

A SUPPLEMENT
TO
THE MORNING EXERCISE.
(CONTINUED.)

SERMON V.

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WHAT SPIRITUAL KNOWLEDGE THEY OUGHT TO SEEK FOR THAT
DESIRE TO BE SAVED, AND BY WHAT MEANS THEY MAY
ATTAIN IT.

*For it is a people of no understanding : therefore he that made them will
not have mercy on them, and he that formed them will show them no
favour.—Isaiah xxvii. 11.*

IN this and the precedent verse we have a *dreadful denunciation of judgment* upon either the oppressors and enemies of God's people, or upon obstinate and incorrigible sinners among God's people ; together with *the reason of that denunciation*, or cause of that judgment threatened.

I. *The judgment denounced is,*

1. *Great desolation as to their outward state.* (Verse 10, and former part of verse 11.)

2. *Utter destruction, final ruin.*—"He that made them will not have mercy on them." (Verse 11.) It is the highest severity, where no Saviour is to be found, where "judgment" is executed "without mercy:" (James ii. 13 :) and this is amplified by the consideration,

(1.) *Partly of the inflicter of the judgment.*—It is God himself, "He that made them." They were not to fall into the hands merely of men like themselves, their fellow-creatures ; but "into the hands of the living God." (Heb. x. 31.)

(2.) *Partly of kindness formerly received from him.*—"He that made them ; He that formed them ;" that is, He that created them, gave them their being, (if we understand it of the enemies of God's people,) or He that not only made them as his creatures, but formed them to be his servants, formed them into a state and into a church, (if we understand

the words as spoken of God's people themselves,) and so had given them their being, not only a natural one, but a civil and ecclesiastical one: He that had formerly done so much for them, vouchsafed them such choice mercies, yet now would renounce all kindness to them, "have no mercy on them, show them no favour."

II. *The cause of the judgment to be inflicted.*—"It is a people of no understanding," לֹא עִם־בִּינָה, "It is not a people of understanding;" as much as to say, "It is not a people of any understanding;" or, as we read it, "It is a people of no understanding;" it is a sottish, ignorant people, such as take no notice of any thing, know not God, observe not his works, understand not their duty. Other sins, no doubt, they were chargeable with; but the Lord takes notice especially of their ignorance, and it is for that they are here threatened. Hence we take notice, that,

OBSERVATION I. *Ignorance of God, his truths or ways, is no security against his judgments.*—"Pour out thy fury upon the Heathen that know thee not," &c. (Jer. x. 25.)

OBSERV. II. *The knowledge of the will and ways of God is necessary for them that expect to find favour with God.*—They that desire God would save them, must labour to know him. That some knowledge of the will of God is needful to all those that expect to be saved, (for we set aside the case of infants,) I suppose is clear in itself. But when you hear this doctrine, you may be ready to ask, *What is that knowledge which they who would be saved should seek after?* And when that is answered, you may again inquire, *What means you are to use for the obtaining of it.* And so the case to be spoken to is this, *What spiritual knowledge, or knowledge of the things of God, (for other knowledge at present we take no notice of, however commendable in itself, or secondarily useful to higher ends,) they ought to seek for, who desire to be saved; and how such knowledge may be attained.*

THE CASE.

Of this case there be two parts. I shall speak distinctly to each: and so first show *what is that knowledge we are to seek after;* and then give *directions for the attaining of it.*

I. *What knowledge they are to labour after, who expect to be saved.*—In answer to which I must premise something by way of distinction, something by way of concession, and then add other things by way of proposition for the fuller determining the case in hand.

1. **DISTINCTION** (1.) We must distinguish between that knowledge which is simply and absolutely necessary to the salvation of all men; so that no man can be saved without it, but whosoever falls short of it must certainly perish for lack of it; such knowledge the want of which is always actually damning, and that even in them that have not the means of obtaining it, as Heathens who have no revealed light; for in them it is the occasion of their perishing: as a man's not knowing the only medicine in the world that could cure him when sick, would be the occasion of his death, and so would be his undoing, though not his fault.

DISTINC. (2.) And that knowledge, which, though it be not simply necessary to salvation, *necessitate medii*, ["through necessity of the

means,"] yet is secondarily necessary to be in those that would be saved, or necessary in some respects and upon some suppositions; as,—

(i.) On the account of the circumstances wherein men are, and the capacity they are in for the gaining of knowledge, whereby they are brought under the obligation of a command to labour after it; and so they have the necessity of duty to seek that knowledge, though that knowledge itself have not the necessity of a mean.

(ii.) Necessary, though not absolutely to the very *esse*, or "being," of a Christian and his salvation, yet to his *bene esse*, his "well-being" as a Christian, his better and more comfortable management of the affairs of his salvation. The want of this knowledge, if it be not always actually damning, as when God giveth men repentance; yet proceeding in those that are in condition to obtain it not from want of means or capacity, but from gross negligence, or contempt of the truth, it must needs be in itself damnable.

2. BY WAY OF CONCESSION. It is a difficult thing to determine just how much knowledge is absolutely necessary to salvation, to define the *minimum quod sic* * (so to speak) of divine knowledge, so as to say that whoever falls one degree short of it cannot be saved. That there be certain prime fundamental doctrines of religion, which are so necessary to salvation that men cannot in an ordinary way be saved without the knowledge of them, is, I think, confessed by the generality of those that pretend to Christian religion, or to any hopes of salvation. But which in particular those fundamentals are, and how many, is not alike clear. A controversy it is which I shall not need to touch upon, not only as being a tender point, but as not being concerned in my present design, as will further appear in the following propositions. It will little avail us in our present circumstances, amidst such plentiful means of knowledge, and so much truth as is revealed to us, to know just how much knowledge is absolutely needful to salvation; as suppose,—how much would have been sufficient for the salvation of a believing Jew before our Saviour's coming in the flesh;—or what knowledge might be sufficient for the salvation of, and consistent with truth of grace in, some poor Christian in the darker corners of the earth, as among the Indians, or Abyssinians. But our business is to see what knowledge we ourselves, considering our condition, (dismissing others in differing circumstances,) are to labour after in obedience to God's command, and for our more holy and comfortable walking with God, and carrying on the affairs of our salvation. And therefore, though my text lead me directly enough to the former, yet I shall confine myself to the latter, making it my business rather to press men to labour after much knowledge, than trouble myself or others with unedifying distinctions about or uncertain catalogues of fundamentals, or truths absolutely needful to be known; which I suppose few in the world be so magisterial as peremptorily to define. And, for my part, if I could certainly determine which those truths are, I should take heed to whom I told them, lest I should encourage men, slothful enough of themselves, to rest satisfied in a lesser measure of spiritual knowledge, when a greater might be gotten.

* "The smallest portion which is thus necessary."—EDIT.

3. These things premised, I come to answer the case in some PROPOSITIONS ; of which the first shall be this :—

PROPOSITION 1. That, supposing it were certainly defined, how much knowledge, and the knowledge of what truths, were sufficient to salvation ; yet *no man, that is in a capacity of getting more knowledge, ought to acquiesce in just so much.*—“ Unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required.” (Luke xii. 48.) For the more full understanding of this proposition, take these following rules :—

RULE 1. *By how much the better means men have for the getting of knowledge, so much the more they ought to know.*—There is more knowledge required in them that have more means, than in them that have less. Every servant’s improvement is to be according to his talent ; and the gain of *one* is not sufficient for him that hath received *five*, nor the gain of *five* for him that hath received *ten*. According to the means [which] men have, so their duty is to be judged of, and their accounts will be expected. I suppose it can scarce be doubted but that,

(1.) *They that live under the gospel since Christ’s coming in the flesh, ought to abound more in spiritual knowledge than they that lived before his coming.*—And that for this very reason, because the means of knowledge have been greater since his coming than before it, not only as to the extensiveness of them in the publication of the truth in those places where it was not heard before, but as to the efficacy of the means themselves, and the more clear revelation of the will of God in some things, which were formerly, but less clearly, revealed. The pouring out of the Spirit was not only for the further spreading of the truth, but for the more plain and full manifestation of it. The great mysteries of religion, which under the Old-Testament dispensation were more obscure, (as being wrapped up in types and figures, which were, though a shadowing of them out, yet a kind of covering to them,) are now under the gospel more clearly set forth without those veils, in their native lustre and brightness. What was then future, is now come to pass. What then was prophecy, is now become history : so that there being, as to the means, more advantages for our knowledge than there was for theirs who lived in those ages, we are engaged to labour after more. And, excepting prophecies and immediate revelations, I see no reason why vulgar saints may not now know more than patriarchs did then ; and if they may, I dare say they should.

