

SERMON VII.

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HOW ARE THE ORDINARY MEANS OF GRACE MORE CERTAINLY SUCCESSFUL FOR CONVERSION, THAN IF PERSONS FROM HEAVEN OR HELL SHOULD TELL US WHAT IS DONE THERE ?

And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.— Luke xvi. 31.

WHETHER the narrative of our Saviour, beginning at the 19th verse of this chapter, concerning the rich man and Lazarus, be a history, relating really matter of fact ; or a simple parable, representing the matter by way of similitude ; or an useful discourse by way of delineation partaking of both, namely, a *parabolical* history, or *historical* parable ; * hath been variously determined both by the ancients and moderns. † One ‡ indeed would go further, and have it to be a *prophetical* parable, representing by Dives *Judaism*, and by Lazarus *Gentilism*. This latter, as he thinks from the name Lazarus, imports one (before Christ came) “that had no help,” § forsaken of all, kept out of doors amongst the dogs. They who conceive it to be a history, argue it from the proper name of Lazarus. Others, who judge it to be a parable, || allege that the Talmudists do frequently use *לאָזָר לַחַיִּים* *Lahazar* contractly for Eleazar ; yet here not as a *proper* name, but *common*, denoting “a destitute beggar” indefinitely ; or “him who, of himself, is bereft of help ;” or “one to whom help should be showed :” as Rachel is used appellatively, (Jer. xxxi. 15, with Matt. ii. 18,) and as civil lawyers propose a case under the name of Titius : considering further, to speak properly, the rich man could have no tongue to cool when his body was in the cold grave, nor Lazarus a tip of a finger to dip in water whilst in a state of separation. But that which we are mostly to regard in this dialogue, is the main scope and design of our Saviour, which is, as to set forth *the misery* of the covetous, uncharitable rich, who died impenitently, and *the happiness* of the godly, charitable poor, who walked according to scripture canon : (Gal. vi. 16 :) so to teach us, there is no mercy to those who die in their sins unrepented of ; (there being a great gulf fixed betwixt them, and those in Abraham’s bosom, advanced to chief dignity in heaven, verse 26 ;) and that there are no revelations concerning eternal rewards and punishments, to be expected now from the other world for conversion in order to salvation, by those who do not really give credit to the written doctrine of Moses and the pro-

* ΤΡΟΠΟΛΟΓΙΑΣ.—JUSTINUS MARTYR.

† LOMEIERUS.

§ ΑΒΟΛΗΘΥΤΟΣ.

† VOSSII *Theses*, Disput. 5.

|| DR. LIGHTFOOT, &c.

phets; Christ here intimating the approaching ruin of the unbelieving Jews, (not willing to come to him for life, John v. 40,) "though one," even he himself, "should rise again from the dead:" for this he aims at here in my text.

Wherein we have Abraham's concluding answer, to the rich man's request of one from the dead, in a hypothetical form, as it were, from the denial of the consequent, or that which doth necessarily follow from the antecedent, which is here, "having Moses and the prophets," whom they should have believed, but did not: and therefore, from more than a parity of reason, methinks, he doth infer, even as from the greater to the less it certainly follows by a sure sequel or consequence, that if they did not give credit to that which Peter calls "a surer word of prophecy," (2 Peter i. 19,) yea, "which cannot be shaken," *ασαλευτον*, (Heb. xii. 28,) they would not to that which could have no such appointment and attestation as the other already had, even [that] of divine authority, upon their own concession. If the ordinary means, which was granted by themselves to be of divine institution, was not effectual to conversion, it is not easy to imagine how a novel means extraordinary, which they had no proof of, (only in their own conceit,) should become successful. Which may be a sufficient ground to found the case upon, that I am desired, as I can practically, to resolve this morning, in the terms given me; namely,

How are the ordinary means of grace more certainly successful for conversion, than if persons from heaven or hell should tell us what is done there?

In resolving of which I shall endeavour to show,

I. That this proposition, *The ordinary means of grace are more certainly successful for conversion, than if persons from heaven or hell should tell us what is done there*, may be clearly deduced from the words, according to the purport of it, in a short explication.

II. *How or upon what grounds it so comes to pass.* And then,

III. *Make some improvement of it in a short application.*

I. To explain the proposition: *That the ordinary means of grace are more certainly successful for conversion, than if some from heaven or hell should tell us what is done there.*—That we may see it doth clearly result from the text, I shall speak to a few particulars.

1. *Concerning the ordinary means of grace.*—I understand what is here meant and prescribed by Moses and the prophets, which *εχουσι*, "they had," and were to observe, (verse 29, with 16, and elsewhere,*) namely, the *holy scriptures*; and what is thereby required, the true and saving doctrine contained in the oracles of God, which were committed to the Jews, (Rom. iii. 2; ix. 4; Psalm cxlvii. 19; Deut. iv. 10; xxxi. 9—13; Isai. ii. 3; Zech. viii. 13,) and admirably preserved by the diligence of the Masorites, who were very solicitous that one *iota*, or "tittle," of it might not perish. Neither hath the providence of God been less concerned in the preservation of the doctrine therein contained, than of the holy writings. And if, in

* Matt. xi. 11; Luke xxiv. 27.

preserving the whole entire, it hath suffered a variety of reading to creep in, about things of less or no importance, amongst the copies [which] we have, it may serve but as a spur to quicken us to "search the scriptures," (John v. 39,) most frequently put absolutely in the New Testament for "the written word of God," "the Bible:"* so "the holy scriptures," (Rom. i. 2,) and, "All scripture is of divine inspiration." (2 Tim. iii. 15, 16.) And though Christ here, by Abraham, doth expressly mention only "Moses and the Prophets;" yet he coucheth the historical books under the Prophets, according to the common acceptation of the Jews, and their usual manner of reading them in the synagogues; † canonizing them, as he doth elsewhere "the prophets and apostles:" (Luke xi. 49:) not only importing the law given by Moses's ministry and the writings of the prophets, but also the preachers of the same doctrine which Moses wrote, even of Christ, (John v. 46, with Gen. iii. 15; and xxii. 18; xlix. 10; Num. xxiv. 17, &c.; Deut. xviii. 15,) whose practice it was to demonstrate himself from Moses and the Prophets; (John v. 33; Luke xxiv. 44—47; Matt. xxi. 42; xxii. 43, 44;) which method the apostles also used. (Acts xviii. 28; xxiv. 14; xxviii. 23.) For Moses and the prophets spake of the person of the Messiah, and his natures, both Divine (Jer. xxiii. 5; Micah v. 2; Prov. viii. 12—22) and human; (Gen. iii. 15; Isai. vii. 14;) his offices, prophetic, (Deut. xviii. 15; John i. 45,) priestly, (Psalm cx. 4,) kingly, (Psalm ii. 6;) and states both of humiliation (Isai. lii. 2—15; Psalm xxii. 18) and exaltation, (Psalm xlvi. 2; lxviii. 18; cxviii. 22,) with the benefits thereof: (Psalm xxiii. 5;) I might add, that the whole scope of the ceremonial law was to prefigure Christ, coming to suffer for man's redemption, being "the end of the law to every one that believeth, for righteousness;" (Rom. x. 4; Gal. iii. 24; Acts vii. 2—37;) what was taught by Moses about sacrifices, having relation to the sacrifice of Christ, foretold by the prophet Isaiah. (Isai. liii. 1—12.) This was acknowledged by Tryphon the Jew in his discourse with Justin Martyr, though denied by the modern Jews. So that there is a harmony and identity, or sameness, of doctrine and rules of practice, for substance, in the Old and New Testament; the Old having in it the life and soul of the New, though different in degrees; the same object, Christ, "to whom all the prophets witnessed." (Acts x. 43.) And therefore, though the generality of the stiff-necked Jews did not give credit to the main importance of the Old, yet the sincere ones, who did believe the prophets, as the apostles exhorted, (Acts xxvi. 27; John xx. 31,) they, with Philip and Nathanael, "Israelites indeed," rejoiced they had "found him of whom Moses has written in the law," (John i. 41,) and whom the prophet foretold should be "the desire of all nations," (Haggai ii. 7,) "a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of the people Israel." (Luke ii. 32.)

