

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

answer that word, Acts xvii. 11—*Searched the scriptures.* We are not only to seek from it, but out of it, or, as the Hebrew signifies, *from in* it, or, as in the Greek, *to* it, and seek *from* it. [3.] The way to study, *read* it. Do not satisfy yourselves to hear it, but read it with your own eyes. For the eye makes ordinarily deeper impression than the ear.

(2.) The accomplishment in the most minute circumstance. [1.] Whereas the Lord had named a great many horrible creatures that should possess the dwellings of his enemies, *none of them shall fail*, they shall all be there. [2.] Whereas he had said they should have their mates, that so their kinds might be continued there, *none of them shall want their mate* for that purpose.

2. The confirmation or reason of this accomplishment according to the word. And it hath two parts, namely, that he has spoken the one, and will effectuate the other.

(1.) Himself has spoken the word: *My mouth it hath commanded.* His truth is engaged for its accomplishment. He has commanded, not these creatures, but the word or book, as Psal. cv. 8.—*The word he commanded:* and God is said to command his word, for that he gives it as a lawgiver, of supreme authority. And so this answers to the first part of the intimation.

(2.) He will effectuate the thing in accomplishment of the word: His spirit will gather these creatures. So his power is engaged to make it forthcoming. There seems to be here a remarkable change of the persons. But I am mistaken if *the mouth of the Lord* be not one of the names of Christ in the scripture: Thus, Isa. lxii. 2.—‘Thou shalt be called by a new name, which the mouth of the Lord shall name.’ Jer. xxiii. 16. ‘They speak—not out of the mouth of the Lord.’ Compare John i. 18. ‘No man hath seen God at any time: the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.’ Heb. i. 1, 2. ‘God who at sundry times, and in divers manners, spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son.’ And so the words run very plainly and exactly according to the original, *For my mouth he hath commanded, and his Spirit it hath gathered them.*

Two doctrines naturally arise from the words, viz.

DOCT. I. ‘The holy scripture is the book of the Lord.’

DOCT. II. ‘The scripture is a book to be read, carefully, and diligently searched, consulted, and sought into.’

As it is the last of these doctrines I mainly intend to discourse upon, I shall be very brief in the illustration of the first: and though some things to be spoken upon it interfere with what has

been already delivered, I hope it will tend to your establishment in the truth, and the more endear the holy scripture to you.

Doct. I. 'The holy scripture is the book of the Lord.'

All I intend upon this head is to shew,

I. In what respects the holy scripture is the book of the Lord.

II. That it is so.

III. Make a short improvement.

I. My first province is to shew in what respects the holy scripture is the book of the Lord.

1. The Lord is the subject-matter of that book, as the book of the wars of the Lord. It is the commendation of a book, that it treats of a noble subject; and this book treats of God, the great scope of it being to show what God is, and what his will is. Hence we are commanded to 'hold fast the form of sound words,' 2 Tim. i. 13. If we would know God, and our duty to him, we must turn to this book and learn it.

2. The Lord is the author of it, 2 Tim. iii. 16. 'All scripture is given by inspiration of God.' And who was fit to make a book on that noble subject but himself? John i. 18. forecited. It is the product of his own unerring Spirit, and so his own book in a most proper sense. It is for this reason that it is called 'the book of the Lord.' It is true, several hands were employed in the writing of it; but yet all and every part of it was from the Lord.

(1.) The motion to write was from the Lord, by a particular impulse on the spirits of the holy penmen, which influenced them to the work, and carried them on it, 2 Pet. i. 21. 'Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.' Sometimes they had particular express calls, but they had always this motion powerfully determining and inclining them to the work.

(2.) The matter of their writing was from him. He laid it to their hands, 2 Tim. iii. 16. 'All scripture is given by inspiration of God.' Some things were matters of pure revelation, that could not be known otherwise; such as things past, whereof there was no manner of record, things to come, things without the reach of men's knowledge, as the thoughts of others. These things they had by immediate suggestion. Some things they might have by other records, their own judgment, or memory. In these the Spirit of the Lord infallibly guided them what to chuse and refuse, strengthened their judgment and memories, so that they could not mistake, John xvi. 13. 'The Spirit of truth—will guide you into all truth.'

(3.) The very words they wrote were from him. Since the apostles spoke the very words of the Holy Ghost, much more did they write them, 1 Cor. ii. 13. And therefore God is said to speak by and in

the holy penmen, 2 Sam. xxiii. 2. Luke i. 70. Acts i. 16. He did not give them the matter to put in their own words, but put the words in their hearts too, but in a manner suited to their native style. And truly it is hard to conceive how the inspiration of the holy scriptures could reach the end without it, seeing so much depends on the suitable expressing of matter.

II. I proceed to shew, that the holy scripture is the book of the Lord. This is evident from many things, of which I shall only observe a few.

1. This book discovers what no mortal could ever have done, and nowise could be had but by divine revelation, as the history of the creation, what was done before man was on the earth, the sublime mysteries of the Trinity, of the incarnation of the Son of God, and the eternal counsels of God concerning man's salvation.

2. The perfect holiness of the doctrine. It commands all holiness, forbids all impurity in heart and life, under the pain of damnation: which shews it could neither be the work of men, being so far above their reach, and cross to their corrupt nature; nor of evil angels, being so opposite to Satan's kingdom; nor of good ones, who could never have put a cheat on the world, making their own words pass for God's.

