

THE COMMON PRINCIPLES OF THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION.

by Hugh Binning

Lecture I.

GOD'S GLORY THE CHIEF END OF MAN'S BEING.

ROM. 11.36. "*Of him, and through him, and to him, are all things; to whom be glory for ever.*" And 1 COR. 10.31. "*Whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.*"

ALL that men have to know, may be comprised under these two heads,—What their end is; and What is the right, way to attain to that end. And all that we have to do, is by any means to seek to compass that end. These are the two cardinal points of a man's knowledge and exercise: *Quo et qua eundum est*,—Whither to go, and what way to go. If there be a mistake in any of these fundamentals, all is wrong. All arts and sciences have their principles and grounds that must be presupposed to all solid knowledge and right practice; so hath the true religion some fundamental principles which must be laid to heart and imprinted into the soul, or there can be no superstructure of true and saving knowledge, and no practice in Christianity that can lead to a blessed end. But as the principles are not many, but, a few common and easy grounds, from which all the conclusions of art are reduced, so the principles of true religion are few and plain; they need neither burden your memory, nor confound your understanding. That which may save you 'is nigh thee,' says the apostle, (Rom. 10.8.) 'even in thy mouth.' It is neither too far above us, nor too far below us. But, alas! your not considering of those common and few and easy grounds, makes them both burdensome to the memory, and dark to the understanding. As there is nothing so easy but it becomes difficult if you do it against your will,—*Nihil est tam facile, quin difficile fiat, si invitus feceris*,—so there is nothing so plain, so common, but it becomes dark and hard if you do not indeed consider it and lay it to heart.

That which is, in the first place, to be considered is, Our end. As in all other arts, and every petty business, it hath the first place of consideration, so especially in the Christian religion. It is the first cause of all human actions, and the first principle of all deliberate motions. Except you would walk at random, not knowing whither you go, or what you do, you must once establish this and fix it in your intention—What is the great end and purpose wherefore I am created,

and sent into the world? If this be not either questioned, or not rightly constituted, you cannot but spend your time, *Vel nihil agendo, vel aliud agendo, vel male agendo*; you must either do nothing, or nothing to purpose, or, that which is worse, that which will undo you. It is certainly the wrong establishing of this one thing that makes the most part of our motions either altogether irregular, or unprofitable, or destructive and hurtful. Therefore, as this point hath the first place in your catechism, so it ought to be first of all laid to heart, and pondered as the one necessary thing. 'One thing is needful,' says Christ, Luke 10.42; and if any thing be in a superlative degree needful, this is it. O that you would choose to consider it, as the necessity and weight of it require!

We have read two scriptures, which speak to the ultimate and chief end of man, which is the glorifying of God by all our actions and words and thoughts. In which we have these things of importance: 1. That God's glory is the end of our being. 2. That God's glory should be the end of our doing. And, 3. The ground of both these; because both being and doing are from him, therefore they ought to be both for him. He is the first cause of both, and therefore he ought to be the last end of both. 'Of him, and through him, are all things;' and therefore all things are also for him, and therefore all things should be done to him.

God is independent altogether, and self-sufficient. This is his royal prerogative, wherein he infinitely transcends all created perfection. He is of himself, and for himself; from no other, and for no other, 'but of him, and for him, are all things.' He is the fountain-head; you ought to follow the streams up to it, and then to rest, for you can go no farther. But the creature, even the most perfect work, besides God, it hath these two ingredients of limitation and imperfection in its bosom: it is from another, and for another. It hath its rise out of the fountain of God's immense power and goodness, and it must run towards that again, till it empty all its faculties and excellencies into that same sea of goodness. Dependence is the proper notion of a created being,—dependence upon that infinite independent Being, as the first immediate cause, and the last immediate end. You see then that this principle is engraven in the very nature of man. It is as certain and evident that man is made for God's glory, and for no other end, as that he is from God's power, and from no other cause. Except men do violate their own conscience, and put out their own eyes—as the Gentiles did, Rom. 1.19,&c.—'that which may be known' of man's chief end, 'is manifest in them,' so that all men are 'without excuse.' As God's being is independent, so that he cannot be expressed by any name more suitable than such as he takes to himself, 'I am that I am,'—importing a boundless, ineffable, absolute, and transcendent being, beside which, no creature deserves so much as to have the name of being, or to be made mention of in one day with his name, because his glorious light makes the poor derived shadow of light in other creatures to disappear, and to vanish out of the world of beings,—so it is the glorious perfection of his nature, that he doth 'all things for himself,' Prov. 16.4, for his

own name; and his glory is as dear to him as himself.' I am the Lord, that is my name, and [therefore] my glory will I not give to another,' Isa. 42.8; and 48.11. This is no ambition. Indeed, for a man to seek his own glory, or search into it, 'is not glory,' (Prov. 25.27,) but rather a man's shame. Self-seeking in creatures is a monstrous and incongruous thing; it is as absurd, and unbeseeming a creature, to seek its own glory, as to attribute to itself its own being. Shall the thing formed say to the potter, Thou hast not made me? That were ridiculous. And shall the thing formed say, 'Tis made for itself? That were as ridiculous. Self-denial is the ornament and beauty of a creature, and therefore humility is an ornament and clothing, 1 Pet. 5.5; and honour upholds the humble spirit, Prov. 29.23. But God's self-seeking, and seeking of his own glory, is his eminent excellency. It is indeed his glory, because he is, and there is none else; there is nothing, besides him, but that which hath issued forth from his incomprehensible fullness. And therefore it is all the reason of the world, that as he is the beginning, so he should be the end of all things, Rev. 1.8. And there is the more reason of it, that his majesty's seeking of his own glory is not prejudicial to the creature's good, but the very communication of his fullness goes along with it: so that in glorifying himself, he is most beneficial to his own creatures. Poor creatures, indigent at home, are yet proud of nothing, and endeavour, in seeking of themselves, to engross all perfections into their own bosoms! Ambition and vainglory robs and spoils others' excellencies to clothe itself withal; and then boasts itself in these borrowed feathers! But our blessed Lord is then doing most for our advantage when he does all for his own glory. He needs not go abroad to seek perfection, but to manifest what he is in himself; he communicates of himself to us. O blessed self-seeking that gave us a being and well-being; that makes no advantage by it, but gives advantage! He hath the honour of all, but we have the profit of all.

'All things are of him, and for him;' but man in a peculiar and proper way. As God, in making of man, was pleased of his goodness to stamp him with a character of his own image—and in this he puts a difference between man and other creatures, that he should have more plain and distinct engravings of divine majesty upon him, which might show the glory of the workman—so it appears that he is in a singular way made for God, as his last end. As he is set nearer God, as the beginning and cause, than other creatures; so he is placed nearer God as the end. All creatures are made *ultimò*, lastly, for God, yet they are all made *proximè*, nextly, for man. Therefore David falls out a wondering, 'Lord, what is man, that thou art mindful of him,' 'and hast made him to have dominion over the works of thy hands, and put all things under his feet!' Psal. 8.4,6. The creature comes out in a direct line from God, as the beams from the body of the sun; and it is directed towards the use and service of mankind, from whom all the excellency and perfection that is in it should reflect towards God again. Man is both *proximè et ultimò* for God. We are to return immediately to the fountain of our being; and thus our happiness and well-being is perpetuated. There is

nothing intervening between God and us that our use and service and honour should be directed towards: but all the songs and perfections of the creature, that are among the rest of the creatures, meet all in man as their centre, for this purpose that he may return with them all to the glorious fountain from whence they issued. Thus we stand next God, and in the middle between God and other creatures. This, I say, was the condition of our creation. We had our being immediately from God, as the beginning of all; and we were to have our happiness and well-being by returning immediately to God as the end of all. But sin coming in between God and us, hath displaced us, so that we cannot now stand next God, without the intervention of a Mediator; and we cannot stand between God and creatures, to offer up their praises to him; but 'there is one Mediator between God and man,' that offers up both man's praises and the creature's songs which meet in man.

Now, seeing God hath made all things for himself, and especially man for his own glory, that he may show forth in him the glory and excellence of his power, goodness, holiness, justice, and mercy; it is not only most reasonable that man should do all things that he doth to the glory of God, but it is even the beauty and perfection of a man,—the greatest accession that can be to his being,—to glorify God by that being. We are not our own, therefore we ought not to live to ourselves, but to God whose we are.

But you may ask, What is it to glorify God? Doth our goodness extend to him? Or is it an advantage to the Almighty that we are righteous? No indeed! And herein is the vast difference between God's glorifying of us and sanctifying of us, and our glorifying and sanctifying of him. God 'calls things that are not,' and makes them to be: but we can do no more but call things that are, and that far below what they are. God's glorifying is creative,—ours only declarative. He makes us such,—we do no more but declare him to be such. This then is the proper work that man is created for, to be a witness of God's glory, and to give testimony to the appearances and out-breakings of it in the ways of power and justice and mercy and truth. Other creatures are called to glorify God, but it is rather a proclamation to dull and senseless men, and a provocation of them to their duty. As Christ said to the Pharisees, 'If these children hold their peace, the stones would cry out,' so may the Lord turn himself from stupid and senseless man, to the stones and woods and seas and sun and moon, and exhort them to man's duty, the more to provoke and stir up our dulness, and to make us consider that it is a greater wonder that man, whom God hath made so glorious, can so little express God's glory, than if stupid and senseless creatures should break out in singing and praising of his majesty. The creatures are the books wherein the lines of the song of God's praises are written; and man is made a creature capable to read them, and to tune that song. They are appointed to bring in brick to our hand; and God has fashioned us for this employment, to make such a building of it. We are the mouth of the creation; but ere God want praises

when our mouth is dumb, and our ears deaf, God will open the mouths of asses, 'of babes and sucklings,' and in them perfect praises, Psalm 8.1,2. Epictetus said well, *Si Luscinia essem, canerem ut Luscinia: cum autem homo sim, quid agam? Laudabo Deum, nec unquam cessabo*—If I were a lark, I would sing as a lark; but seeing I am a man, what should I do, but praise God without ceasing? It is as proper to us to praise God, as for a bird to chaunt. All beasts have their own sounds and voices peculiar to their own nature; this is the natural sound of a man. Now as you would think it monstrous to hear a melodious bird croaking as a raven; so it is no less monstrous and degenerate to hear the most part of the discourses of men savouring nothing of God. If we had known that innocent estate of man, O how would we think he had fallen from heaven! We would imagine that we were thrust down from heaven, where we heard the melodious songs of angels, into hell, to hear the howlings of damned spirits. This then is that we are bound unto, by the bond of our creation; this is our proper office and station God once set us into, when he assigned every creature its own use and exercise. This was our portion, (and O the noblest of all, because nearest the King's own person!) to acknowledge in our hearts inwardly, and to express in our words and actions outwardly, what a One he is, according as he hath revealed himself in his word and works. It is great honour to a creature to have the meanest employment in the court of this great King; but, O, what is it to be set over all the King's house, and over all his kingdom! But, then, what is that, in respect of this,—to be next to the King,—to wait on his own person, so to speak? Therefore the godly man is described as a waiting-maid, or servant, Psal. 123.2.

