

## SERMON II. (VI.)

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THE SCRIPTURE IS A SUFFICIENT RULE OF CHRISTIAN FAITH, OR A RECORD OF ALL NECESSARY CHRISTIAN DOCTRINES, WITHOUT ANY SUPPLEMENT OF UNWRITTEN TRADITIONS, AS CONTAINING ANY NECESSARY MATTER OF FAITH; AND IS THUS FAR SUFFICIENT FOR THE DECISION OF ALL CONTROVERSIES.

*Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle.*—2 Thessalonians ii. 15.

THE apostle, after he had comforted the Thessalonians,—he exhorteth them to constancy in the truth, whatever temptations they had to the contrary. The comforts [which] he propoundeth to them were taken, 1. *From their election.* (Verse 13.) 2. *From their vocation.* (Verse 14.) His exhortation is to perseverance: “Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle.”

In the words observe,

I. *The illative particle*, “therefore:” *Because* God hath “chosen you” and “called you,” and given you such advantages against error and seduction.

II. *The duty inferred*: Στηνεται, “Stand fast.”—It is a military word; you have the same in other places: “Watch ye, stand fast in the faith.” (1 Cor. xvi. 13.) “Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth.” (Eph. vi. 14.) The word intimateth perseverance.

III. *The means of perseverance*: “Hold the traditions which you have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle.”

Where observe, (I.) *The act*; (II.) *The object*.

(I.) *The act*: Κρατειτε, “Hold with strong hand.”—The word implieth a forcible holding against assaults, whether of error or persecution. The Thessalonians were assaulted in both kinds: the Heathens persecuted them; and some were gone abroad that began “the mystery of iniquity,” and were ready to pervert them.

(II.) *The object*; which is propounded,

1. *By a common and general term*: “The traditions which you have been taught.”

2. *By a distribution*: “Whether by word, or our epistle.”

1. *The common and general term*: “The traditions which ye have been taught.” There are two sorts of traditions, *human* and *divine*.

(1.) *Human traditions* are certain external observances instituted by men, and delivered from hand to hand, from progenitors to their

posterity. These may be either *beside*, or *contrary to*, the word of God.

(i.) *Beside the word*.—As the institutions of the family of the Rechabites, in the observance of which from father to son they were so exact and punctual, that God produced their example to shame the disobedience of his people: “Jonadab the son of Rechab our father commanded us, saying, Ye shall drink no wine, neither ye, nor your sons for ever; neither shall ye build house, nor sow seed, nor plant vineyard, nor have any: but all your days ye shall dwell in tents; that ye may live many days in the land where ye be strangers.” (Jer. xxxv. 6, 7.)

(ii.) *Contrary to the word of God*.—Such as were those of the Pharisees: “Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition?” (Matt. xv. 3.) Human inventions in religion are contrary to and destructive of divine laws.

(2.) *Traditions Divine* are either heavenly doctrines revealed by God, or institutions and ordinances appointed by him for the use of the church. These are the rule and ground of our faith, worship, and obedience. The whole doctrine of the gospel is a tradition delivered and conveyed to us by fit messengers, such as the apostles were: “Now I praise you, brethren, that ye remember me in all things, and keep the ordinances,” (margin, “traditions,”) “as I delivered them to you.” (1 Cor. xi. 2.) So that “holding the traditions” is nothing else but perseverance in apostolical doctrine.

2. *The distribution*.—That no cheats might be put upon them under any pretence, therefore he saith, “Whether by word, or our epistle;” that is, by word of mouth, when present, or by epistle, when absent. And he saith not *epistles*, but “epistle:” as alluding to the former written unto them. They were bound to yield to both alike credence and obedience; for, whether in speaking or writing, the apostolical authority was the same.

To improve this verse for your benefit, I shall lay down several PROPOSITIONS.

PROPOSITION I. *That whatever assurance we have of God’s preserving us in the truth, yet we are bound to use diligence and caution.*—For the apostle had said, that God had “chosen” and “called” them to the “belief of the truth;” and yet saith, “Therefore, brethren, stand fast.”

First. Reason will tell us, that when we intend an end, we must use the means: otherwise the bare intention and desire would suffice; and to the accomplishing of any effect, we need no more than to will it. And then the sluggard would be the wisest man in the world; who is full of wishings and wouldings, though his hands refuse to labour. But common experience showeth, that the end cannot be obtained without a diligent use of the means: “The soul of the sluggard desireth, and hath nothing: but the soul of the diligent shall be made fat;” (Prov. xiii. 4;) that is, rewarded with the intended benefit.

