

THE SCOPE OF THE SCRIPTURES.

1 TIM. i. 13.—*Hold fast the form of sound words—in faith and love.*

IN these words there is, (1.) The character of scripture-doctrine ; it is *sound words* ; sound and pure in itself, and sound in its effects, being of a soul-healing virtue, Ezek. xlvii. 9. (2.) The sum of it, *faith*, shewing what we are to believe ; and *love*, what we are to do, 1 John v. 3. John xiv. 15. This love has a particular relation to Christ, all our obedience being to be offered unto God through him, as our faith fixes on God through him. This was what the apostle preached. (3.) Our duty with respect to it ; to *hold fast the form of sound words*. This signifies, [1.] To have a pattern of the doctrine in our minds, to which all that ministers teach must be conformable. (2.) To hold it fast ; to cleave to, and keep hold of it, without flinching from it, whatever dangers or difficulties may attend the doing so. Both these senses are implied in the words.

The text affords the following doctrinal proposition.

Doct. “The scriptures principally teach what man is to believe concerning God, and what duty God requires of man.”

As to the matter of scripture-doctrine.

1. Some things are taught in the scriptures less principally ; that is, the main design of the scriptures is not to teach these things ; neither are they taught for themselves, but for the respect they have to other things. Thus in the scripture we may learn the knowledge of several natural things, as of the nature of some trees, birds, beasts, &c. of husbandry, the customs of several nations, especially of the Jews, &c. But these and such like things are only taught in the scripture, as having some respect to our faith and obedience. So the vine tree is described, Ezek. xv. to hold forth the uselessness of barren professors, &c. However, whatsoever is taught in the scriptures, seeing the scripture is God’s word, is all to be received by divine faith, though all scripture-truths are not of equal importance.

2. The scripture teaches some things chiefly. And these are faith and obedience. These are the two parts of the doctrine of the Bible. Whatsoever concerns religion, or the salvation of souls, in the Old and New Testament, may be reduced to one of these two heads : It is either an article of faith, or a point of obedience.

Here I shall consider,

I. The nature of faith and obedience, and the connection betwixt the two.

II. The manner of the scripture's teaching:

III. The sense of scripture.

IV. Shew that the Spirit of God speaking in the scriptures is the supreme judge of controversies in religion.

I. Let us consider the nature of that faith and obedience which the scripture teaches, with the connexion betwixt the two.

First, As to faith. Divine faith is a believing of what God has revealed, because God has said it, or revealed it. People may believe scripture-truths, but not with a divine faith, unless they believe it on that very ground, the authority of God speaking in his word. And this divine faith is the product of the Spirit of God in the heart of a sinner, implanting the habit or principle of faith there, and exciting it to a hearty reception and firm belief of whatever God reveals in his word. And the faith which the scripture teaches is what a man is to believe concerning God. This may be reduced to four heads: What God is, the persons in the Godhead, the decrees of God relating to every thing that comes to pass, and the execution of them in his works of creation and providence. Now, though the works of creation and providence shew that there is a God, yet that fundamental truth, that God is, and the doctrines relating to the Trinity of Persons in the Unity of the Divine Essence, God's acts and purposes, the creation of all things, the state of man at his creation, his fall, and his recovery by the mediation and satisfaction of Christ, are only to be learned from the holy scriptures. Hence we may infer,

1. That there can be no right knowledge of God acquired in an ordinary way without the scriptures, Matt. xxii. 29. "Ye do err (said Christ to the Sadducees), not knowing the scriptures." As there must be a dark night where the light is gone, so those places of the earth must needs be dark, and without the saving knowledge of God, that want the scriptures. Thus the Apostle tells the Ephesians, that, before they were visited with the light of the gospel, they were "without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world." Eph. ii. 12.

2. That where the scriptures are not known, there can be no saving faith. For, says the apostle, Rom. x. 14, 15, 17. 'How shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? and how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good

things! So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.'