(2.) *They that live in the Reformed world, in this age of light, should abound more in knowledge, than they that lived before the Reformation in the darkness of popery.*—A little knowledge might have gone further then than a great deal more now. The means of knowledge are now much greater, than three or four hundred years ago they were. There is not only more human learning abroad in the world, than then there was ; but the original languages in which the Scriptures were written, are better known. The word is more soundly and powerfully preached, controversies in religion are more thoroughly discussed, more good books are written, more cases stated, more errors detected, and, in a word, many truths (which though always to be found in scripture, yet were almost lost in the world in the ignorance of those ages) are anew discovered.

(3.) *They who live under better means of instruction now, should ordi-*

narly be more knowing than such as have not the like means.—They that have the word preached to them more plainly, powerfully, frequently, should know more than they who sit under an idle, ignorant ministry; they that may hear a sermon every day, if they will, than they that can scarce hear one sermon in many months. And so should they likewise, who live in religious families, where God is daily worshipped, children and servants daily instructed, know more than they who live under profane or ignorant masters or parents.

RULE II. *They that have more time for the gaining of knowledge, are concerned to know more than they that have less time.*—Not only by how much the longer men enjoy such means, the more they should know; (and more than such as have lived a less season under them: upon which account the apostle blames the Hebrews, because, “when for the time they ought to be teachers, they had need that one should again teach them which were the first principles of the oracles of God;” Heb. v. 12; and, in 2 Tim. iii. 7, he speaks of some that were “ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth;”) but likewise, by how much more leisure men have for studying the scriptures, and attending on the means of grace, while they do enjoy them, so much the more proportionably they should know. They that have plentiful estates, easy employments, few avocations, may and therefore ought to seek after a greater measure of knowledge than they who, by reason of more burdensome callings, a lower condition in the world, and the necessity of providing for themselves and their families, are not in a capacity of spending so much time in attending on those means whereby a greater proportion of knowledge might be gained. They that have their time lying on their hands, and know not how to fill it up, but with inquiring after news and fashions, studying pleasures and diversions, how much knowledge might they arrive unto, if they spent but half that time in studying the truth, and inquiring after the things of God!

RULE III. *By how much the better capacities men have for the receiving of knowledge, so much the more, cæteris paribus, they are to know.*—They that have riper parts, quicker apprehensions, stronger memories, a deeper reach, should know more than they that are naturally more weak, and less capable of learning. Although I suppose there be none that have the use of their reason, but they are capable of understanding so much of the things of God as is absolutely needful to salvation, and may be sufficient for the salvation of them, in their circumstances; yet there is a vast difference between the abilities of several persons: and therefore men are not to take their measures for their inquiries after spiritual things merely by the necessariness of the things themselves, but likewise by the abilities [which] God hath given them. So that, upon the whole, the better means and advantages in any kind men have for the gaining of knowledge, so much the more knowledge is required to be in them.

RULE IV. *By how much the more use men have for their knowledge, and by how much the more good they may do with it, so much the more knowledge will be expected of them.*—That knowledge which might do well in a private Christian, yet is not ordinarily sufficient for a minister. That which would be much in the one, might be but little in the other. And that which might do well in a child, would not be sufficient in a parent

or master of a family. They that are to instruct others in the knowledge of God, ought themselves to be more abounding in it.

PROP. II. *Men should in their seeking knowledge first study those truths which are most confessedly necessary to salvation, and before those which are apparently less necessary.*—And so principles before controversies, things essential before such as are only circumstantial. And, indeed, by how much the nearer any truth is to the foundation, so much the more they should labour after the knowledge of it : as, for instance, men should acquaint themselves,

1. *With the being and attributes of God* :—As the foundation of all service yielded to him, and expectations of rewards from him. (Psalm xiv. 4.) He that knows not God to be holy, how can he know that God requires holiness ? (Heb. xi. 6.) And then how can he himself be holy ? How can a man trust God, if he know him not to be wise, powerful, faithful ? or love him, if he know him not to be good ? or fear him, if he know him not to be just ? And it will easily follow, that he who knows not God, as he can never worship him while he lives, so he can never expect that he should save him when he dies.

2. *With the doctrine of the Trinity*.—Three persons in the Godhead, the Father, Son, and Spirit ; each person having his proper part in the salvation of sinners : the Father as the original and fountain of it, (John vi. 57,) the Son as the manager, (John xiv. 16,) and the Holy Ghost as the applier. (John xv. 26.)

3. *With their own natural state and condition*.—Their being by nature in a state of sin and misery ; as having sinned against this holy, righteous, powerful God, and thereby exposed themselves to his wrath and curse. (Eph. ii. 1—3.) They that would be delivered from the curse, must know themselves to be obnoxious to it. They that would not perish, must know themselves to be in danger of it. Men are not likely to enjoy God's favour, unless they know that they have lost it. (John xvi. 8.)

4. *With the doctrine of a Redeemer*.—And that both,

(1.) *As to the person ; who he is*.—That the Lord Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, the second person of the Trinity, is the Redeemer of sinners, (Matt. xx. 28,) and the only one ; (Acts iv. 12 ;) that God hath not left all mankind to perish in their sin and misery, but hath, out of his abundant mercy and free grace, found out a ransom for them, a Saviour to deliver them ; and that the Lord Jesus Christ is he, and none beside him : so that it is in vain to seek for salvation in any else, seeing he alone hath the words of eternal life. (John vi. 68.) He that knows nothing of a Saviour, knows nothing savingly ; nor can any man partake of redemption without some knowledge of the Redeemer. They can never come to God that know not by whom to come.

(2.) *And as to the way of his working that redemption*.

(i.) That he did, in order to the salvation of sinners, take the nature of man upon him ; (John i. 14 ; iii. 13 ;) was both God and man in one person, and still continues so to be. He had those natures united in himself, which he was to reconcile to each other.

(ii.) That not only he was *able* as being God, *fit* as being man, to satisfy divine justice for the injury sin had done it ; (Rom. iii. 24—26 ;) but

that by his obedience and death he did it to the full. (Rom. v. 10.) He that knows God to be infinitely just, and himself to be a sinner, had need know something of a sacrifice for sin, or he can never have any well-grounded hopes of escaping the hands of such a God. (1 Tim. ii. 6.)

(iii.) That Christ, being raised from the dead, and ascended into heaven, sits at the Father's right hand, and, by his intercession there, is now making application of the redemption [which] he wrought on earth. (Rom. viii. 34; Mark xvi. 19.) "He ever liveth to make intercession." (Heb. vii. 25.) Men would be in an ill condition, if redemption were wrought, and there were none to apply it; if Christ had died for them, and left them to intercede for themselves.

5. *Men should acquaint themselves with the doctrine of justification by Christ.*—That sinners must be justified by the righteousness of the Lord Jesus imputed to them, if ever they be justified at all. He is "the Lord their righteousness." (Jer. xxiii. 6.) They are "accepted in the Beloved;" (Eph. i. 6;) "found in Christ, not having their own righteousness, &c., but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith." (Phil. iii. 9.) All their own righteousness inherent in them, and wrought by them, even after regeneration, and by the help of the Spirit of grace, being finite, imperfect, short of the law, and due to it.

6. *With the way of their being made partakers of this righteousness.*—That it should be received by faith alone, as the means God hath appointed for their being interested in it. "God hath set forth Christ to be a propitiation through faith in his blood;" (Rom. iii. 25;) and therefore they that are justified, must be "justified by faith." (Rom. v. 1.) All the holiness any saint could ever arrive unto in this life, would never entitle him to Christ's righteousness, if faith were wanting.

7. *With the nature, properties, and fruit of that faith.*—That it must be an effectual, lively faith; (James ii. 17;) not only an assent of their minds to the truth of the scripture, but the consent of their hearts to the terms of the covenant; a receiving whole Christ, with an eye to all the good things he offers there, and for all those holy ends and purposes for which he is propounded to them. (John i. 12.) In a word: they are to look upon faith as the principle of their obedience and walking with God, according to that rule of righteousness [which] God hath given them.

8. *With the doctrine of sanctification.*—That God is wont to fit and frame men's hearts at first to the duties of obedience [which] he requires of them, by the work of the Spirit upon their hearts, changing them, regenerating them, and causing "old things" to pass away, and "all things" in them to "become new;" (2 Cor. v. 17;) and further to increase that fitness for and readiness to spiritual things, by his guiding, assisting, and quickening them in those holy ways into which he hath brought them, and by those ordinary means (the word and ordinances) which he hath appointed for the working and improving of their graces.