Secondly. The business in hand is, whether God’s election, calling,

or promise doth so secure the end to us, as that we need not be so careful in the diligent use of means. Such a notion or conceit there may be in the hearts of men; therefore let us attack it a little by these considerations:—

1. *God's decree is both of ends and means.*—For all his purposes are executed by fit means. He that “hath chosen us to salvation,” bringeth it about by “the belief of the truth and sanctification of the Spirit.” (2 Thess. ii. 13.) And without faith and holiness no man shall see God and escape condemnation. (Heb. xi. 6; xii. 14.) God had assured Paul, that there should be “no loss of any man's life among them, except of the ship;” (Acts xvii. 22;) and yet afterward, Paul telleth them, “Except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved.” (Verse 31.) How could that assurance given to Paul from God, and Paul's caution to the mariners, stand together? Doth the purpose of God depend upon the uncertain will and actions of men? I answer: Not as a cause from whence it receiveth its force and strength, but as a means appointed also by God to the execution of his decree; for by the same decree God appointeth the event, what he will do, and the means by which he will have it to be done. And the Lord revealing by his word this conjunction of ends and means, there is a necessity of duty lying upon man to use these means, and not to expect the end without them. God intended to save all in the ship, and yet the mariners must abide in the ship. Therefore what God hath joined together let no man separate. If we separate these things, God doth not change his counsel, but we pervert his order to our own destruction.

2. *God, that hath bidden us to believe his promises, hath forbidden us to tempt his providence.* (Matt. iv. 7.)—Now we tempt God, when we desire him to give an extraordinary proof of his care over us, when ordinary means will serve the turn, or be useful to us.

3. *Though the means seem to have no connexion with the end; yet if God hath enjoined them for that end, we must use them.*—As in the instance of Naaman: God was resolved to cure him; but Naaman must take his prescribed way, though against his own fancy and conceit: “Go and wash in Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again to thee, and thou shalt be clean.” (2 Kings v. 10.) Compare verse 13: “If the prophet had bid thee do some greater thing, wouldst thou not have done it?” So, Peter must submit to be washed, though he could not see the benefit of it. (John xiii. 6, 7.) So, the blind man must submit to have his eyes anointed with clay, and wash in the pool of Siloam; (John ix. 6, 7;) though the clay seemed to put out his eyes, rather than cure them; and the pool could not wash away his blindness. But means appointed by God must be used, whatever improbabilities are apprehended by us.

4. *That when God's will is expressly declared concerning the event, yet he will have the means used.*—As for instance: God was absolutely resolved to add fifteen years more to Hezekiah's life: yet he must take a lump of figs, and lay it on the boil. (2 Kings xx. 5—7.) Which

plainly showeth, that no promise on God's part, nor assurance on ours, hindereth the use of means : God will work by them, not without them.

5. *In spiritual things assurance of the event is an encouragement to industry, not a pretence to sloth.*—"Ye shall abide in him." (1 John ii. 27.) "And now, little children, abide in him." (Verse 28.) The promise of perseverance doth encourage us to use endeavours that we may persevere, and quicken diligence, rather than nourish security, or open a gap to carnal liberty : "I therefore so run, not as uncertain." (1 Cor. ix. 26.) We are the more earnest, because we are assured [that] the means shall not be uneffectual.

PROPOSITION II. *Our duty is to stand fast in the faith of Christ, and profession of godliness, whatever temptations we have to the contrary.*—"Stand fast" being a military word, it alludeth to a soldier's keeping his ground; and is opposed to two things : 1. *A cowardly flight.* 2. *A treacherous revolt.*

1. *A cowardly flight* implieth our being overcome in "the evil day," by the many afflictions that befall us for the truth's sake : "Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand." (Eph. vi. 13.) Their temptation was the many troubles and persecutions that befell them, called there "the evil day." Their defence lay in "the whole armour of God," which is there made of six pieces : "the girdle of truth" or sincerity, which is a strength to us as a girdle to the loins ; "the breast-plate of righteousness," or a holy inclination and desire to perform our duty to God in all things ; and "the shield of faith," or a steadfast adhering to the truths of the gospel, whether delivered in a way of command, promise, or threatening ; "the helmet of hope," or a certain and desirous expectation of the promised glory ; "the shoe of the preparation of the gospel of peace," which is, a readiness to endure all encounters for Christ's sake, who hath made our peace with God ; and "the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God." (Verses 13—17.) Now if we take this armour, and use it in our conflicts, what doth it serve for ? "To withstand" and "stand." The first is the act of a soldier, the second is the posture of a conqueror : here is withstanding till the field be won, and then standing when the day of evil is over. Here we make our way to heaven by conflict and conquest, and hereafter we triumph.