3. The efficacy of the doctrine in its searching and convincing the conscience, Heb. iv. 12.; converting souls from their most beloved lusts, even when nothing can be expected from the world for such a change, Psal. xix. 7.; rejoicing the heart under the deepest distresses. ver. 8. This is not from any virtue in the letters or syllables, but from the Spirit, whose instrument it is.

4. The miracles wherewith it has been confirmed. These were wrought to confirm the doctrine, Mat. ix. 6. These are God's seal, which he will never put to a lie.

5. *Lastly*, There is an inward sensation of this in the spirits of those that have their senses exercised. For it is not to be doubted, but as the works of God bear the marks of a divine hand, so his word also does. And while there are such manifest differences betwixt one voice and another of men, how can it be thought, but the voice of God has a peculiar signature on it? If that be not discerned by others, it is by his own people that know his voice.

I shall now make a short improvement of this point.

USE 1. For information. It informs us, that,

1. The scripture is the best of books. They who heard Christ, said, 'Never man spake like this man;' and they that see the true glory of the scriptures must own, never did any write like these writings. There we have the true picture of the great Author, in

spotless holiness; there the revelation of his mind with respect to our salvation. Whatever other books there be in the world relating to our salvation; they are but dim tapers lighted at this burning lamp.

2. They are enemies to God that are enemies to the scriptures, whether in their principles, as Papists and others, or in their practices. For if men loved God, they would love his word, Psal. cxix. 97. And men, by their relish of the word, may know what case their souls are in. For according as they relish the scriptures, so is it with their souls. If they have lost the gust of them, it is evident that either they have no grace, or that it is not in exercise.

3. Wo to those whom the Bible condemns; and these are all wicked men and hypocrites, whatever their stations or professions be. But happy they whom it approves and justifies; and these are all the sincere seekers of God. Seek to be of the number of the latter, and then none of the woes denounced in God's word shall fall upon you.

USE II. Of exhortation.

1. Let us highly prize this book for the sake of the Author. The Ephesians thought that they had good ground to be zealous for the image of Diana, because they fancied it fell down from Jupiter, Acts xix. 35. Your Bible is a book really come from God; let us be ashamed we do not prize it more, by using it diligently to the ends for which it was given the church.

2. Let us believe it in all the parts thereof; the commands, that we may study to conform ourselves to them; the promises, that we may thereby be encouraged to a holy life; and the threatenings, that we may thereby be deterred from sin. Alas! though we own it to be the word of God, that we are no more moved with it than if it were the word of man, and such a man as we give little credit to. For compare the lives of the most part with it they say, it is but idle tales.

3. Let us submit our souls to it, as the oracles of the living God. He is the great Lawgiver, and in that book he speaks; let us own his authority in his word, and submit to it as the rule of our faith and life, without disputing or opposing.

4. *Lastly*, Let us study to be well acquainted with it, and make it our business to search the scriptures. This brings me to the main thing I intend.

DOCT. II. "The scripture is a book to be read, carefully and diligently searched, consulted, and sought into."

If ye ask, by whom this is to be done? it is by all into whose hands, by the mercy of God, it comes. Some never had it, and so

they will not be condemned for slighting it, Rom. ii. 12. Magistrates are called to look into it, and be much conversant in it, Josh. i. 8. 'This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth, but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayst observe to do according to all that is written therein.' Deut. xvii. 18, 19. 'And it shall be, when he sitteth upon the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write him a copy of this law in a book, out of that which is before the priests the Levites. And it shall be with him, and he shall read therein all the days of his life; that he may learn to fear the Lord his God, to keep all the words of this law, and these statutes, to do them.' Ministers are in a special manner called to the study of it, 1 Tim. iv. 13. 'Give attendance to reading.' 2 Tim. iii. 16, 17. 'All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.' But not they only are so commanded, but all others within the church, John v. 39. 'Search the scriptures.' Deut. vi. 6, 7. 'These words which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart. And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.'

In discoursing further from this point, I shall,

I. Explain this seeking into the book of the Lord.

II. Give the reasons of the doctrine.

III. Make application.

I. I am to explain this seeking into the book of the Lord. And here I will shew,

1. What is presupposed in this seeking.

2. What is the import of a studious inquiry into the scriptures.

FIRST, I am to shew what is presupposed in this seeking into the book of the Lord. It presupposes,

1. That man has lost his way, and needs direction to find it, Psal. cxix. 176. 'I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek thy servant.' Miserable man is bemisted in a vain world, which is a dark place, and has as much need of the scriptures to direct him, as one has of a light in darkness, 2 Pet. i. 19. What a miserable case is that part of the world in that want the Bible? They are vain in their imaginations, and grope in the dark, but cannot find the way of salvation. In no better case are those to whom it has not come in power.

2. That man is in hazard of being led farther and farther wrong. This made the spouse say, 'Tell me, O thou whom my soul loveth, where thou feedest, where thou makest thy flock to rest at noon:

for why should I be as one that turneth aside by the flocks of thy companions?' There is a subtle devil, a wicked world, corrupt lusts within one's own breast, to lead him out of the right way, that we had need to give over, and take this guide. There are many false lights in the world, which, if followed, will lead the traveller into a mire, and leave him there.