9. *With the reward God promiseth to their faith and obedience.*—In the blessedness of their souls at the end of this life, and of their whole man after the resurrection, in their being for "ever with the Lord;" (1 Thess. iv. 17;) when the unbelief and disobedience of others will be

punished with everlasting torments inflicted by him. In a word: whoever "cometh to God must believe," not only "that he is," but "that he is the rewarder of those that diligently seek him." (Heb. xi. 6.) Men ought in the beginning of religion to look to the end of it; have some sight of the goal, when they enter upon their race; know their wages, when they set about their work. The doctrine of rewards furnisheth men with the greatest incentives to holiness. Ignorance or unbelief of future recompence must needs make men negligent of present service. Take away the knowledge of heaven and hell, and ye take away all care and thoughts of religion.

These things I lay not down as an enumeration of fundamentals, or complete scheme of religion; it is sufficient for my purpose that they are some of the most necessary and substantial truths, wherein the generality of Christians are concerned; which they are therefore, especially and in the first place, to acquaint themselves with, and before those things which are less necessary to salvation, as being further from the foundation. And, indeed, this is the very method of nature: men usually seek those things first which are most necessary, and other things afterward; they first lay their foundation, and then set up their superstructures. Principles must be known before conclusions can be drawn from them. Those doctrines of religion must be first known from whence others are to be deduced, and without the knowledge of which others can be but confusedly and darkly known. This seems to have been the apostle's method, Heb. vi. 1; where he speaks of some truths, (which they are in particular, I stand not to dispute,) which were "principles," and first learned; others, as conducing to the "perfection" of the saints, unto the knowledge of which he would therefore have them go on. "He that knows not those things which must be known, knows nothing yet to any purpose."*

PROP. III. *Men should labour after such a knowledge of the truth, as that they may be able to give "a reason of the hope that is in them."* (1 Peter iii. 15.)—To show on what ground they stand, what is the foundation of their faith and hope; that the religion they profess is indeed the true religion; and that the doctrines they own are really founded upon the scripture of truth; (Dan. viii. 16; xii. 4;)+ and, in a word, they should be able to give a reason why they believe rather thus than otherwise, and hold such doctrines rather than the contrary. They should labour after such a grounded knowledge of the truths of the gospel, as that they may be able to say of them, as well as of the duties of it, that they are "fully persuaded in their own minds," (Rom. xiv. 5,) and do not take-up things upon trust, or believe the truth upon the credit of others. It is a shame for professors to be merely believers upon tradition, to see with other men's eyes, or be like the heathen idols, that "have eyes and see not." They are men, and have reasonable powers; and ought to make use of them even in the things of God, so far as they are revealed and subjected to their judgment. The spiritual man "judgeth all things, even the deep things of God." (1 Cor. ii. 10, 15.) Though they are to submit their understandings to God, yet they are not

* Ὁ μὴ εἰδὼς ἄνευ εἰδέναι χρεὶν, οὐδὲν οἶδε.—CHRYSOSTOMUS.
here is Dan. xvi. 2; which is manifestly erroneous.—EDIT.

† The reference

to resign them to men. They that will judge for themselves in the things of this life, should no less do it in the things of the other. That man that will not trust another with his estate or purse, should much less do it with his conscience and salvation.

PROP. IV. *Men should especially give themselves to the study, and labour after the knowledge, of the present truths.* (2 Peter i. 12.)—I mean those truths which are the special truths of the times, and ages, and places in which men live. We shall find, if we observe it, that God who delivers his mind and will to men *πολυμερως*, “by several parts and degrees,” doth in some ages make more clear discoveries of some truths, in others of other truths; and though the whole will of God, and all those truths which we are any way concerned to know in order to our salvation, be sufficiently laid down in the scripture; yet there is sometimes more knowledge of one truth stirring in the world, sometimes of some other. Sometimes God calls his servants more especially to preach-up, and bear witness to, such or such a particular truth, which either was less known and understood before, or is more opposed at present. Immediately after Christ’s resurrection, the great truth of that time, the then “present truth,” was, that “Jesus was the Christ,” that very Messiah whom God had promised to the fathers, and [whom] the Jews themselves did expect. This the apostles did first of all preach, confirming it especially by his resurrection from the dead. Thus, “God hath made that same Jesus both Lord and Christ.” (Acts ii. 36.) “Him hath God exalted to be a Prince and a Saviour.” (Acts v. 31.) So Philip to the eunuch. (Acts viii. 35.) And Paul, so soon as he was converted, and sent to preach, presently declares that Jesus was the “very Christ;” (Acts ix. 22;) and Peter to Cornelius, (Acts x. 42, 43;) and Apollos in Achaia. (Acts xviii. 28.) And afterwards we find that the Jews and Judaizing Christians, pertinaciously adhering to the law of Moses, gave occasion to the more full preaching of the doctrine of free grace and justification by Christ alone, and the abolishing of the legal ceremonies, as we may see in the epistle to the Romans, Galatians, Colossians, and Hebrews. And after, toward the end of the apostles’ times, the heresy of Cerinthus gave occasion to the more full vindicating [of] the doctrine of Christ’s Godhead, as we see in the gospel of John. And, some hundreds of years after that, the Pelagian heresy gave occasion for the renewed publication of the doctrine of free grace by Austin, Prosper, and others.* And in the beginning of the Reformation of religion, in the last age, the first truths God called those worthies that then lived to the preaching of, were those especially which concern the Lord Jesus Christ in his prophetic and priestly offices, such as the authority, perfection, &c., of the scripture, and the sufficiency of Christ’s satisfaction and intercession. And, to come nearer to ourselves, one great truth which hath been more clearly known and published in our age is, the doctrine of Christ’s kingly office and legislative power in relation to his church, in opposition to the usurpations and impositions of men. Now then we say, that men are called, at such times, especially to study such truths; because God doth then give them the best means and advantages for the knowing of them; or they may then do him best service in maintaining them and bearing testimony to them, when the devil and his instruments do most

* HIERONYMUS in *Catalogo Scriptorum Ecclesiast.*

oppose them. It is a shame for professors not to see, when the world is so full of light; not to have the knowledge of those truths in the minds, the talk of which is in every man's mouth.

PROP. v. *Men should labour for such knowledge as may defend them from the errors of the times and places in which they live.*—This I add to second the former proposition, from whence it follows. Thus Paul labours to establish the saints, to whom he writes, chiefly the churches before-mentioned, against the then prevailing errors of those, whether Jews or false brethren among themselves, who endeavoured to bring-in the ceremonial law upon the professors of the gospel; and therefore bids the Galatians “stand fast in their liberty,” &c. (Gal. v. 1.) Doctrinal error tends to the corruption of worship. And the apostle John, in his epistles, gives caution against those seducing spirits and antichrists, that were even then among the churches. (1 John iv. 1—8.) We find by experience, that as there be some doctrines more especially known and published in their respective times and ages, so likewise several ages and many times places have their peculiar errors, either new ones first forged or old ones new burnished. The devil makes it his business, and even sets his wits upon the tenters, to furnish the world with variety of lies, suitable to the various humours and interests of men: and when one error is detected, begins to smell rank, and go out of date, through the power and prevalency of the truth, he carefully provides another to succeed it; and if a new one be not at hand, as if his invention failed him, he many times conjures up some old dead one, and makes it walk about in a new dress, and pass for some new or newly-revived truth, when, indeed, it is but the apparition of a long-since buried error. As merchants are wont to observe what commodities please most in such and such places, and at such and such times, and accordingly take care to supply the markets; so the devil looks what wares will vend best in such a country, at such a season, what will be most grateful to the lusts and interests of men, and then will be sure to supply them with those most which he sees take most. Diseases have their times and seasons, and are then most dangerous when they prevail most, and spread farthest. Errors have their times and seasons too, (there is an “hour” of these as well as other temptations, Rev. iii. 10,) when they are most infectious and dangerous; and therefore, as, when diseases are epidemical, every one almost will be taking antidotes, so, when errors are epidemical, it is the wisdom of every Christian to fence himself against them. And though we do not say, that every private believer is bound to be a school-divine, to be exact in all the niceties and controversies which may arise about matters of religion; (a man may be saved that never read Aquinas nor Scotus;) yet, sure, every one that is capable of it should labour so to understand the doctrine of religion, as to be able to know what is truth, and what is error; and to be so established in the belief of the truth, as that, though he cannot answer all the quirks and captions of a wrangling sophister, yet he may see a reason (as before) for what he believes, and for his firmly adhering to it. As if a subtle disputer should bring an argument to prove that the sun is not up at noon-day, though a man were not able presently to discover the fallacy, yet he would not lightly believe a thing so contrary to his very sense. It is good, I am sure, for Christians to

be so established against reigning errors, as that though an angel from heaven should labour to propagate them, yet to be pertinacious and graciously obstinate in rejecting them.