2. *A treacherous revolt*, or yielding to the enemy, by complying with those things which are against the interest of Christ and his kingdom for advantage-sake : "Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world." (2 Tim. iv. 10.) Backsliders in heart are the worst sort of apostates ; such as lose their affection to God, and delight in his ways, and esteem of his glorious recompences, for a little pleasure, profit, or pomp of living : they "sell the birth-right for one morsel of meat." (Heb. xii. 15, 16.) Some fail in their understandings ; but most miscarry by the perverse inclination of their wills : they are carnal, worldly hypocrites, that never thoroughly mortified the fleshly mind ; prize things as they are commodious to the flesh,

and will save them from sufferings. The bias of such men's hearts doth easily prevail against the light of their understandings.

PROPOSITION III. *The means of standing fast is by holding the traditions which were taught by the holy apostles.*—Here I will prove,

1. *That the doctrine of Christianity taught by the apostles is a tradition.*

2. *That holding this tradition by "strong hand," when others would wrest it from us, is the means of our perseverance.*

1. *That the doctrine of Christianity is a tradition.*—I prove it by two arguments.

ARGUMENT I. First. Matters not evident by the light of nature, nor immediately revealed to us by God, must be either *an invention* or *a tradition*.

*An invention* is something in religion not evident by natural light, nor agreeable to sound reason; but is some "cunningly-devised fable," invented by one or more, and obtruded by various artifices upon the belief of the world. Inventions in this kind were man's disease, not his remedy: "God hath made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions." (Eccles. vii. 29.) As when the philosophers sat a-brood upon religion, a goodly chimera it was [which] they hatched and brought forth!—"They became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened;" and "professing themselves to be wise, they became fools." (Rom. i. 21, 22.) These inventions little became the nature of God. Nor were they profitable to man; for still the great sore of nature was unhealed, which is, a fear of death and the righteous wrath of God; (Rom. i. 32;) so that neither man's comfort nor duty was well provided for. Surely the gospel is none of this sort; not an invention of man, but a revelation of God; and a revelation not made to us in person, but brought out of the bosom of God by Jesus Christ, and by him manifested to chosen witnesses, who might publish this mystery and secret to others.

Well then, since the gospel is not an invention, it is *a tradition*; or "a delivery" of the truth upon the testimony of one that came from God to instruct the world, or reduce it to him: not an invention of man; but a secret brought out of the bosom of God, by our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore it is said, "How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him; God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will?" (Heb. ii. 3, 4.) Christ delivered it to the apostles, and the apostles delivered it to others: "The things which thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also." (2 Tim. ii. 2.) The apostles received the gospel from Christ, and the churches and ministers from the apostles, and then delivered it down to others until it came to us; which is the means of our believing the truth, and confessing the name of Christ. This testimony, delivered and conveyed to us by

the most credible means, and which we have no reason to doubt of, is as binding as if we had heard Christ and his apostles in person; for we have their word in writing, though we did not hear them preach and publish it with the lively voice: their authority is the same, delivered either way. And that these are their writings, appeareth by the constant tradition of the church, and the acknowledgment of friends and enemies, who still appeal to them as a public authentic record; and as they have been attested by the church, they have been owned by God, and blessed by him to the converting and sanctifying of many souls, throughout all successions of ages. And by this tradition, Christianity hath held up the head against all encounters of time: and the persecutions of adverse powers have not suppressed it, nor the disputes of enemies silenced the profession of it; but from age to age it hath been received and transmitted to future generations, though sometimes at a very dear rate. And this is binding to us: though we saw not the persons, and miracles by which they confirmed their message, and heard not the first report; yet the universal tradition having handed it to us, is a sufficient ground of faith; and so we "believe through their word," and are concerned in Christ's prayers; (John xvii. 20;) for with them and their successors, as to these necessary things, Christ hath promised to be "to the end of the world." (Matt. xxviii. 20.)