Well then, without more discourse upon it, without multiplying of it into particular branches, to glorify God is in our souls to conceive of him, and meditate on his name, till they receive the impression and stamp of all the letters of his glorious name; and then to express this in our words and actions, in commending of him, and obeying of him. Our souls should be as wax to express the seal of his glorious attributes of justice, power, goodness, holiness, and mercy: and as the water that receives the beams of the sun reflects them back again, so should our spirits receive the sweet warming beams of his love and glorious excellency, and then reflect them towards his Majesty, with the desires and affections of our souls. All our thoughts of him, all our affections towards him, should have the stamp of singularity, such as may declare there is none like him, none besides him; our love, our meditation, our acknowledgment should have this character on their front,—'There is none besides thee: thou art, and none else.' And then a soul should, by the cords of affection to him and admiration of him, be bound to serve him. Creation puts on the obligation to glorify him in our body and spirits which are his; but affection only puts that to exercise. All other bonds leave our natures at liberty, but this constrains, 2 Cor. 5.14; it binds on all bonds, it ties on us all divine obligations. Then a soul will glorify God, when love so unites it to God, and makes it one spirit with him, that his glory becomes its honour, and becomes the principle of all our inward

affections and outward actions. It is not always possible to have and express particular thoughts of God and his glory, in every action and meditation; but, for the most part it ought to be so: And if souls were accustomed to meditation on God, it would become their very nature,—*altera natura*,—pleasant and delightful. However, if there be not always an express intention of God's glory, yet there ought to be kept always such a disposition and temper of spirit as it may be construed to proceed from the intention of God's glory; and then it remains in the seed and fruit, if not in itself.

Now when we are speaking of the great end and purpose of our creation, we call to mind our lamentable and tragical fall from that blessed station we were constitute into. 'All men have sinned and come short of the glory of God,' Rom. 3.23. His being in the world was for that glory, and he is come short of that glory. O strange shortcoming! Short of all that he was ordained for! What is he now meet for? For what purpose is that chief of the works of God now! The salt, if it lose its saltness, is meet for nothing, for wherewithal shall it be seasoned? Mark 9.50. Even so, when man is rendered unfit for his proper end, he is meet for nothing, but to be cast out and trode upon; he is like a withered branch that must be cast into the fire, John 15.6. Some things, if they fail in one use, they are good for another; but the best things are not so,—*Corruptio optimi, pessima*. As the Lord speaks to the house of Israel, 'Shall wood be taken of the vine tree to do any work?' Even so the inhabitants of Jerusalem, Ezek. 15.2-6. If it yield not wine, it is good for nothing. So, if man do not glorify God,—if he fall from that,—he is meet for nothing, but to be cast into the fire of hell, and burnt for ever; he is for no use in the creation, but to be fuel to the fire of the Lord's indignation.

But behold! the goodness of the Lord and his kindness and love hath 'appeared toward man. Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us,' 'through Jesus Christ,' Tit. 3.4-6. Our Lord Jesus, by whom all things were created, and for whom, would not let this excellent workmanship perish so, therefore he goes about the work of redemption,—a second creation more laborious and also more glorious than the first, that so he might glorify his Father and our Father. Thus the breach is made up; thus the unsavoury salt is seasoned; thus the withered branch is quickened again for that same fruit of praises and glorifying of God. This is the end of his second creation, as it was of the first: 'We are his workmanship created to good works in Christ Jesus,' Eph. 2.10. 'This is the work of God, to believe on him whom he hath sent;' 'to set to our seal,' and to give our testimony to all his attributes, John 6.29, and 3.33. We are 'bought with a price,' and therefore we ought to glorify him with our souls and bodies. He made us with a word, and that bound us; but now he has made us again, and paid a price for us, and so we are twice bound not to be our own but his, 'and so to glorify him in our bodies and spirits,' 1 Cor. 6.20. I beseech you, gather your spirits, call them home about the business. We

once came short of our end,—God's glory and our happiness; but know, that it is attainable again. We lost both; but both are found in Christ. Awake then and stir up your spirits, else it shall be double condemnation—when we have the offer of being restored to our former blessed condition—to love our present misery better. Once establish this point within your souls, and therefore ask, Why came I hither? To what purpose am I come into the world? If you do not ask it, what will you answer, when he asks you at your appearance before his tribunal? I beseech you, what will many of you say in that day when the Master returns and takes an account of your dispensation? You are sent into the world only for this business,—to serve the Lord. Now what will many of you answer? If you speak the truth (as then you must do it,—you cannot lie then!) you must say, "Lord, I spent my time in serving my own lusts; I was taken up with other businesses, and had no leisure; I was occupied in my calling," &c. Even as if an ambassador of a king should return him this account of his negotiation: "I was busy at cards and dice; I spent my money, and did wear my clothes." Though you think your plowing and borrowing and trafficking and reaping very necessary, yet certainly these are but as trifles and toys to the main business. O what a dreadful account will souls make! They come here for no purpose but to serve their bodies and senses, to be slaves to all the creatures which were once put under man's feet: Now man is under the feet of all, and he has put himself so. If you were of these creatures, then you might be for them. You seek them as if you were created for them, and not they for you; and you seek yourselves, as if you were of yourselves, and had not your descent of God. Know, my beloved, that you were not made for that purpose, nor yet redeemed either to serve yourselves, or other creatures, but that other creatures might serve you, and ye serve God, Luke 1.74,75. And this is really the best way to serve ourselves, and to save ourselves,—to serve God. Self-seeking is self-destroying; self-denying is self-saving, soul-saving. 'He that seeketh to save his life shall lose it, and he that loseth his life shall find it, and he that denies himself and follows me, is my disciple.' Will ye once sit down in good earnest about this business? 'Tis lamentable to be yet to begin to learn to live, when ye must die! Ye will be out of the world almost, ere ye bethink yourself, Why came I into the world? *Quidam tunc vivere incipiunt, cum desinendum est; imo quidam ante vivere desierunt quam inciperent;* this is of all most lamentable,—many souls end their life, before they begin to live. For what is our life, but a living death, while we do not live to God, and while we live not in relation to the great end of our life and being,—the glory of God? It were better, says Christ, that such 'had never been born.' You who are created again in Jesus Christ, it most of all concerns you to ask, Why am I made? And why am I redeemed? And to what purpose? It is certainly that ye may glorify your heavenly Father, Mat. 5.16; Psalm. 56.13. And you shall glorify him if you bring forth much fruit, and continue in his love, John 15.8,9. And this you are chosen and ordained unto, ver. 16; and therefore abide in him, that ye may bring forth fruit, ver. 4. And if you abide in him by believing, you do indeed honour him; and he that honoureth the Son honoureth the Father, John 5.23.

Here is a compendious way to glorify God. Receive salvation of him freely, righteousness and eternal life; this sets to a seal to God's truth and grace and mercy: and whoso counts the Son worthy to be a Saviour to them, and sets to their seal of approbation to him whom God the Father hath sent and sealed, he also honours the Father; and then he that honoureth the Father, hath it not for nothing, 'for them that honour me I will honour,' 1 Sam. 2.30, says the Lord; and 'he that serves me, him will my Father honour,' John 12.26. As the believing soul cares for no other, and respects no other but God, so he respects no other but such a soul. 'I will dwell in the humble, and look unto the contrite;' there are mutual respects and honours. God is the delight of such a soul, and such a soul is God's delight. That soul sets God in a high place, in a throne in its heart; and God sets that soul in a heavenly place with Christ, Eph. 2.6; yea he comes down to sit with us, and dwells in us, off his throne of majesty, Isa. 66.1,2; and 57.15.

Lecture II.

UNION AND COMMUNION WITH GOD THE END AND DESIGN OF THE GOSPEL.

PSALM 73.24-28. "*Thou wilt guide me with thy counsel, &c. Whom have I in heaven but thee? &c. It is good for me to draw near to God.*"—1 JOHN 1.3. "*That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.*"—JOHN 17.21-23. "*That they all may be one, as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us,*" &c.

IT is a matter of great consolation that God's glory and our happiness are linked together; so that whoever set his glory before them singly to aim at, they take the most compendious and certain way to true blessedness. His glory is the ultimate end of man, and should be our great and last scope. But our happiness—which consists in the enjoyment of God—is subordinate to this, yet inseparable from it. The end of our creation is communion and fellowship with God, therefore man was made with an immortal soul capable of it; and this is the greatest dignity and eminency of man above the creatures. He hath not only impressed from God's finger, in his first moulding, some characters resembling God, in righteousness and holiness; but is created with a capacity of receiving more of God by communion with him. Other creatures have already all they will have,—all they can have,—of conformity to him; but man is made liker than all, and is fitted and fashioned to aspire to more likeness and conformity, so that his soul may shine more and more to the perfect day.

There was an union made already in his first moulding; and communion was to grow as a fragrant and sweet fruit out of this blessed root. Union and similitude are the ground of fellowship and communion. That union was gracious,—that

communion would have been glorious; for grace is the seed of glory. There was a twofold union between Adam and God,—an union of state, and an union of nature; he was like God, and he was God's friend. All the creatures had some likeness to God, some engravings of his power and goodness and wisdom: but man is said to be made according to God's image, 'Let us make man like unto us.' Other creatures had *similitudinem vestigii*, but man had *similitudinem faciei*. Holiness and righteousness are God's face,—the very excellency and glory of all his attributes; and the Lord stamps the image of these upon man. Other attributes are but like his back parts; and he leaves the resemblance of his footsteps upon other creatures. What can be so beautiful as the image of God upon the soul? Creatures, the nearer they are to God, the more pure and excellent. We see in the fabric of the world, bodies the higher they are, the more pure and cleanly, the more beautiful. Now then, what was man that was 'made a little lower than the angels?'—in the Hebrew, 'a little lower than God,' *tantum non deus*. Seeing man is set next to God, his glory and beauty certainly surpasses the glory of the sun and of the heavens. Things contiguous and next other are like other. The water is liker air than the earth, therefore it is next the air. The air is liker heaven than water, therefore is it next to it. *Omne contiguum spirituali, est spirituale*. Angels and men next to God, are spirits, as he is a spirit. Now similitude is the ground of friendship. *Pares paribus congregantur; similitudo necessitudinis vinculum*. It is that which conciliates affections among men: So it is here by proportion. God sees all is very good, and that man is the best of his works; and he loves him, and makes him his friend, for his own image which he beholds in him.