Wherefore I may very fairly hence under this first head in the explication deduce from my text:—

* Ἡ γραφή, αἱ γραφαί: (John ii. 22; Matt. xxi. 42;) and Βιβλίον, βιβλος. (Luke iv. 17; John xx. 30.)

† DR. LIGHTFOOT.

(1.) *That the holy scriptures, read, preached, and heard, accompanied with prayer, and other institutions of Christ, as the seals of the new covenant, and the ministry of reconciliation, are the means of grace ordained of God, to bring men and women to "repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ."* (Acts xx. 21.)—That men, by the applying themselves sincerely to the use of these means, (which though they have no natural force, in and of themselves, to the effecting of a change,) may, by the efficacy of the Spirit exerting insuperable grace, be cleansed. (John xv. 3; xvii. 17; Eph. v. 26.) God, the great Efficient, may, in these helps of his own ordaining, reveal his own arm, (Isai. liii. 1,) draw them unto Christ, (John vi. 44, 45,) make the seed of the word fruitful, and, putting forth his own power, (Rev. i. 16,) bring them to salvation in the heavenly kingdom, and rest sweetly in "Abraham's bosom," where they shall not know trouble any more.

(2.) These are *ordinary* means, according to the order established by the Supreme Ruler, who knows what is best for those under his government; in opposition to *extraordinary*, which seldom happen, upon some singular work of judgment or mercy to a person or people. It is true, the most sovereign Agent, who is most free,—he may, if he pleaseth, without means, by an immediate impression of light and infusion of grace work on the soul, as he did on the apostles and Paul. (Acts ii. 4; ix. 1—22; Gal. i. 12.) But, generally and for the most part, God revealeth himself mediately, by the ordinary means [which] he hath settled to abide in his church to the end, there being an aptness and fitness in them under Divine influence for "converting the soul," (Psalm xix. 7,) when ambassadors come "in Christ's stead, beseeching men to be reconciled to God," (2 Cor. v. 20,) having a promise of his presence with them to the end of the world, (Matt. xxviii. 20,) in communicating of the mind of God, by writing or speaking, reading or interpreting, exhorting and directing; (2 Peter iii. 1; Acts xxi. 25; iv. 20—29; xv. 21; viii. 30—35; 1 Cor. xii. 28—30; Acts xv. 32; 1 Thess. ii. 11;) every way preaching for the begetting of faith; (Rom. x. 13, 15;) when the advice of Gregory Nazianzen is observed; namely, *Ευχου και σκοπου*, that is, "Pray and search;" having prayed with David, "Open thou mine eyes," (or "reveal,") "that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law." (Psalm cxix. 18.) It concerns us to be much in meditating upon it. (Psalm i. 2; John v. 39.) Gregory (called the Great) gives an account of an illiterate man, who bought a Bible, hired one to read to him out of it, and thereby became a great proficient in the school of Christianity. Luther,* by reading of it, was turned from Popery; so was John Huss, by reading of our Wickliff's books, proving his doctrine from it. We know, Augustine was converted by taking it up, and reading; † and it is said, Cyprian, by reading the prophet Jonas; ‡ as [was] Junius, by the first chapter of John's gospel; though it is supposed neither of them then had much skill in the originals,

* MELCHIOR ADAMUS in *Vitâ*.
 † NICEPHORUS, pp. 5, 27.

† *Confessiones*, lib. 8, cap. viii. sec. 2.

but were beholden to translations. Thus we see how the scripture is the means, and the ordinary means.

The next thing in the explication is to show,

2. *That this means becomes more certainly successful, or effectual.*—“Certainly” is to be understood in opposition to that which happens uncertainly and peradventure: not as if, every where that “the immortal seed” of the word is sown, conversion did certainly and always follow; it being but a subservient instrument. Some seed meets with “bad ground;” (Matt. xiii. 4, 5;) some “reject the counsel of God against themselves;” (Luke vii. 30;) “they put it from them, judging themselves unworthy of eternal life;” (Acts xiii. 46;) that is, by contradicting of the word, they do as evidently deprive themselves of eternal life, as if the judge did pass that sentence upon the bench. So what is “the savour of life” to others, becomes “the savour of death” to them. (2 Cor. ii. 16.) The rich man, as he is brought-in here, conceits,—after the mode of the Jews, seeking for signs, (John iv. 48; vi. 30,) (which Christ gave check to, when, by his accomplishment of the prophecies, he had demonstrated himself to be the Messiah, and they would have him to be a political or temporal king, Matt. xii. 39,)—that one rising miraculously from the dead, and preaching, would keep others from hell. But Abraham, “the father of the faithful,” who knew what it was to repent, and believe, and be converted, was of another persuasion. He bids [them] hearken to the written word, read and preached; on which faith and repentance were to be grounded; God’s providential works, how admirable soever, not being the rule for men to go by, but his word; it being no good sense, that God’s extraordinary actings should be our ordinary rule. He that would not plough or sow till manna be rained from heaven, because it once did, may expect bread till he starve; and so may he that looks to be fed with ravens, as Elias once was. Man may be most certainly assured from God’s word what his mind is. God himself, indeed, doth principally make any means effectual or successful. Paul’s planting, and Apollo’s watering, come to nothing without him, his influence and blessing. (1 Cor. iii. 6, 7.) Augustine said right, “Men may read and understand, behold and confess, not by the law and doctrine sounding outwardly, but by the inward and hidden, wonderful and ineffable, power of God, [which] doth not only work divine true revelations, but also good wills.”* Yet from the external preaching of the word of God, as a means of his appointment, there is a “godly sorrow” (or “a sorrowing after God”) wrought, which “worketh repentance to salvation.” (2 Cor. vii. 10, 11.) It proves successful to some, who are “not hearers only, but doers of the word.” (James i. 22.) It falls out prosperously and happily with them, using of the means. Solomon saith, “A good understanding giveth favour” and success. (Prov. xiii. 15.) Be sure, a good understanding of God’s mind from his word becomes ordinarily more successful, that “the soul may be in health and prosper,” (3 John 2,) than any expectation of that which can only give an uncertain sound, till evidenced to be from heaven, as the word is.