ARG. II. My next argument is: Because Christian religion must needs be a tradition, *partly because matter of fact is the foundation of it, and it is in itself matter of faith.*

(1.) *Because it is built upon matter of fact.*—That the Son of God came from God to bring us to God; that is to say, appeared in human nature, instructed the world by his doctrine and example, and at length died for sinners; confirming both in life and death the truth of his mission, by such unquestionable miracles as showed him to be the Son of God, and the Saviour of the world. Now a testimony, tradition, or report is necessary in matters of fact, which of necessity must be confined to some determinate time and place. It was not fit that Christ should be always working miracles, always dying, always rising and ascending, in every place, and in the view of every man; but these things were to be once done in one place of the world, in the sight of some particular and competent witnesses. But, because the knowledge of them concerned all the rest of the world, they were by them to be attested to others. Matters of fact can only be proved by credible witnesses; and this was the great office put upon the apostles. (Acts i. 8, 21, 22; ii. 32; iii. 15; x. 39—43.)

(2.) *As it is matter of faith, or the doctrine built upon this matter of fact.*—We cannot properly be said to believe a thing but upon report and testimony. I may know a thing by sense or reason; but I cannot believe it but as it is affirmed or brought to me by credible testimony. As we are said to see those things which we perceive by the eye or the sense of seeing, and to know those things which we receive by reason or sure demonstration; so we are said to believe those things which are brought to us by valuable testimony, tradition,

and report. As, for instance, if any one ask you, "Do you believe the sun shineth at noon-day?" you will answer, "I do not believe it, but see it." So if any one ask you, "Do you believe that twice two make four, and twice three make six?" you will say, "I do not believe it, but know it; because certain and evident reason telleth me, that two is the half of four, and three of six, and every whole consisteth of two halves or moieties." But if he should ask you, "Do you believe that the sun is bigger than the earth?" you will say, "I believe it:" for though your eye doth not discover it, nor doth an ignorant man know any certain demonstration of it; yet, having the authority of learned men, who are competent judges in the case, you judge it a rash and foolish obstinacy not to believe it. Apply it now to the mysteries of godliness revealed in the gospel. They cannot be seen with the eye, for they are invisible; nor found out and comprehended by any human understanding, because they exceed the reach of man's reason, and depend upon the love and arbitrary will of God. (John iii. 16.) Yet you believe them, because God hath revealed them to the prophets and apostles; and God, being Truth and Wisdom itself, cannot deceive, or be deceived. And therefore you believe them with the certainty of divine faith; and do no more doubt of them, than you do of those things which you see with your eyes, and know and understand by a sure demonstration.

The sense of seeing may be deceived, and human reason may err; but it is impossible [that] God should deceive or be deceived. It oftentimes falleth out, that men do prefer the authority and report of a man whom they judge to be wise and good before their own sense and reason: as for instance: that man who by his eye judgeth the sun to be less than the earth, yet doth not obstinately stand in his opinion, when he heareth a knowing and skilful philosopher assert the contrary. Now "if we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater." (1 John v. 9.) And this testimony of God is brought to us by his authorized messengers as the ground of faith; and what is that but tradition? We believe in God by hearing of him, and we hear by a preacher. (Rom. x. 14.) Ordinary preachers declare his mind to us; but the extraordinary confirm it. The common preachers give us notice; but Christ and his apostles give us assurance; and by their testimony and tradition our faith is ultimately resolved into the veracity of God.

2. *That holding this tradition is the great means of standing fast in the faith of Christ, and the confession of his name.*—For in the word of God delivered by Christ and his apostles, there is sure direction to walk by, and sure promises to build upon. For whatever they made known of Christ was not a fable, but a certain truth; for they had the testimony of sense, (2 Peter i. 16, 17; 1 John i. 1—4,) and so could plead both the authority of his command and the certainty of his promise, and that with uncontrollable evidence. And without this revelation there can be neither *faith*, nor *obedience*, nor *sure expectation of happiness*. For we cannot trust God for what he hath not promised, nor obey God in what he hath not commanded,

nor in our difficulties and distresses expect happiness from him without his warrant and assurance. But by this doctrine delivered to us we have all that belongeth to faith, obedience, and happiness; and beyond that the creature can desire no more.

(1.) *There can be no faith till we have a sure testimony of God's revelation.*—For faith is a believing such things as God hath revealed, because he hath revealed them. It is not faith, but fancy, to believe such things as God hath never revealed; nor is it trust and a regular confidence, to think that he will certainly give us what he hath never promised: this were to lay us open to all manner of delusion. And therefore we are never upon sure and stable ground, but by sticking to such a tradition as may justly entitle itself to God.