PROP. VI. *Men should seek especially for such knowledge, and study such truths, as have the greatest influence upon practice.*—And so may make them most useful in their places, and may further them most in the universal exercise of powerful godliness. Indeed the whole doctrine of the gospel is called “the truth which is according to godliness.” (1 Tim. vi. 3; Titus i. 1.) There is no one truth revealed by God to us, but may have its use in our conversations, and influence on our practice, but yet some truths more directly and immediately than others; and such as those we should especially study. We should labour to know not only what we must believe, but what we must do; not only what thoughts we are to have of God, but what affections towards him; that so not only our minds may be established, but our conversations rightly ordered.* We must not rest in the bare knowledge even of the greatest truths; nor labour to know, merely that we may know or that we may talk, but that we may act suitably to our knowledge. *Discamus non opinioni sed vitæ*: “We should learn, not merely that we may be able to maintain an opinion, but that we may know how to guide our lives and govern our actions.” The knowledge of the most excellent truths may be unprofitable to us, if we know not our duty too. It is best for us to know those things which may make us best; such as may further our graces rather than heighten our reputation, make us rather useful than famous, and serviceable to God rather than admired by men. It is a vain thing to know what to hold, and not know what to do; to understand controversy, and be ignorant of duties. *Ne quære, saith one, in scientiâ oblectamentum animæ, sed remedium*: “We should not labour to know these things merely which may delight our minds, but such as may heal our souls;” to know our distemper and our medicines, our wanderings and our way, our defects and our duties; and not only those things, neither, which concern us as Christians in the general, but in such ranks, orders, and relations as God hath set us in: and so that which is every man’s special duty, should be every man’s special study. As ministers should know how to behave themselves “in the house of God,” (1 Tim. iii. 15,) so should magistrates, how they are to behave themselves in the commonwealth, masters in their families, husbands toward their wives, wives toward their husbands, both toward their children, and they again toward their parents. In a word: men are to study those things which are most profitable; such as will better their condition, and not only improve their understanding. You know, a sick man had rather have a good medicine than fine clothes; he minds more the easing of his pain, than the dressing-up of his body. That which will make you spruce, will not always make you well. Fine trappings will not cure a lame horse, nor the painting of the face heal the diseases of the spleen or liver. That knowledge which adorns your mind, yet may not always mend your

* *Χρη δε ου μόνον ειδεσθαι τι προσωκει περι του Θεου δοξαζειν, αλλα και κατα τους εκεινους πολετευεσθαι νομους.*—THEODORETUS. “It is necessary for us not only to know the sentiments which we ought to entertain concerning God, but also to conduct ourselves according to those laws which he has enjoined.”—EDIT.

heart. To conclude this: men must labour to know "the truth as it is in Jesus;" (Eph. iv. 21); so to know as to feel it, and be under the influence of it; or to know the truth to that end for which Christ teacheth it; that is, that men may be better, as well as wiser, more ready to do their Master's will, as well as know it. Men know the truth as they should, and as Christ would have them, when their knowledge puts them upon the great duties of mortification and sanctification: "That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man; and be renewed in the spirit of your mind; and put on the new man." (Eph. iv. 22—24.)

PROP. VII. *Every man should labour to get as much spiritual knowledge as he can, by the means of the knowledge he hath [gotten], and as he can get without the neglect of other necessary duties.*—It is not for nothing that the apostle prays for the Colossians, "that they might be filled with the knowledge of God's will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding;" (Col. i. 9); and exhorts the Corinthians, though "in malice" they were "children," yet "in understanding to be men." (1 Cor. xiv. 20.) If Christians ought to grow in every grace, why not in knowledge, which is itself a grace, and helpful to all other graces? We are to be accountable for the means [which] we have of getting our knowledge increased, and therefore, sure, are to labour that we may get it increased. And though a less measure of knowledge might serve turn to bring a man to heaven, yet, 1. It is contrary to that spirit of ingenuity, that largeness of heart towards the things of God, which is supposed to be in believers, to stint themselves in the knowledge of the truth, and to be content to know only just so much as may carry them to heaven. That were to study spiritual truths, not so much because they love them, as because they cannot want them; and so not of choice but necessity. 2. Even where a less measure of knowledge might save a man, yet a greater should be endeavoured after; because it might be otherwise so useful: for,

(1.) *It might make his work more easy.*—Clearness of knowledge takes off much from the difficulty of duty. The better a man sees his work, the more easily he may do it. The most skilful artist may fumble when he works by a dim light. *That man is like to go on most readily in his way who not only knows the right one, but the wrong ones too, those turnings and by-paths which might mislead him; and, seeing the monuments of others' mistakes, may be warned by their wanderings.*

(2.) *More knowledge might make his way more pleasant.*—The more delectable objects a man hath to entertain his eyes, the more delight he may take in travelling; when night-journeys, as they have more of danger, so have less of pleasure. A clear sight of spiritual things may help a Christian in his way, not only as a direction, but as a delight.

(3.) *It might make himself more useful, more helpful to others.*—Though less knowledge might suffice us for ourselves as to our *general* duties, yet more will make us helpful to others, and enable us better for the performance of *relative* duties.* The more knowledge we have, the

* *Nec in hoc tantum te accerso ut proficias, sed ut prosis.*—SENECÆ *Epist.* "I send for you, not only that you make proficiency yourself, but that your knowledge may be profitable to others."—EDIT.

more we may communicate. Those that understand most themselves, may best instruct and direct others. They that are well skilled in their own duties, are most fit to teach others theirs: "Filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another." (Rom. xv. 14.)

And thus we see, in these propositions, what knowledge we are to labour after in order to salvation. Only I add two cautions against two ordinary vices, which men are very liable to in their inquiring after knowledge:—

CAUTION 1. *Take heed of curiosity, which is the itch of the mind.*—

It is not a kindly appetite, but a fond longing, or an ambitious, vain affectation of knowing those things which we are least concerned, or not at all concerned, to know, and which, if known, would do us little good. It is a lust; and therefore not to be indulged in ourselves, but mortified. It appears,

1. *In making inquiries into those things which God hath not revealed.*—

"The secret things belong unto the Lord our God: but those things which are revealed unto us and to our children," &c. (Deut. xxix. 29.) This curiosity our Saviour checks in his disciples: "Wilt thou," say they, "at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts i. 6.) Our Saviour replies: "It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power." God hath revealed enough to us in his word for our use and furtherance in faith and holiness; and to desire to know more, is to desire to be wiser than God would have us. We must not pry into those things which it is only God's prerogative to know. The angels themselves know not some things, and we should be content, as well as they, not to be omniscient.* It is dangerous peeping into God's ark: you know who smarted for it. (1 Sam. vi. 19.) If knowing what God hath revealed do not save us, I am sure searching into what he hath not revealed will not. God hath told us so much of his mind in the word, as may take up our whole man in the study of it; and we cannot busy ourselves in inquiring into his secrets without neglecting the study of those things which are revealed, and are most useful for us.

2. *Curiosity appears in inquiring into the reason of God's will.*—If rulers in the world will not have their laws disputed; if *Volumus et jubemus* † be their style; and though they do not give the reason of their commands, yet they count their commands reason enough for their subjects' obedience; sure, we should allow God as much as we do his creatures. We should reckon God's will is never unreasonable. His commands are as wise as [they are] holy; and if He hath not revealed to us the reason of his will, it is because he would exercise our humility, and have us own his sovereignty in our obedience, and acknowledge him to be the Supreme Judge, as well as Author, of our duty.

3. *The same we may say of men's inquiring into those things which con-*

* *Nihil igitur certius est quàm alterum angelicæ cognitionis genus, quo post Deum, et quæ in Deo sunt, reliqua intelligunt, non ita perfectum esse, quin in hoc cognitionis genere quotidie proficere possint, novi semper aliquid discendo ac novo modo cognoscendo.*—ZANCHIUS *De Dei Operibus*. "Angels know God and his inherent perfections; but it is most certain, that, beyond this, their second kind of knowledge, by which they understand other things, is not so perfect as to preclude the possibility of their daily proficiency in it, by their continually learning something new, and knowing it after a new manner."—EDIT. † "It is our will and pleasure, and we hereby command."—EDIT.

cern others rather than themselves.—When men are learned in other men's duties, but ignorant of their own; can spy "motes" in other men's eyes, and not see "beams" in their own; (Matt. vii. 3;) can criticize upon little faults in their neighbours, and yet overlook much greater in themselves.

4. *Men are curious, when they study things rather difficult and nice, than useful and edifying; such as are more fine than substantial, new or rare, instead of great and weighty.*—Such seem to have been *κενοφωνιαί*, those "vain babblings,"* against which the apostle cautions Timothy, (1 Tim. vi. 20,) great words of little signification, a noise of something worth just nothing: and such those "questions and strifes of words" about which some doted. (Verse 4.) The vainest, emptiest persons amongst us are not more fantastical in their garb or diet, than some others are in their studies and inquiries. They are for that knowledge which is most fashionable. Their very minds must be in the mode. Their notions must be the neatest and newest. They disdain what is common, though never so profitable. What they like must have newness and variety, or else abstruseness and difficulty, to commend it; something, be sure, beside usefulness. They have sick, queasy stomachs, distempered palates; cannot eat their spiritual food unless it be minced, nor relish the most wholesome truths unless set off with a philosophical gust. In a word: they are rather for odd things than good; such as may gratify their wanton fancies, rather than bring any saving benefit to their souls.