* *De Gratia Christi*, cap. 24.

3. [*It becomes effectual*] for conversion.—That is, from all sin to God; which imports a thorough change of heart and life, and that it is indeed from God the Author, by his Spirit, (2 Thess. ii. 13; Titus iii. 5,) above the creature's power and activity; (John i. 13;) yet God useth Christ's ambassadors in the ministry of reconciliation, (2 Cor. v. 19, 20; Acts xxvi. 18,) and those who are instructors in him, that we may be acquainted with God, (Job xxii. 21,) receive forgiveness, and be built up even "an habitation of God, through the Spirit," "upon the foundation" (doctrinal) "of the prophets and apostles, Christ" (personally) "being the chief corner-stone:" (Eph. ii. 20:) wherefore Paul urgeth Timothy to read the divinely inspired scriptures, in that they "were able," as an instrument in God's hands, "to make him wise to salvation," (2 Tim. iii. 15,) as they were a ground of "hope and comfort to others," (Rom. xv. 4,) by means of which we are begotten or born again. (James i. 18; 1 Peter i. 23.) Yea, and from God's appointment and ordination, or (as it were) common law, we are not only first converted from sin to God, but are carried on in a state of grace, till we, in "exercising ourselves unto godliness," are afterwards brought unto glory.

It remains, before I leave the explication, that I touch upon,

4. *The persons whom the rich man is here represented to desire to come from heaven or hell, to give an information to his relatives how things go in those unchangeable states of happiness or misery.*—[They] are only brought in *ex hypothesi*, "upon supposition or condition," granting it were so: not that there is a ground for the expectation of any new messengers from the other world. We may yield the thing possible, though not probable. We are not to limit the Holy One, who is most perfect: He is not bounded as to his omnipotency, any more than his omniscieny. He could, if he would, reveal himself now, as he did to John in the isle of Patmos. (Rev. i. 9, 10.) He might, if he would, in the dispensation of his grace and providence, use the ministration of angels, (Heb. i. 14,) without giving any account of his matters, (Job xxxiii. 12, 13,) and put them upon obedience extraordinarily; for those heavenly spirits must be at his service, in the affairs of his kingdom. (Rev. xxii. 9.) Indeed the great instance of their ministry was about the person of Christ; yet he did use them afterwards to reveal his mind. (Rev. i. 1; xix. 10.) How far he is pleased to do it at this day in any rare instance, is not for me to determine: but some have pretended to have revelations from angels, which have proved delusions. There is, it is true, a ministry of them, (in this chapter where my text is, verse 22,) to carry holy souls to "Abraham's bosom," which is ordinary. But we will suppose there should be any extraordinary, yet that would not be any more (if so much) regarded than the ordinary means; and we should, "through the grace given," be careful not to be wise "above that which is written." (Rom. xii. 3.)

Having thus explained the sense of the answer to the case before me, I hope, according to the explication given, you will come to conclude with me, that it doth clearly result from my text, and is proved thence.

II. The Second general is to show *how, or upon what grounds, the*

ordinary means of grace are more certainly successful for conversion, than if persons from heaven or hell should tell us what is done there ; as hath been explained.

That I may do this as well as I can in a little room, I shall be concerned, like Bezaleel and Aholiab, (Exod. xxxvi. 1—7,) though not with the like wisdom, to lay-by much of the good “stuff” [which] would offer itself to me in this case. Somewhat methinks I should premise *in the general*, and then proceed to *particular grounds*.

1. Let me premise *in the general* these two or three things :

(1.) From my text, and in a Christian congregation, I am not necessitated, in showing how this comes about, which I have deduced from it, to prove Moses and the prophets, (or, which is all one for substance, more largely, the holy scriptures,) to be the word of God ; that being the hypothesis, or what is presupposed and not questioned, in this dialogue between the rich man and “the father of the faithful ;” as we find, verse 29, as well as in the words compared with verse 16 of this chapter. The Jews did acknowledge it, and never denied it, when our Saviour and his apostles did ever and anon show them how the scriptures were fulfilled, manifested, and accomplished. So that not to grant this, were to take away the *substratum* or “foundation” of the case ; which the Jews frankly yielded : “We know that God spake unto Moses.” (John ix. 29.) Indeed, it was evident enough when he refuted any objection against it, comforting of them by showing them that God was with him. (Exod. iii. 2, 6, 14 ; iv. 1—23 ; xiv. 31 ; xx. 1—26 ; Num. xi. 17.) We find, they did readily agree to it that God was the author of the Old Testament. Apollos, we read, “did mightily convince many of the Jews from the scriptures ;” (Acts xviii. 24—28 ;) that is, those books which they did own to be of divine inspiration. And, by consequence, if people be not worse than Jews, the New Testament should be owned to be so too, being [seeing] the Old directs to it. When Christ was transfigured, “Moses and Elias appeared talking with him,” (Matt. xvii. 2, 3,) and so gave their testimonies to the main subject and substance of the gospel, since in Christ “are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.” (Col. ii. 3.)

(2.) Man, in his innocent state, had an innate pure light, consisting in the knowledge of God the Creator, Lawgiver, Governor, and Rewarder ; presently enlarged by revelation from without, in the sacramental precept of the divine will under the first covenant : (Gen. ii. 17 :) and from the consideration of God’s works, which were all “very good ;” (Gen. i. 31 ;) and this was necessary to that state. But since man, being mutable, “sought out many inventions,” (Eccles. vii. 29,) and, hearkening to the serpent’s suggestion, (Gen. iii. 5,) had obscured this light, God, of his infinite goodness, pitying the vanity of fallen man as mortal, (not knowing how to “deliver his soul from the hand of the grave,” Psalm lxxxix. 47, 48,) did think it necessary to reveal himself, and magnify his grace, in condescending to enter into a new covenant with this fallen creature ; giving his word, or

first promise, that the seed of the woman should "bruise the serpent's head." (Gen. iii. 15.) Herein Christ was promised, and hence called "the Word;" being he indeed concerning whom that saving word of God, (John i. 14,) or word of promise, is made; as we say, "I will give you *my word* for it." We may easily conceive it requisite, from that natural light which remained in the reasonable creature, that God the Creator and Governor is to be worshipped; (Acts xvii. 23; Rom. i. 23, 25; 1 Kings xviii. 21;) and that no worship can be accepted of God, but what is instituted of himself: and since there abides in man, naturally, a strong desire of truth and immortality; of knowing how he "may be accepted of God," (2 Cor. v. 9; Psalm iv. 6; lxxiii. 24,) and enjoy communion with him; that there should be some assured revelation, (2 Tim. iii. 14; John i. 18; Deut. xix. 29,) (whereby he doth manifest himself and declare his will,) as the glass of his Divinity, (2 Cor. iii. 18; iv. 6,) and the rule of his worship, (Isai. i. 10—20; Matt. vii. 21; Col. ii. 23,) that we may not be guilty of worshipping we know not what or how, being [seeing] "he is a Spirit, and will be worshipped in spirit and in truth." (John iv. 22, 24.)