3. That there is nothing we are bound to believe as a part of faith but what the scripture teaches, be who they will that propose it, and whatever they may pretend for their warrant. 'To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because their is no light in them,' Isa. viii. 20. No man must be our master in these things: 'For one is our master, even Christ,' Matth. xxiii. 10. He is Lord of our faith, and we are bound to believe whatever he has revealed in his word.

Secondly, As to obedience, it is that duty which God requires of man. It is that duty and obedience which man owes to God, to his will and laws, in respect of God's universal supremacy and sovereign authority over man; and which he should render to him out of love and gratitude. The scriptures are the holy oracle from whence we are to learn our duty, Psal. xix. 11. 'By them is thy servant warned,' says David. The Bible is the light we are to take heed to, that we may know how to steer our course, and order the several steps of our life. 'Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light to my path,' says the Psalmist, Psal. cxix. 105. From whence we may infer.

1. That there can be no sufficient knowledge of the duty which we owe to God without the scriptures. Though the light of nature does in some measure shew our duty to God, yet it is too dim to take up the will of God sufficiently in order to salvation.

2. That there can be no right obedience yielded to God without them. Men that walk in the dark must needs stumble; and the works that are wrought in the dark will never abide the light; for there is no working rightly by guess in this matter. All proper obedience to God must be learned from the scriptures.

3. That there is no point of duty that we are called to, but what the scripture teaches, Isa. viii. 20. forecited. Men must neither make duties to themselves, or others, but what God has made duty. The law of God is exceeding broad, and reaches the whole conversation of man, outward and inward, Psal. xix. and man is bound to conform himself to it alone as the rule of his duty.

Thirdly, As to the connexion of these two, faith and obedience are joined together, because there is no true faith but what is followed with obedience, and no true obedience but what flows from faith. Faith is the loadstone of obedience, and obedience the touchstone of faith, as appears from Jam. ii. *passim*. They that want faith cannot be holy; and they that have true faith, their faith will work by love. Hence we may see,

1. That faith is the foundation of duty or obedience, and not obedience or duty the foundation of faith, Tit iii. 8. and that the things to be believed are placed before the things to be practised, in order to distinguish between the order of things in the covenant of grace, and what they were under the covenant of works. Under the latter, doing, or perfect obedience to the law, was the foundation of the promised privilege of life; but under the former, the promise is to be believed, and the promised life is to be freely received: and thereupon follows the believer's obedience to the law, out of gratitude and love for the mercy received. This appears from the order laid down by God himself in delivering the moral law from mount Sinai. He lays the foundation of faith, first of all, in these words, 'I am the Lord thy God,' &c. which is the sum and substance of the covenant of grace; and then follows the law of the ten commandments, which is as it were grafted upon this declaration of sovereign grace and love, Exod. xx. 2,—18. And let it be remembered, that the apostle Paul calls gospel-obedience the obedience of faith as springing from and founded upon faith. And if we examine the order of doctrine laid down in all his epistles, we shall find, that he first propounds the doctrine of faith, or what man is to believe, and upon that foundation inculcates the duties that are to be practised.

• 2. That all works without faith are dead, and so cannot please God. For whatsoever is not of faith is sin; and without or separate from Christ we can do nothing. Faith is the principle of all holy and acceptable obedience.

3. That those who inculcate moral duties without discovering the necessity of regeneration, and union with Christ, as the source of all true obedience, are foolish builders; they lay their foundation on the sand, and the superstructure they raise will soon be overturned; and they pervert the gospel of Christ. Such would do well to consider what the Apostle says, Gal. i. 9. 'If any man preach any other gospel unto you than ye have received, let him be accursed.'

II. I proceed now to consider the manner of the scripture's teaching.

1. The scripture teaches some things expressly in so many words; as, 'Except a man be born again, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God,' &c. Other things it teaches by good and necessary consequence; as, that infants are to be baptized. Now, whatever can be proved by just and necessary consequence from sacred writ, is all one, as to the binding power on men's consciences, as if it were taught there in so many words, whether it be in points of faith or obedience.