CAUTION II. *Take heed of pride, which, we may say, is a worm very apt to breed out of the tree of knowledge.*—"Knowledge puffeth up." (1 Cor. viii. 1.) It is a hard thing for men to know much, and not know that they do so. Many that have great knowledge of other things, yet know too little of themselves, of their own infirmities, of their own follies, and those things in themselves which might keep them humble. This brings me to the second part of the case propounded; namely,

II. *What means we should use for the obtaining such knowledge as is needful for us.*

1. *Here the first thing we should direct to is humility.*—He that would be truly wise must labour to be humble. He that would ever arrive at any height of knowledge, let him get low thoughts of himself.† Pride, and a conceit of a man's own knowledge, is one of the greatest hindrances of his knowing: "If any man think that he knoweth any thing, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know." (1 Cor. viii. 2.) "There is more hope of a fool than a man" that is "wise in his own conceit." (Prov. xxvi. 12.) Humility makes men teachable; sense of ignorance makes them willing to learn; ‡ and God promiseth to teach them. "The meek will he guide in judgment: and the meek will he teach his way." (Psalm xxv. 9.)

2. *We must deny ourselves in our carnal reasonings, subject our under-*

* *Ματαιολογίαί* apud Theophylactum. "Theophylact renders the word *frivolous verbiage, silly talk.*"—EDIT.

† *Homo sapiens est quamdiu quærit sapientiam; ubi autem se putat ad ejus culmen pervenisse, desipit.* Sap. Arab. apud DRUSIUM. Drusius gives this as an Arabian proverb: "A man is wise so long as he searches after wisdom; but when once he vainly imagines himself to have gained its summit, he is actually running down the declivity of folly."—EDIT.

‡ *Ἀρχὴ γνῶσεως τῆς ἀγνοίας ἡ γνῶσις.*—THEODORETUS *De curandis Græcorum Affectionibus.* "True wisdom has its commencement in the consciousness which a man feels of his own ignorance."—EDIT.

standings to the authority of God, leave something for faith to do,* and not think to be such absolute masters of all divine mysteries, as to receive no more of them than our own reason can comprehend, when it is the highest reason in the world to believe whatever God speaks, though our reason cannot reach it.—Our wisdom in spiritual things must begin in our being fools in the world's account. "If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise." (1 Cor. iii. 18.) Though we must use our reason in the search of spiritual truths, yet not reason only: many things purely are the objects of our faith, and of them reason is no competent judge.†

3. *We must be diligent in the reading and studying of the scriptures, as the repository, the fountain of spiritual knowledge.*—"Search the scriptures," saith our Saviour Christ. (John v. 39.) "O how I love thy law! it is my meditation all the day," saith David. (Psalm cxix. 97.) "Give attendance to reading," saith Paul. (1 Tim. iv. 13.) I have heard of a cardinal, that either acknowledged or boasted, that he never read the Bible but once in his life. Reading other books, sententiaries, and canonists, might make him wise enough to be a cardinal, but not wise enough to be a Christian. Where should we seek for knowledge but in the fountain of knowledge? How should we better understand God's law, than by receiving it at his mouth? (Job xxii. 22.)

4. *Yet we are not so confined to the scripture alone, as that we may not make use of other good books, the labours of such faithful servants of God as have best studied his word, and best understood his mind.*—How doth this age and place abound with good and sound and profitable books! And well it were, that it abounded with none else: however, we have our choice, and that too in our own tongue. Private Christians need not the learned languages to make them learned in the scriptures. Expositors we have, to help us to understand the meaning of the word; practical writers and casuists, to quicken our affections, and apply truths to our consciences; controversial ones, to discover errors, and arm us against them; and systematical and catechetical ones, to methodize our knowledge, and order what we know, and show the connexion of spiritual truths among themselves, and their dependence upon each other, that so we may have a map of the way to heaven before us, a full prospect of our whole religion at one view. And were it not well if some would spare a little time from their shop-books for such books as these? if when they cannot be getting money, they would get knowledge? when they cannot be dealing with good customers, they would deal with good authors, such as might make them more wise, when not more rich?

5. *We should be diligent and regular in attending on the word preached.*—As it is the duty of ministers to "be instant, and preach the word in season, out of season;" (2 Tim. iv. 2;) so it is the duty of people

* Ἡγεσθω ἡ πίστις, καὶ ἕτεραί ἡ γνώσις.—*Idem.* "Let faith but precede as the commander, and knowledge will submissively follow in its train."—EDIT. † Ὅταν δὲ καὶ σοὶ τὰ τοιαῦτα ζητοῦντι ἀπορία τις ἐκείνη, ἀποφῆρε τοῖς ζητοῦμενοις ἐπισημὴ λύσιν, πίστιν.—JUSTINUS MARTYR in *Exposit. Fidei.* "But, when you are likewise engaged in such inquiries as these, should any doubt arise within your breast, bring forth and allege this faith, as an expeditious and effectual solution of those things which are called in question."—EDIT. Τῷ *disputa, ego credo.* "You may dispute, while I believe."—EDIT.

to hear it. Reading the scriptures and good books is not sufficient for those that are in a capacity to hear. The preaching of the word is the great ordinance appointed by God, for the instruction, edification, and conversion of those that are to be saved; and it is that which God doth usually accompany with most life and power. As it is in other cases, so it is for the most part here: you are commonly more affected with what you hear men speak, than with what they write. Ministers may write or print their sermons, but not their affections; not that power and spirit of the word which themselves feel, and you perceive in them. You are most likely to be warmed by the word, when you hear it coming out of a hot heart. When you see your teachers affected with the truths they deliver, and speaking like those that feel what they speak, you are most likely to be affected too. Though, indeed, the great reason of hearing is, because it is God's ordinance; and He hath not only taken care that the word should be written, that so all may read it, but hath appointed officers, too, purposely to preach it, that so all may hear it.

But, withal, be sure to be regular in your hearing. "Take heed *how* you hear;" (Luke viii. 18;) and "take heed *what* you hear;" (Mark iv. 24;) and from both will follow, that you must take heed *whom* you hear too. Hear those that are most knowing, and best able to instruct you; those that are most sound, and least likely to mislead you. Do not choose to put your souls under the conduct of blind guides. Seek for the law at *their* mouths *whose* lips do best preserve knowledge. (Mal. ii. 7.) And when you have found such, keep close to them. Settle yourselves under the guidance of some faithful pastor, upon whose ministry you may ordinarily attend. That running to and from, which is usual among us, is quite another than what Daniel speaks of, and, I am sure, is not the way to increase knowledge. (Dan. xii. 4.) Rolling stones gather no moss. Such rovers seldom hit upon the right way. Such wandering stars may be soonest bemisted. They that thus run from one minister to another, may soon run from one opinion to another, and from one error to another. I dare safely say, you may get more sound knowledge of the things of God by constant attendance upon the ministry of *one* of less abilities, than by rambling up and down to hear *many*, though of the greatest gifts. It is a great advantage to your gaining knowledge to hear a minister's whole discourse, and be able to take up the full design of his work, and not merely to hear *in transitu*, ["in passing,"] by snatches, to pick up here a notion and there a notion, or hear one man's doctrine in the morning, and another's application in the afternoon. It is no wonder if men that run to and fro, be "tossed to and fro." They that are so light of hearing may easily be "carried about with every wind of doctrine;" (Eph. iv. 14;) the word of Christ seldom dwells in such vagabond hearers.

6. *Pray earnestly for knowledge.*—We are to cry after wisdom, and "lift up our voice for understanding." (Prov. ii. 3.) "Ask it of God." (James i. 5.) Especially address we ourselves to the Lord Jesus Christ as "the Apostle and High Priest of our profession;" (Heb. iii. 1;) the great Prophet and Doctor of the church; "in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge;" (Col. ii. 3;) "who of God is made unto us wisdom;" (1 Cor. i. 30;) who liveth "in the bosom of

the Father," and declares him to us. (John i. 18.) He that was his Father's Counsellor in making his laws, and his Messenger in publishing them, is best able to make us understand them. As it is our duty to hear him, so it is his business to instruct us: only, beside the use of all other means, we must look to him for his teaching. He only can make all means effectual; and none learn as they should, but they that learn of him. There is no learning like that we get upon our knees: that is the only saving knowledge which we fetch from heaven. If you put your children to a trade, you will have them learn it of such as are most skilful in it. If you would yourselves understand any art well, you seek for the best artist you can to instruct you. Who can teach you all things like Him that knows all things? Who can enlighten you like Him who is "the true Light?" (John i. 9.) Men, when they teach their scholars, oftentimes complain of their dulness; they can but propound their notions to them, not beget an understanding in them.* And ministers complain of their hearers, as the apostle did of the Hebrews, that they are "dull of hearing." (Heb. v. 11.) They spend their strength upon them; but cannot work the truth into them. But the Lord Jesus Christ is such a Teacher as is beyond all teachers. He can give "the Spirit of wisdom and revelation," as it is called, (Eph. i. 17,) and promiseth to do it. (John xiv. 26.) He can give inward light as well as outward, eyes as well as objects, understandings to receive the truth, as well as truths to employ your understandings.