(3.) Though God, in infinite wisdom, during the time of the long-lived patriarchs, till some time after the flood, thought it sufficient (notwithstanding there was an early defection from his appointments, which yet in some measure came under the reformation of Enoch, Gen. iv. 26, Noah, Gen. viii. 20; ix. 5, and Abraham, Gen. xvii. 1—27) to continue that way of revelation from one to another, during the infancy of his church; however, when she grew up, it became necessary, for the due conservation, vindication, and propagation of his word, that as all nations by the light of nature are directed generally to the use of laws, (Deut. viii. 5—7; iv. 7, 8,) his own laws, reaching to the very motions of the heart, should be written. (Prov. xxii. 19, 20; Luke i. 3, 4; Rom. xv. 4.) This is found to be the most credible way of proposal; it being most fit [that] we should ascribe that to God which is really consonant to the greatest wisdom. That the certainty of the word of truth might be known and communicated, God himself wrote his laws, (Exod. xxiv. 12; Hosea viii. 12,) and commanded Moses and the prophets to write his will and oracles; (Exod. xxxiv. 1, 27; Hab. ii. 2; Jer. xxxvi. 2;) these coming as the credential letters of the supreme infallible Majesty, which are to remain inviolable,* not be rejected by any, who could never see any demonstrative evidence to weaken the authority thereof. So that it would be most injurious to the divine benignity, to suspect that the all-wise and most gracious God would be wanting to his church in so necessary a matter.† The great doctor of the Gentiles would argue, "He that spared not his Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" (Rom. viii. 32.)

These things being premised, I shall proceed,

2. To the particular grounds of the assertion: so as, I would hope,

* *Scripta tabella manet.* "That which is marked by a style on a writing-tablet remains as a permanent memorial."—EDIT. † DR. TEMPLER.

they may not only satisfy real Christians, but such as are doubting of the divine authority of the holy scriptures, if not disposed to be anti-scripturists.

(1.) *The assent of divine faith, whereby a sinner is converted and brought nigh to God, is only built upon the authority of God the revealer; considering his infallible veracity, that he is a God of truth and cannot deceive or be deceived; having dominion over his creatures, who are therefore to submit to his word; penned upon his command, by those who were divinely inspired, as they vouched and proved themselves to be, and we have no solid reason to except against their proof.* (2 Tim. iii. 16; 2 Sam. xxiii. 2, 3; Hosea xii. 10; 2 Peter i. 21; 1 Thess. ii. 13.)—Though the prophets and penmen of scripture were not always accompanied with miracles, when they delivered their messages from God; yet they required an attendance and obedience, under an eternal penalty to be inflicted upon those who did disobey the voice and message of God, which if they to whom it came did not receive with a divine faith, they did, in God's account, refuse to obey. There is no suspending our assent, when God expressly declares his will by himself, or his messengers coming in his name, as "in the last days he did by his Son," (Heb. i. 1, 2,) who spake "with authority, and not as the scribes." (Matt. vii. 29.) There was a divinity discerned in it by the hearers; and so there was, in some proportion, in the prophets of the Lord, "somewhat divine,"* which might be discerned by those unto whom it came; (as by Paul distinctly, Acts xxii. 9;) else it had been hard for God to have charged their eternal and temporal welfare or ruin upon their discerning or not discerning aright betwixt his word in the mouth of his own prophets, and that word which *pretended only so to be* in the mouths of the false prophets. We have a notable instance hereof, in opposition to those who pretended to prophecy in the name of the Lord, to gain credit to their lies. "The prophet that hath a dream, let him tell a dream; and he that hath my word, let him speak my word faithfully. What is the chaff to the wheat, saith the Lord? Is not my word like fire, saith the Lord; and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?" (Jer. xxiii. 25, 28, 29.) The righteous God would not have required of men, under a dreadful penalty, to have assented to his word, in opposition to the impostors' dreams, had there not been most certain tokens for the differencing of it from that of the false prophets, whose words (as all others' beside his) were as "chaff," light and useless stuff for man's food; which "the wheat," the bread of life, might be easily known from, by those who had eyes to see, and did not, "because of their evil deeds, love darkness rather than light." (John iii. 19.) We know, they who by a good light are conversant in receiving and paying of moneys, do readily discern the genuine from counterfeit coin. Whereupon Gerson affirmed,† that the true coin of divine revelation may be known from the counterfeits of diabolical visions, as true gold is from its counterfeit, by its weight, flexibility, and durableness, (or coptinuity and incorruptibleness,) con-

* Ομοιον τι.

† *De Distinctione verarum Visionum a falsis, pars prima.*

figuration, and colour. God's holy word had light, and heat, and power proper to it, which made it evident, though prejudice and conceited interest hindered many to whom it came from giving entire credit to it, delivered by the Lord's true prophets, (Isai. liii. 1; Jer. xliii. 3,) and Christ himself, (John ix. 29; xii. 37, 38,) who will certainly "manifest himself," as in displeasure to those who reject him revealing the Father, so in favour to those who receive him. (John xiv. 21; Matt. xi. 20.) It is no way likely that one from the dead should so manifest himself, if he came to impart his experiences to his friends yet in the state of the living; who should in all reason consider, that "if we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater;" (1 John v. 9;) and consequently should be deemed more successful for conversion. Hence,