2. The scriptures teach but externally. It is the Spirit that

teaches internally. The scriptures externally reveal what we are to believe concerning God, and what duty God requires of man; but the inward illumination of the Spirit of God is necessary for the saving understanding of such things as are revealed in the scriptures, for several reasons which I mentioned in the former discourse, and shall not now repeat.

III. I come now to consider the sense of the scripture.

1. The sense of the scripture is but one, and not manifold. There may be several parts of that one sense subordinate one to another; as some prophecies have a respect to the deliverance from Babylon, the spiritual by Christ, and the eternal in heaven; and some passages have one thing that is typical of another: yet these are but one full sense, only that may be of two sorts; one is simple, and another compound. Some scriptures have only a simple sense, containing a declaration of one thing only; and that is either proper or figurative. A proper sense is that which arises from the words taken properly, and the figurative from the words taken figuratively. Some have a simple proper sense, as, 'God is a Spirit, God created the heavens and the earth;' which are to be understood according to the propriety of the words. Some have a simple figurative sense; as, 'I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. Every branch in me that beareth not fruit, he taketh away,' &c. These have but one simple sense; but then it is the figurative, and is not to be understood according to the propriety of the words, as if Christ were a tree, &c. Thus you see what the simple sense is. The compound or mixed sense is found wherein one thing is held forth as a type of the other; and so it consists of two parts, the one respecting the type, the other the antitype; which are not two senses, but two parts of that one and entire sense intended by the Holy Ghost: *e. g.* Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, that those who were stung by the fiery serpents might look to it and be healed. The full sense of which is, 'As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, that, &c. even so must the Son of man be lifted up; that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have eternal life.' Here is a literal and mystical sense, which make up one full sense betwixt them. Those scriptures that have this compound sense are sometimes fulfilled properly (or literally, as it is taken in opposition to figuratively) in the type and antitype both; as Hos. xi. 1. 'I have called my Son out of Egypt,' which was literally true both of Israel and Christ. Sometimes figuratively in the type, and properly in the antitype, as Psal. lxix. 21. 'They gave me vinegar to drink.' Sometimes properly in the type, and figuratively in the antitype, as Psal. ii. 9. 'Thou shalt break them with a rod of

iron.' Compare 2 Sam. xii. 31. Sometimes figuratively in both, as Psal. xli. 9. 'Yea mine own familiar friend—hath lifted up his heel against me;' which is meant of Ahitophel and Judas. Now the sense of the scripture must be but one, and not manifold, that is, quite different and no wise subordinate one to another, because of the unity of truth, and because of the perspicuity of the scripture.

2. Where there is a question about the true sense of scripture, it must be found out what it is by searching other places that speak more clearly, the scripture itself being the infallible rule of interpreting scripture. Now that it is so, appears from the following arguments.

(1.) The Holy Spirit gives this as a rule, 2 Pet. i. 20. 21. After the apostle had called the Christians to take heed to the scripture, he gives them this rule for understanding it, 'Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation, *tes ideas e-piluseos*, of our own exposition. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man; but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.' As it came; so it is to be expounded: but it came not by the will of man; therefore we are not to rest on men for the sense of it, but holy men speaking as they were moved by the Holy Ghost, and so never erring; therefore we are to look to the dictates of the same Spirit in other places.

(2.) There are several approved examples of this, comparing one scripture with another, to find out the meaning of the Holy Ghost; as Acts xv. 15. 'And to this agree the words of the prophet,' &c. The Bereans are commended for this, Acts xvii. 11. Yea, Christ himself makes use of this to shew the true sense of the scripture against the devil, Matth. iv. 6. 'Cast thyself down, (said that wicked spirit): for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee,' &c. Ver. 7. 'It is written again, (says Christ), Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.' And thus our Lord makes out the true sense of that scripture, that it is to be understood only with respect to them who do not cast themselves on a tempting of God. Some more will occur concerning this point under the next head.