At length from these two roots this pleasant and fragrant fruit of communion with and enjoyment of God grows up. This is the entertainment of friends, to delight in one another, and to enjoy one another. *Amicorum omnia communia*. Love makes all common. It opens the treasure of God's fullness, and makes a vent of divine bounty towards man; and it opens the heart of man, and makes it large as the sand of the sea to receive of God. Our receiving of his fullness is all the entertainment we can give him. O what blessedness is this, for a soul to live in him! And it lives in him when it loves him. *Anima est ubi amat, non ubi animat*. And to taste of his sweetness and be satisfied with him, this makes perfect oneness: and perfect oneness with God, who is 'the fountain of life, and in whose favour is life,' is perfect blessedness.

But we must stand a little here and consider our misery, that have fallen from such an excellency. How are we come down from heaven wonderfully? Sin has interposed between God and man; and this dissolves the union, and hinders the communion. An enemy has come between two friends, and puts them at odds; and oh! an eternal odds. Sin hath sown this discord, and alienated our hearts from God. Man's glory consisted in the irradiation of the soul from God's shining countenance; this made him light, God's face shined on him. But sin interposing

has eclipsed that light and brought on an eternal night of darkness over the soul. And thus we are spoiled of the image of God, as when the earth comes between the sun and the moon. Now then, there can no beams of divine favour and love break through directly towards us, because of the cloud of our sins, that separates between God and us, and because of 'the partition-wall,' and 'the hand-writing of ordinances that was against us,'—God's holy law, and severe justice, Eph. 2.14; Col. 2.14.

Then, what shall we do? How shall we see his face in joy? Certainly it had been altogether impossible, if our Lord Jesus Christ had not come, who is 'the light and life of men.' The Father shines on him, and the beams of his love reflect upon us, from the Son. The love of God, and his favourable countenance, that cannot meet with us in a direct and immediate beam, they fall on us in this blessed compass, by the intervention of a mediator. We are rebels standing at a distance from God; Christ comes between, a mediator and a peace-maker, to reconcile us to God. 'God is in Christ reconciling the world. God first makes an union of natures with Christ; and so he comes near to us, down to us, who could not come up to him; and then he sends out the word of reconciliation,—the gospel, the tenor whereof is this, 'That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son,' 1 John 1.3. It is a voice of peace and invitation to the fellowship of God. Behold, then, the happiness of man is the very end and purpose of the gospel. Christ is the repairer of the breaches; the second Adam aspired to quicken what Adam killed. He hath 'slain the enmity,' and cancelled the hand-writing that was against us, and so made peace by the blood of his cross; and then, having removed all that out of the way, he comes and calls us unto the fellowship which we were ordained unto from our creation. We who are rebels, are called to be friends; 'I call you not servants, but friends.' It is a wonder that the creature should be called a friend of God; but, O great wonder, that the rebel should be called a friend! And yet that is not all. We are called to a nearer union,—to be the sons of God; this is our privilege, John 1.12. This is a great part of our fellowship with the Father and his Son; we are the Father's children, and the Son's brethren; 'and if children, then heirs, heirs of God;' and if brethren, then co-heirs with Christ, Rom. 8.17.

Thus the union is begun again in Christ; but as long as sin dwells in our mortal bodies, it is not perfect, there is always some separation and some enmity in our hearts; and so there is neither full seeing of God, for 'we know but in part,' and we see 'darkly,' nor full enjoying of God, for we are 'saved by hope,' and we 'live by faith, and not by sight.' But this is begun which is the seed of eternal communion; we are here partakers of the divine nature. Now then it must aspire unto a more perfect union with God whose image it is. And therefore the soul of a believer is here still in motion towards God as his element. There is here an union in affection, but not completed in *fruition*,—*affectu non effectu*. The soul

pants after God,—‘Whom have I in heaven or earth but thee? My flesh and my heart faileth,’ &c. A believing soul looks upon God as its only portion,—accounts nothing misery but to be separated from him, and nothing blessedness but to be one with him. This is the loadstone of their affections and desires; the centre which they move towards, and in which they will rest. It is true, indeed, that oftentimes our heart and our flesh faileth us, and we become ignorant and brutish. Our affections cleave to the earth, and temptations with their violence turn our souls towards another end than God. As there is nothing more easily moved and turned wrong than the needle that is touched with the adamant, yet it settles not in such a posture, it recovers itself and rests never till it look towards the north, and then it is fixed,—even so, temptations and the corruptions and infirmities of our hearts disturb our spirits easily, and wind them about from the Lord, towards any other thing; but yet we are continuing with him, and he keeps us with his right hand; and therefore though we may be moved, yet we shall not be greatly commoved; we may fall, but we shall rise again. He is ‘the strength of our heart,’ and therefore he will turn our heart about again, and fix it upon its own portion. Our union here consists more in his holding of us by his power, than our taking hold of him by faith. Power and good-will encamp about both faith and the soul: ‘We are kept by his power through faith,’ 1 Pet. 1.5. And thus he will guide the soul, and still be drawing it nearer to him, from itself, and from sin, and from the world, till he ‘receive us into glory,’ and until we be one as with the Father and the Son,—‘He in us and we in him, that we may be made perfect in one,’ as it is in the words read.

This is strange. A greater unity and fuller enjoyment, a more perfect fellowship, than ever Adam in his innocency would have been capable of! What soul can conceive it? what tongue express it? None can: for it is that which ‘eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into man’s heart to conceive.’ We must suspend the knowledge of it till we have experience of it. Let us now believe it, and then we shall find it. There is a mutual inhabitation which is wonderful. Persons that dwell one *with* another have much society and fellowship; but to dwell one *in* another is a strange thing,—‘I in them, and they in me;’ and therefore God is often said to dwell in us, and we to dwell in him. But that which makes it of all most wonderful and incomprehensible is that glorious unity and communion between the Father and the Son, which it is made an emblem of: ‘As thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us.’ Can you conceive that unity of the Trinity? Can you imagine that reciprocal inhabitation,—that mutual communion between the Father and the Son? No: it hath not entered into the heart to conceive it! Only thus much we know, that it is most perfect, it is most glorious; and so much we may apprehend of this unity of the saints with God. O! love is an uniting and transforming thing. ‘God is love, and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.’ He dwelleth in us by love; this makes him work in us, and shine upon us. Love hath drawn him down from his seat of majesty, to visit poor cottages of sinners, Isa.

66.1,2; and 46.3,4. And it is that love of God reflecting upon our souls that carries the soul upward to him, to live in him, and walk with him. O how doth it constrain a soul to 'live to him,' and draw it from itself! 2 Cor. 5.15. Then the more unity with God, the more separation from ourselves and the world; the nearer God the farther from ourselves; and the farther from ourselves the more happy; and the more unity with God, the more unity among ourselves, among the brethren of our family. Because here we are not fully one with our Father, therefore there are many differences between us and our brethren; because we are not one perfectly in him, therefore we are not one, as he and the Father are one. But when he shall be in us, and we in him, as the Father is in the Son, and the Son in the Father, then shall we be one among ourselves, then shall we meet in the unity of the faith, into a perfect man, 'into the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ,' Eph. 4.13. Christ is the uniting principle: While the saints are not wholly one, *uni tertio*, they cannot be perfectly one *inter se*, among themselves. Consider this, I beseech you. Christ's union with the Father is the foundation of our union to God, and our union among ourselves. This is comfortable; the ground of it is laid already. Now it is not simply the unity of the Father and the Son in essence that is here meant; for what shadow and resemblance can be in the world of such an incomprehensible mystery? But it is certainly the union and communion of God with Christ Jesus as mediator, as the head of 'the church which is his body.' Therefore seeing the Father is so wonderfully well-pleased and one with Christ, his well-beloved Son and messenger of the covenant, and chief party contracting in our name, he is, by virtue of this, one with us, who are his seed and members. And therefore, the members should grow up in 'the head Christ, from whom the whole body maketh increase,' 'according to the effectual working [of the Spirit] in it,' Eph. 5.15,16. Now, if the union between the Father and Christ our head cannot be dissolved, and cannot be barren and unfruitful, then certainly the Spirit of the Father, which is given to Christ beyond measure, must effectually work in every member, till it bring them to 'the unity of the faith,' and, 'to the measure of the perfect man, which is the fullness of Christ.' So then every believing soul is one with the Father as Christ is one, because he is the head and they the members; and the day is coming that all the members shall be perfectly united to the head Christ, and grow up to the perfect man, which is 'the stature of Christ's fullness.' 'And then shall we all be made perfect in one:' we shall be one as he is one; because he and we are one perfect man, head and members.

Now, to what purpose is all this spoken? I fear, it doth not stir up in our souls a desire after such a blessed life. Whose heart would not be moved at the sound of such words? 'Our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son.' 'We are made perfect, he in us, and we in him.' Certainly, that soul is void of the life of God that doth not find some sparkle of holy ambition kindled within, after such a glorious and blessed condition! But these things savour not, and taste not to the most part; 'the natural man knoweth them not, for they are spiritually discerned.'

How lamentable is it, that Christ is come to restore us to our lost blessedness, and yet no man almost considers it or lays it to heart! O how miserable,—twice miserable—is that soul that doth not draw near to God in Christ, when God hath come so near to us in Christ; that goes a-whoring after the lust of the eyes and flesh, and after the imaginations of their own heart, and will not be guided by Christ, the way and life, to glory! 'Thou shalt destroy them, O Lord,' Psalm 73.27. All men are afar off from God, from the womb: behold, we may have access to God in Christ. Wo to them that are yet afar off, and will not draw near: 'they shall all perish!' I exhort you to consider what you are doing; the most part of you are going away from God; you were born far off, and you will yet go farther; know what you will meet with in that way,—destruction!