(2.) *The scriptures prove themselves by their own light to be from God, and appointed by him, to convince and convert sinners, and direct them to come to him for rest.*—If God do reveal himself, his attributes and will, by his "works which praise him," (Psalm cxlv. 9—15,) and manifest "his eternal power and Godhead," (Rom. i. 20,) to leave men inexcusable so far as that evidence goes;* and likewise by the voice of nature, or the innate light, those common principles left in the consciences of men exercised to discern betwixt good and evil; (Rom. ii. 14, 15;) then, he having "magnified his word above all his name," (Psalm cxxxviii. 2,) which is all that whereby he makes himself known, there be certainly more clear characters and glorious impressions of the Divine Majesty, his power, holiness, goodness, wisdom, and grace, to be discerned therein, than any where besides. It is rational to collect, that by the same counsel [by which] God did inscribe ensigns of himself in "the works of his own hands," he did impress documents of Divinity on the words of his mouth, wherein the lineaments of heavenly wisdom are as conspicuous as the sagacity of Joab in the speech of the woman of Tekoah unto David.† (2 Sam. xiv. 1—19.) Even as by the light of the sun in the firmament we may see the glorious body of the sun itself, so by the word of God, which "is pure, enlightening the eyes," (Psalm xix. 4—8,) we may discern clearly who is the Author of it. By the condescending beams and influences vouchsafed in that bright Sun, who is indeed "the Father of lights, from whom every good and perfect gift descends," (James i. 17,) we may come to see our chief good, and the only way to enjoy it. "In him is the fountain of life, and in his light we shall see light." (Psalm xxxvi. 9.) God, who is the true invariable light, "in whom there is no darkness at all," (1 John i. 5—7,) can so shine upon the "glass" of his word, (James i. 23; 2 Cor. iii. 18,) that we may see therein a lively, spiritual portraiture of himself, and his pleasure toward us, with our duty unto him. For you know, by looking in a glass we see the glass itself, ourselves, and other things within reach in the room; and so, by the crystal glass of the word, we may see

* *Præsentemque refert qualibet herba Deum.* "Every herb, in its elegant and appropriate form, proclaims the presence of the Deity."—EDIT. † DR. TEMPLER *De Sacro Canone.*

God who speaks it, ourselves with our besmeared faces, and the emptiness of the creatures in the same room with us : which may well engage us to seek to the fountain of all fulness, God himself. But then we should remember, as an honourable person adviseth,* to consider the holy Bible as a harmonious system, though written by parts and piece-meal in several ages : it being like a fair suit of arras, of which, though a shred may assure us of the fineness of the colours and the richness of the stuff, yet the hangings never appear to their true advantage but when they are displayed to their full dimensions and seen together. Be sure, the scriptures ("to which we do well to take heed, as to a light shining in a dark place," 2 Peter i. 19) will, in this prospect, clearly show their Author and original ; namely, that they came from Him who is "the Light of men, and shineth in darkness," (John i. 4, 5 ; 1 John i. 4, 5,) to the good satisfaction of the consciences of the honest beholders themselves, whatever objections may be made by carnal reasonings to the contrary ; hereby being far more effectual to "convert the soul and rejoice the heart," (Psalm xix. 7, 8,) than any appearances of prodigious spectres, giving some notice of what passes in the other world, could ever do ; since the real resurrection of Lazarus had no other influence on some of the Jews, than only to give them occasion of turning informers to the Pharisees against Christ, who had, just before their eyes, wrought that most notable miracle. (John xi. 46.) Hence,

(3.) *The power and efficacy [which] the scriptures have had in changing the minds and hearts of men, show that, as to any future expectations, they are more successful for conversion than any new revelations or appearances from the other world.*—The powerful effects of it proving the word of God to be a perpetual ordinance, or "covenant which God hath commanded for ever," (Psalm cxi. 9,) deriving virtue from him for this very end, and by "its powerfulness and quickness" evidencing him to be the undoubted Author of it, (Heb. iv. 12,) when "it is received," (though revealed to and by men immediately or mediately,) "not as the word of men, but as it is in truth the word of God, which worketh effectually in them that believe," (1 Thess. ii. 13,) yea, and brings men to believe who are not prepossessed with prejudices and corrupt affections, which cause a rage against divine appointments ; whereupon "the god of this world" (the prince of darkness) "blinds their minds, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of (the invisible) God, should shine into them." (2 Cor. iv. 3, 4.) Yet, in the dispensation of the word, there is an evidence of Divinity in it, commending itself to the consciences of unprejudiced men ; the ordinary means of grace being "mighty, through God, to the pulling down of the strong-holds," yea, "every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God," (2 Cor. x. 4, 5,) from whom it came, and unto whom it directs us. Even great ones have been "astonished at the doctrine of the Lord," (Acts xiii. 12 ; Psalm cxix. 111,) drawn from vicious courses

* The Honourable ROBERT BOYLE'S "Considerations upon the Style of Scripture," p. 72.

into virtuous and holy practices, "from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God," (Acts xxvi. 18,) when little good, comparatively, was done by Christ himself preaching at Capernaum, (Matt. xi. 23 ; xiii. 58,) the magazine of his miracles, those extraordinary discoveries of their Author. In the use of the ordinary means of grace, even at one sermon of Peter's, we find three thousand converted ; (Acts ii. 41 ;) and afterwards, upon hearing of the word, we meet with "about five thousand" more that believed ; (Acts iv. 4 ;) which may well evidence who was the Author of it, and in whose hand it was an instrument. Many have been built upon this "foundation," (Eph. ii. 20,) enlightened and directed by this "light," (Psalm cxix. 105,) fed with this meat, (Heb. v. 13, 14,) regenerated by this seed, (1 Peter i. 23,) which, as a grain of mustard-seed, in a matter of sixty-six years' space after the sowing of it, grew into a great tree ; which Pliny, the proconsul in Bithynia, employed by Trajan to root-up Christianity, (which they accounted a crime,) did acknowledge.* Tertullian, and others, prove the spreading of it in the second and third centuries.† "So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed" in the primitive times, (Acts xix. 20,) ingenerating unconquered constancy of faith and godliness in the minds of the hearers, and always victoriously triumphing over the kingdom of Satan and false religions. (Isai. xlvi. 10 ; John x. 35 ; Acts i. 16.) In the beginning of the Reformation said Luther, "We do everywhere experience in the church, in the commonwealth, in the family, certain fruits of the word, which as leaven doth spread itself into all the parts of the commonwealth, the offices, and all the states." ‡

Afterwards we find how it did diffuse itself in England, Scotland, and Ireland, &c.§ Notwithstanding they of the antichristian state have laboured to keep up their superstition and idolatry, by feigned apparitions, as may be seen in later collections of Popish miracles, "The History of Jetzer," &c.

(4.) *The Holy Bible being the appointed instrument wherewith the Holy Spirit will work for "the sanctification of the soul ;"* (John xvii. 17 ; 1 Peter i. 22 ;) *it is indeed a "surer word of prophecy" (which "the Spirit of Christ," τὸ ἐν αὐτοῖς, "that spake in the prophets themselves," did signify, 1 Peter i. 11,) than that which came from heaven at the transfiguration.* (2 Peter i. 18, 19 ; Matt. xvii. 5.)—Not in regard of the truth, (for therein they were both equal,) but in regard *that* at the transfiguration was more transient, being heard but by a few ; *this* of the scripture more firm and fixed, being written for an unalterable record ; just so as holy men had it brought to them at several times by the Holy Ghost. It was not of any private conception ; for "it came not by the will of man," but was brought into them "by the will of God," who hath strongly preserved it amongst

* *Mos ipso tractu, ut fieri solet, diffundente se crimine, &c.*—PLINIUS SECUNDUS, epist. xcvi. lib. 10. "But this crime spreading (as is usually the case) while it was actually under prosecution, several instances of the same kind occurred."—MELMOTH'S Translation.

