

Lecture XIII.

Of The Unity Of The Godhead And The Trinity Of Persons

Deut. vi. 4.—“Hear, O Israel The Lord our God is one Lord.”—1 John v. 7 “There are three that bear record in heaven the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost and these three are one.”

“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness,” 2 Tim. iii. 16. There is no refuse in it, no simple and plain history, but it tends to some edification, no profound or deep mystery, but it is profitable for salvation. Whatsoever secrets there be in the mysteries of God which are reserved from us, though it be given us but to “know in part,” and “darkly through a veil,” yet as much is given to us to know as may make the man of God perfect in every good work. As much is given us to know as may build us up to eternal salvation. If there were no more use of these deep mysteries of the holy Trinity, &c. but to silence all flesh, and restrain the unlimited spirits of men, and keep them within the bounds of sobriety and faith, it were enough. That great secret would teach as much by its silence and darkness, as the plainer truths do by speaking out clearly. O that this great mystery did compose our hearts to some reverend and awful apprehension of that God we have to do with, and did imprint in our soul a more feeling sense of our darkness and ignorance. This were more advantage then all the gain of light, or increase of knowledge that can come from the search of curiosity. If men would labour to walk in that light they have attained, rather than curiously inquire after what they cannot know by inquiry, they

should sooner attain more true light. If men would set about the practice of what they know, without doubt they would more readily come to a resolution and clearness in doubtful things. Religion is now turned into questions and school debates. Men begin to believe nothing but dispute everything, under a pretence of searching for light and resolution. But for the most part, while men look after light, they darken themselves, this is the righteous judgment of the Lord upon the world that doth not receive the truth in love, or walk in the light of what they have already attained, therefore he gives men up to wander in their search into the dark dungeons of human wisdom and fancy, and to lose what they have already. If those things which are “without controversy” (as the apostle speaks, 1 Tim. iii. 16) were indeed made conscience of, and embraced in love, and practised, it were beyond all controversy that the most part of present controversies would cease. But it falls out with many, as with the dog, that, catching at a shadow in the water, lost the substance in his teeth, so they, pursuing after new discoveries in controverted things, and not taking a heart hold and inward grip of the substantial truths of the gospel, which are beyond all controversy, do even lose what they have. Thus, even that when they have not is taken from them, because though they have it in judgment, yet they have it not surely and solidly in affection, that it may be holden. So, to this present point if we could learn to adore and admire this holy, holy, holy One,—if we could in silence and faith sit down and wonder at this mystery,—it would be more profitable to us, and make way for a clearer manifestation of God, than if we should search and inquire into all the volumes that are written upon it, thinking by this means to satisfy our reason. I think there is more profoundness in the sobriety of faith than in the depths of human wisdom and learning. When the mystery is such an infinite depth, O but men's eloquence and wisdom must be shallow, far too shallow either to find it out, or unfold it.

But there is yet both more instruction and consolation to be

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pressed out of this mystery, and, therefore, if you cannot reach it in itself, O consider what it concerns us, how we may be edified by it, for this is true religion! Look upon that place of Moses—what is the great instruction he draws from this unity of God's essences? ver. 5 “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart.” Since God is one, then have no God but one, and that the true and living God, and this is the very first command of God, which flows as it were immediately from his absolute oneness and perfection of being. There is no man but he must have some God, that is some thing whereupon he placeth his affection most. Every man hath some one thing he loves and respects beyond all other things, some lord and master that commands him. Therefore saith Christ “no man can serve two masters.” Before a man will want a god to love and serve he will make them, and then worship them. Yea he will make himself, his belly, his back, his honour, and pleasure, a god, and sacrifice all his affections and desires and endeavours to these. The natural subordination of man to God, the relation he hath as a creature to a Creator, is the first and fundamental relation beyond all respects to himself or other fellow creatures. This is the proto natural¹⁴¹ obligation upon the creature, therefore it should have returned in a direct line to his majesty all its affections and endeavours. But man's fall from God hath made a wretched thraw¹⁴² and crook in the soul that it cannot look any more after him, but bows downwards towards creatures below it, or bends inwardly towards itself, and so since the fall man hath turned his heart from the true God, and set it upon vanity,—upon lying vanities,—upon base dead idols which can neither help him nor hurt him. “Your hearts are gone a whoring from God. O that ye would believe it.” None of you will deny but ye have broken all the commands. Yet such is the brutish ignorance and stupidity of the most part, that you will not confess that when it comes to

¹⁴¹ [That is, the most natural.—*Ed*]