This then is the great, chief, and infallible rule of interpretation of scripture, to compare one passage with another. Other things may be added as helps and means in order to find out the true sense.

1. The knowledge of the Hebrew and Greek, in which languages the prophets and apostles wrote, is an excellent mean to the right understanding of the scriptures. These original tongues are the best commentaries on scripture; and many times it is found so by those that know them.

2. Diligently consider the scope and design of the Holy Ghost in the portion of scripture where ye find difficulty, the coherence and context, with all circumstances going before and following. *Nullo est objectio in lege quæ non habet solutionem in latere* says a rabbi, *Quis scopus, impellens, sedes, tempusque, locusque, et modus, hæc septem scripture attendito lector.*

3. Distinguish proper from improper words. The scripture frequently uses improper and figurative expressions, which, if taken as the letters sound, will found a very absurd sense.

4. The commentaries of godly and learned writers are not to be neglected.

5. The reading also of profane history is of notable use in the knowledge of the prophetic writings. And the knowledge of the Jewish customs brings great light to the scriptures.

6. *Lastly*, Always take heed to the analogy of faith, and see there be no deviating therefrom: for the Spirit of God speaking in the scripture is always one and the same; and therefore we are never to think that one scripture can be contrary to another, or the known doctrine of the Bible and the form of sound words: *e. g.* 'This is my body which is broken for you;' it cannot be so understood as if Christ's body were locally present in the sacrament; because we believe, according to the constant doctrine of scripture, that Christ is ascended into heaven, and will come again at the last day; and till then the heavens must contain him. So we must not take the words literally, when it is contrary to modesty, as when Isaiah is bid go naked, Isa. xx. 2.; or to piety, to cut off the right hand, &c. More particularly,

1. Go to God for his Spirit to teach you, Psal. exix. 18. It is Christ's work to give people to understand the scriptures. If you would know what Paul says, pray for the spirit by which he wrote.

2. Take heed of a carnal, earthly, and fleshly mind. When the heart is carnal, the mind is much blinded, and so utterly unfit for searching the scriptures.

3. Endeavour to be exercised unto godliness. An exercised frame proves sometimes an excellent commentator.

4. *Lastly*, Endeavour to practise what you know.

IV. I proceed to shew that the spirit of God speaking in scripture is the supreme judge by which all controversies of religion are to be determined, and all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men, and private spirits, are to be examined, and in whose sentence we are to rest.

This is a very important point, and upon it depends the whole of religion. One man says so, another man says otherwise: the ques-

tion is, Who shall be judge, and to whose determination are we to stand and acquiesce in? Four sundry ways do men go here.

First, Enthusiasts set up the private spirit, and its revelations, without the Spirit, for the judge of controversies. But whatever these may pretend, the scripture is our only rule. For,

1. Whatever revelation or light men may pretend to, God binds them and us to the written word, Isa. viii. 20. 'If they speak not according to the scriptures,' it is not true light, but 'because there is no light in them,' that makes it so: for going against the word, they shew themselves to be acted with a spirit of delusion, 1 John iv. 6.

2. The Apostle Paul devotes them to a curse, though they were angels, who preach any other gospel than what he preached, and the Galatians received from his hand, Gal. i. 8, 9; not only a gospel contrary to it, but *another*, any thing diverse from or besides it, though not contrary to it. And if it be contrary the Spirit is contrary to himself, for he is the author of the scriptures.

3. We are commanded to 'try the spirits,' 1 John iv. 1. Now, how must they be tried but by a rule; and what rule have we to try them by but the written word? This was the rule which the Bereans made use of to try the spirit of the apostles, for which they are highly commended. It is that rule which Christ sends the Pharisees to try his own doctrine by, John v. 40. But by the scriptures we cannot try the spirits, unless we lay them to that rule, and observe whether or not the spirits speak as the scriptures do; and then how can the new revelations be received?