You have never yet asked in earnest, For what purpose you came into the world? What wonder ye wander and walk at random, seeing ye have not proposed to yourselves any certain scope and aim! It is great folly; you would not be so foolish in any petty business; but O how foolish men are in the main business! 'The light of the body is the eye;' if that be not light, 'the whole body is full of darkness.' If your intention be once right established, all your course will be orderly; but if you be dark and blind in this point, and have not considered it, you cannot walk in the light, your whole way is darkness. The right consideration of the great end would shine unto you, and direct your way. But while you have not proposed this end unto yourselves—the enjoyment of God—you must spend your time, either in doing nothing to that purpose, or doing contrary to it. All your other lawful business, your callings and occupations, are but in the by; they are not the end, nor the way, but you make them your only business; they are altogether impertinent to this end. And the rest of your walking, in lusts and ignorance, is not only impertinent, but inconsistent with it and contrary to it. If you think that you have this before your eyes, to enjoy God,—I pray you look upon the way you choose. Is your drunkenness, your swearing, your uncleanness, your contentions and railings, and such works of the flesh,—are these the way to enjoy God? Shall not these separate between God and you? Is your eating and drinking, sleeping as beasts, and labouring in your callings,—are these all the means you use to enjoy God? Be not deceived; you who draw not near God by prayer often in secret, and by faith in his Son Christ, as lost miserable sinners, to be saved and reconciled by him, you have no fellowship with him, and you shall not enjoy him afterward! You whose hearts are given to your covetousness, who have many lovers and idols besides him, you cannot say, Whom have I besides Thee in earth? No; you have many other things besides God. You can have nothing of God, except, ye make him all to you,—unless you have him alone. 'My undefiled is One,' Cant. 6.9. He must be alone, for 'his glory he will not give to another.' If you divide your affections, and pretend to give him part, and your lusts another part, you may be doing so, but he will not divide his glory so, he will give no part of it to any other thing. But as for those souls that come to him and see their misery without him, O know how

good it is! It is not only good, but best, yea only good; it is *bonum*, and it is *optimum*; yea, it is *unicum*. 'There is none good, save one, even God;' and there is nothing good for us but this one, to be near God, and so near, that we may be one,—one spirit with the Lord,—'for he that is joined to the Lord is one spirit.' 1 Cor. 6.17. Rejoice in your portion, and long for the possession of it. Let all your meditations and affections and conversation proclaim this, 'Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none in the earth whom I desire besides thee.' And certainly he shall guide you to the end, and receive you into glory. Then you shall rest from your labours, because you shall dwell in him, and enjoy that which you longed and laboured for. Let the consideration of that end unite the hearts of Christians here. O what an absurd thing is it, that those who shall lodge together at night, and be made 'perfect in one,' should not only go contrary ways, but have contrary minds and affections!

Lecture III.

THE AUTHORITY AND UTILITY OF THE SCRIPTURES.

2 TIM. 3.16. "*All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.*"

WE told you that there was nothing more necessary to know than what our end is, and what the way is that leads to that end. We see the most part of men walking at random,—running an uncertain race,—because they do not propose unto themselves a certain scope to aim at, and whither to direct their whole course. According to men's particular inclinations and humours so do the purposes and designs of men vary; and often do the purposes of one man change, according to the circumstances of time and his condition in the world. We see all men almost running cross one to another. One drives at the satisfaction of his lust by pleasure; another fancies a great felicity in honour; a third in getting riches; and thus men divide themselves; whereas, if it were true happiness that all were seeking, they would all go one way towards one end. If men be not in the right way, the faster they seem to move toward the mark, the farther they go from it. Wandering from the right way, (suppose men intend well) will put them farther from that which they intend. *Si via in contrarium ducat, ipsa velocitas majoris intervalli causa est.* Therefore it concerns us all most deeply to be acquainted with the true path of blessedness; for if we once mistake, the more we do, the swifter we move, the more distant we are from it indeed. And there is the more need, because there are so many by-paths that lead to destruction. What say I? By-paths! No; highways, beaten paths, that the multitude of men walk in, and never challenge, nor will endure to be challenged as if they were in an error! In other journeys, men keep the plain highway, and are afraid of any secret by-way, lest it lead them wrong: *At hic, via quæque tritissima maxime decipit.* Here the high-pathed way leads wrong, and O, far wrong!—to hell. This is the meaning of Christ's sermon, "Enter in at the strait

gate, but walk not in the broad way where many walk, for it leads to destruction." Therefore I would have this persuasion once begotten in your souls, that the course of this world,—the way of the most part of men,—is dangerous, is damnable. O consider whither the way will lead you, before you go farther! Do not think it a folly to stand still now, and examine it, when you have gone on so long in their company. Stand, I say, and consider! Be not ignorant as beasts, that know no other things than to follow the drove; *quæ pergunt, non quo eundum est, sed quo itur*; they follow not whither they ought to go, but whither most go. You are men, and have reasonable souls within you; therefore I beseech you, be not composed and fashioned according to custom and example, that is, brutish, but according to some inward knowledge and reason. Retire once from the multitude, and ask in earnest at God, What is the way? Him that fears him he will teach the way that he should choose. The way to his blessed end is very strait, very difficult; you must have a guide in it,—you must have a lamp and a light in it,—else you cannot but go wrong.

The principles of reason within us are too dark and dim; they will never lead us through the pits and snares in the way. These indeed shined so brightly in Adam that he needed no light without him, no voice about him; but sin hath extinguished it much; and there remains nothing but some little spunk or sparkle, under the ashes of much corruption, that is but insufficient in itself, and is often more blinded and darkened by lusts. So that if it were never so much refined—as it was in many heathens—yet it is but the blind leading the blind, and both must fall into the ditch. Our end is high and divine,—to glorify God and to enjoy him; therefore our reason *caligat ad suprema*; it can no more steadfastly behold that glorious end, and move towards it, than our weak eyes can behold the sun. Our eyes can look downward upon the earth, but not upward to the heavens: so we have some remnant of reason in us, that hath some petty and poor ability for matters of little moment, as the things of this life; but if we once look upward to the glory of God, or eternal happiness, our eyes are dazzled, our reason confounded, we cannot steadfastly behold it, Eph. 4.18; 2 Cor. 3.13,14.

Therefore the Lord hath been pleased to give us the scriptures, which may be 'a lamp unto our feet,' and a guide unto our way; whereunto we shall do well 'to take heed, as unto [a candle or] a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn,' 2 Peter 1.19. These are 'able to make us wise unto salvation.' Let us hear what Paul speaks to Timothy, 2 Tim. 3.16, 'All scripture is given by inspiration of God,' &c.: where you have two points of high concernment,—the authority of the scriptures, and their utility. Their authority, for they are given by divine inspiration; their utility, for they are 'profitable for doctrine,' &c., and can make us perfect, and well 'furnished to every good work.'

The authority of it is in a peculiar way divine. 'Of him and through him are all things.' All writings of men, according to the truth of the scriptures, have some

divinity in them, inasmuch as they have of truth, which is a divine thing. Yet the holy scriptures are by way of excellency attributed to God, for they are immediately inspired of God. Therefore Peter saith that 'the scriptures came not in old time by the will of man, but holy men spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost,' 2 Peter 1.21. God by his Spirit, as it were, acted the part of the soul in the prophets and apostles; and they did no more but utter what the Spirit conceived. The Holy Ghost inspired the matter and the words, and they were but tongues and pens to speak and write it unto the people; there needed no debate, no search in their own minds for the truth, no inquisition for light; but light shined upon their souls so brightly, so convincingly, that it put it beyond all question that it was the mind and voice of God. You need not ask How they did know that their dreams or visions were indeed from the Lord; and that they did not frame any imagination in their own hearts, and taught it for his word, as many did? I say, you need no more ask that, than ask, How shall a man see light, or know the sunshine? Light makes itself manifest, and all other things. It is seen by its own brightness. Even so the holy men of God needed not any mark or sign to know the Spirit's voice; his revelation needed not the light of any other thing, it was light itself; it would certainly overpower the soul and mind, and leave no place of doubting. God, who cannot be deceived, and can deceive no man, hath delivered us this doctrine. O! with what reverence shall we receive it, as if we heard the Lord from heaven speak! If you ask, How you shall be persuaded that the scriptures are the word of God,—his very mind opened to men and made legible. Truly there are some things cannot be well proved, not because they are doubtful, but because they are clear of themselves, and beyond all doubt and exception. Principles of arts must not be proved, but supposed, till you find by trial and experience afterward that they were indeed really true. There are, no question, such characters of divinity and majesty imprinted in the very scriptures themselves, that whosoever hath the eyes of his understanding opened, though he run he may read them, and find God in them. What majesty is in the very simplicity and plainness of the scriptures! They do not labour to please men's ears, and adorn the matter with the curious garments of words and phrases; but represent the very matter itself to the soul, as that which in itself is worthy of all acceptance, and needs no human eloquence to commend it. Painting doth spoil native beauty. External ornaments would disfigure some things that are of themselves proportioned and lovely; therefore the Lord chooses a plain and simple style which is 'foolishness' to the world; but in these swaddling-clothes of the scriptures, and this poor cottage, the child Jesus, the Lord of heaven and earth, is contained. There is a jewel of the mysterious wisdom of God, and man's eternal blessedness, in this mineral. What glorious and astonishing humility is here! What humble and homely glory and majesty also! He is most high, and yet none so lowly. What excellent consent and harmony of many writers in such distant times! Wonder at it. All speak one thing to one purpose,—to bring men to God, to abase all glory, and exalt him alone. Must it not be one spirit that hath quickened all these, and breathes in

them all this one heavenly song, of 'glory to God on high, and good-will towards men?' Other writers will reason these things with you to convince you and persuade you; and many think them more profound and deep for that reason, and do despise the baseness of the scriptures; but to them whose eyes are opened, the majesty and authority of God commanding and asserting and testifying to them, is more convincing, from its own bare assertion, than all human reason.

Although there be much light in the scriptures to guide men's way to God's glory and their own happiness, yet it will all be to small purpose if 'the eyes of our understanding' be darkened and blinded. If you shall surround a man with day-light, except he open his eyes, he cannot see. The scriptures are a clear sun of life and righteousness; but the blind soul encompassed with that light is nothing the wiser, but thinks the lamp of the word shines not, because it sees not; it hath its own dungeon within it. Therefore the Spirit of God must open the eyes of the blind, and enlighten the eyes of the understanding, that the soul may see wonderful things in God's law, Psalm 119.5,18. The light may shine in the darkness, but 'the darkness comprehendeth it not,' John 1.5. I wonder not that the most part of men can see no beauty, no majesty, no excellency in the holy scriptures to allure them, because they are natural, and have not the Spirit of God, and so cannot know these things 'for they are spiritually discerned,' 1 Cor. 2.14: Therefore as the inspiration of God did conceive this writing at first, and preached this doctrine unto the world, so there can no soul understand it, or profit by it, but by the inspiration of the Almighty. 'Verily there is a spirit in man, and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth him understanding,' saith Job. When the Spirit comes into the soul to engrave the characters of that law and truth into the heart which were once engraven on tables of stone, and not written with pen and ink; then the Spirit of Christ Jesus writes over and transcribes the doctrine of the gospel on 'the fleshly tables of the heart,'—draws the lineaments of that faith and love preached in the word upon the soul; then the soul is 'the epistle of Christ,' 'written not with [pen and] ink, but with the Spirit of the living God,' 2 Cor. 3.3. And then the soul is manifestly declared to be such, when that which is impressed on the heart is expressed in the outward man in walking, that it may be 'read of all men.' Now, the soul having thus received the image of the scriptures on it, understands the Spirit's voice in them, and sees the truth and divinity of them. The eye must receive some species and likeness of the object before it see it; it must be made like to the object ere it can behold it,—*Intelligens in actu fit ipsum intelligibile*: so the soul must have some inspiration of the Holy Ghost, before it can believe with the heart the inspired scriptures.