3. That men are slow of heart to understand the mind of God in his word. It will cost searching diligently ere we can take it up, John v. 39. Our eyes are dim to the things of God, our apprehensions dull, and our judgment is weak. And therefore, because the iron is blunt, we must put too the more strength. We lost the sharpness of our sight in spiritual things in Adam; and our corrupt wills and carnal affections, that savour not the things of God, do more blind our judgments: and therefore it is a labour to us to find out what is necessary for our salvation.

4. That the book of the Lord has its difficulties which are not to be easily solved. Therefore the Psalmist prays, 'Open thou mine eyes, that I may see wondrous things out of thy law,' Psal. cxix. 18. Philip asked the eunuch, 'Understandest thou what thou readest? And he said, How can I, except some man should guide me?' There are depths there wherein an elephant may swim, and will exercise the largest capacities, with all the advantages they may be possessed of. God in his holy providence has so ordered it, to stain the pride of all glory; to make his word the liker himself, whom none can search out to perfection, and to sharpen the diligence of his people in their inquiries into it.

5. That we need highly to understand it, otherwise we would not be bidden search into it. 'Of the times and seasons (says the apostle), ye have no need that I write unto you;' and therefore he wrote not of them. There is a treasure in this field; we are called to dig for it; for tho' it be hid, yet we must have it, or we will pine away in our spiritual poverty.

6. *Lastly*, That we may gain from it by diligent inquiry. The holy humble heart will not be always sent empty away from these wells of salvation, when it plies itself to draw. There are shallow places in these waters of the sanctuary, where lambs may wade.

SECONDLY, I proceed to shew what is the import of a studious inquiry into the scriptures. This holds out the matter and manner of the duty.

First, As for the matter of the duty; it lies in three things.

1. We should be capable to read the scriptures distinctly. Alas! How shall they study the book of God that cannot so much as read it? Isa. xxix. 12. It is sad to think that there are among Chris-

tians who call God their Father, and cannot read his testament; who say they would be at heaven, and yet cannot consult the directions for the way. And if their parents have neglected to teach them, they have not the grace to make up that by their own industry. Their case is little better that cannot read it distinctly; for without that there can be little benefit got by it. Neh. viii. 8.

2. We should acquaint ourselves with the letter of the scriptures, the histories, prophecies, precepts, &c. This Timothy is commended for, 'that from a child he had known the holy scriptures,' 2 Tim. iii. 15. That is the sacred field where the treasure lies; the blessed body, where the soul of the scripture lodgeth; the words wherein the mind of God towards sinners is held forth, Mat. xiii. 52.

3. We ought to labour to understand the mind of God in them, and that savingly and spiritually. Wisdom lies in the book of the Lord; and see what course we should take to get at it, Prov. ii. 4, 5. 'If thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures: then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord; and find the knowledge of God.' To read the scriptures just for reading's sake, without labouring to understand what ye read, is very unprofitable work. Nay we should search narrowly till we find the sense and meaning of what we read, as one that digs deep, breaks the clods of earth, till he finds the golden ore.

Secondly, As to the manner of the duty; it imports,

1. A high esteem of the treasure to be found in the book of the Lord, Matth. xiii. 44. People will not be at the pains to seek into what they do not value. If men did not prize gold, they would not rip up the bowels of the earth for it. It is the undervaluing of the scriptures that makes people so little to study and seek into them.

2. A design of spiritual profit by the scripture. No wise man will be at pains but to gain thereby. And he that would aright study the holy scriptures, must design his soul's advantage thereby. We should come to the reading of the book of the Lord, as to a soul-feast, Psal. cxix. 131; as to the gathering of spoil after battle, Psal. cxix. 162. Some read the scriptures to furnish their heads with notions of the things of religion, and their tongues with talk about them; but read ye for holiness to your hearts, and to rule your walk thereby. Some read them to support their errors, and some for matter of jest and drollery; which are horrible work. But 'search ye the scriptures: for in them ye will find eternal life; and they are they that testify of Christ,' John v. 39.

3. A serious application of the heart to the work; for it will not be a by-hand work, Psal. i. 2. In the scriptures God speaks to us, as in prayer we speak to God; and when God speaks, we should

listen attentively. The angels pry into scripture-mysteries, 1 Pet. i. 12. So should we into the scriptures, James i. 25.

4. Painfulness in the study. Silver and gold are not to be gathered up by every lazy passenger from the surface of the earth, as stones are, but must with labour be digged out of the bowels of it, Prov. ii. 4. forecited. This is the gate of heaven; and there must be striving to get in at it. It is not easy to overcome a dark, carnal, hard heart, which unfits us for the study of the scriptures. And indeed many get but little advantage by their reading it; for dig they cannot, and beg they will not; and therefore they go empty from these wells of salvation.

5. Diligence and constancy, 1 Pet. i. 10. It is the hand of the diligent that maketh rich in all cases, while drowsiness cloaths a man with rags. See the duty of a Christian with respect to the word, Psal. i. 2. 'His delight is in the law of the Lord; and in his law doth he meditate day and night.' He suffers not his Bible to gather dust.

Lastly, A thorough search. We should go through every leaf of the book of the Lord, and endeavour to acquire the knowledge of the whole scriptures. For '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. Some never read all the Bible in their days, but pick out portions here and there only. Searchers do not so, but look into every corner. And we should labour to know more and more of what we have some insight into: for this Bible says one, contains a puncheon that hitherto has not been pierced.

