

all taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard, and learned of the Father, cometh unto me.' It is plain that by coming unto Christ is meant saving faith in him. Now, in order to this there is a promise, that they shall all, viz. all the elect, for faith is the saving faith of God's elect, be taught of God, viz. by the Spirit, not merely by external revelation, because whosoever thus hears comes unto Christ: but it is certain that all come not to Christ that hear, and learn of the Father by external revelation only. From all, which it is evident, that unto the sufficient understanding of the things revealed in the scripture the teaching of the Spirit is necessary; and that all who attain to the saving knowledge of these things do believe.

What then remains upon this head but, that we diligently read the holy scriptures as being the word of God, and the rule which he hath given to direct us both as to faith and practice; and that we fervently pray to God, that he may give us his holy Spirit to enlighten our minds in the saving knowledge of the word, without which we will remain in the dark, and the word will be but a dead letter to us? Lord open our eyes, that we may understand thy word.

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#### THE UTILITY OF THE SCRIPTURES AS A RULE.

I proceed to the consideration of another Doctrine.

DOCT. 'The scriptures are the rule to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy God.'

Here I shall only give the properties of this rule.

1. It is a perspicuous or clear rule. For though all things in scripture are not alike plain in themselves, nor alike clear unto all; yet those things which are necessary to be known, believed, and observed for salvation, are so clearly propounded and opened in some place of scripture or other, that not only the learned, but the unlearned, in a due sense of the ordinary means, may attain unto a sufficient understanding of them.

(1.) With respect to all things necessary to salvation, whether for faith or practice, it cannot be denied, but there are portions of the scripture very obscure, which possibly are not rightly interpreted even to this day; but in such things as are necessary to salvation, they are clear. And in this respect it hath been said, that the

scriptures are a depth wherein a lamb may wade, and an elephant may swim.

(2.) Though some things, the faith of which is necessary to salvation, be high and incomprehensible mysteries, such as the doctrine of the Trinity, of the incarnation of the Son of God, &c. yet the way of propounding them is clear.

(3.) It may be that what is truly necessary unto salvation may be very obscurely laid down in some place of scripture; yet in some other place we shall find the same thing clearly propounded:

(4.) And that so as not only the learned, but even the unlearned, may attain to a sufficient understanding of them; which you must carefully remember is meant here of believing persons, who have the inward illumination of the Spirit, removing their own natural darkness: for if ye shall understand it of unbelievers, it contradicts what we have laid down above, relating to the necessity of spiritual illumination. And so the sense is, that not only may the learned, but even the unlearned Christian, attain to a sufficient understanding of the word;

(5.) Providing they make use of the ordinary means appointed of God for the understanding of them; reading attentively and devoutly with prayer and meditation on them, &c.

This perspicuity of the scriptures I shall prove by the following arguments.

(1.) The scripture plainly teaches its own perspicuity and clearness in this sense. It is called *a lamp* and *a light*, Psal. cxix. 105. The very 'entrance of it (it is said) gives light and understanding to the simple,' ver. 130. See Prov. vi. 23. The apostle, 2 Pet. i. 19. calls the holy scriptures *a light*, and particularly the word of prophecy, or the prophetic word, which of all the rest seems most dark, yet this he calls *a light* and a shining light, *shining in a dark place*; shewing thereby, that where it comes and shines, though the place be of itself dark, yet it dispels the darkness.

(2.) Such is the way God hath delivered his word, that its commands are not remote from the understanding; the meanest believer hath no reason to complain of the difficulty of it in the things necessary to salvation, Deut. xxx. 11. &c. 'For this command which I command thee this day, it is not hidden from thee, neither is it far off: It is not in heaven, that thou shouldst say, Who shall go up for us to heaven, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it, and do it? Neither is it beyond the sea, that thou shouldst say, Who shall go over the sea for us, and bring it in unto us, that we may hear it, and do it! But the word is very nigh unto thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart, that thou mayest do it.'

(3.) If all things necessary to salvation be understood by all sincere Christians, and this by virtue of the Spirit dwelling in every believer, then the scriptures are clear in all things necessary to salvation to the meanest believer. But the former is true: 1 Cor. ii. 15. 'He that is spiritual judgeth all things;' 1 John ii. 20, 27. 'Ye have an unction from the holy One, and ye know all things. The anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you; but the same anointing teacheth you of all things.' Consider to whom John is there speaking, not only to learned men and great divines, but to all believers, even to little children; to all that have the Spirit, which is common to all; 'for if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.'

(4.) The things that are necessary to salvation are hid only to unbelievers, in whom the God of this world hath blinded their eyes; as for others, God himself hath taught them, 2 Cor. iv. 4, 6.

(5.) God hath promised to write his law in his people's hearts, and that he himself will teach them to know himself, Jer. xxxi. 33, 34; therefore the scripture must needs be perspicuous and clear in things necessary to salvation: for that which is written in our hearts cannot be but clear unto us; and that which God himself teacheth us cannot be obscure, for who teacheth like God?