† *Ipsa multitudine perturbatus.*—TERTUL. *Adversus Gentes.* ‡ *Ubique experimur in templo, in republica, &c.*—Tom. iv. p. 282. § See "The Fulfilling of Scriptures," pp. 401, 414.

his people, notwithstanding the endeavours of Antiochus to destroy it under the Old Testament; and afterwards, when the canon was completed, though several of the Roman emperors used their utmost power to burn it.* For rather than they whom the Spirit of God had wrought upon by it, in the communication of spiritual light and life, would become *traditores* (such "traitors" to God and their own soul, as) to deliver it up to Diocletian's officers, they in great numbers suffered themselves in Egypt to be bodily destroyed, in humble confidence [that] the Author of it would take their souls into "Abraham's bosom," to be for ever happy there. So successful a means is the word of God for the work of grace in the soul, that no marvel—upon the rich man's speaking his own conceit, or odd wish, for some one's prodigious † return from the other world; as if a preacher thence would bring his brethren to return to God!—father Abraham discovers himself to be of another mind; as it were, giving him a reprimand, shows that the written word, giving more clear evidence of its really coming from above, and so manifesting itself to be from God, should rather do it, as being the stated means which the Spirit useth in the conversion of others. And therefore the hankering after messengers to come anew from heaven or hell, argues those who are so disposed to be such (as our Saviour showed in confuting the Sadducees) who really "know not the scriptures, nor the power of God" therein. (Matt. xxii. 29.) For let us suppose, one who had been dead, and known to be so, for several years, should be wonderfully raised up by God, to warn his known friends here in this world to flee from the wrath to come, and to return to God; what new arguments could he use, that had not been used in the ministration of the word before, since therein he had been acquainted with the pure precepts of the Divine Majesty, and also his sure promises of heaven to the obedient, with the certain threatenings of hell to the disobedient, and the never-ceasing pains under the execution of them, felt by him who in this parable here would have warning given to his brethren? What can he, supposed to come from the other world, offer more to the serious consideration of his relatives? After a little startling of them, who, it may be, would be somewhat concerned a little while at the surprise; (as the drunkard, seeing his pot-companion fall down dead under the table, or others struck dead on every side in a dreadful pestilence;) yet the survivors remain unchanged in their minds, wills, and affections of love and hatred, hope and fear, all this while: though they have often heard the ministers of the word, even in Christ's stead, laying cogent arguments before them to gain their assent, powerful motives to work upon their wills and affections, from the sure word, universally suited to the cases of their several souls; when, it may be, they had some common motions of the Spirit which they have quenched, whereupon they may now be

* Τας δ' εὐθεοῦς καὶ ἱερὰς γραφὰς κατὰ μέσας ἀγορὰς πυρὶ παραδιδόμενας, &c.—EUSEBIJ *Ecclesiastica Historia*, lib. x. cap. 3. "The divinely-inspired and sacred writings were committed to the flames in the midst of vast multitudes."—EDIT. † In the sense of "marvellous," "after the manner of a prodigy."—EDIT.

prone to doubt, whether this supposed new and extraordinary messenger be indeed commissioned from God, unless he produce his credentials, and these be attested to by the Spirit. (Gal. iii. 1, 2.) For, upon the appearance of an angel, there might well be a suspicion, since, if a good one, his message would accord with God's word; if a bad one, he would endeavour to deceive by his lies.* When the angel did instruct Joseph by a vision, he forthwith adjoined a testimony from the prophetic scripture, (Matt. i. 23; Isai. vii. 14,) which Christ and his apostles had respect to, though they could work miracles to confirm their doctrine.

(5.) *God out of his infinite wisdom hath given us his oracles, and sent his ambassadors in the ministry of reconciliation, men like to ourselves, as more suitable to us in houses of clay than angels, which live out of the sphere of our commerce.* (2 Cor. v. 19, 20.)—God might think, now their testimonies to his church here below would not be so convenient for his government, and so consequently not so successful for the beginning of conversion. He could have had the use of the noblest spirits for his errand, and embodied them, if he would, for expedition; when he chose to employ Moses, notwithstanding his excuses, when the promise of God's presence with him on his embassy might answer all; (Exod. iii. 11, 12; iv. 10, 12;) so that he found he might say, with converted Paul, he could "do all things through Christ enstrengthening him." (Phil. iv. 13.) Man is best drawn in such a way as is most agreeable to his nature. The head, which is the governing part in the organical body, may move most uniformly with members of the same nature, (Deut. xviii. 15,) who have the irrefragable authority of God's word to back them, wherein they speak for God to stubborn ones; and though the "treasure" is presented in "earthen vessels," yet the "excellency of the power is of God." (2 Cor. iv. 7; 1 Cor. i. 18.) Converse with good angels is a dignity which our present state in the body cannot well bear, and therefore it is rare. There is indeed a story related in Bodin,† of one who had desired much the guidance and assistance of an angel; and from the thirty-seventh year of his age, he said, he had a spirit that assisted and followed him to his death. He would knock and awake him early in the morning; if he spake unwary words, he would reprove him for it by a dream in the night; if he was reading a bad book, the angel would strike on the book for him to leave it; and give some pre-notice to him in a dream when some accident was like to befall him, &c. This is related from the man as matter of fact. But it concerns us to be wary, and not to be wise "above that which is written." (1 Cor. iv. 6.) If we are not satisfied with the infallible testimony of God himself, how should the coming of a creature in a strange way give us satisfaction? The father of lies may impose on our simplicity, and deceive us in the habit of "an angel of light." (2 Cor. xi. 14.) Too many easy people have been imposed on by the Popish legends. Luther,‡ being acquainted with such impostures, said, "Satan indeed

* LAVATER *De Spectris.*

† *De Magorum cum Satanâ Commercio*, lib. 1.

‡ *In Gen. xxii.*

hath often tempted me, (even as Augustine, who deprecated, that an angel might not appear to him,) that I might ask a sign of God : but far be it from me that I should hearken to this temptation. The martyrs, without the apparition of angels, confirmed by the word alone, did meet death for the name of Christ ; and why should not we acquiesce in the same ?" It is said, when once he had kept a day of humiliation and prayer, he had a vision of Christ, when he said, " Away ! away ! I know no picture of Christ but the scripture." And elsewhere, " I have made a covenant with the Lord my God, that he may not send me visions, or dreams, or angels ; for I am content with this gift that I have, the holy scripture, which doth abundantly teach and supply all things that are necessary both to this and a future life."* Let us all then content ourselves with the ordinary means of grace, which are more successful for conversion to carry it on from first to last, rather than expect persons from heaven or hell to acquaint us what is done there.