Now, for the utility and profit of the scriptures, who can speak of it according to its worth? Some things may be over-commended,—nay, all things but this one,—God speaking in his word to mankind. Many titles are given to human writings; some are called accurate, some subtile, some ingenious, and some profound and

deep, some plain, some learned; but call them what they please, the scripture may vindicate to itself these two titles as its own prerogative,—holy and profitable. The best speaker in the world in many words cannot want sin; the best writer hath some dross and refuse; but here, all is holy, all is profitable. Many books are to no purpose but to feed and inflame men's lusts; many serve for nothing but to spend and drive over the time, without thought; most part are good for nothing but to burden and over-weary the world, to put them in a fancy of knowledge which they have not; many serve for this only, to nourish men's curiosity and vain imaginations, and contentions about words and notions; but here is a book profitable,—all profitable. If you do not yet profit by it, you can have no pleasure in it; it is only ordained for soul's profiting, not for pleasing your fancy, not for matter of curious speculation, not for contention and strife about the interpretation of it. Many books have nothing in them, but specious titles to commend them; they do nothing less than what they promise; they have a large and fair entry, which leads only into a poor cottage; but the scriptures have no hyperbolic and superlative styles to allure men; they hold out a plain and common gate and entry which will undoubtedly lead to a pleasant palace; others *et prodesse volunt et delectare*, but these certainly *et prodesse volunt et possunt*,—they both can profit you and will profit you. I wish that souls would read the scriptures as profitable scriptures, with the intention to profit. If you do not read with such a purpose, you read not the scriptures of God, they become as another book unto you. But what are they profitable for? For doctrine, and a divine doctrine; a doctrine of life and happiness. It is the great promise of the new covenant, 'You shall be all taught of God.' The scriptures can make a man learned and wise, learned to salvation; it is foolishness to the world, 'but the world through wisdom know not God.' Alas! what then do they know? Is there any besides God? And is there any knowledge besides the knowledge of God? You have a poor petty wisdom among you to gather riches and manage your business. Others have a poor imaginary wisdom that they call learning; and generally people think, to pray to God is but a paper-skill, a little book-craft; they think the knowledge of God is nothing else but to learn to read the Bible. Alas! mistake not; it is another thing to know God. The doctrine of Jesus Christ written on the heart is a deep profound learning; and the poor, simple, rudest people, may by the Spirit's teaching become wiser than their ancients, than their ministers. O, it is an excellent point of learning, to know how to be saved! What is it, I pray you, to know the course of the heavens,—to number the orbs, and the stars in them,—to measure their circumference,—to reckon their motions,—and yet not to know him that sits on the circle of them, and not know how to inhabit and dwell there? If you would seek unto God, and seek eyes opened to behold the mystery of the word, you would become wiser than your pastors; you would learn from the Spirit to pray better; you would find the way to heaven better than they can teach you, or walk in it.

Then, it is 'profitable for reproof and correction.' It contains no doctrine very pleasant to men's natural humours; but it is indeed most pleasant to a right and ordered taste. You know, the distemper of the eye, or the perverting of the taste, will misrepresent pleasant things, and sweet things to the senses, and make them appear ill-savoured and bitter. But, I say, to a discerning spirit there is nothing so sweet, so comely. 'I have seen an end of all perfection,' but none of thy law. 'Thy word is sweeter to me than the honey, or the honey-comb.' If a soul be prepossessed with the love of the world, and the lusts of the world, it cannot savour and taste of them [the scriptures]; that vicious quality in the mind will make the pleasant gospel, unpleasant. 'I piped unto you, and ye have not danced.' But however, the scriptures are then most profitable when they are least pleasant to our corruptions; and, therefore, it is an absolute and entire piece. *Et prodesse volunt et delectare. Omne tulit punctum, qui miscuit utile dulci.* There are sharp reproofs, and sad corrections of his holy law, which must make way for the pleasant and sweet gospel. There is a reproof of life,—a wounding before healing,—that whoso refuse them, despise their own soul, but 'the ear that heareth them abideth among the wise,' Prov. 15.31,32. Woe unto that soul that correction or reproof or threatening is grievous unto; 'he shall die,' Prov. 15.10; 'he is brutish,' Prov. 12.1. There is a generation of men that can endure to hear nothing but gospel-promises; that cry out against all reproofing of sins, and preaching of God's wrath against unbelieving sinners, as legal, and meddling with other men's matters, especially if they reprove the sins of rulers, their public state enormities; as if the whole word of God were not profitable; as if reproofs were not as wholesome as consolations; as if threatenings did not contribute to make men flee from the wrath to come into a city of refuge. Let such persons read their own character out of wise Solomon, 'Correction is grievous to them that forsake the way.' 'Rebuke a wise man, and he will love thee; give instruction to a wise man, and he will be yet wiser,' Prov. 9.8,9. If we were pleasers of men, then were we not the servants of Jesus Christ; let us strive to profit men, but not to please them. Peace, peace, which men's own hearts fancy, would please them; but it were better for them to be awakened out of that dream, by reproof, by correction; and he that will do so, shall 'find more favour of him afterwards, than he that flattereth with the tongue,' Prov. 28.23.

Well then, let this be established in your hearts as the foundation of all true religion, that the scriptures are the word of the eternal God, and that they contain a perfect and exact rule both of glorifying God and of the way to enjoy him. They can make you perfect to every good work. I shall say no more on this; but beseech you, as you love your own souls, be acquainting yourselves with them. You will hear, in these days, of men pretending to more divine and spiritual discoveries and revelations than the scriptures contain: but, my brethren, these can make you 'wise to salvation,' these can make you 'perfect to every good work.' Then, what needs more? All that is besides salvation, and beyond perfection, count it superfluous and vain, if not worse, if not diabolical.

Let others be wise to their own destruction,—let them establish their own imaginations for the word of God, and rule of their faith,—but hold you fast what you have received, and 'contend earnestly' for it. Add nothing, and diminish nothing; let this lamp shine 'till the day dawn,'—till the morning of the resurrection; and walk ye in the light of it, and do not kindle any other sparkles, else ye shall lie down in the grave in sorrow, and rise in sorrow. Take the word of God as the only rule, and the perfect rule,—a rule for all your actions, civil, natural, and religious; for all must be done to his glory, and his word teacheth how to attain to that end. Let not your imaginations, let not others' example, let not the preaching of men, let not the conclusions and acts of Assemblies be your rule, but in as far as you find them agreeing with the perfect rule of God's holy word. All other rules are *regulæ regulatæ*; they are but like publications and intimations of the rule itself. Ordinances of assemblies are but like the herald-promulgation of the king's statute and law; if it vary in any thing from his intention, it is not valid and binding. I beseech you, take the scriptures for the rule of your walking, or else you will wander; the scripture is *regula regulans*, a ruling rule. If you be not acquainted with it, you must follow the opinions or examples of other men; and what if they lead you unto destruction?

Lecture IV

THE SCRIPTURES REVEAL ETERNAL LIFE THROUGH JESUS CHRIST.

JOHN. 5.39. "*Search the scriptures, for in them ye think ye have eternal life, and they are they which testify of me.*" EPH. 2.20. "*And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets.*"

AS in darkness there is need of a lantern without and the light of the eyes within,—for neither can we see in darkness without some lamp, though we have never so good eyes, nor yet see without eyes, though in never so clear a sunshine,—so there is absolute need for the guiding of our feet in the dangerous and dark paths to eternal life (that are full of pits and snares,) of the lamp, or word written or preached, without us, and the illumination of the Holy Ghost within us. These are conjoined, Isa. 59.21, 'This is my covenant:' 'The Spirit that is upon thee, and my words which I have put in thy mouth, will not depart out of thy mouth, nor out of the mouth of thy seed,' &c. There are words without, and there must needs be a spirit within, which makes us to behold the truth and grace contained in these words. There is a law written without, with pen and ink, and there is a law written within, upon the heart, with the Spirit of the living God. The law without is the pattern and exact copy; the law within, is the transcript or the image of God upon the heart, framed and fashioned according to the similitude of it, 2 Cor. 3.3; Heb. 8.10. So then, there needs be no more question about the divine authority of the scriptures, among those who have their senses exercised to discern between good and ill, than among men who see

and taste, concerning light and darkness, sweet and bitter. The persuasion of a Christian is fetched deeper than the reasons of men. Their faith is 'the evidence of things not seen.' It is an eye, a supernatural eye, whereby a soul beholds that majesty and excellency of God shining in the word, which, though it shine about the rest of the world, yet 'tis not seen, because they cannot know it nor discern it. Wonder not that the multitude of men cannot believe the report that is made; that there are few who find any such excellency and sweetness in the gospel as is reported, because saith Isaiah; 53.1, the arm of 'the Lord is not revealed to them.' The hand of God must first write on their heart, ere they understand the writings of the scriptures; his arm must create an eye in their souls, an internal light, before it can behold that glorious brightness of God shining in the word. The word is God's testimony of himself, of his grace and mercy, and good-will to mankind. Now no man can receive this testimony, unless it be sealed and confirmed by the Holy Ghost into the heart: saith Peter, 'We are his witnesses of these things, and so is also the Holy Ghost whom God hath given to them that obey him,' Acts 5.32. The word witnesses to the ear, and the Spirit testifieth to our spirits, the truth and worth of that; and therefore the Spirit is a seal and a witness. The word is the Lord's voice to his own children; bastards cannot know it, 'but my sheep know my voice,' John 10.4,16. You know no difference between the bleating of one sheep from another, but the poor lambs know their mother's voice; there is a secret instinct of nature that is more powerful than many marks and signs: even so those who are begotten of God know his voice,—they discern that in it which all the world that hear it cannot, discern,—there is a sympathy between their souls and that living word. That word is the immortal seed they are begotten of; and there is a natural instinct to love that, and to meditate in it; such an inclination to it, as in new-born babes to the breasts; so the children of God 'do desire the sincere milk of the word, that they may grow thereby,' as they were born of it, 1 Pet. 2.2. In those scriptures which we read in your audience, you have something of their excellency, and our duty. There is a rich jewel in them, a precious pearl in that field, even Jesus Christ, and in him eternal life; and therefore we ought to search the scriptures for this jewel, to dig in the field for this pearl, the doctrine of the prophets and apostles, as a sure foundation whereupon souls may build their eternal felicity, and the hope of it. Jesus Christ is the very chief stone in that foundation, whereupon the weight of all the saints and all their hope hangs. And therefore we ought to lean the weight of our souls only to this truth of God, and build our faith only upon it, and square our practice only by it.