II. The next general head is, to give the reasons of the point, that the book of the Lord should be read, carefully and diligently searched, consulted, and sought into.

1. Because the way of salvation is to be found only therein, John v. 39. forecited. This is the star risen in a dark world, to guide us where Christ is. All the researches of the wise men of the world, all the inventions of men, can never guide us to Immanuel's land, John i. 18. 'No man has seen God at any time, the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.' Here, and here only, the counsels of God touching man's salvation are discovered. And so, as salvation is the most necessary thing, the study of the scriptures is the most necessary exercise. To slight it, is to judge ourselves unworthy of eternal life.

2. It is the only rule of our faith and lives, 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,' Eph. ii. 20. 'Ye are

built upon the foundation of the prophets and apostles, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone,' Rev. xxii. 18, 19. 'I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: and if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.' The Bible is the pattern shewn on the mount, to which our faith and lives must be conformed, if we would please God. The Lord says to us, as Deut. xxviii. 14. 'Thou shalt not go aside from any of the words which I command thee this day, to⁴ the right hand or to the left.' None can walk regularly unless they observe the rule; but how can one observe it unless he know it? Matt. xxii. 29. God has given each of us our post in the world: the Bible is the book of our instructions; and shall we not study it? The lawyer studies his law-books, the physician his medical books; and shall not a Christian study the book of the Lord?

3. The Lord himself dictated it, and gave it us for that very end, 2 Tim. iii. 16, 17. forecited, Rom. v. 4. 'Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning.' And has the Spirit of the Lord written it, and will not we read it? Has he given it us to be studied by us, and will we slight it? This must be horrid contempt of God, and ingratitude to him with a witness. Whose image and superscription is this on the scriptures? Is it not the Lord's? Then take it up and read.

4. We must be judged by the scriptures at the great day, John xii. 48. That is one of the books opened, Rev. xx. 12. This is the book of the Lord's laws and ordinances, by which he will proceed in absolving or condemning us. I own God will go another way to work with those who never had the Bible, Rom. ii. 12. But know thou, that seeing it is in the country where thou livest, though thou never redest a letter of it, thou must be judged by it. Is there not good reason then for reading the scriptures?

III. I proceed now to the practical improvement of this important subject.

USE I. Of information. It lets us see,

1. The necessity and advantage of translations of the scriptures into the vulgar languages, as I have formerly shewn.

2. The people not only may without any licence from the church-guides, but must read the scriptures, for God has commanded it. The Papists here take away the key of knowledge; for their kingdom riseth and standeth by darkness, and ignorance of the scriptures.

3. The scriptures, whatever difficulties be in them, yet are so plain in things necessary to salvation, that even the unlearned may reap advantage by reading them.

USE II. Of exhortation. I exhort one and all of you to the study of the holy scriptures, to *seek out of the book of the Lord, and read*. I will lay this before you in several branches, before I come to the motives.

1. Let such as cannot read, learn to read. Ye that have children, as ye tender their immortal souls, teach them to read the Bible. Remember therefore the vows taken upon you at their baptism, and the duty laid upon you by the Lord himself, Eph. vi. 4. 'Fathers, bring up your children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord,' 2 Tim. iii. 15. Timothy from a child knew the holy scriptures. Ye who got no learning when ye were young, labour to get it now. Alas! some parents, or others that have had some when young with them, have been cruel to their souls, as the ostrich to her young. They have learned them to work, but have been at no pains to teach them to read; so have sent them out into the world a prey to the devourer's teeth, without the ordinary means of the knowledge of God. Thus they are destroyed with gross ignorance.

But will ye pity your own souls, though others did not that brought you up? And do not enter yourselves heirs to their sin, by being as negligent of yourselves as they were. Though perhaps they left you nothing to live upon, yet for a livelihood ye have done something for your bodies. And will you do nothing for your souls?

Think not it will excuse thee at the hand of God, that thou art a servant; for thy soul is in as great danger as thy master's, and ignorance of religion will destroy it, Is. xxvii. 11. There are few but know how to improve the scarcity of servants to the raising of the fee; but will you improve it by getting it in your condition to learn to read, and seek out such families where you may have that advantage, for some such there are, like Abraham's, Gen. xviii. 10. Nay rather than not do it, give over service for a time, and learn.

Neither will it excuse you that now you have a family; for you have an immortal soul still, which gross ignorance of the mind of God in the scriptures will ruin eternally, 2 Thess. i. 8. And the more need you have to read the scriptures, that you have a family, that you may know the Lord's mind yourself, and teach it your family. Such an excuse will no more screen you from everlasting destruction, than covering yourself with leaves will save you from the flames of a devouring fire.

Say not you are too old now to learn. It is never out of time to

learn to do well for your eternal salvation. If your eyes can serve you to learn, you ought to do it, whatever your age be. But if your sight be so far gone, that you cannot though you were ever so willingly; then tremble at the thoughts of the awful judgment of God, that has taken away sight from you, that when you had it would not use it for his glory, and the good of your own soul; and humble thyself, and apply to the blood of Christ, for this thy neglect, lest it prove ruining to thee for ever. And cause others read to you, and beg the teaching of the Spirit, if so be such an old careless slighter of salvation may find mercy.