¹⁴² [That is, a twist or undue bend.—*Ed.*]

particulars, and especially, if you should be challenged for loving other things more than God, or having other gods besides the true God, you will instantly deny it, and that with an asseveration and aversation—"God forbid that I have another God." Alas! this shows, that what you confess in the general is not believed in the heart, but only is like the prating of children, whom you may learn to say any thing. I beseech you consider, that what you give your time, pains, thoughts, and affections to, that is your God. You must give God all your heart, and so retain nothing of your own will if God be your God. But do ye not know that your care and grief and desire and love vents another way, towards base things? You know that you have a will of your own which goeth quite contrary to his holy will in all things, therefore Satan hath bewitched you, and your hearts deceive you, when they persuade you that you have had no other God but the true God. Christianity raises the soul again, and advances it by degrees to this love of God, from which it had fallen. The soul returns to its first husband, from whom it went a whoring, and now the stamp of God is so upon it that it is changed into his image and glory. Having tasted how good this one self sufficient good is, it gladly and easily divorces from all other lovers. It renounces former lusts of ignorance, and now begins to live in another. Love transplants the soul into God, and in him it lives, and with him it walks. It is true, this is done gradually, there is much of the heart yet unbroken to this sweet and easy yoke of love, much of the corrupt nature untamed, unreclaimed, yet so much is gained by the first conversion of the soul to God, that all is given up to him in affection and desire. He hath the chief place in the soul. The disposition of the spirit hath some stamp and impression of his oneness and singularity. My beloved is one. Though a Christian is not wholly rid of strange lords, yet the tie of subjection to them is broken. They may often intrude by violence upon him, but he is in a hostile posture of affection and endeavour against them. I beseech you, since the Lord is one, and there is none beside him,

O let this be engraven on your hearts, that your inward affections and outward actions may express that one Lord to be your God, and none other beside him! It is a great shame and reproach to Christians that they do not carry the stamp of the first principle of religion upon their walking. The condition and conversation of many declare how little account they make of the true God. Why do ye enslave your souls to your lusts and the service of the flesh, if ye believe in this one God? Why do ye all things to please yourselves, if this one Lord be your one God? As for you, the Israel of God, who are called by Jesus Christ to partake with the commonwealth of Israel in the covenant of promises hear, I beseech you, this, and let your souls incline to it, and receive it. Your God is one Lord; have, then, no other lords over your souls and consciences, not yourselves, not others.

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But in the next place: Let us consider to what purpose John leads such three witnesses, that we may draw some consolation from it. The thing testified and witnessed unto is the ground work of all a Christian's hope and consolation, that Jesus Christ is the eternal Son of God and Saviour of the world—one, able to save to the uttermost all that put their trust in him, so that every soul that finds itself lost, and not able to subsist, nor abide the judgment of God, may repose their confidence in him, and lay the weight of their eternal welfare upon his death and sufferings, with assurance to find rest and peace in him to their souls. He is such an one as faith may triumph in him over the world, and all things beside. A believer may triumph in his victory, and in the faith of his victory, over hell and death and the grave may overcome personally, "For this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith," ver. 4. And how could a soul conquer by faith, if he in whom it believes were not "declared to be the Son of God with power?" There is nothing so mean and weakly as faith in itself. It is a poor despicable thing of itself, and that it sees, and that it acknowledges. Yea, faith is a very act of its self denial. It is a renouncing of all help without and within itself, save only

that which is laid on Christ Jesus. Therefore it were the most unsuitable mean of prevailing and the most insufficient weapon for gaining the victory, if the object of it were not the strong God the Lord Almighty, from whom it derives and borrows all its power and virtue, either to pacify the conscience, or to expiate sin or to overcome the world. O consider, Christians, where the foundation of your hope is situated! It is in the divine power of our Saviour. If he who declared so much love and good will to sinners, by becoming so low, and suffering so much, have also all power in heaven and earth, if he be not only man near us, to make for us boldness of access, but God near God to prevail effectually with God then certainly he is “a sure foundation laid in Zion, elect and precious.” He is an immovable Rock of Ages, whosoever trusts their soul to him shall not be ashamed. I am sure that many of you consider not this, that Jesus Christ, who was in due time born of the virgin Mary and died for sinners, is the eternal Son of God equal to his Father in all glory and power. O how would this make the gospel a great mystery to souls, and the redemption of souls a precious and wonderful work, if it were considered! Would not souls stand at this anchor immoveable in temptation, if their faith were pitched on this sure foundation and their hope cast upon this solid ground! O know your Redeemer is strong and mighty, and none can pluck you out of his hand, and himself will cast none out that comes! If the multitude of you believed this you would not make so little account of the gospel that comes to you, and make so little of your sins which behaved to be taken away by the blood of God and could be expiated by no other propitiation, you would not think it so easy to satisfy God with some words of custom, and some public services of form, as you do, you would not for all the world deal with God alone without this Mediator. And being convinced of sin, if you believe this solidly, that he in whom forgiveness of sin and salvation is preached is the same Lord God whom you hear in the Old Testament, who gave out the law, and inspired the

prophets,—the Only Begotten of the Father, in a way infinitely removed from all created capacities,—you could not but find the Father well satisfied in him and find a sufficient ransom in his death and doings to pacify God, and to settle your consciences.