EXCEPTION. " If some rare instance should be alleged of some atheistical persons, who, having been intimate companions in wickedness, had agreed that when either of them should depart this world, and find a joyful heaven, or dreadful hell, he would, if possible, acquaint the survivor with it ; and thereupon some spectre or voice hath been heard or seen, or fancied to be so ; upon such a discovery there hath been an inclination to return to God, and an amendment of life."

ANSWER. I fear, such an inclination and amendment have been but some temporary emotions upon such a prodigious occurrence, and have soon vanished like a blush ; or have occasioned only some fainter essays toward amendment of life, which have not come to a thorough change ; only to be an " almost Christian," as Agrippa, and not such an " altogether " Christian as Paul himself was, (Acts xvi. 28, 29,) when converted upon the call of Christ, by whom God spake to him, having ordained to reveal himself by the word. (Gal. i. 1 ; Heb. i. 2.) But we do not now find the revelation by angels, or the spirits of those who are departed this life, to be any stated ordinance of God for man's conversion, as the scriptures be. For should we suppose bad angels to come to us, they are enemies to man's conversion : good ones, as God's ministers, would confirm his word.

Should we suppose wandering spirits or spectres from the dead, according to Dives's conceit, to be monitors of the living, we must reckon them to be either the souls of *believers* or *unbelievers* : if of *believers*, they will, after the example of Christ their Head, send us to the holy scriptures ; as Augustine thought he heard a voice saying, " Take and read ! take and read !" They will say, with God the Father concerning his Son and our Saviour, " Hear ye him." (Matt. xvii. 5.) *If the souls of unbelievers and wicked miscreants*, who would hearken to them, or give credit to what they say ?

Further : what these supposed ones say does either *agree with the written word*, or *is contrary to it* : if the former, they are received,

* In Caput xxviii. Genes. Pactum feci cum Domino Deo meo, &c.

not because they are believed by them, but because contained in the word of God, which hath been found a successful means of God's own appointment for man's conversion. *If the latter*, that is, [if] they be contrary to the word, they ought by no means to be received, should we suppose, (that which is not possible,) an angel from heaven should speak to them.

But I fear I am become tedious; yet I beg your patience a little longer, while I touch upon,

III. Some short APPLICATION of this stated case, that *the ordinary means of grace are more certainly successful for conversion, than if some persons from heaven or hell should tell us what is done there.*—And it shall be for,

1. *The reproof of those who devalue the scriptures, and discourage such as would search them in the language they understand, according to our Saviour's injunction to "search the scriptures;"* (John v. 39;) *which we find to be authentical, from God himself, as hath been evidenced, and might be further by other arguments which have been urged by others.**—The truth is, if God himself were not the Author of the Bible, it must be some creature, either good or bad. *If bad*, why forbids he evil so rigorously, and commands good so expressly, aiming at nothing but God's glory, and man's happiness? *If good*, why doth he challenge to himself that which is proper to God alone; as, to make laws for the heart, to punish and reward eternally? *If no creature*, God himself must be the Author. It is highly blameworthy then to have low thoughts of God's own book; yet such is the corruption of fallen man, that even the generality of those who make some profession of the truth, are too apt to set light by "Moses and the prophets," (Luke xvi. 31,) which Paul styles "the oracles of God." (Rom. iii. 2.) The Heathens were exceeding fond of their oracles, which were but riddles and cheats; but many under the Christian name do disregard the lively and true oracles of God: I mean, not only those who of old looked upon the Old Testament as not indited by the Spirit; † or of later days, as out of date under the New Testament, and all of it but as a dead letter; ‡ and those who forbid the reading of it to the laity; § but such as slight, and do not consult, these infallible oracles which really passed God's own hands, having his signature upon them, and being "able to make us wise unto salvation." (2 Tim. iii. 15.) Yea, are there not to be found those who, though they professedly renounce Popery, do yet droll upon the holy scriptures, burlesque them, and make a ridicule of them? (and such would deal so with monitors from the dead;) wherein, if we would indeed exercise our spiritual senses to discern, we might see the face of God and live. (Exod. xxxiii. 20.) Alas! how does the speech of many "bewray" them (Matt. xxvi. 73) (because "out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh," Matt. xii. 34) to have little value for the divine oracles, since they in all their talk seldom, if ever, discourse of them with reverence! Which would indeed dispose one to fear, that some under the name of Pro-

* See GROTIUS; MORNÆUS; MR. BAXTER'S "Saints' Rest;" SIR CHARLES WOLSELEY; MR. WHITE; &c. † Manichees. ‡ Weigelians. § Papists.

testants have in reality no more value for the oracles of God than the Popes of Rome, who put their own canons and decrees not only in the same rank with the canonical scriptures, but above them.*

2. *We should not any of us tempt God in hankering after new revelations or extraordinary discoveries; but adhere to God, in the ordinary means [which] he hath appointed and allowed to us for conversion and confirmation.*—It is true, as a great man† hath well observed, all religion doth depend, or is presumed to depend, upon revelations from above. “Flesh and blood,” saith Christ, “hath not revealed it, but my Father which is in heaven.” (Matt. xvi. 17.) But then when this is consigned in a sufficient and clear canon, undoubtedly attested, with an exclusion of additionals, under dreadful plagues, (Rev. xxii. 18,) we should rest satisfied, and not be reaching after novelties; yea, and we should heartily acknowledge our gratitude to our gracious God for his true light, which doth perpetually cast out his rays, and, as Polybius saith of truth, “Itself doth, by itself, prevail, and pulls down all the falsehood that perks up its head against it.”‡ O how thankful should we be for the liberty we do enjoy, for the good of our precious souls, to worship God as he hath prescribed in his word of eternal truth; (Matt. xi. 25, 26;) heartily waiting, as dependents upon him, that he would “open our eyes” to see the wonderful things contained in his law! (Psalm cxix. 18.) We should be well contented with the proposals that God himself makes to us in his unerring word, and not expect to have our curiosities gratified with strange relations from the dead. If the house of God amongst us be “built upon the foundation of the” true “prophets and apostles,” (Eph. ii. 20,) we shall not need, as a learned man saith,§ “daubing with such spurious visions and prophecies as the Romanists brag of.” Luther, vexed with their impositions, writes, “I am wont to pray God daily, that he may not send any angel to me, for any cause. If any should be offered, I would not hear; unless he should signify somewhat of political necessity; even as pleasant dreams and glad tidings are sometimes wont to cheer us up in civil matters. And yet I know not whether even in such a case I would hearken to him and believe him. But in spiritual things we do not desire angels.”|| The ordinary means of grace which I have been discoursing of, as being ordained of God to discover what he would have us to do, and what he will do for us, is that which the Holy Spirit joins himself to, and makes more effectual usually to a saving change of the heart, than prodigious and sensible alarms, which uneasy souls desire to pry into; whenas the holy angels desire to peep into the mysteries revealed to the church, and made known by the “manifold,” or *embroidered*, “wisdom of God.” (1 Peter i. 12; Eph. iii. 10.)