We shall speak something of the first, that it may be a spur to the second. The Jews had some respective opinion of the word of God; they knew that in them was eternal life; they thought it a doctrine of life and happiness, and so cried up Moses' writings, but they would not believe Christ's words. They erred, not understanding the scriptures, and so set the writings of Moses' law at variance with the preaching of Christ's gospel. What a pitiful mistake was this! They

thought they had eternal life in the scriptures, and yet they did not receive nor acknowledge him whom to know was eternal life. Therefore our Lord Jesus sends them back again to the scriptures:—"Go and search them; you think, and you think well, that in them ye may find the way to eternal life; but while you seek it in them you mistake it: these scriptures testify of me, the end of the law, but you cannot behold the end of that ministry, because of the blindness of your hearts, (Rom. 10.3; 2 Cor. 3.13,14.) Therefore search again, unfold the ceremonies; I am wrapt in them, and life eternal with me. Dig up the law till you find the bottom of God's purpose in it,—till you find the end of the ministration,—and you shall find me, 'the way, the truth, and life;' and so you shall have that eternal life which now you do but think you have, and are beguiled. While you seek it out of me, in vain you think you have it, for it is not in the scriptures, but because they testify of me, the life and the light of men." May not this now commend the word to us? eternal life is in it. Other writings and discourses may tickle the ears with some pleasing eloquence, but that is vanishing; it is but like a musician's voice. Some may represent some petty and momentary advantage, but how soon shall an end be put to all that? So that within a little time the advantage of all the books of the world shall be gone. The statutes and laws of kings and parliaments can reach no further than some temporal reward or punishment; their highest pain is the killing of this body; their highest reward is some evanishing and fading honour, or perishing riches: but 'he showeth his word and judgments unto us, and hath not dealt so with any nation,' Psalm 147.19,20. And no nation under the whole heaven hath such laws and ordinances; eternal life and eternal death is wrapt up in them. These are rewards and punishments suitable to the majesty and magnificence of the eternal Lawgiver. Consider, I beseech you, what is folded up here,—the scriptures show the path of life; life is of all things the most excellent, and comes nearest the blessed being of God. When we say *life*, we understand a blessed life, that only deserves the name. Now this we have lost in Adam. Death is passed upon all men, but that death is not the worst: 'tis but a consequence of a soul-death. The immortal soul—whose life consisteth in communion with God, and peace with him—is separated from him by sin, and so killed, when it is cut off from the fountain of life; what a life can it have more, than a beam that is cut off by the intervention of a dark body from the sun. Now then, what a blessed doctrine must it be that brings to light, life and immortality? especially when we have so miserably lost it, and involved our souls into an eternal death. Life is precious in itself, but much more precious to one condemned to die,—to be caught out of the paws of the lion,—to be brought back from the gibbet. O how will that commend the favour of a little more time in the world! But then if we knew what an eternal misery we are involved into, and stand under a sentence binding us over to such an inconceivable and insupportable punishment as is the curse and wrath of God; O how precious an esteem would souls have of the scriptures, how would they be sweet unto their soul, because they show unto us a way of escaping that pit of misery, and a way of attaining eternal blessedness as

satisfying and glorious as the misery would have been vexing and tormenting! O that ye would once lay these in the balance together,—this present life and life eternal! Know ye not that your souls are created for eternity; that they will eternally survive all these present things? Now how do ye imagine they shall live after this life? Your thoughts and projects and designs are confined within the poor narrow bounds of your time. When you die, in that day your thoughts shall perish. All your imaginations and purposes and providences shall have an end then; they reach no farther than that time. And if you should wholly perish too, it were not so much matter. But for all your purposes and projects to come to an end, when you are but beginning to live, and enter eternity, that is lamentable indeed! Therefore I say, consider what ye are doing, weigh these in a balance,—eternal life and the present life; if there were no more difference but the continuance of the one, and the shortness of the other,—that the world's standing is but as one day, one moment to eternity,—that ought to preponderate in your souls. Do we not here flee away as a shadow upon the mountains? Are we not as a vapour that ascends, and for a little time appears a solid body, and then presently vanisheth? Do we not come all into the stage of the world, as for an hour, to act our part and be gone; now then, what is this to endless eternity? When you have continued as long as since the world began, you are no nearer the end of it. Ought not that estate then to be most in your eyes, how to lay up a foundation for the time to come? But then, compare the misery and the vexation of this life with the glory and felicity of this eternal life. What are our days? But few and full of trouble. Or, if you will, take the most blessed estate you have seen and heard of in this world, of kings and rich men, and help all the defects of it by your imaginations; suppose unto yourselves the height and pitch of glory and abundance and power that is attainable on earth; and when your fancy hath busked up such a felicity, compare it with an eternal life: O how will that vanish out of your imaginations! If so be you know any thing of the life to come, you will even think that an odious comparison,—you will think all that earthly felicity but light as vanity, 'every man at his best estate is altogether vanity.' Eternal life will weigh down eternally, 2 Cor. 4.17,18. O but it hath an exceeding weight in itself,—one moment of it, one hour's possession and taste of it! but then what shall the endless endurance of it add to its weight? Now there are many that presume they have a right to eternal life, as the Jews did. You think, saith he, that you have it; you think well, that you think 'tis only to be found in the scriptures; but you vainly think that you have found it in them: and there is this reason for it, because 'you will not come to me that you might have life,' John 5.40. If you did understand the true meaning of the scriptures, and did not rest on the outward letter and ordinances, you would receive the testimony that the scriptures give of me. But now you hear not me, the Father's substantial Word, therefore 'ye have not his word abiding in you,' ver. 38. There was nothing more general among that people, than a vain carnal confidence and presumption of being God's people, and having interest in the promise of life eternal, as it is this day in the visible church. There is a multitude that are

Christians only in the letter, and not in the spirit, that would never admit any question concerning this great matter of having eternal life; and so by not questioning it, they come to think they have it, and by degrees their conjectures and thoughts about this ariseth to the stability of some feigned and strong persuasion of it. In the Old Testament the Lord strikes at the root of their persuasions, by discovering unto them how vain a thing it was, and how abominable it was before him, to have an external profession of being his people, and to glory in external ordinances and privileges, and yet to neglect altogether the purging of their hearts and consciences from lust and idol-sins, and to make no conscience of walking righteously towards men. Their profession was contradicted by their practice, 'Will ye steal, murder, and commit adultery, and yet come and stand in my house?' Jer. 7.9,10. Doth not that say as much as if I had given you liberty to do all these abominations? Even so it is this day; the most part have no more of Christianity but a name. They have some outward privileges of baptism and hearing the word; and, it may be, have a form of knowledge, and a form of worship; but in the meantime they are not baptized in heart,—they are in all their conversation even conformed to the heathen world,—they hate personal reformation, and think it too precise and needless. Now, I say, such are many of you, and yet you would not take well to have it questioned whether ye shall be partakers of eternal life. You think you are wronged when that is called in question. Oh that it were beyond all question indeed! But know assuredly that you are but Christians in the letter,—in the flesh and not in the spirit. Many of you have not so much as 'a form of knowledge'—have not so much as the letter of religion. You have heard some names in the preaching often repeated,—as Christ, and God, and faith, and heaven, and hell,—and you know no more of these but the name. You consider not and meditate not on them; and though you know the truth of the word, yet the word abideth not nor dwelleth in you. You have it in your mouth, you have it in your mind or understanding, but it is not received in love, it doth not dwell in the heart. 'Let, the word of Christ dwell in you richly,' Col. 3.16. You have it imprisoned in your minds, and shut up in a corner where it is useless, and can do no more but witness against you, and scarce that. As the Gentiles incarcerated and detained the truth of God, written by nature within them, in unrighteousness, (Rom. 1.18,) so do many of you detain the knowledge of his word in unrighteousness. It hath no place in the heart, gets no liberty and freedom to walk through the affections, and so to order the conversation of men; and therefore the most part of men do but fancy to themselves an interest and right to eternal life. You think it, and do but think it; it is but a strong imagination, that hath no strength from the grounds of it, no stability from any evidence or promise, but merely from itself; or it is but a light and vain conjecture that hath no strength in it because there is no question or doubts admitted which may try the strength of it. But then I suppose that a man could attain some answerable walking, that he had not only a form of knowledge, but some reality of practice, some inward heat of affection and zeal for God and

godliness, yet there is one thing that he wants, and if it be wanting will spoil all; and it is this, which Christ reproveth in the Jews, 'you will not come to me to have life;' the scriptures testify of me, but you receive not their testimony. Suppose a man had as much equity and justice towards men, piety towards God, and sobriety towards himself, as can be found amongst the best of men; let him be a diligent reader of the scriptures, let him love them, and meditate on them day and night; yet if he do not come out of himself, and leave all his own righteousness as dung behind him, that he may be found in Jesus Christ, he hath no life, he cannot have any right to life eternal. You may think this is a strange assertion, that if a man had the righteousness and holiness of an angel, yet he could not be saved without denying all that, and fleeing to Christ as an ungodly man; and you may think it as strange a supposal, that any person that reads the scriptures, and walks righteously, and hath a zeal towards God, yet are such as will not come to Christ and will not hear him whom the Lord hath sent.

But the first is the very substance of the gospel. 'There is none other name whereby men may be saved, but by Jesus Christ,' Acts 4.12. Life eternal is all within him. All the treasures of grace and wisdom and knowledge are seated in him, Col. 1.19; 2.3. All the light of life and salvation is embodied in this sun of righteousness, since the eclipse of man's felicity in the garden. Adam was a living soul, but he lost his own life, and killed his posterity. Christ Jesus, the second common man in the world, is a quickening spirit. He hath not only life in himself, but he gives it more abundantly; and therefore you have it so often repeated in John, who was the disciple most acquainted with Christ, 'in him was life; and the life was the light of men,' John 1.4. And he is 'the bread of life,' that gives life to the world, John 6.33,35. He is 'the resurrection and the life,' 11.25; and 'the way, the truth, and the life,' 14.6. The scriptures do not contain eternal life, but in as far as they lead to him who is life, and whom to know and embrace is eternal life: and therefore, saith he, 'these are they which testify of me.' Man lived immediately in God when he was in innocency; he had life in himself from God; but then he began to live in himself without dependence on God the fountain of life, and this himself being interposed between God and life, it vanished even as a beam by the intervening of any gross body between it and the sun. Now man's light and life being thus eclipsed and cut off, the Lord is pleased to let all fullness dwell in his Son Jesus Christ, and the fullness of the Godhead dwelt in him bodily, Col. 2.9; that since there was no access immediately to God for life (a flaming fire, and sword of divine justice compassing and guarding the tree of life, lest man should touch it) there might be access to God in a mediator like unto us, that we might come to him, and might have life from God by the intervention of Jesus Christ.

Look then what is in the Holy Scriptures, and you shall find it but a letter of death and ministration of condemnation while it is separated from him. Christ is the very life and spirit of the scriptures, by whose virtue they quicken our souls.