(6.) If the scriptures be not clear in themselves to all believers, but that all its perspicuity depends on the interpretation of the church, then our faith is to be ultimately resolved into the testimony of man; but that cannot be, for human testimony is not infallible and authentic, and therefore cannot found divine faith and an infallible persuasion. The reason of the consequence is clear. Hearers are obliged if they will not pin their faith on men's sleeves, to compare the interpretations given by men, with the scriptures themselves; which is utterly unpracticable, unless the scriptures be clear in themselves in such things as are necessary to salvation.

(7.) The perspicuity of the scripture appears, if ye consider their author, who is God himself, the Father of lights; and the end for which he gave the scriptures unto the church, viz. that they might be a rule of faith and life. Of his power to speak plainly, who can doubt? and the end for which they are given may sufficiently satisfy as to his will to speak so; for how can they be a rule to us, if wrapt up so as we cannot understand them without the church's interpretation, in those things that are necessary to salvation?

2. It is a perfect rule. There is nothing necessary to be believed or done but what is to be found there. It is a perfect rule for us to walk by in the way to heaven and glory. What can be more desired than that in the text, It is *profitable for doctrine, for reproof,*

for correction, for instruction in righteousness? 'The law of the Lord is perfect,' Psal. xix. 7. The scriptures were written that men might have life, John xx. 31. and comfort and hope in all conditions, Rom. xv. 4. But I insisted on this more fully in the preceding doctrine.

3. It is the only rule. Every doctrine taught any manner of way in religion must be brought to this rule, and if it agree not with it, must be rejected, Isa. viii. 20. Hereby traditions must be tried, Matth. xv. 3; and spirits or revelations, 1 John iv. 1; and nothing must be added to it, Prov. xxx. 6. Rev. xxii. 18. I shall shut up with a few inferences.

*Inf.* 1. The opinions of fathers, decrees of councils, acts of assemblies, covenants, and minister's sermons, are not the rule of faith to us; nor can any of them bind us but in so far as they are agreeable to the word of God, by which all of them must be judged and examined, Isa. viii. 20.

2. Translations of the scriptures into the vulgar languages are most necessary and profitable. How otherwise should the unlearned read them, if they were not translated? It was by means of these translations that Romish Babel was brought down at the Reformation, as by the division of tongues the building of old Babel was hindered. And that makes the Papists such enemies to translations of the scriptures. We have reason to bless God for human learning, by which these translations are made, seeing the prophets and apostles wrote in languages which but few understand.

3. This may give us a just abhorrence of Popery, which almost in every point on this head casts dust on the scriptures. The Papists deny the necessity of translations; will not allow the people the free reading of the Bible; cry out on it for its obscurity; accuse it of imperfection; and add their traditions to it, that it may not be the only rule. And thus they blaspheme both God and his word, and expose themselves to that direful threatening, Rev. xxii. 18.

4. This may also give us a just detestation of Quakerism, which sets up the light within men, which in very deed is nothing but a natural conscience, and the spirit without the scriptures, to be a rule to men. But their light is but darkness, and their spirit a spirit of darkness and delusion, if it agree not with the scriptures, Isa. viii. 20. and must be tried and examined by the scriptures, 1 John iv. 1. The Quakers are a dangerous set of people that overturn the foundation of true religion.

5. This may likewise give us a just abhorrence of the superstition and ceremonies of the church of England, wherewith they have corrupted the worship of God, rejecting the simplicity of gospel-

worship, and regulating their worship in many things not by the scripture, but the dregs of Antichrist: Deut iv. 2. 'Ye shall not add unto the word that I command you.' What word? Statutes, ver. 1. ceremonies and rites of worship. To baptize with water is Christ's command; but who has added the sign of the cross? Christ instituted the sacrament of the supper: but who has added kneeling, to overturn the table-gesture, which we have from Christ's own example? The Lord's day is of divine institution: but whose are the numerous holidays observed in the church of England? Matth. xv. 9. What is all this but an accusing the scripture of imperfection, as if God had not laid down a sufficient rule to teach us how we may glorify him: as if they were ashamed of simple scripture-worship, but they must deck it up in the whorish garments made by their own brains? God has a special zeal for his worship; and it becomes us to quicken our zeal for it, in a time when enemies are bringing in innovations in worship into this church, and setting up their Dagon beside the ark. But though God should, for our contempt of our pure worship, plague the land with this superstitious worship once more, yet as sure as Babylon shall fall, it shall fall and flee before the glory of the latter days.

6. *Lastly*, Be exhorted to study the holy scriptures. Read them in your families, and read them in secret, and cry for the Holy Spirit, who dictated them, to make you understand them. Lock them not up in your chests, and let them not lie dusty in your windows, as too many do to their shame and disgrace, lest the dust of them witness against you. Prefer the Bible to all other books, as the book whereof God himself is the author. Prize and esteem it, as showing you the way to salvation, as a lamp to your feet, and a light to your paths.