

Lecture XII.

The Unity Of The Divine Essence, 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.”

“Great is the mystery of godliness,” 1 Tim. iii. 16. Religion and true godliness is a bundle of excellent mysteries—of things hid from the world, yea, from the wise men of the world, (1 Cor. ii. 6.) and not only so, but secrets in their own nature, the distinct knowledge whereof is not given to saints in this estate of distance and absence from the Lord. There is almost nothing in divinity, but it is a mystery in itself, how common soever it be in the apprehensions of men. For it is men's overly,¹³⁹ and common and slender apprehensions of them, which make them look so commonly upon them. There is a depth in them, but you will not know it, till you search it, and sound it, and the more you sound, you shall find it the more profound. But there are some mysteries small and some great. There is a difference amongst them; all are not of one stature, of one measure. The mystery of Christ's incarnation and death and resurrection, is one of the great mysteries of religion, “God manifest in the flesh.” Yet I conceive there is a greater mystery than it, and of all mysteries in nature or divinity I know none equal to this,—the Holy Trinity. And it must needs be greatest of all, and without controversy greatest, because it is the beginning and end of all,—*fons et finis*

¹³⁹ [That is, careless.—*Ed.*]

omnium. All mysteries have their rise here, and all of them return hither. This is furthest removed from the understandings of men,—what God himself is, for himself is infinitely above any manifestation of himself. God is greater than God manifested in the flesh, though in that respect he be too great for us to conceive. There is a natural desire in all men to know, and, if any thing be secret and wonderful the desire is the more inflamed after the knowledge of it. The very difficulty or impossibility of attaining it, instead of restraining the curiosity of man's spirit, doth rather incense it. *Nitimur in vetitum*¹⁴⁰ is the fruit, the sad fruit we plucked and eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. If the Lord reveal any thing plainly in his word to men, that is despised and set at nought, because it is plain, whereas the most plain truths, which are beyond all controversy, are the most necessary, and most profitable, for our eternal salvation. But if there be any secret mystery in the Scriptures, which the Lord hath only pointed out more obscurely to us, reserving the distinct and clear understanding of it to himself, (Deut. xxix. 29.),—that is the apple which our accursed natures will long for, and catch after, though there be never so much choice of excellent saving fruit in the paradise of the Scriptures besides. If the ark be covered to keep men from looking into it, that doth rather provoke the curious spirit of man to pry into it, 1 Sam. vi. 10. If the Lord show his wonderful glory in the mount, and charge his people not to come near, lest the glorious presence of God kill them, he must put rails about it, to keep them back, or else they will be meddling. Such is the unbridled license of our minds, and the perverse dispositions of our natures, that where God familiarly invites us to come,—what he earnestly presseth us to search and know,—that we despise as trivial and common, and what he compasseth about with a divine darkness of inac-

¹⁴⁰ [The heathen poet whose words these are, (“We move towards what is forbidden”), describes well the perversity and the imbecility of our nature. Vid Ovid Amor. lib. iii. eleg. 4 ver. 17 Met. lib. vii. ver. 20.—*Ed.*]

cessible light, and hath removed far from the apprehensions of all living, that we will needs search into, and wander into those forbidden compasses, with daring boldness. I conceive this holy and profound mystery is one of those “secret things” which it belongs to God to know, for who knoweth the Father but the Son, or the Son but the Father, or who knoweth the mind of God but the Spirit? Yet the foolish minds of men will not be satisfied with the believing ignorance of such a mystery, but will needs inquire into those depths, that they may find satisfaction for their reason. But, as it happeneth with men who will boldly stare upon the sun, their eyes are dazzled and darkened with its brightness, or those that enter into a labyrinth, which they can find no way to come out, but the further they go into it, the more perplexed it is, and the more intricate, even so it befalls many unsober and presumptuous spirits, who, not being satisfied with the simple truth of God, clearly asserting that this is, endeavour to examine it according to reason, and to solve all the objections of carnal wit and reason, (which is often “enmity against God,”) not by the silence of the Scriptures, but by answers framed according to the several capacities of men. I say, all this is but daring to behold the infinite glory of God with eyes of flesh, which makes them darkened in mind, and vanishing in their expressions, while they seek to behold this inaccessible light, while they enter into an endless labyrinth of difficulties out of which the thread of reason and disputation can never extricate them or lead them forth. But the Lord hath showed us “a more excellent way,” though it may be despicable to men. Man did fall from blessedness by his curious and wretched aim at some higher happiness and more wisdom; the Lord hath chosen another way to raise him up again, by faith rather than knowledge, by believing rather than disputing. Therefore the great command of the gospel is this, to receive with a ready and willing mind whatsoever the Lord saith to us, whatsoever it may appear to sense and reason, to dispute no more, to search no more into the secret of divine mysteries,