7. *Take fit time for the getting knowledge.*—You have a great deal to learn; you had need be early up, that you may have the most time and the best time. Begin young, before your minds be corrupted with errors, or possessed with prejudices; before you have learned too much of those things which must be unlearned, if ever you would learn the things of God. It is a great advantage in this case, when men are instructed in the scriptures from their childhood; when the first thing they learn is, to know God and Christ and themselves, their own condition, their duty, their hopes. (2 Tim. iii. 15.) The time of youth is the best time for getting knowledge: as of other things, so of spiritual things. There is then least within to keep knowledge out; and what is then received usually enters most deeply, and proves to be most durable.† The more pliable the wax is, the deeper the impression; and the deeper the impression is, the more likely it is to last. "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it." (Prov. xxii. 6.) It is, I am sure, a preposterous

* *Culpa docentis*

*Scilicet arguitur, quod levā in parte mamillæ
Nil salit Arcadico juveni.*—JUVENALIS *Sat.* vii. 158—160.

"The pay, indeed! what learnt he since he came?"

The boy's an ass! the master bears the blame!

The hapless master has not done his part,

Because the blockhead wants a pulse at heart!"—OWEN'S Translation.

† *Qui legem dicit in pueritā similis est ei qui scribit in chartā novā; qui in senectute, similis est ei qui scribit in chartā veterē.*—R. ELEAZ. *apud* DRUSIUM. Drusius, in his Hebrew Proverbs, gives this as the saying of Rabbi Eleazer: "He who learns the law in his youth, resembles him that writes easily on new and pliable parchment; but he who begins to learn it in his old age, is like a man that tries to write on old and shrivelled parchment."—EDDT.

course, to learn other things before you learn what is most necessary ; to get a trade before you have a religion ; to learn to know the world before you know God.

8. If you say, this concerns your children, rather than yourselves, I add, *Be much in teaching others the things of God.*—That is the way to learn them more fully yourselves. The communicating your knowledge is the way to increase it. You will get more than you give ; and while you impart it, you will best retain it. While you instruct others, God will instruct you ; and you may come to see more in his truths when you teach them [to] others, than ever you did when you learned them first yourselves : not that every professor of the gospel is to be a public preacher of the gospel ; private persons are not to invade an office to which God never called them. But yet private Christians may be a kind of private teachers ; *they* may read the scriptures in their houses, *who* yet may not take upon them to explain it in the public ; *they* may catechise, and, as Abraham, teach their “children and their households” to know “the way of the Lord,” (Gen. xviii. 19,) *who* are not to instruct congregations ; *they* may exhort one another, and admonish one another, and teach one another, in godly discourse and conference, communicating each other’s experiences, and solving each other’s doubts, *who* yet are not to usurp a work into their hands, for which Christ hath appointed a particular office in his church.

9. *Be sure to practise what you know, and live up to what you have learned.*—Doing duty is the way to gain knowledge. Ordinarily, the more holy you are, the more really wise you are, or are likely to be. The better your hearts are, the clearer your heads will be, as to the knowledge of those spiritual things you are most concerned to know. You will most easily learn to know what you love most to do. Though the receiving [of] the truths of God be the immediate office of the understanding, yet the affections, where they are right, will help the understanding in its work. The purifying of the heart will rid it of those lusts which are wont to steam and vapour up into the head, and darken the eyes of the mind, and hinder it from a right receiving of spiritual truths.* Where sanctification is promoted in heart and life, knowledge will certainly be increased too. They that exercise themselves unto godliness, and thereby show their love to God’s law, shall not want for the knowledge of it. They that love his ways shall not want for a guide. “The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him ; and he will show them his covenant.” (Psalm xxv. 14.) “If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God,” &c. (John vii. 17.)

USES.

USE 1. This doctrine INFORMS US, 1. *How miserable they are that are without knowledge.*—Poor, ignorant, blind sinners, that know nothing of God and Christ, and the mysteries of the gospel, and the way of duty ! but especially they that enjoy the means of knowledge, and are in a capacity of obtaining it ! Woe be to them that are ignorant in an age of knowledge, blind in a land of light, see so little even in “a valley of

* *Cupiditas hostis intelligentiæ.* “Lust and cupidity are enemies to the understanding.”
—EDIT.

vision ;" that are ignorant in England, ignorant in London ; that are ignorant because they will be ignorant, are in the dark because they love darkness ! We may even wonder at many, what shift they make to maintain their ignorance when so much knowledge is abroad ; but that they draw the curtains and close their eyes, and wink away the light, and, instead of looking for saving knowledge, they hope to be excused by their ignorance ! What, though such as are under an invincible ignorance of revealed truths may not be damned for not believing what they have not heard, or for not doing what they have not known ? they are miserable enough in not knowing what might save them, as well as in their not practising the little they do know ; which, though it be not sufficient to make them happy, yet is sufficient to make them inexcusable. And what is this to those that are so deeply ignorant under the means of knowledge ? Who is there among us, but might come to know so much as is needful to his salvation ? Who is there but might hear good ministers, or hath some good relations, or might converse with some good people, or read some good book ? Who is there but hath, or may have, a Bible, and a Catechism ? And so long as men have the Bible in their hands, they can never be excused if they perish in their ignorance. So long as Christ is the Prophet of his church, and promiseth his Spirit to them that ask him, and offereth so freely to instruct them ; the case of those that are among and converse with God's people, and yet remain ignorant, must needs be desperate. Is it so great a matter to hear the word, to read the scriptures, and to pray to God for an understanding of them ? Who will pity a man that perisheth for thirst, and yet sits by a fountain ? or that starves for hunger, and yet may come every day to a full granary ?

2. *How foolish are they that cry down knowledge, and consequently cry up ignorance !*—Make that the mother of devotion, which is indeed the parent of irreligion ! as if *they* were like to do most *who* know least, as if *they* were the best servants *who* were least acquainted with their master's will ; or might be "wise to salvation," and yet ignorant of the truth ! Others there are too, who, under the name of "head-knowledge," do upon the matter cry down all knowledge, at least which themselves have not reached, and care not for seeking after. Because some men have only a notional knowledge, floating in their heads, these persons are ready to condemn all knowledge under that notion. They have got a fine word by the end, and are resolved to make much of it. A form of speech they have taken up, as a way of excusing their own sloth and ignorance, by declaiming against those that are better taught. Heart-knowledge without head-knowledge is nonsense in divinity as well as reason : it is but fire without light, and so at the best but that which the apostle ascribes to the Jews,—“a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge.” (Rom. x. 2.)

3. *How wicked are they, how great is their sin, that keep others from knowledge !*—Some there be that would persuade men from labouring after it ; tell them, “Private persons need not be so knowing ; they may be saved with less learning, and less teaching ; a little knowledge will carry them to heaven, if they do but live honestly and do their duty.” And is it possible for a man to live honestly without knowledge, or do his duty

without understanding his duty? or, I add, to believe as he should, without knowing what to believe? Can you be religious by instinct? or do the will of God by guess, though you never inquire after it? Why do they not as well tell men, that they may be rich enough, if they do but keep to their shops, and sell their goods, though they do not understand their trade? or that they may maintain their health, if they do but eat and drink, though they cannot distinguish between meat and poison? Others there be, who, if they cannot persuade men against knowledge, will do their best to hinder them from the means of obtaining it. Such are the popish clergy, that keep the people from reading the scriptures; would have God's revealed will kept secret, or known to none but *themselves*, who never intend to do it; at least, no more of it known than pleaseth holy church; that is, no more than is for the interest of the Pope's pride, and the priests' paunches. Knowledge hath already done them no small mischief; and how can *that* choose but be too much light *which* endangers the ruin of their kingdom of darkness? Thus, those scribes, or Jewish lawyers, "took away the key of knowledge: they entered not in themselves" into the kingdom of heaven, "and them that were entering-in they hindered:" (Luke xi. 52:) and the Jews forbade the apostles to preach "to the Gentiles, that they might be saved." (1 Thess. ii. 16.) And how great a sin is it to grudge others the grace of Christ, and the kingdom of God! to drive a design for the damnation of souls! It is a wretched thing for men to build their greatness upon the ruin of others, and rather to let thousands of souls be damned, than their stakes should not be saved. Doubtless, if they considered how little comfort they are like to have in hell, in the society of those [whom] they have brought thither, they would at least be content to perish alone.