4. The spirit's revelations are either a complete or partial rule. If our complete rule, then the scriptures are useless which is blasphemous, and contrary to all those commands that requires us to give attendance to the reading, searching, &c. of them. If they be a partial rule only, then they either teach according to the scripture, or not. If according to it, then it is no new revelation, but what the scripture already affords us. If not, it is because there is no light in them, Isa. viii. 20.

There is one scripture that we must more narrowly inquire into, both because it is abused by the adversaries in this point, and affords us an argument for our doctrine, The passage is, 2 Pet. i. 19. 'We have also a more sure word of prophecy, whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day-star arise in your hearts.' Enthusiasts here, by the day-star arising in the heart, understand some extraordinary revelation and light which God sets up in the soul, which when it is set up, the person is to take heed to the written word no

longer. But, (1.) Whither would these men drive us? They tell us, that all men have a light within them, according to which they must walk; and this is the spirit within us; yet must we still expect a new light to turn us off from the scriptures; (2.) The apostle here plainly prefers the word of prophecy unto an immediate voice from heaven, and that in the very same thing wherein they both agree: how much more preferable is the scripture to new revelations? (3.) This supposes, that the apostles and believers in those days had not this light; for they say, 'We have a more sure word of prophecy, whereunto ye do well that ye take heed.' This being so, we envy not the Quakers their light, which the apostles and these Christians were strangers to.

Some by the day dawning and the day-star arising understand the more clear dispensation which they suppose is to come in the latter days. Others understand by it the sight of God and Christ in glory, till which time the scriptures must be made use of, but no longer. Others understand this as spoken to the believing Jews in reference to the prophets of the Old Testament, to which they did well to take heed, till their gospel light should shine more clearly. Some say, the word *until* is not to be taken exclusively of the time following that dawning of the day, and day star arising; and thereby understand simply more clear light arising after some darkness, which the people of God may be in for a time; till which light arising they are to take heed to the scriptures; not that they are then to give over taking heed to them. Laying aside that which relates to a more clear dispensation yet to come, because it supposes that then the scriptures must be laid aside, which is very contrary to the scripture, for the Spirit shall never in this life jumble out the word, but his office is to teach, not new things unwritten, but whatever Christ spoke to his disciples: 'He shall bring all things to your remembrance, (says he), whatsoever I have said unto you,' John xiv. 26: Laying aside that, it is hard to determine which of the rest is indeed the true meaning of the apostle. Only it seems to bid fairest for the apostle's sense, to say, that he speaks of the more clear knowledge of Christ which the believers at that time were afterwards to have, till which time they did well to take heed to the prophetic word, as it is in the Greek; that is, to the doctrine of the prophets who prophesied of Christ; not that they were then to lay by the use of the prophets, but that then they would be of less use to them than before, when they should attain to a more clear gospel-light; as the candle is of less use when the day dawns than it was before, though it be still useful. And I think it abundantly plain, that the word of prophecy is not here to

be understood generally of the whole scripture, as the other interpretations seem to take it, but particularly of the doctrine of the prophets concerning Christ and the gospel, as appears from the phrase, *the prophetic word*, and the first verse of the following chapter, where he speaks of false prophets that were among the people of the Jews. So by the day-star I understand Christ himself, who is called *the morning star*, Rev. xxii. 16. It is true it is here *Phosphoros*, but there *oster ornithes*: but, for ought I know, the first of these is, *apax legomenon*; and though the words be different, the sense is the same, one thing gets but different names. And Christ is called the day-star or morning-star, which we know are both one thing; because, (1.) As the morning star is the most eminent among the stars, and most lucid, as appears by its shining when the appearance of the sun makes the rest disappear; so there is none like Christ among the sons, Cant. ii. 3. (2.) As the day-star puts an end to the dark night, so doth Christ's arising in the soul put an end to the night of spiritual darkness. Never was the sight of the day-star so refreshful to the weary traveller in the night, as Christ's appearance in and to the soul; only the apostle calls him here rather the day-star than the sun, because he is speaking of his appearance in this life, whereas the full knowledge of him is deferred till his second coming. So the day-dawning is easily understood. And this is expected to rise not absolutely, but comparatively in respect of degrees of fuller manifestation, as he promises to those that continue in his word, and are his disciples indeed, that they shall know the truth, viz. more fully, John viii. 31, 32. And that passage, Hos. vi. 3. 'Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord: his going forth is prepared as the morning,' doth excellently serve to shew us this truth. So there he hath respect to this further manifestation of Christ which they were afterwards to have: but they are not then to give over the prophetic word; for, as was before noticed, the word *until* is not always exclusive of the following time, as Psal. cx. 1. 2 Sam. vi. *ult.*

