, let his performance be ever so weak or extravagant; yet, if he possess but a sufficient quantity of overbearing assurance, he will have his admirers; and some serious people will be in danger of being turned aside. How are these things to be accounted for? I conceive the principal reason is, that Christians content themselves with a superficial knowledge of divine things. Great numbers, from a dislike to controversy, will never take any pains to understand the difference between one set of religious principles and another. They have no desire to enable themselves to distinguish between true and false reasonings. — They are too apt to take it for granted, that what they have imbibed is truth, and that nothing can be advanced with the least color of reason for the contrary: when, therefore, an argument appears with a little plausibility on its face, it has only to obtain a reading, or a hearing, and their assent is gained. Brethren, let shame, if nothing else, provoke us, that we *henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine.* Ephes iv. 14. Let us be concerned, not obstinate to adhere to our present sentiments, be they what they may, but to know the mind of God in his word; and knowing it, let us stedfastly adhere to it.

The present age seems to be an age of trial. Not only is the gospel corrupted by those who bear the Christian name; but, of late, you well know, it has been openly assailed. The most direct and daring opposition has been made to the very name of Christianity. I am not going to alarm you with any idea that *the church is in danger*: no, my brethren, the church, of which we, I trust, are members, and of which Christ, and Christ alone, is head, is not in danger: it is built upon a rock, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. Neither are my apprehensions excited concerning those who are true members of the church: these trying blasts, though they may affect them for a season, will ultimately cause them to take deeper root. Nevertheless, it becomes us to feel for the souls of men, especially for the rising generation; and to warn even good men that they be not unarmed in the evil day.

The human heart has ever been averse to the gospel of Christ, but the turn or temper of the present age is peculiarly in favor of infidelity. In much the same manner as in former ages men were violently attached to a persecuting superstition, they are now verging to the opposite extreme, and are in danger of throwing off all religion. Our temptations, and those which will attend our posterity after us, are likely, therefore, to be widely different from what they have hitherto been. Hitherto nominal Christianity has been no reproach; but reproach has attached itself to the other side. The case, in this respect, may soon be altered. Men grow bold in avowing their contempt of Christianity; and many among the dissipated part of the

youth are following their example. Now if characters of this description should spring up in sufficient numbers, not only to keep each other in countenance, but to turn the tide of reproach against Christians, as a company of wrong-headed enthusiasts, we shall soon see which side the mass of mankind will take. Their characters been loose and profligate, they have long felt themselves condemned by the gospel; and this is a matter that does not fit very easy upon them.— Nothing has kept them from rejecting it before now, but the disgrace that would follow upon their becoming open infidels: whenever, therefore, this disgrace shall be removed, we may expect them to go off in great companies. The slightest observation of human nature must convince us, that the greater part of mankind, even in religious matters, are governed by fashion: they go with *the course of this world*. So great an influence has the tide of public opinion upon them, that even where it is not altogether agreeable to their own views and inclinations, they are, nevertheless, frequently carried away by it: but if it be thus where public opinion and private inclination are at variance, it must, of course, be much more so in those cases wherein they are agreed. This will be like a union of the wind and tide: the vessel that is carried along by such a joint influence, can scarcely have any thing left to impede its progress.

The great influence which a certain popular pamphlet has had upon men's minds, is not so much owing to the work itself, though it possesses all the agreeableness to a depraved heart, which wit and malignity can give it, as to the bias of the present generation.

in favor of the principles which it contains. Of this the author himself seems to have been sufficiently aware, by the title which he has thought proper to give his performance.*

It is not unlikely that almost all our religious controversies will soon be reduced to one, upon which the great body of men will divide. Is Christianity true or false? Is there a God? Is there a heaven and a hell? Or is it all a fiction? Agitated by these important questions, the greater part of the inhabitants of Europe, and, perhaps, of America, including our own posterity, may rank either as real Christians, or as open Infidels.

What shall we say to these things? Ought they to depress us? We ought, undoubtedly, to feel for the welfare of men's souls, and cannot but feel for those who are more intimately connected with us: but upon any other principle, I know not that they ought to have any such effect upon us. God is upon his throne: his church is upon a rock: whatever *hour of temptation may be coming upon the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth, those who hold fast the word of his patience will be kept through it: Rev. iii. 10. all things are working together for good to them that love God.* With these views Christians may rejoice, and rejoice always.

While we rejoice, however, we must rejoice with trembling; and while we confide in God, must be diffident of ourselves. Let us not presume on our own firmness, but *put on the whole armour of God, that*

* The Age of Reason.

we may withstand in the evil day. The first thing required in this divine accoutrement is, that *our loins be girt about with truth*: Ephes. vi. 14. but truth will not prove as a girdle to our loins in the day of battle, except we be deeply and intimately acquainted with it.

- O ye sons and daughters of carelessness, who are called Christians, but have no root in yourselves, what aspect do these things wear towards you? The time seems drawing nigh that will prove you to be what you are! Hitherto there has been an *outer court* for you, and you have worshipped in it. You have long had a form of godliness, but have been without the power. You have ranked with the friends of truth, but have never received it in love, that you might be saved. You have kept up the profession of something that has been called Christianity, without feeling yourselves under any necessity to proceed farther: but now your outer court will probably be taken away, and you will feel yourselves impelled, as it were, either to come in and be Christians in reality, or to go out and take your portion with the unbelieving and the abominable.