USE II. *What a REPROOF is here for ignorant souls!*—They that are ignorant, not because they want the means of knowledge; but either because they hate it, or because they are too busy, or too lazy, or too proud to learn! I would bespeak such but even in their own language: "Why should you be wiser than your forefathers, and wiser than your teachers?" They that lived before you or I were born, were fond of the truth, studied the scriptures, inquired into God's will, made his law their "meditation," their "delight," their "counsellor:" so did David; (Psalm cxix. 24, 97;) such an one was Daniel; (ix. 2;) and such were other prophets; (1 Peter i. 11, 12;) and such were the apostles: it was their glory to have the mind of Christ; (1 Cor. ii. 16;) and such were the primitive Christians: the Bereans were commended for searching the scriptures; (Acts xvii. 11;) and such [were] the martyrs: they would have made much of any single leaf of the Bible. And why then should you be wiser than they? Why should you think to be saved without knowledge, when they could not? Have you found out any newer, or nearer, or better way to heaven, than they knew of? Will God be more favourable to you than to them? Will he dispense with your ignorance, and would not with theirs? And so, "Why must you needs be wiser than your teachers?" They are fain to study the scriptures, and labour to know the will of God, and spend their time and strength in the search of truth, and count it their wisdom so to do, both that they may "save themselves and them that hear them;" and what need they go so far

about, if there were a shorter cut to heaven? What need they seek so much knowledge, if less would serve their turn? What need they weaken their bodies, and waste their spirits, and shorten their days, that they may teach you the good knowledge of the Lord, and instruct you in the things that concern your peace, if you may be saved without knowing them? If ignorance were so innocent a thing as many think it, ministers might save their breath and strength for better purposes, than the teaching of those that have no need of it. Is it not a great shame, that there is so much ignorance among those that profess to be enlightened? Alas! how few be there that can give any tolerable account of the principles they own! How few have any faith but an implicit one! any religion but a traditional one! How many are themselves guilty of what they blame in Papists! Papists believe as the church (suppose a council or Pope) believes; and how Protestants believe as their parents, or as their ministers, believe! and so "their faith stands not in the power of God," but "in the wisdom," or gifts, or parts, or authority, "of men." (1 Cor. ii. 5.)

USE III. FOR EXHORTATION. *Let every one that desires to be saved, labour after such knowledge in spiritual things as is most conducing to so high an end.*—Labour for the knowledge of the best things, and for as much of it as you can get. Do not be afraid of too much wisdom, of being overcharged with spiritual knowledge. There is no danger that this learning should make you mad. To enforce the duty, consider,

1. *How useful this knowledge is.*—"That the soul be without knowledge is not good." (Prov. xix. 2.) Knowledge in the mind is as necessary and useful as eyes in a guide. What a leader is to his followers, or a driver to a chariot, that the mind is to the man.* He had need of eyes that is to be an inspector or leader of others. As the eye is the overseer of the body, so the understanding is of the whole; and therefore knowledge is as useful in the one, as light in the other. And as the knowledge of natural things is useful to a man as a man, so is the knowledge of spiritual things most useful to him as a Christian; and that,

(1.) *In the exercise of holiness, the guidance of his will and affections, and ordering of his actions in relation to his highest end.*—The will is of itself *cæca facultas*, "a blind faculty;" and the affections are no better. The will can command, but cannot judge. It hath authority over the inferior powers; but such as must be regulated by the discretion of the understanding. And the affections are, as it were, the legs of the soul. They can go this way and that way; but they must have the eye of the mind to superintend their motion; like a blind man carrying a lame one on his shoulder, "who lends his own legs, and borrows the other's eyes."† So that, though the understanding's work be only to discern, consider, judge; yet without its performing that work the will and affections can never rightly do theirs. You can never love or hate, choose or refuse, as you should, such objects as are presented to you,

* The mind is commonly called *το ἡγεμονικόν, το ἡνιοχόν*. ["the governing and directing principle."] So HIEROCLES: *Το μὲν κριτικόν, ὡς ἡνιοχόν το δε ἔπομενον, ὡς ἡνιοχόν μόνον.*—*In Carmina Pythagor.*, vers. 67, p. 293. "The one of these is the faculty of judging, which acts as charioteer; the other follows as it may be guided, like a horse which obeyeth him who holds the bridle."—EDIT. † Πόδας χρῆσας ὀμμάτια χρῆσαμενος.—*Anthologia Græca.*

unless you first pass a right judgment upon those objects, and the understanding determine of their being good or evil; and the understanding cannot judge aright, if it be not informed aright. It cannot lead you, if it be not itself enlightened. You can never love God supremely, if your understandings do not judge him to be supremely lovely. If ever you would duly prosecute your true interest, you must be first acquainted with it, and have it rightly stated. If you would do your duty, you must first know it. You must of necessity either neglect or mis-perform it, if you know not the rule of your doing it. Where holiness is your work, knowledge must be your director. And the more knowledge you have, the more fit you will be for the practice of holiness. The clearer your light and the better your eyes, the more circumspectly you will walk. The more you see the nature, the beauty, the benefit of holiness, the more holy you may be.

(2.) *Knowledge will be most useful for the avoiding of sin.*—The more knowledge you have of the nature of sin, the abundance of it in yourselves, its offensiveness to God; the more knowledge you have of the rule, the exactness, the purity, the spirituality, and extent of the law; and so the better able you are to judge what sin is, and what its consequences are; the better you may escape it. The clearer your knowledge, and the stronger your convictions are of the evil of sin, the more arguments you are furnished with to persuade your hearts against it. A good treasure of spiritual knowledge will best help you to maintain your spiritual warfare. When you know not only your Leader and your weapons and your reward, but your enemies too, and their stratagems and way of fighting, you are likely then to be most courageous in your combat.

(3.) *Knowledge will be greatly useful to you for your profiting by ordinances.*—The better you understand the nature and use and ends of them, the more good you are likely to get by them. The more you know of the word, the more you will still learn by it. If the foundation of spiritual knowledge be well laid, ordinances will more easily build you up. Not only the work of ministers would be more easy, if their hearers were better catechised; there would not be such danger of missing the mark by shooting over people's heads, they would not lose so much labour nor spend so much strength in vain, they should not need so much to study plainness, and be inculcating principles, and lispng out the first rudiments of religion as to those that are but babes in knowledge:—but hearers likewise would receive the word with more profit; they would more easily be brought down under convictions, feel the power of exhortations, be quickened to duties, yield to reproofs, entertain admonitions, and taste the sweetness of God's consolations, and so more easily obtain the end of their hearing. To conclude: if your understandings were more enlightened, your affections would either be sooner warmed, or their heat be more regular; if more truth were known, more duty would be done; if our doctrine were better understood, our application would be more effectual.

2. *Spiritual knowledge is most delightful.*—“The knowledge of wisdom” is said to be “to the soul, as the honey and the honey-comb” to the taste. (Prov. xxiv. 13, 14.) The knowledge of truth, which is the proper object of the understanding, doth usually carry something of

pleasure in it; and the more excellency there appears in any truth, the more delectable a thing it is to know it. But there be no truths so excellent as spiritual ones, such as concern God and Christ and the mysteries of salvation; and therefore the knowledge of none is so delightful. What high and refined delights doth the contemplation of God in all his holy attributes and excellences afford to glorious angels, and "the spirits of just men made perfect!" How do those heavenly creatures despise the gross and feculent pleasures of the sensual world! And though saints here upon earth cannot rise so high in their delights, because not so high in their knowledge, yet they may find incomparably more pleasure in knowing the things of God, even according to their present capacity, than the greatest voluptuaries can in the enjoyment of the creature. If a philosopher can take more pleasure in the study of nature, or a mathematician in his demonstrations, than a sensualist can in his feasts and treatments; if lines and angles can do more for the mind of the one, than meats and drinks for the palate of the other; how far then do the delights a gracious soul finds in the study and search of divine truths transcend both! And this pleasure is yet more heightened by the interest [which] saints have in the truths they know; when they are not only excellent in themselves, but of the greatest consequence to them. To know God, and that as their God; to know Christ, and that he is a Christ for them; to know the saints' privileges, and that they belong to them; to know the promises, and that they have a share in them; to know there is a heaven, a state of future glory and blessedness, and that themselves are concerned in it:—this must needs be a delightful knowledge. You can take some pleasure in seeing a rich country, and pleasant seat, and fine houses; but much more if you see them as they that are to inherit them. If a natural man may take some pleasure in the mere notion of divine truths, how much more may he do it that is concerned in them!