Now, if the writings of the prophets be more sure than a voice from heaven, and Christians are commended for taking heed to the same; and when the day-star ariseth in the heart, it shews only the same thing more clearly. What place is there left for new revelations against or besides the scriptures?

Secondly, The Papists set the church upon the tribunal: but what that church is, they do not agree among themselves, whether it be the pope, or a council, or both together. However, they assert that there is in the church a visible and infallible judge of controversies in religion. This we deny, and far more that the pope, or a council approved by him, is such a judge. For,

1. The scripture makes no mention of any such judge, in any of the places where the officers of the church are reckoned up, as Rom. xii. 7, 8. 1 Cor. xii. 28. Eph. iv. 11. nor any where else. And though negative theology, as they say, is not argumentative, yet that cannot have place here, unless we deny the perfection of the scripture, which we have proved already. A positive institution is requisite here.

2. Our faith must not lean upon the testimony or authority of man, 1 Cor. vii. 23. 'Be not the servants of men,' not bodily but spiritually; 2 Cor. i. 24. 'Not that we have dominion over your faith;' where the apostle declines, in his own name, and in the name of his fellows, the being of such a judge. But our faith leans on the word of God, Eph. ii. 20. 'And are built on the foundation of the prophets,' &c.

3. The doctrine of the church should be examined by the scriptures, Acts xvii. 11. 'These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether these things were so.' Now he whose sentence is to be examined by another, cannot be the supreme judge of controversies. See Isa. viii. 20. 'To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.'

4. Neither pope nor council, conjunctly nor severally, have such properties as are requisite to constitute a supreme judge in controversies of religion; they have no infallibility, or testimony thereof; yea, they have many ways deceived and been deceived. We may appeal from them, as being bound to the scriptures, as well as others. And the church, be what it will, must not be judge in its own cause.

5. *Lastly*, Here is a controversy in religion, Who is the supreme judge of controversy in religion? Who must decide this, or be supreme judge here? The church cannot, neither pope nor council so decide it in their own favour. That were absurd. Wherefore the Papists themselves are obliged to make another judge of this controversy; and if so, why not of all?

Thirdly, The Socinians set up reason to be the supreme judge of controversies in religion, to whose determination we ought to stand, and therein to acquiesce. There is no doubt but we have much use for reason in matters of religion; as, (1.) To perceive and understand the things revealed in the scripture, Matth. xiii. 51. (2.) To collate them one with another, Acts xvii. 11. (3.) To explain the same, Neh. viii. 8. (4.) To argue from the scriptures, Matth. xxi. ult. (5.) To vindicate the truths from objections, Rom. ix. 19, 20.

That it is not the judge nor the rule, that is, that reason ought not to be admitted of itself, and according to its principles, to determine controversies of religion, is what we assert. To illustrate this by an example, the scripture says, *These three are one*; we say we plainly perceive the scripture says so; and therefore, though our reason cannot comprehend, we will believe it, because it is plain the scripture says so. They say, they cannot believe that there are three persons in the Godhead, and not three gods, because reason is against it; and therefore finding the thing unagreeable to reason, though it were in ever so plain words found in the scripture, they will not believe (as they pretend) it means as the words sound, but will fasten another meaning on the words though never so far fetched. And that it may not be thought that this is the same way that the orthodox go too, in explaining scriptures that are understood figuratively, I shall give an example of that too. The scripture says, Christ is a vine, a door, the bread is his body, &c. We know indeed that this is contrary to reason if expounded literally: but that is not the prime reason why we reject the literal meaning, and on which we build our faith as to the true meaning, as the case is with the Socinians, but because it agrees not with other scriptures to understand it so; which testify that Christ is God and man. Now, that reason is not the supreme judge of controversies in religion, is proved by the following arguments.