as if by searching we could find them out “unto perfection,” but to believe what is spoken, “till the day break, and the shadows flee away,” and the darkness of ignorance be wholly dispelled by the rising of the Sun of righteousness. We are called then to receive this truth,—That God is one, truly one, and yet there are three in this one, the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. This, I say, you must believe, because the wisdom of God saith it, though you know not how it is, or how it can be. Though it seem a contradiction in reason, a trinity in unity, yet you must lead your reason captive to the obedience of faith, and silence it with this one answer, The Lord hath said it. If thou go on to dispute, and to inquire, “How can these things be?” thou art escaped from under the power of faith, and art fled into the tents of human wisdom, where thou mayest learn atheism, but no religion, for “the world by wisdom knew not God,” 1 Cor. i. 21. And certainly, whoever he be that will not quiet his conscience, upon the bare word of truth in this particular, but will call in the help of reason and disputation, how to understand and maintain it, I think he shall be further from the true knowledge of God and satisfaction of mind than before. There is no way here, but to flee into Paul's sanctuary, “Who art thou, O man, that disputest?” Whenever thou thinkest within thyself? How may this be, how can one be three, and three one? then withal let this of Paul sound in thine ears, “Who art thou, O man, who disputest?” Think that *thou* art man, think that *he* is God! Believing ignorance is much better than rash and presumptuous knowledge. Ask not a reason of these things, but rather adore and tremble at the mystery and majesty of them. Christianity is “foolishness” to the world upon this account, because it is an implicit faith so to speak, given to God. But there is no fear of being deceived,—though he lead the blind by a way thou knowest not, yet he cannot lead thee wrong. This holy simplicity in believing every word of God, and trusting without more trying by disputation, is the very character of Christianity, and it will be found only true wisdom. For if

any will become wise, he must be a fool in men's account. That he may be wise, he must quit his reason to learn true religion, which indeed is a more excellent and divine reason, neither is it contrary to it, though it be high above it.

In this place of Moses, you have the unity of God asserted, "The Lord thy God is one Lord," and it is indeed engraven on the very hearts of men by nature, that God is one. For all may know that the common notion and apprehension of God is, that he is a most perfect Being,—the original of all things,—most wise, most powerful, and infinite in all perfections. Now common reason may tell any man that there can be but one thing most perfect and excellent, there can be but one infinite,—one almighty,—one beginning and end of all,—one first mover, one first cause, "of whom are all things, and who is of none." [066]

Again, in this place of John ye have a testimony of the blessed trinity of persons, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, in that holy unity of essence. The great point which John hath in hand is this fundamental of our salvation that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and Saviour of the world, in whom all our confidence should be placed, and upon whom we should lean the weight of our souls. And this he proves by a two-fold testimony—one out of heaven, another in the earth. There are three bearing witness to this truth in heaven, "the Father the Word," (that is, Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, whom this apostle calls the Word of God, or Wisdom of God, John i. 1) and the Holy Ghost. The Father witnessed to this truth in an audible voice out of heaven, when Christ was baptized, (Mat. iii. 17) "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." Here is the Father's testimony of the Son when he was baptized which was given very solemnly in a great congregation of people, and divinely, with great glory and majesty from heaven, as if the heavens had opened upon him, and the inaccessible light of God had shined down on him. This was confirmed in the transfiguration, (Mat. xvii. 5) where the Lord gave a glorious evidence—to the astonishment of the

three disciples—how he did account of him—how all saints and angels must serve him, “him hath God the Father sealed,” saith John. Indeed, the stamp of divinity, of the divine image in such an excellent manner upon the man Christ, was a seal set on by God the father, signifying and confirming his approbation of his well beloved Son and of the work he was going about. Then the Son himself did give ample testimony of this. This was the subject of his preaching to the world, “I am the light and the life of men, he that believeth in me shall be saved.” And therefore he may be called the Word of God, (John i. 1) and the Wisdom of God, (Prov. viii.) because he hath revealed unto us the blessed mystery of wisdom concerning our salvation. He is the very expression and character of the Father's person and glory, (Heb. i. 3) in his own person, and he hath revealed and expressed his Father's mind, and his own office, so fully to the world that there should be no more doubt of it. Out of the mouth of these two witnesses this word might be established, but for superabundance, behold a third, the Holy Ghost witnessing at his baptism,—in his resurrection,—after his ascension. The Holy Ghost signifieth his presence and consent to that work, in the similitude of a dove, the Holy Ghost testifieth it in the power that raised him from the dead, the Holy Ghost put it beyond all question when he descended upon the apostles according to Christ's promise. For the other three witnesses on earth, we shall not stay upon it, only know, that the work of the regeneration of souls by the power of the Word and Spirit signified by water, the justification of guilty souls signified by the blood of Jesus Christ, and the testimony of the Spirit in our consciences, bearing witness to our spirits, is an assured testimony of this, that Jesus Christ, in whom we believe, is “the Only Begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.” The changing, pacifying, and comforting of souls in such a wonderful manner, cries aloud that he in whom the soul believes is the true and living God, whom to know is eternal life. But mark, I pray you, the accuracy of the apostle in the change

of speech. “These three” witnesses on earth, saith he, “agree in one, in giving one common testimony to the Son of God and the Saviour of sinners.” But as for the heavenly witnesses—the Father, the Word and the Holy Ghost,—however they be three after an inconceivable manner, and that they do also agree in one common testimony to the Mediator of men, yet moreover they are One. They not only agree in one but are one God,—one simple, undivided, self-being, infinite Spirit,—holden out to us in three persons, the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, to whom be praise and glory.