If you consider the perfect rule of righteousness in the law, you cannot find life there, because you cannot be conformed unto it; the holiest man offends in every thing, and that holy law being violated in any thing will send thee to hell with a curse. 'Cursed is he that abideth not in all things.' If you look upon the promise of life, 'do this and live;' what comfort can you find in it, except you could find doing in yourselves? And can any man living find such exact obedience as the law requires? There is a mistake among many. They conceive that the Lord cannot but be well-pleased with them if they do what they can. But be not deceived,—the law of God requires perfect doing; it will not compound with thee, and come down in its terms; not one jot of the rigour of it will be remitted. If you cannot do all that is commanded, all you do will not satisfy that promise; therefore thou must be turned over from the promise of life to the curse, and there thou shalt find thy name written. Therefore it is absolutely necessary that Jesus Christ be made under the law, and give obedience in all things, even to the death of the cross, and so be made a curse for us, and sin for us, even he 'who knew no sin.' And thus in him you find the law fulfilled, justice satisfied, and God pleased. In him you find the promise of life indeed established in a better and surer way than was first propounded. You find life by his death, you find life in his doing for you. And again, consider the ceremonial law,—what were all those sacrifices and ceremonies? Did God delight in them? Could he savour their incense and sweet smells, and eat the fat of lambs and be pacified? No, he detests and abhors such abominations! Because that people did stay in the letter, and went no further than the ceremony, he declares that it was as great abomination to him as the offering up of a dog. While they were separated from Jesus Christ, in whom his soul rested and was pacified, they were not expiations, but provocations; they were not propitiations for sin, but abominations in themselves. But take these as the shadow of such a living substance; take them as remembrances of him who was to come, and behold Jesus Christ lying in these swaddling clothes of ceremonies, until the fullness of time should come, that he might be manifested in the flesh, and so you shall find eternal life in those dead beasts, in those dumb ceremonies. If you consider this Lamb of God slain in all these sacrifices, from the beginning of the world, then you present a sweet-smelling savour to God,—then you offer the true propitiation for the sins of the world,—then he will delight more in that sacrifice than all other personal obedience.

But what if I should say, that the gospel itself is a killing letter, and ministration of death, being severed from Christ? I should say nothing amiss, but what Paul speaketh, that his gospel was 'a savour of death' to many. Take the most powerful preaching, the most sweet discourse, the most plain writings of the free grace and salvation in the gospel,—take all the preaching of Jesus Christ himself and his apostles,—and you shall not find life in them, unless ye be led by that Spirit of Christ unto himself, who is 'the resurrection and the life.' It will no more save you than the covenant of works, unless that word abide and dwell in your

hearts, to make you believe in him, and embrace him with your souls, whom God hath sent. Suppose you heard all, and heard it gladly, and learned it, and could discourse well upon it, and teach others, yet if you be not driven out of yourselves, out of your own righteousness, as well as sins, and pursued to this city of refuge, Jesus Christ, you have not eternal life. Your knowledge of the truth of the gospel, and your obedience to God's law, will certainly kill you, and as certainly as your ignorance and disobedience, unless you have embraced in your soul that good thing Jesus Christ, contained in these truths, who is the diamond of that golden ring of the scriptures; and unless your soul embrace these promises as soul-saving, as containing the chief good, and 'worthy of all acceptation,' as well as your mind receive these as true and faithful sayings, 1 Tim. 1.15.

Thus ye see Jesus Christ is either the subject of all in the scriptures, or the end of it all. He is the very proper subject of the gospel. Paul knew nothing but Christ crucified in his preaching; and he is the very end and scope 'of the law for righteousness,' Rom. 10.3. All the preaching of a covenant of works, all the curses and threatenings of the Bible, all the rigid exactions of obedience, all come to this one great design; not that we set about such a walking to please God, or do something to pacify him, but that we being concluded under sin and wrath on the one hand, and an impossibility to save ourselves on the other hand, Gal. 3.22, Rom. 5.20, 21, may be pursued unto Jesus Christ for righteousness and life, who is both able to save us, and ready to welcome us. Therefore the Gospel opens the door of salvation in Christ, the law is behind us with fire and sword, and destruction pursuing us; and all for this end, that sinners may come to him and have life. Thus the law is made the pedagogue of the soul to lead to Christ; Christ is behind us, cursing, condemning, threatening us, and he is before with stretched-out arms ready to receive us, bless us, and save us, inviting, promising, exhorting to have life. Christ is on Mount Sinai, delivering the law with thunders, Acts 7.38; and he is on the Mount Zion, in the calm voice; he is both upon the mountain of cursings and blessings, and on both doing the part of a mediator, Gal. 3.19,20. It is love that is in his heart which made him first cover his countenance with frowns and threats; and it is love that again displays itself in his smiling countenance. Thus souls are enclosed with love pursuing and love receiving; and thus the law, which seems most contrary to the Gospel, testifies of Christ. It gives him this testimony, that except salvation be in him, it is nowhere else. The law says, "It is not in me, seek it not in obedience; I can do nothing but destroy you, if you abide under my jurisdiction." The ceremonies and sacrifices say, "If you can behold the end of this ministry,—if a veil be not upon your hearts, as it was upon Moses' face, (2 Cor. 3. 13.) you may see where it is; it is not in your obedience, but in the death and suffering of the Son of God whom we represent." Then the Gospel takes all these coverings and veils away and gives a plain and open testimony of him: "There is no name under heaven to be saved by, but Christ's." The Old Testament spake by figures and signs, as

dumb men do, but the New speaks in plain words, and with open face. Now I say, for all this that there is no salvation but in him, yet many souls,—not only those who live in their gross sins and have no form of godliness, but even the better sort of people that have some 'knowledge' and civility and a kind of 'zeal for God,'—yet they do not 'come to him that they may have life,' they do not 'submit to the righteousness of God,' Rom. 10.2,3. Here is the march that divides the ways of heaven and hell,—coming to Jesus Christ, and forsaking ourselves. The confidence of these souls is chiefly or only in that little knowledge, or zeal, or profession they have; they do not as really abhor themselves for their own righteousness as for their unrighteousness. They make that the covering of their nakedness and filthiness which is in itself as menstruous and unclean as any thing. It is now the very propension and natural inclination of our hearts, to stand upright in ourselves. Faith bows a soul's back to take on Christ's righteousness; but presumption lifts up a soul upon its own bottom. 'How can ye believe that seek honour one of another?' The engagements of the soul to its own credit or estimation,—the engagements of self-love and self-honour,—do lift up a soul that it cannot submit to God's righteousness, to righteousness in another. And therefore many do dream and think that they have eternal life, who shall awake in the end, and find that it was but a dream, a night-fancy.

Now from all this I would enforce this duty upon your consciences, to 'search the Scriptures' if you think to have eternal life; search them if ye would 'know Christ, whom to know is life eternal;' then again search them, for 'these are they that testify of him.' Searching imports diligence,—much diligence,—it is a serious work; it is not a common seeking of an easy and common thing, but a search and scrutiny for some hidden thing, for some special thing. It is not bare reading of the Scriptures that will answer this duty, except it be diligent and daily reading; and it is not that alone, except the spirit within meditate on them, and by meditation accomplish a diligent search. There is some hidden secret that you must search for that is enclosed within the covering of words and sentences. There is a mystery of wisdom that you must apply your hearts to search out, Eccl. 7.25. Jesus Christ is the treasure that is hid in this field. O a precious treasure of eternal life! Now then, souls, search into the fields of the Scriptures for him 'as for hid treasure,' Prov. 2.4. It is not only truth you must seek and buy, and not sell it, but it is life you would search; here is an object that may not only take up your understandings, but satisfy your hearts. Think not you have found all when you have found truth there, and learned it; no, except you have found life there, you have found nothing, you have missed the treasure. If you would profit by the Scriptures, you must bring both your understanding and your affections to them, and depart not till they both return full. If you bring your understanding to seek the truth, you may find truth, but not truly; you may find it, but you are not found of it. You may lead truth captive, and enclose it in a prison of your mind, and encompass it about with a guard of corrupt affections, that it shall have no issue, no outgoing to the rest of your souls and ways, and

no influence on them. You may 'know the truth,' but you are not 'known of it,' nor brought into captivity to the obedience of it. The treasure that is hid in the Scriptures is Jesus Christ, whose entire and perfect name is, 'Way, Truth, and Life.' He is a living truth and true life; therefore Christ is the adequate object of the soul, commensurable to all its faculties. He has truth in him to satisfy the mind; and has life and goodness in him to satiate the heart; therefore if thou wouldest find Jesus Christ, bring thy whole soul to seek him, as Paul expresseth it. He is true and faithful, and 'worthy of all acceptation,' then bring thy judgment to find the light of truth, and thy affections to embrace the life of goodness that is in him. Now, as much as ye find of him, so much have ye profited in the Scriptures. If you find commands there which you cannot obey, search again, and you may find strength under that command. Dig a little deeper, and you shall find Jesus the end of an impossible command. And when you have found him, you have found life and strength to obey, and you have found a propitiation and sacrifice for transgressing and not obeying. If you find curses in it, search again, and you shall find Jesus Christ under that, 'made a curse for us;' you shall find him 'the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believes.' When you know all the letter of the Scripture, yet you must search into the spirit of it, that it may be imprinted into your spirits. All you know does you no good but as it is received in love; unless your souls become a 'living epistle,' and the word without be written on the heart, you have found nothing. As for you that cannot read the Scriptures, if it be possible, take that pains to learn to read them. O if you knew what they contain, and whom they bear witness of, you would have little quietness till you could read at least his love-epistles to sinners! And if you cannot learn, be not discouraged; but if your desires within be fervent, your endeavours to hear it read by others will be more earnest. But it is not so much the reading of much of it that profiteth, as the pondering of these things in your hearts, and digesting them by frequent meditation, till they become the food of the soul. This was David's way; and by this he grew to the stature of a tall and well-bodied Christian.

Lecture V.

OF THE SCRIPTURES.

EPH. 2.20. "*And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone.*"

BELIEVERS are 'the temple of the living God,' in which he dwells and walks, 2 Cor. 6.16. Every one of them is a little sanctuary and temple to his Majesty; 'sanctify the Lord of hosts in your hearts.' Though he be 'the high and lofty One that inhabits eternity,' yet he is pleased to come down to this poor cottage of a creature's heart, and dwell in it. Is not this as great a humbling and condescending for the Father to come down off his throne of glory, to the poor

base footstool of the creature's soul, as for the Son to come down in the state of a servant, and become in the form of sinful flesh? But then he is a temple and sanctuary to them. 'And he shall be for a sanctuary,' (Isa. 8.14.) a place of refuge, a secret hiding-place. Now, as every one is a little separated retired temple, so they all conjoined make up one temple, one visible body, in which he dwells. Therefore Peter calls them 'living stones, built up a spiritual house' to God, I Pet. 2.5. All these little temples make up one house and temple fitly joined together, in which God shows manifest signs of his presence and working. Unto this the apostle in this place alludes. The communion and union of Christians with God is of such a nature, that all the relations and points of conjunction in the creatures are taken to resemble it, and hold it out to us. We are citizens, saith he, and domestics, house-hold-men, and so dwell in his house; and then we are 'his house' besides. Now ye know there are two principal things in a house,—the foundation and the corner-stone; the one supports the building, the other unites it and holds it together. These two parts of this spiritual building are here pointed at. The foundation of every particular stone, and of the whole building, is the doctrine of the prophets and apostles, as holding out Jesus Christ to souls, 'the rock' on which our house shall be builded: not the apostles, or prophets, far less pastors and teachers since,—for they are but at best, 'workers together with God,' and employed in the building of the house; nor yet their doctrine, but as it holds out that 'sure foundation' that God has laid in Zion, (Isa. 28.16.) which is Jesus Christ; for 'other foundation can no man lay.' And then, 'the corner-stone' is that same Jesus Christ, who reaches from the bottom even to the top of the building, and immediately touches every stone, and both quickens it in itself, and unites them together.