3. *There should be no seeking to familiar spirits, or consulting of conjurers and cunning men, as they would be thought to be, who converse with Satan, since we are called to the law and to the testimonies.*—If

* HONORATUS, lib. ii. epist. 16.

† MIRANDULA *De Fid. et Ord. Cred.*

‡ Αυτη δι' αυτης επικρατει και καταγωνιζεται το ψευδος.

§ DR. SPENCER, “Of

Prophecies.” || *In Gen. xxii. : Ego soleo Deum precari, &c.*

any pretenders to new lights, or discoveries from the other world, speak not "according to this word," that is already revealed and sealed, "it is because there is no light in them." (Isai. viii. 20.) Some expound it: If they be otherwise-minded than they have from God been advised, and will resolve to run after witches and wizards, there shall no day-light of prosperity befall them; but all darkness of affliction and misery shall betide them.* God allows not a going to the witch at Endor, having written laws by which he will rule and judge the world. His people of old were not to hearken unto the word of those false prophets that "gave a sign or a wonder," (Deut. xiii. 1—3,) though God permitted it to come to pass, for their trial, when pretended to be an attestation to that which God abhorred. (2 Thess. ii. 8, 9.) But they were to hearken unto the Prophet whom God would send, even Jesus Christ, (Deut. xviii. 15, 22; Matt. xvii. 5,) unto whom the true prophets under the Old Testament did refer, and who hath silenced all lying oracles; which the true oracles do caution us to take heed we be not deceived with. (Matt. x. 16; xxiv. 23, 24; 1 Tim. iv. 1, 2; 2 Thess. ii. 9, 10.) Christ's apostles brought the conjurers, by the power of God's word, to confess their delusions, and bring their books to be burned openly, (Acts xix. 18, 19,) which were of the same kind in effect with some prognostications about future contingencies, that there can be no true foundation for in genuine astrology, though that be pretended, to the prejudice of the divine oracles. To which, whoever refuseth to give entire credit upon due deliberation, he gives ground of suspicion that he hath none of the Spirit of Christ, (1 Cor. xii. 3,) neither would he ever believe Christ himself returning in the flesh, and all the angels, or those from the dead. Hence we may take notice how the wonderful boldness of Satan bewrays itself; as well as the incredulity of men in receiving the truth, and their credulity in embracing of fables.† For how many are there who account, for such, those things concerning eternal punishment which are declared by the Son of God! And, on the other hand, how many, partly by mere fictions, partly by true nocturnal apparitions of unclean spirits assuming dead corpses but to deceive miserable men, have on purpose given themselves occasion to be deceived, (not heeding Paul's fear, "lest through the serpent's subtilty," their "minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ," 2 Cor. xi. 3;) to which impostures the Popish purgatory, prayer for the dead, invocation of saints, and that which they call "the adoration of relics," owe their original, when the Lord hath of old forbidden that the dead should be consulted or heard! (Deut. xviii. 11.) To conclude:

4. *Let us be exhorted to mind "Moses and the prophets."*—Let us labour in the light of the scriptures to see the Author of them, (Psalm xxxvi. 9; lxxxiv. 11,) that we may thereby, as the most successful means, be brought to repentance of our sins, avoid the torments of hell, and enjoy the pleasures of heaven. And if any of us, under temptation, as looking for somewhat more sensible and lively, fall into doubting concerning the divine writ, or word of God

* See "English Annotations."

† BEZA.

as written ;—which yet, I have showed, is more credible, for that it shows itself in a diviner way, being written ; as water in the fountain, or light in the sun ; which, while it is strained, passing through the pipes and instruments of mortals, in a traditional way, is defiled or obscured ;—let us then take off our eyes from curiosities, and not think to delight our senses with novelties ; and preter-evangelical doctrines, knowing the great apostle hath anathematized, or cursed, all them who bring another gospel, or doctrines beside the gospel, in the beginning of his epistle to the Galatians. (Chap. i. 6—9.) Christ here in my text represents Abraham as preferring the sacred scriptures, to be more worthy of credit, and beneficial to conversion, than the reports of those raised from the dead ; and Paul, by whom Christ himself speaks, not writing rashly and unadvisedly, when moved by the Holy Ghost, but upon mature deliberation, with a great deal of gravity, repeats : “ As we said before, so say I now again,” (confirming what he and others for substance had delivered,) for greater certainty : “ If any man preach any other gospel unto you ;” he doth not say, as some of the ancients have observed,* *any contrary*, but “ any the least thing beside that we have preached and ye have received, though he be an angel from heaven, let him be accursed.” (Verse 9.) He prefers the divine writ to the angels’ coming down with a message from heaven ; evangelical doctrines to angelical, could it be supposed ; and that deservedly : because, the angels, though great, yet are servants and ministers ; (Heb. i. 14 ;) whereas all the holy scriptures are not commanded and sent of servants to be written ; but of God himself, the Lord of all, as hath been showed. (2 Tim. iii. 16 ; 1 Peter i. 11, 12 ; 2 Peter i. 20, 21 ; John xx. 31.) Let us then depend solely upon the sure word, which is most effectual to convert and comfort us. Here is a firm support ; for if this earthly globe [which] we stand upon, though heavy and bulky, hang up, encompassed by the heavens, not stirring from its centre, though it hath no shores to uphold it but “ the word” of God, (Heb. i. 3,) certainly it concerns us to stay ourselves securely on the infallible promise of the eternal God, admiring the excellency of his holy writ ; “ which,” saith Augustine,† “ is a burning light, fit both to make bare those things which are covered with darkness, and to demonstrate itself to thine eyes.” For indeed it contains the purest precepts, the best counsels, the clearest examples, the strongest helps, and the most cogent motives and encouragements to duty, the most dreadful threatenings of wrath to the disobedient, and the surest and fullest promises of rest to the obedient.

* CHRYSOSTOMUS, THEOPHYLACTUS : [Ουχ] ὅτι εαν εναντια καταγγελουσιν αλλα καν μικρον τι ευαγγελιζονται παρα δ ευγγελιζομεθα. † *Lucerna ardens est idonea, et alia quæ tenebris operiebuntur nudare, et seipsam tuis oculis demonstrare.*—Tract. 35 in Johannem.