But as the thing testified is a matter of great consolation, so the witnesses testifying to this fundamental of our religion may be a ground of great encouragement to discouraged souls. It is ordinary, that the apprehensions of Christians take up Jesus Christ as very lovely, and more loving than any of the persons of the Godhead, either the Father or the Holy Ghost. There are some thoughts of estrangedness and distance of the father, as if the Son did really reconcile and gain him to love us, who before hated us and upon this mistake, the soul is filled with continual jealousies and suspicions of the love of God. But observe I beseech you, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, all of them first agreeing in one testimony. The Father declares from heaven that he is abundantly well pleased with his Son, not only because he is his Son, but even in the undertaking and performing of that work of redemption of sinners. It is therefore his most serious invitation and peremptory command to all to hear him, and believe in him, Mat. iii. 17, John iii. 23. Nay, if we speak more properly, our salvation is not the business of Christ alone, as we imagine it, but the whole Godhead is interested in it deeply, and so deeply, that you cannot say who loves it most or likes it most. The Father is the very fountain of it, his love is the spring of all—“God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son.” Christ hath not purchased that eternal love to us, but is rather the gift, the free gift of eternal love. And therefore, as we have the Son delighting among the sons of men, Prov. viii. 31, and delighting to be employed and to do his will, Psal. xl. 8, so we have the Father delighting to send his Son, and taking pleasure in instructing him and furnishing him for it, Isa. xlii. 1. And therefore Christ often professed that he was not about his own work, but the Father's work who sent him, and that it was not his own will, but his

Father's he was fulfilling. Therefore we should not look upon the head spring of our salvation in the Son but rather ascend up to the Father, whose love and wisdom did frame all this. And thus we may be confident to come to the Father in the Son, knowing that it was the love of the Father that sent the Son, though indeed we must come to him only in the Son, in the name of Christ, and faith of acceptation through a Mediator, not because the Mediator purchaseth his goodwill, but because his love and good will only vents in his beloved Son Christ, and therefore he will not be known or worshipped but in him, in whom he is near sinners, and reconciling the world to himself. And then the Holy Ghost concurs in this testimony, and as the Son had the work of purchasing rights and interests to grace and glory, so the great work of applying all these privileges to saints and making them actually partakers of the blessings of Christ's death, is committed in a special way to the Holy Ghost. "I will send the Comforter," &c. So then Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, all agree in one, that Jesus Christ is a sure refuge for sinners—a plank for ship-broken men—a firm and sure foundation to build everlasting hopes upon. There is no party dissenting in all the gospel. The business of the salvation of lost souls is concluded in this holy council of the Trinity with one voice. As at first, all of them agreed to make man,—“let us make man,” so again, they agree to make him again, to restore him to life in the second Adam. Whoever thou be that wouldst flee to God for mercy, do it in confidence. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost are ready to welcome thee,—all of one mind to shut out none, to cast out none. But to speak properly, it is but one love, one will, one counsel, and purpose in the Father, Son, and Spirit, for “these Three are One,” and not only agree in One, they are One, and what one loves or purposes, all love and purpose. I would conclude this matter with a word of direction how to worship God, which I cannot express in fitter terms than these of Nazianzen: “I cannot think upon one, but by and by I am compassed about with the brightness of

three, and I cannot distinguish three but I am suddenly driven back unto one.” There is great ignorance and mistake of this even among the best Christians. The grosser sort, when they hear of one God only, think Christ but some eminent man, and so direct their prayers to God only, excluding the Son and Holy Ghost, or when they hear of three persons,—the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost,—they straightway divide their worship, and imagine a trinity of gods. And I fear, those of us who know most, use not to worship God as he hath revealed himself,—Father, Son and Holy Ghost, and yet one God. Our minds are reduced to such a simple unity as we think upon one of them alone or else distracted and divided into such a plurality, that we worship in a manner three gods instead of one. It is a great mystery to keep the right middle way. Learn, I beseech you, so to conceive of God, and so to acknowledge him, and pray to him as you may do it in the name of Jesus Christ, that all the persons may have equal honour, and all of them one honour, that while you consider one God, you may adore that sacred and blessed Trinity, and while you worship that Holy Trinity, you may straightway be reduced to an unity. To this wonderful and holy One, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, be all praise and glory.