1. Reason in an unregenerate man is blind in the matters of God, 1 Cor. ii. 14. 'The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned;' Eph. iv. 17, 18. Eph. v. 8. *Except.* This only respects reason not illustrated by divine revelation. *Ans.* By that illustration of reason by divine revelation, they understand either subjective or objective illustration. If they understand it of subjective illustration, they quit that article of their religion, wherein they believe that the mind of man is capable of itself, without the illumination of the Spirit, to attain sufficient knowledge of the mind of God revealed in the scripture. If of objective illustration, by the mere revelation of these truths, then it is false that they assert: For the apostle opposes here the natural man to the spiritual man; and therefore by the natural man is understood every unregenerate man, even that has these truths revealed to him; for, says the apostle, 'they are foolishness unto him.' Now, how can he judge them foolishness if they be not revealed?

2. Reason is not infallible, and therefore cannot be admitted judge in matters concerning our souls. Reason may be deceived. Rom. iii. 4. and is not this to shake the foundations of religion, and

to pave a way to scepticism and atheism? *Except.* That is not to be feared where sound reason is admitted judge. But why talk they of sound reason? The adversaries themselves will yield, that reason is unsound in the most part of men. We say, that it is not fully sound in the world; for even the best know but in part; darkness remains in some measure on the minds of all men.

3. Reason must be subject to the scripture, and submit itself to be judged by God speaking there, 2 Cor. x. 4, 5. 'The weapons of our warfare are—mighty—to the pulling down of strong holds, casting down imaginations,—and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.' Matters of faith are above the sphere of reason; and therefore as sense is not admitted judge in those things that are above it, so neither reason in those things that are above it, 1 Tim. iii. 16.

4. If reason were the supreme judge of controversies, then our faith should be built on ourselves, and the great reason why we believe any principle of religion would be, because it appears so and so to us; which is most absurd. The scripture teaches otherwise, 1 Thess. ii. 13. 'Ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth the word of God.' Most plainly does our Lord teach this, John v. 34, 'I receive not testimony from men;' chap. v. 39. 'Search the scriptures.'

Fourthly, The orthodox assert the supreme judge of controversies in religion to be the Holy Spirit speaking in the scriptures. This is proved by the following arguments.

1. In the Old and New Testaments, the Lord still sends us to this judge. So that we may neither turn to the right hand nor left from what he there speaks, Deut. v. 32. and xvii. 11. 'According to the sentence of the law which they shall teach thee;' Is. viii. 20. 'To the law and to the testimony,' &c.; Luke xvi. 29. 'They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them;' John v. 39. 'Search the scriptures.' Some hereto refer that passage, Matth. xix. 28. 'Verily I say unto you, that ye which have followed me in the regeneration, when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.' In this sense it must be meant of the doctrine they taught as dictated to them by the Holy Ghost.

2. It was the practice of Christ and his apostles to appeal to the Spirit speaking in the scriptures, Matth. iv. where Christ still answers Satan with that, 'It is written,' And so while discoursing with the Sadducees about the resurrection, Matth. xxii. 31, 32. So also in John, chap. v. and x. and Luke xxiv. 44. And so did others, Acts xvii. 11. and xxvi. 22, 23. 2 Pet. i. 19. Acts xv. 15,

16. A careful examination of which passages I recommend to you for your establishment in the truth.

3. To the Spirit of God speaking in the scriptures, and to him only, agree those things that are requisite to constitute one supreme Judge. (1.) We may certainly know that the sentence which he pronounces is true, for he is infallible being God. (2.) We cannot appeal from him, for he is one above whom there is none. (3.) He is no respecter of persons, nor can be biassed in favour of one in preference to another.