3. *This knowledge doth greatly adorn and beautify the soul.*—It is a considerable part of the soul's perfection. The image of God is said to consist, as "in righteousness and true holiness," so likewise "in knowledge." (Col. iii. 10.) How full of it was Adam in Paradise! And how full of it are angels in heaven! The more men know of God, the more like they are to him; and the more they resemble him, the more beautiful and perfect they are. You count a clear eye not only useful to the body, but a piece of beauty in it. Light in the mind is an ornament to the soul, as well as a help. Saints in heaven that are most perfect, are most knowing; and the fulness of their knowledge is a great part of their perfection.

4. *It is a most becoming thing.*—Most suitable to you as Christians, suitable to your new nature, your new state, your spiritual relations and spiritual privileges. It ill becomes them who are "called into God's marvellous light," (1 Peter ii. 9,) who are the "children of light," (Eph. v. 8,) and the children of him who is "the Father of lights," (James i. 17,) they that are said to be "in the light," (1 John ii. 9,) nay, to be "light," (Eph. v. 8,) yet to be without light. An ignorant saint is as great a solecism in Christianity, as a graceless saint, and that is such a saint as is no saint.

5. Consider the mischief and danger of ignorance.

(1.) *It exposeth you to errors and delusions.* (Matt. xxii. 29.)—Who so apt to be misled as he that hath no eyes? He that knows not which is the right way, may easily be drawn into a wrong one. “He that walks in darkness knows not whither he goes.” (John xii. 35.) Affection is a good follower, but a bad leader. It is too blind to be a guide. It embraces its object, and yet knows it not. It must be beholden to the eye of the mind, light in the understanding, or else all its motions will be but wanderings. It will be sure to rove, where it is not led. It is an egregious paralogism of them that argue against the translation of the scriptures into vulgar languages, that “that is the way to increase errors and divisions among Christians:” for that multitude of errors which is among us is not the effect of too much knowledge, but too little; as men’s losing their way by day-light is not the effect of their having eyes, but either of their not having them, or not using them. Men do not run into errors because they know the truth, but because they do not know it, or are not established in it, or are not able to prove it. Not only pride and obstinacy, but ignorance too, hath a hand in heresies. That which is heresy at last, may be but a simple error at the first; and that, too, men may embrace, not so much, or not only, because they hate the truth, but because they do not know it. “Perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds” proceed from them as being “destitute of the truth.” (1 Tim. vi. 5.) In other places we see by experience, that where men have ordinarily more knowledge, they have fewer errors; where they are better catechised, they are less unsound. It is scarce to be imagined, that so many absurd and ridiculous opinions should pass current among us for great truths, were it not for ignorance, as well as interest. And I doubt not but many of the greatest patrons of errors, if thoroughly examined, would be found guilty of the deepest ignorance; and while they pretend to know more than others, they know much less than is needful for themselves. When men walk the rounds in religion, it is a sign that it is night with them. It is darkness that fills them with so many fancies and whimsies. Men’s heads are most apt to be giddy, when their eyes are closed.

(2.) *It exposeth them to wickedness too.*—When the mind is dark, no wonder if the mind be impure. When there is no light coming in at the window, the house may well be dirty. He that cannot judge what is good and what is evil, may easily refuse the good and choose the evil. He that is ignorant of duty, may soon come to be prejudiced against it, and then disaffected to it, and then to embrace the contrary. Crooked steps are but the ordinary consequents of blind eyes; and none more ready to walk after the course of this world, than he that is unacquainted with the ways of God’s commandments; or, (to invert the apostle’s words, 1 Cor. xiv. 20,) none are more likely to be “men” *in malice* and wickedness, than they that are “children” *in understanding*. That the Heathen were “alienated from the life of God,” it was because of “the ignorance that was in them.” (Eph. iv. 18.) I shall never wonder to see a conscience not informed, to be debauched; to see him that knows not God, to neglect God; him that knows not duty, neglect duty; or him that is ignorant of sin, live in sin. And though the beginning of

sin be out of ignorance, yet men's progress in it may be out of affection. If at first they commit it, because they know not the evil and bitterness of it; yet they may afterward love it, when they have tasted sweetness in it. They that "have no knowledge to do good," may the sooner learn to be "wise in doing evil." (Jer. iv. 22.) Men's lusts do then especially rule over them, when they are themselves under the power of ignorance. "Not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance." (1 Peter i. 14.)

(3.) *It exposeth them to apostasy even from what good they professed to have.*—How soon are their leaves shaken off from them by the storms of temptation! How soon are they withered by the hot sun of persecution, who are not well rooted in spiritual knowledge! Men will never heartily love the truth, if they see not its beauty; and never adhere to it, if they do not love it. An unsettled judgment will make unconstant affections. I have heard of a martyr that could not dispute for Christ, and yet could burn for Christ; but I never heard of any that could burn for him, and yet did not know him. They that do not know the truth,—the excellency, and power, and preciousness of it,—cannot see reason enough for their laying-down their lives for it. They that know not the riches and glory of the other world, those great things which may deserve their perseverance, and encourage their resolution and constancy, will hardly be induced to secure the hope of *they know not what*, by the loss of what they see and enjoy. We may certainly say, that ignorance of God's truths and ways is one main root of apostasy from them; and had many of them who in these declining times have forsaken either, seen as much in them as others see, they might have found as good reason for their adhering to them, as others have found; so that (to conclude this) ignorance is a sin which exposeth men to temptations of all kinds: the devil can scarce desire fitter matter to work upon, than ignorant persons. To whom should he put-off his wares but to those that are so dim-sighted, that they cannot perceive the falseness of them? (Eph. vi. 12.) Where should "the ruler of the darkness of this world" set up his throne, erect his kingdom of darkness, but in dark souls? Where should the devil reign, but where ignorance reigns? None more obedient vassals to him, than they that know not the laws of their true Sovereign.

(4.) Lastly. *Ignorance exposeth men to God's judgments, as well as any other sin doth.*—And those not only temporal, (Isai. v. 12, 13,) but eternal too: Christ, when he comes to judgment, will execute "vengeance on them that know not God." (2 Thess. i. 8.) Those that God will love, he will have them "come unto the knowledge of the truth." (1 Tim. ii. 4.) And even the servant that knows not his master's will, shall have his share of "stripes." (Luke xii. 48.) Men may perish not only for lack of that knowledge which is absolutely necessary to salvation, but for lack of that which they were bound, according to their opportunities, to have gained. I have heard it as the saying of a learned man, that "a Papist might be saved, but a Recusant * could not;" as

* Blount says, "*Recusant* is, by statute-law, any person that refuseth to come to church, and hear the Common-Prayer read. But the word is now almost wholly appropriated to the Roman Catholics; and is commonly employed to designate one who refuses to take the oath of the King's supremacy in matters of religion."—EDIT.

having sufficient means for conviction and information. I am not concerned to dispute the truth of the former, but see no reason to question the certainty of the latter. And might it not be said of many Protestants, that they might be saved in another country, but cannot be saved here, and that for the same reason,—because here they have means of getting more knowledge? Alas! how many ignorant souls are in hell already, and how many more are posting after them! When they die, there goes not only “dust to dust,” but “darkness to darkness;” the darkness of ignorance to the darkness of hell! *They will at last find themselves greatly deceived that think they shall be saved because they are poor ignorant creatures, and know no better; that is, that they shall be saved because they know not the way to salvation; they shall be healed because they know not what will cure them.* And, however they may for a time flatter themselves, upon the account of any external privileges, that they are Christians, Protestants, professors, yet they may read their doom in the text, which will one day be made good upon them; and if they will not know what else they should, yet let them know this, that “because they are a people of no understanding, therefore He that made them will not have mercy on them, and He that formed them will show them no favour.”

SERMON VI.

BY THE REV. THOMAS CASE, A.M.

OF SABBATH SANCTIFICATION.

If thou turn away thy foot from the sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day; and call the sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord, honourable; and shalt honour him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words: then shalt thou delight thyself in the Lord; and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.—Isaiah lviii. 13, 14.

THESE two verses contain a model of sabbath-sanctification.

The thirteenth verse contains *the duties enjoined.*

The fourteenth verse contains *the privileges annexed.*

The *duties* are set forth unto us, I. *Negatively*; II. *Affirmatively.*

I. The negative duties are expressed, 1. *Generally and comprehensively*; 2. *More particularly and distinctly.*

First. *The general* in these words: “If thou turn away thy foot from the sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day.” Wherein there are three things:

1. *The thing forbidden.*—That is, the doing of our pleasures on the sabbath. God never appointed a sabbath for the satisfaction of corrupt nature.