2. Let such as can read procure Bibles. I dare say one that has a love to the Bible (and that all who love the Lord have) will make many shifts ere they want one. But they must be lawful shifts: for stealing of Bibles, or keeping them up from the owners, is like a thief stealing a rope to hang himself in. But spare it off your bellies or your backs, and procure one rather than want.

3. Let such as have Bibles read them frequently, and acquaint themselves with the book of the Lord. Read them in your families morning and evening; and read them in secret by yourselves; it should be a piece of your duties in secret. Make the Bible your companion abroad and at home, in the house and in the field. It is lamentable to think how unacquainted with the Bible many are, and how little heart they have to it. Ballads and song-books get the place of the Bible with many; and many have no use for it but once in the week, on the sabbath-day, as if it were more for a shew with them than the necessity of their souls.

4. *Lastly*, Not only read it, but search into it, and study it, to know the mind of God therein, and that ye may do it. Be not superficial in your reading of the scriptures, but do it with application, painfulness, and diligence; using all means to read it with understanding; breaking through the surface that ye may come at the hid treasure therein. Reading as well as praying by rote is to little purpose: for a parcel of bare words will neither please God, nor edify your own souls.

I shall now give some motives to enforce this important duty of reading the scriptures.

Mot. 1. God requires it of us, he commands us to do it, John v. 39. 'Search the scriptures.' The Jews had once the scriptures committed to them; but did God design they should only have them in the temple? nay, in their houses also: Only laid up in the ark? nay, he designed another chest for them, even their hearts, Deut. vi. 6, 7. formerly cited. Let the authority of God sway you, then, and as you have any regard to it, study the scriptures.

Mot. 2. Nay, the very being of the Bible among us is enough to move us to study it, seeing it is that by which we must stand or fall for ever. The proclaiming of the law publicly is sufficient to oblige the subjects; and they cannot plead ignorance, though they get not every one a copy of it. *Ignorantia juris excusat neminem*; for every one ought to know the rule of his duty. And sinners will be condemned by it, if they conform not to it, whether they knew it or not, John iii. 19.

Mot. 3. It is an exercise very pleasing to God, so that it be done in a right manner, namely, in faith. For thereby God speaks to us, and we hear and receive his words at his mouth; and obedient ears are his delight.

1. The Spirit of God commends it. It was the commendation of the Bereans, Acts xvii. 11. of Apollos, chap xviii. 24. of Timothy, 2 Tim. iii. 15. And why does the Spirit of God commend others for this, but to recommend the scriptures to us?

2. There is a particular blessing annexed to this exercise, Rev. i. 3. 'Blessed is he that readeth.' And the children of God in all ages have sucked the sap of it, while they have had sweet fellowship with God in his word, and the influences of the Spirit, to the quickening, enlightening, fructifying and comforting their souls.

Mot. 4. Consider what a great privilege it is, that we have the scriptures to read and study, at this day. If Christ had not died for our salvation, the world had never been blessed with this glorious light, but had been in darkness here, as a pledge of eternal darkness. Let us compare our case with that of others, and see our privilege.

1. Look back to the case of the church in its first age before the flood, or the time of Moses, while they had not the written word. The will of God was revealed to some of them by visions, voices, dreams, &c.; but we may say, as 2 Pet. i. 19. 'We have a more sure word of prophecy.' But that was not the lot of all, but of a few among them; the rest behoved to learn by tradition. Now every one has alike access to the word of divine revelation.

2. Look to the case of the church under the Old Testament. In David's time there was little more than the five books of Moses written; yet how does that holy soul swell in commendation of his little Bible, when little more than the ground-work of this glorious structure was laid! Psal. cxix. *per tot.* Take that church at her best in this respect, when the canon of the Old Testament was completed, they saw not the light of the New. Now the whole canon of the scripture is in our hands, this glorious image of God has got the finishing stroke; no more is to be added thereto for ever. The New

Testament casts a light upon the types, shadows, and dark prophecies of the Old. And shall we not be sensible of our mercy?

3. But look abroad into the Pagan world at this day, in comparison of which all that know any part of the scriptures are but few, and the Bible is not heard of among them. That precious treasure is not opened to them to this day, and they can know no more of God but what they can learn from the dark glimmerings of nature's light. O may we not in some sort say, as Psal. cxlvii. 19, 20. 'He sheweth his word unto Jacob, his statutes and his judgments unto Israel. He hath not dealt so with any nation: and as for his judgments, they have not known them. Praise ye the Lord.'

4. Look back but a few years hence, when no Bibles were but such as were manuscript, namely, before the art of printing was found out, which was but a little before the reformation from Popery. How rare behoved they then to be! and how dear, ye may easily perceive. But now how common and easy are they to be had?

5. Look to the case of those that lived, or yet live, under Popish tyranny, where it is a crime to have or to read the Bible without a special licence. What a struggle had our reformers in this church, ere they could get allowance by the laws of the land to read the Bible in English? And how is the Bible kept out of the people's hands to this day in Popish countries? Whereas now ye are pressed to read and study it. A New Testament was very precious in those days of Popish persecution, when one gave a cart-load of hay for a leaf of the Bible. But, alas! as one says of the French Protestants, When they burned us for reading the scriptures, we burned in zeal to be reading them; now with our liberty is bred also negligence and disesteem of God's word.

