

Lecture V.

Of The Scriptures

Eph. ii. 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. vi. 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. viii. 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, 1 Pet. ii. 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, household-men, and so dwell in his house, and then we are this house besides. Now ye know there are two principal things in a house—the foundation and the

cornerstone, 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. xxviii. 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 vi. 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 reformation 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. xl. 6-8. And therefore Peter makes it an “incorruptible seed” of which believers are begotten, 1 Peter i. 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 cornerstone 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 fulness 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 where-upon 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,¹³⁵ do cast a mist upon that word of God which is a light that

¹³⁵ [The allusion here appears to be to the doctrines of the Quakers who, in

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 practise 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!

Binning's time, were increasing in the west of Scotland, and accustomed to rail, with impunity, at ministers in the face of their congregations. See Baillie's Letters, vol. ii., pp. 393, 413, 419.—*Ed.*]

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. [027]