Well then, here is a sure foundation to build our eternal happiness upon; the word of God, that endures for ever, holds it out to us. All men are building upon something. Every man is about some establishment of his hopes,—lays some foundation of his confidence which he may stand upon. They are one of the two that Christ speaks of, Luke 6.48,49: one builds on the rock, another on the sand. Now as the foundation is, so is the house. A changeable foundation makes a falling house; a sure foundation makes an unchangeable house; a house without a foundation will prove quickly no house. Now whatsoever men build their hope and confidence upon,—besides the word of God, his sure promise and sure covenant, and Jesus Christ in them,—they build upon no foundation, or upon a sandy foundation. 'All flesh is grass, and the flower and perfection of it is as the flower of the field.' Here is the name and character of all created perfections,—of the most excellent endowments of mind,—of all the specious actions of man: it is all but vanishing and vanity! 'Every man at his best estate is such, yea, altogether such.' You who have no more to build upon but your prosperity and wealth, O that is but sand and dung! Would any man build a house upon a dunghill? You who have no other hope but in your own good prayers and meanings,—your own reformations and repentances,—your professions and

practices,—know this, that your hope is like a spider's house, like the web that she has laboriously exercised herself about all the week over, and then when you lean upon that house it shall fall through, and not sustain your weight.

Whatsoever it be, besides this 'living stone,' Jesus Christ, who is the very substance of the word and promises, it shall undoubtedly prove thy shame and confusion. But behold the opposition the prophet makes between the word and these other things: 'The word of our God shall stand for ever,' Isa. 40.6-8. And therefore Peter makes it an 'incorruptible seed' of which believers are begotten, 1 Peter 1.23. It is the unchangeable truth and immutable faithfulness of God that makes his word so sure; 'it is builded up to the heavens.' Therefore the Psalmist often commends the word of the Lord as 'a tried word,'—as 'purified seven times.' It hath endured the trial and proof of all men,—of all temptations,—of all generations. It hath often been put in the furnace of questions and doubtings,—it hath often been tried in the fire of afflictions,—but it came forth like pure gold, without dross. This is faith's foundation, 'God hath spoken in his holiness;' and therefore, though 'all men be liars,' yet God will be found true; he deceives none, and is deceived of none. The Lord hath taken a latitude to himself in his working; he loves to show his sovereignty in much of that; and therefore he changes it in men and upon men as he pleaseth. Yet he hath condescended to limit and bound himself by his word, and in this to show his faithfulness. And therefore, though heaven and earth should pass away,—though he should annihilate this world, and create new ones,—yet 'not one jot of his word shall fail.' The earth is established sure, though it hath no foundation, for the word of his command supports it: and yet a believer's confidence is upon a surer ground. 'Though the earth should be removed, yet it cannot pass or fail,' saith our Lord. And therefore the Psalmist useth to boast in God, that though the earth were moved, and the floods lifted up their voice, yet he would not fear, because his foundation was unshaken for all that; the word is not moved, when the world is moved, and therefore he was not moved. The world's stability depends upon a word of command; but our salvation depends on a word of promise. Now ye know, promises put an obligation upon the person, which commands do not. A man may change his commands as he pleases to his children or servants, but he may not change his promises. Therefore the promises of God put an obligation upon him who is truth itself, not to fail in performance; or rather he is to himself, by his unchangeable will and good pleasure, by his faithfulness and truth, an obliging and binding law. When no creature could set bounds to him, he encloses himself within the bounds of promises to us, and gives all flesh liberty to challenge him if he be not faithful.

Now all 'the promises of God are yea and amen in Jesus Christ;' that is, established and confirmed in him. Christ is the surety of them; and so the certainty and stability of them depend upon him, at least to our sense; for God in all his dealing condescends to our weakness, that we may have strong consolation. A promise might suffice to ground our faith, but he addeth an oath

to his promise, and he takes Christ surety for the performance; and therefore Christ may be called the truth indeed,—the substantial word of God,—for he is the very substance of the written and preached word. And then he is the certainty and assurance of it; the Scriptures testify of him, and lead us to this 'rock higher than we,' to build upon; and against this 'the gates of hell cannot prevail.' If the word lead not a soul into Christ himself, that soul hath no foundation. Though thou hear the word,—though thou know the word,—yea, suppose thou couldest teach others, and instruct the ignorant,—yet all that will be no foundation, as good as none, except thou do it. And what is it to do the word, but believe in him whom the word testifies of? This is the work of God, to resign thy soul to his mercies and merits, and have no confidence in the flesh; to scrape out all the rubbish of works and performances and parts out of the foundation, and singly to roll thy soul's weight upon God's promises and Christ's purchase; to look with Paul, on all things besides, in thee, and about thee, as dung and dross that thou can lean no weight upon; and to remove that dunghill from the foundation of thy hope, that Jesus Christ may be the only foundation of thy soul, as God hath laid him in the church for 'a sure foundation that whoso believeth in him may not be ashamed.' Whatever besides a soul be established on, though it appear very solid, and the soul be settled and fixed upon it, yet a day will come that will unsettle that soul and raze that foundation. Either it shall be now done in thy conscience, or it must be done at length, when that great tempest of God's indignation shall blow from heaven 'against all unrighteousness of men,' in the day of accounts. Then shall thy house fall, and the fall of it shall be great! But a soul established upon the sure promises, and upon Christ, in whom they 'are yea and amen,' shall abide that storm, and in that day have confidence before God,—have wherewith to answer in Jesus Christ, all the challenges of divine justice, and the accusations of conscience. 'He that trusts in him shall be as mount Sion, which cannot be moved.' You see all things else change, and therefore men's hopes and joys perish. Even here the temptations and revolutions of the times undermine their confidence and joy; and the blasts of the northern wind of affliction blow away their hopes.

Now as Christ is 'the foundation,' so he is 'the corner-stone' of the building. It is Christ who hath removed that 'partition-wall' between Jews and Gentiles, even the ceremonies of the one, and the atheism of the other. 'He is our peace, who hath made both one.' The two sides of the house of God are united by this corner-stone, Jesus Christ. Thus we, who were the temples of Satan, are made the temples of God. Thus poor stranger Gentiles, who had no interest in the covenant of promises, come to share with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and to be founded upon the doctrine of the prophets who taught the Jewish church. Christ is the bond of Christians; this is 'the head' into which all the members should grow up into a body. Distance of place, difference of nations, distinction of languages, all these cannot separate the members of Jesus Christ; they are more one—though consisting of divers nations, tongues, and customs, and

dispositions—than the people of one nation, or children of one family; for one Lord, one spirit, unites all. Alas, that all are not united in affection and judgment! Why do the sides of this house contend, and wrestle one against another, when there is such a corner-stone joining them together? Are there not many Christians who cannot endure to look upon one another, who are yet both placed in one building of the temple of God? Alas, this is sad and shameful! But that which I would especially have observed in this, is, that Jesus Christ is such a foundation that reacheth throughout the whole building, and immediately toucheth every stone of the building. It is such a foundation as riseth from the bottom to the top; and therefore Jesus Christ is both 'the author and finisher of our faith,' 'the beginning and the end.' The first stone and the last stone of our building must rise upon him, and by him; the least degree of grace and the greatest perfection of it, both are in him; and therefore Christians should be most dependent creatures,—dependent in their first being, and in after well-being,—in their being, and growing, wholly dependent upon Christ; that out 'of his fullness' they may receive grace, and then more 'grace for grace,' that all may appear to be grace indeed.

Now, I beseech you, my beloved in the Lord, to know whereupon ye are builded, or ought to be builded. There are two great errors in the time, take heed of them; one is the doctrine of some, and another is the practice of the most part. Some do prefer their own fancies and night-dreams, and the imaginations of their own heart, to the word of God; and upon pretence of revelation of new light, do cast a mist upon that word of God which is a light that hath shined from the beginning. 'Be not deceived:' but 'try the spirits whether they be of God,' or not. There are many pretend to much of the Spirit, and therefore cry out against the word, as letter, as flesh. But, my brethren, believe not every doctrine that calls itself a spirit. That spirit is not of God that hears not God's voice: as Christ reasoneth against the Jews. Seek ye more of the Spirit of Christ which he promiseth, who is a Spirit that teacheth all things; and bringeth to remembrance these blessed sayings; and leads us in all truth. It shall be both safest and sweetest to you to meditate on that word of the prophets and apostles; and the entrance into it shall give you light,—an old light which was from the beginning, and therefore a true light—for all truth is eternal—and yet a new light to your sense and feeling. It is both an old command, and a new command; an old word, and a new word; if thou search it by the Spirit's inspiration, that old word shall be made new, that letter made spirit and life. Such are the words that Christ speaks. But yet there are many who do not reject the Scriptures in judgment, who, notwithstanding, do not build on them in practice. Alas, it may be said of the most part of professed Christians among us, that they are not built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, but upon the sayings of fallible and weak men! What ground have many of you for your faith; but because the minister saith so, you believe so? The most part live in an implicit faith, and practice that in themselves which they condemn in the papists. You do

not labour to 'search the scriptures,' that upon that foundation you may build your faith in the questioned truths of this age; that so you may be able to answer those that ask a reason of the faith that is in you. Alas! simple souls, you believe every thing, and yet really believe nothing; because you believe not the word, as the word of the living God, but take it from men upon their authority! Therefore when a temptation cometh, from any gainsayings of the truth,—you cannot stand against it, because your faith hath no foundation but the sayings of men, or acts of assemblies. And therefore, as men whom you trust with holding out light unto you, hold out darkness instead of light, you embrace that darkness also. But, I beseech you, be builded upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets; not upon *them*, but upon that whereon they were builded, the infallible truths of God. You have the Scriptures, search them; since you have reasonable souls, search them. Other men's faith will not save; you cannot see to walk to heaven by other men's light, more than you can see by their eyes. You have eyes of your own, souls of your own, subordinate to none but the God of spirits, and the Lord of consciences, Jesus Christ; and therefore examine all that is spoken to you from the word, according to the word; and receive no more upon trust from men, but as you find it upon trial to be the truth of God.