6. *Lastly*, Consider the many helps there are to understand the scriptures beyond what were formerly. Many have run to and fro, and knowledge that way has been increased, both by preaching and writing. And that useful exercise of lecturing, which our church has commanded to be of a large portion of scripture, is no small help. What will we be able to answer to the Lord, if this great privilege be slighted?

Mot. 5. Consider it has been the way of the people of God, to be much addicted to and conversant in the scripture. So true is it that wisdom is justified of her children. O take heed ye go forth by the footsteps of the flock, and ye will not find them in the way of slighting, but prizing the word of God. Consider,

1. Ye shall find the saints highly prizing the word, Psal. xix. & exix. what large commendations of the word are there! How sweet was it to Jeremiah! chap. xv. 16. 'Thy words were found, and I did

eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of my heart.' Peter, who heard the voice on the mount, yet prefers the scriptures to voices from heaven, 2 Pet. i. 19. Paul speaks highly of it, 2 Tim. iii. 16. 'All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.' The martyrs highly prized it, and ventured their lives for it. One cast away at sea, and swimming for his life on a mast, having five pounds, which was all his stock, in the one hand, and a Bible in the other, and being obliged to let go one of them, kept the Bible, and let the five pounds go.

2. Ye shall find them much addicted to the study of the word. It was David's companion and bosom oracle, Psal. cxix. 97. Daniel at Babylon searches the scriptures of the prophets, Dan. ix. 2. So did the noble Bereans, Apollos, and Timothy.

3. Yea, the Spirit of God makes it the character of a godly man, Psal. i. 2. 'His delight is in the law of the Lord; and in his law doth he meditate day and night.' O how rational is that! The man that is born of God has a natural desire after the word, as the child after the mother's breast, 1 Pet. ii. 2. The new nature tends to communion with God; it is by the word the soul has communion with him, for thereby God speaks to us. And therefore it is a sad sign, that there are few true Christians, while there are so few that diligently ply the word.

Mot. 6. Consider the excellency of the scriptures. There is a transcendent glory in them, which whoso discerns cannot miss to hug and embrace them. To commend the Bible to you, I shall say these eight things of it.

1. It is the best of books. They may know much, ye think, that have many good books; but have ye the Bible, and ye have the best book in the world. It is the book of the Lord, dictated by unerring infinite wisdom. There is no dross here with the gold, no chaff with the corn. Every word of God is pure. There is nothing for our salvation to be had in other books, but what is learned from this. They are but the rivulets that run from this fountain, and all shine with light borrowed from thence. And it has a blessing annexed to it, a glory and majesty in it, an efficacy with it, that no other book has the like. Therefore Luther professed he would burn his books he had writ, rather than they should divert people from reading the scriptures.

2. It is the greatest and most excellent of the works of God to be seen in the world, Psal. cxxxviii. 2. If the world beautified with sun, moon, and stars, be as a precious ring, the Bible is the diamond in the ring. The sparkling stars, and that glorious globe of light

the sun, yet leave but a dark world, where there is no Bible. Were it put to the choice of the saints, either to put the sun out of the firmament, or the Bible out of the world, they would chuse the former, but never the latter; for that they cannot want till they go there where they shall read all in the face of Jesus. For that must needs be most excellent that has most of God in it.

3. It is the oracles of God, Rom. iii. 2. This was the chief of the Jewish privileges, without which their temple, altar, &c. would have been but dumb signs. The Pagan world did highly reverence and prize the devil's oracles: but we have God's oracles, while we have the scriptures that manifest to us the secrets of heaven. And if we discern aright who speaks in them, we must say, The voice of God, and not of man. Here is what you may consult safely in all your doubts and darknesses; here is what will lead you into all truth.

4. It is the laws of heaven, Psal. xix. 7. The Lord and King of heaven is our great Lawgiver, and the laws are written in this book. It concerns us to study it. Hence we must prove our title to heaven, the blessed inheritance, or we will never obtain it. From thence the sentence of our justification must be drawn, else we are still in a state of wrath. Here is the rule we must follow, that we may please God here; and from this book shall the sentence of our absolution or condemnation be drawn at the great day.

5. It is Christ's testament and latter-will, 1 Cor. xi. 25. Our Lord has died, and he has left us this Bible as his testament; and that makes his children have such an affection to it. Herein he has left them his legacy, not only moveables, but the eternal inheritance; and his last will is now confirmed, that shall stand for ever without alteration. So, all the believer's hopes are in this Bible, and this is the security he has for all the privileges he can lay claim to. This is his charter for heaven, the disposition by which he lays claim to the kingdom. And therefore, if ye have any interest in the testament, ye must needs not be slights of it.

6. It is the sceptre of his kingdom, Psal. cx. 2. and it is a sceptre of righteousness. It is by this word he rules his church, and guides all his children in their way to the land that is far off. Wherever he hath a kingdom, he wields it; and the nations subjecting themselves to him, receive it. And where he rules one's heart, it has place there too, Col. iii. 16. It is a golden sceptre of peace, stretched forth to rebels to win them by offering them peace; to fainting believers, to give them peace. And whosoever will not subject themselves to it, shall be broken with his rod of iron.