Having discussed the doctrinal part of this subject, I shall now conclude with two or three inferences.

Inf. 1. People then should diligently read and study the holy scriptures, in order to their knowing what to believe and what to do. As the scripture is the only rule and test of faith and obedience, let us accomplish a diligent search into it, that we may understand all matters to be believed and practised in order to our salvation, and reject every dictate and every precept, come from what quarter it will, if it be not taught us in the sacred records. We are not to believe any thing to be an article of faith, or a duty that we are to perform, unless it has the sanction of the Spirit of God in the written word, and be enjoined us by that infallible Judge. Let it then be our daily care and principal study to acquaint ourselves with the word of God, and draw from that infallible treasury all our knowledge as to faith and practice.

* 2. How dangerous must it be to maintain opinions and practices which are evinced to be contrary to the word of God? How hazardous must be the state of those who hold doctrines contrary to and eversive of the foundations of Christianity? Many such doctrines are taught and propagated in our day; such as the tenets of Socinians and Arians, who degrade the Son of God to the rank of a mere creature, and deny his supreme Godhead and essential glory, and impugn his satisfaction; the Arminians, who overturn the doctrine of original sin, assert free will, and stickle for the resistibility of grace, and other things eversive of the doctrine of the Bible; and others who set up creeds, confessions, and covenants of human manufacture, in the place of the infallible oracles of truth.

3. How worthy of reproof are they who make no conscience of reading the scriptures? They seldom look into them, or at most only on a sabbath-day, without giving attention to what they read; and so are grossly ignorant of the first principles of religion.

4. Religion, if it be of the right sort, will be practical religion. A blind obedience, or ignorant obedience, to some of the duties of religion is no better than bodily exercise, which profiteth little.

All right obedience flows from a principle of faith in the heart. True faith will always be productive of, and accompanied with good works. And it is in vain for men to say they have religion, unless they abound in all the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ unto the praise and glory of God. Let us then shew our faith by our works, in having a respect unto all the commands of God, and doing whatsoever he has enjoined us in his word.

THE SCRIPTURES THE BOOK OF THE LORD, AND THE DILIGENT STUDY AND SEARCH THEREOF RECOMMENDED AND URGED.

ISAIAH XXXIV. 16.—*Seek ye out of the book of the Lord, and read: no one of these shall fail, none shall want her mate: for my mouth it hath commanded, and his spirit it hath gathered them.*

HAVING considered the divine authority of the holy scriptures, and their scope, I come now to recommend unto you the diligent study and search of these sacred oracles, from the text now read.

In the former part of this chapter, there are most terrible threatenings denounced against the enemies of God and his church, which receive not their full accomplishment till the last day, as appears from ver. 4, 10. In the text there is the confirmation of the whole. And therein we have,

1. An intimation that all shall be accomplished according to the word. Wherein two things are to be observed.

(1.) The study of the word required. Where we may notice, (1.) The honourable epithet given to it, *The book of the Lord*. Thus the holy scripture is called, as being of divine original and authority, God himself being the author of it. It is true, that in Isaiah's days, even the canon of the Old Testament was not completed, some of the historical books, and of the prophetical too, not being then written. But the body of the doctrine of the word was comprised in the law, or five books of Moses; and what was afterwards written, was but a building on that foundation, by enlargement, explication, and application. And this prophecy looking as far as the end of the world, the Spirit of God might here have an eye to the complete canon of the Old and New Testament. [2.] The study of it recommended, *Seek out of it*. The word signifies to *inquire, search, seek out*; and imports diligence and earnestness in consulting a thing to learn from it. And so it is emphatically pointed, to denote a vehemency and intenseness of spirit in the study. It does in a great measure