7. It is the channel of influences, by which the communications of

grace are made, and the waters of the sanctuary flow into the soul, Isa. lix. *ult.* The apostle appeals for this to the experience of the Galatians, chap iii. 2. 'Received ye the Spirit by the law, or by the hearing of faith?' Is the elect soul regenerated? the word is the incorruptible seed, whereof the new creature is formed, 1 Pet. i. 23. Is faith begotten in the heart? it is by the word, Rom. x. 17. 'Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.' Is the new creature to be nourished, strengthened, quickened, actuated, &c.? Christ is the fountain, faith the mouth of the soul, the word the pipes of conveyance, whereat faith must suck, as the child at the nipples.

8. *Lastly*, It is the price of blood even the blood of Christ, 1 Cor. xi. 25. Had not the personal Word become flesh, and therein died to purchase redemption for us, we had never seen this written word among us. For it is the book of the covenant which is founded on the blood of the Mediator. It is the grant and conveyance of the right to the favour of God, and all saving benefits to believers; for which there could have been no place had not Christ died. And they that slight it, will be found to tread under foot the blood of the covenant.

Mot. 7. Consider the usefulness of the word. If we consider the Author, we may be sure of the usefulness of the work. The apostle tells us, that it alone is sufficient to make the man of God perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works, 2 Tim. iii. 16, 17. There is no case a soul can be in, but it is suitable to their case, that desire to make use of it. To commend it to you from its usefulness, I will say these eight things.

1. It is a treasure to the poor, and such are we all by nature, Rev. iii. 17. 2 Cor. iv. 7. Therefore the Lord bids us search the scriptures, in allusion to those that search in mines for silver and gold. If the poor soul search here, receiving the word by faith, he is made up. He shall find there the discharge of his debt, a new right and title to the mortgaged inheritance. This word of the Lord is a treasure,

(1.) For worth. People make not treasures of any but valuable things. There is nothing in the scriptures but what is highly valuable. There are the eternal counsels of God touching our salvation; life and immortality brought to light; there are the purest precepts, the most awful threatenings, and the most precious promises, 2 Pet. i. 4, &c.

(2.) For variety. In the scriptures shines the manifold wisdom of God. They that nauseate this book of the Lord, because they find not new things in it after some time perusing it, discover their

senses not to be exercised to discern. For should we come to it ever so often, bringing fresh affections with us, we would find fresh entertainment there; as is evident by the glorious refreshment sometimes found in a word, that has been often gone over before without any thing remarkable. And truly the saints shall never exhaust it while here; but as new discoveries are made in it in several ages, so it will be to the end.

(3.) For abundance. There is in it not only for the present, but for the time to come, Isa. xlii. 23. There is abundance of light, instruction, comfort, &c. and what is needful for the saints travelling heavenward, Psal. cxix. 162. And indeed it is the spoil to be gathered by us. Our Lord having fought the battle against death and devils, here the spoil lies to be gathered by us that remained at home when the fight was.

(4.) *Lastly*, For closeness. This word contains the wisdom of God in a mystery. It is a hid book to most of the world, and indeed a sealed book to those that remain in their natural blindness. Nor can we get into the treasure without the illumination of the same Spirit which dictated it, 1 Cor. ii. 10. There is a path here which the vulture's eye hath not seen, which the carnal eye cannot take up, ver. 14. Therefore have we need to seek diligently, and pray, as Psal. cxix. 18. 'Open thou mine eyes, that I may see wondrous things out of thy law.'

2. It is life to the dead: 'The words that I speak unto you (says Christ), they are spirit, and they are life,' John vi. 63. We are naturally dead in sins; but the word is the means of spiritual life. It is the ordinary means of conversion, Psal. xix. 7. 'The law of the Lord—converteth the soul;' and of regeneration, 1 Pet. i. 23. 'Being born again of incorruptible seed by the word of God.' By it the soul is persuaded into the covenant, and brought to embrace Jesus Christ. For thereby the Spirit is communicated to the elect of God. Thus it is of use to bring sinners home to God, from under the power of darkness to the kingdom of his dear Son.

3. It is light to the blind, Psal. xix. 8. 'The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes.' It is a convincing light, to discover one's state to him, and so to rouse up the soul from its natural security. It pierces the heart as an arrow, and makes the careless sinner stand and consider his way: for it freely tells every one his faults, Jam. i. 25. And while the child of God travels through a dark world, it serves to light him the way, 2 Pet. i. 19.—'a light shining in a dark place;' and lets him see how to set down every step. Hence David says, 'Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path,' Psal. cxix. 105.

4. It is awakening to those that are asleep, Cant. vii. 9. It is the voice of God which is full of majesty, to awaken the sleepy Christian to the exercise of grace. For as it is the means of begetting grace in the heart, so it is also the means of actuating and quickening thereof, Psal. cxix. 50. 'Thy word hath quickened me.' Here the Christian may hear the alarm sound to rise up and be doing. Here are the precious promises as cords of love to draw, and the awful threatenings to set idlers to work.

5. It is a sword to the Christian soldier, Eph. vi. 17. 'The sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.' Whoever has a mind for heaven must fight his way to it: for none get the crown but the conquerors, Rev. iii. 21. They must go through many temptations, from the devil, the world, and the flesh; and the word is the sword for resisting them. It is an offensive and defensive weapon. We see how our Lord Jesus wielded it, Mat. iv. 4, 7. 'It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.—It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.' And whatever be our temptations, if we be well versed in the word, we may from thence bring answers to them all.

6. It is a counsellor to those who are in straits, doubts, and difficulties, Psal. cxix. 24. 'Thy testimonies are—my counsellors.' Many a time the children of God, when tossed with doubts and fears, have found a quiet harbour there; and have got their way cleared to them there, when they knew not what to do. And no doubt, if we were more exercised unto godliness, and looking to the Lord in our straits, we would make more use of the Bible, as the oracles of Heaven.

7. It is a comforter to those that are cast down, Psal. cxix. 49, 50. 'Remember the word unto thy servant, upon which thou hast caused me to hope. This is my comfort in my affliction: for thy word hath quickened me.' The way to heaven lies through many tribulations, and afflictions are the trodden path to glory. But the Lord has left his people the Bible as a cordial to support them under all their pressures from within and without. And indeed the sap of the word, and the sweetness of the promises, are never more lively relished, than when the people of God are exercised under afflictions. Then does that heavenly fountain flow most plentifully, when, created streams being dried up, the soul goes for all to the Lord. To sum up all in one word,

8. *Lastly*, It is a cure for all diseases of the soul, Prov. iv. 22. 'My words are—health to all their flesh.' There is no malady that a soul is under, but there is a suitable remedy for it in the word, 2

Tim. iii. 16, 17. frequently quoted above, being adapted by infinite wisdom to the case of poor sinners. By it the simple may be made wise, the weak strengthened, the staggering confirmed, the hard heart melted, the shut heart opened, &c. it being the means the Spirit makes use of for these and all other such purposes.

Mot. 8. Consider the honourable epithets given to the scriptures. Amongst which I name only three.

1. The scriptures of truth, Dan. x. 21. Men may wrest the scriptures to patronise their errors, but the whole word of God is most pure truth. Here are no mistakes, no weaknesses, that adhere to all human compositions. Here we may receive all that is taught us without hesitation. The hearers of men, or readers of their works, are divided into four sorts: Some like sponges, that suck up all, both good and bad: Some like sand glasses, who, what they receive at the one ear let go at the other: Some like a strainer, that lets all the good pass through, but keeps the dregs: Some like the sieve, that keeps the good grain, and lets through what is not worth. These last are only to be approved; but in the reading of the word we must be as the first sort.

2. Holy scriptures, 2 Tim. iii. 15. They are the word of a holy God, from whom nothing can come but what is holy. It consists of holy commands, holy promises, holy threatenings, instructions, directions, &c. And holy hearts will love and reverence them for that very reason.

3. *Lastly*, The book of the Lord. What can be said more to commend it to us, if we have any regard to the Lord himself? If I could tell you of a book that fell down from heaven, and were to be had by any means, who would not be curious to have such a book and study it? This is the book that contains the counsels of Heaven, and is given from Heaven to the church, to let men see the way to it.

Mot. last. Consider the danger of slighting the word. It exposes to sin, and consequently to the greatest danger. How can they keep the way of the word that do not study to acquaint themselves with it? They must needs walk in darkness that do not make use of the light; and this leads to everlasting darkness, John iii. 19. If by this word we must be judged, how can they think to stand that neglect it?

I conclude with some directions for the study of the scriptures.

1. Keep an ordinary in reading them, that ye may be acquainted with the whole; and make this reading a part of your secret duties. Not that ye should bind up yourselves to an ordinary, so as never to read by choice, but that ordinarily this tends

most to edification. Some places are more difficult, some may seem very bare for an ordinary reader; but if you would look on it all as God's word, not to be slighted, and read it with faith and reverence, no doubt ye would find advantage.

2. Set a special mark, one way or other, on those passages you read, which you find most suitable to your case, condition, or temptations; or such as ye have found to move your hearts more than other passages. And it will be profitable often to review these.

3. Compare one scripture with another, the more obscure with what which is more plain, 2 Pet. i. 20. This is an excellent means to find out the sense of the scriptures; and to this good use serve the marginal notes on Bibles. And keep Christ in your eye, for to him the scriptures of the Old Testament (in its genealogies, types, and sacrifices) look, as well as those of the New.

4. Read with a holy attention, arising from the consideration of the majesty of God, and the reverence due to him. This must be done with attention, (1.) To the words; (2.) To the sense: and (3.) To the divine authority of the scripture, and the bond it lays on the conscience for obedience, 1 Thess. ii. 13.

5. Let your main end in reading the scriptures be practice, and not bare knowledge, Jam. i. 22. Read that you may learn and do, and that without any limitation or distinction, but that whatever you see God requires, you may study to practise.

6. Beg of God and look to him for his Spirit. For it is the Spirit that dictated it, that it must be savingly understood, 1 Cor. ii. 11. And therefore before you read, it is highly reasonable you beg a blessing on what you are to read.

7. Beware of a worldly fleshly mind: for fleshly sins blind the mind from the things of God; and the worldly heart cannot favour them. In an eclipse of the moon the earth comes between the sun and the moon, and so keeps the light of the sun from it. So the world, in the heart, coming betwixt you and the light of the word, keeps its divine light from you.

8. Labour to be exercised unto godliness, and to observe your case. For an exercised frame helps mightily to understand the scriptures. Such a Christian will find his case in the word, and the word will give light to his case, and his case light into the word.

9. *Lastly*, Whatever you learn from the word, labour to put it in practice. For to him that hath shall be given. No wonder they get little insight into the Bible, who make no conscience of practising what they know. But while the stream runs into a holy life, the fountain will be the more free.