(2.) *Nor obedience.*—For obedience is a doing what God hath commanded, because he hath commanded it. The fundamental reason of obedience is the sight of God's will. (1 Thess. iv. 3; v. 18; 1 Peter ii. 15.) To do what God never commanded, or not to do it upon that account but for other reasons, is not obedience. And in difficult cases the soul can never be held to its duty, till we are persuaded that so is God's will concerning us. Now to know his will concerning us, we are often bidden to "search the scriptures;" but never bidden to consult with the church, to know what unwritten traditions she hath in her keeping to instruct us in our duty.

(3.) *No certain expectation of happiness.*—We are never safe till we know by what rule Christ will judge us; that is, reward or punish men at the last day. Now he will judge us according to the gospel. (Rom. ii. 16; 2 Thess. i. 8.) Obey the gospel, and you have a perfect rule to guide you to happiness; but if you "neglect this great salvation," (Heb. ii. 3,) or be unfaithful in the profession of it, this word condemneth you, and God will ratify the sentence of it.

PROPOSITION IV. *That whilst the apostles were in being, there were two ways of delivering the truth; and that is, by word of mouth, and writing.*—So in the text: "Whether by word, or our epistle." The apostles went up and down and preached Christ every where. That needeth no proof, unless you would have me to produce the whole book of the Acts of the Apostles. But they did not preach only, but write; and both by the instinct of the Holy Spirit, who guided their journeys, and moved them to write epistles. For, being often absent from churches newly planted, and heresies arising or some contentions, which could not be avoided among weak Christians, God overruled these occasions for the profit of the church in after-ages. Upon one occasion or another they saw a necessity to write: *Αναγκην εσχον*, "It was needful for me to write unto you." (Jude 3.) As in the Old Testament God himself delivered the law with great majesty and terror, and afterward caused the same to be written in tables of stone for the constant use of his people; and the prophets first uttered their prophecies, and then wrote them: so the apostles first preached evangelical doctrine, and then consigned it to writing for the use of all ages. And though all things delivered by them were not delivered in one sermon, or one epistle; yet by



degrees the canon of the New Testament was constituted and made perfect by the writings of the evangelists and apostles.

PROPOSITION V. *That now when they are long since gone to God, and we cannot receive from them the doctrine of life by word of mouth, we must stick to the scriptures or written word.*

1. *Because we are taught to do so by Christ and his apostles.*—Christ always appealeth to the writings of the Old Testament, both against traditions which he condemneth, (Matt. xv. 2—6,) and against pretended revelations: “If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded” to repent, “though one rose from the dead.” (Luke xvi. 31.) And the apostles still have recourse to this proof: “Witnessing none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come.” (Acts xxvi. 22.) And when they pleaded [that] they were eye and ear witnesses, and so their testimony was valuable; yet they say, “Ye have” *βεβαιωτερον λογον*, “a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed.” (2 Peter i. 19.) Now how can we do better than to imitate these great examples?

2. *Because these things were written for our sakes.*—“These things write we unto you, that your joy may be full.” (1 John i. 4.) The apostles, being to leave the world, did know the slipperiness of man’s memory, and the danger of corrupting Christian doctrine, if there were not a sure authentic record left; therefore they wrote, and so fully, that nothing is wanting to complete our joy and happiness.

3. *Because the scriptures are perfect.*—The perfection of scripture is known by its end and intended use, which is, to give us a knowledge of those things which concern our *faith, duty, and happiness.*

(1.) *Our faith in Christ.*—If there be enough written for that end, we need not unwritten traditions to complete our rule. Now St. John telleth us [that] he might have written more things, “But these things are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name.” (John xx. 30, 31.) Certainly, nothing is wanting to beget a faith in Christ: the object is sufficiently propounded, the warrant or claim is laid down in the new covenant, and the encouragements to believe are clear and strong; (what would men have more?) so that here is a perfect rule, perfect in its kind, and for its proper use.

(2.) *For our duty.*—That is sufficiently provided for. The apostle telleth us, that “the grace of God” (take it objectively for “the grace of the gospel,” or subjectively for “grace in our hearts”) “teacheth us” (if you mean objective grace, it prescribeth, directeth—if of subjective grace, it persuadeth and exciteth—what to do) “to live soberly, righteously, godly, in this present world.” (Titus ii. 12.) There are all the branches of man’s duty enumerated: *Sobriety* relateth to self-government; *righteously*, to our carriage toward our neighbour; *godly*, to our commerce and communion with God. Now in the word of God what is there wanting that belongeth either to worship, or justice, or personal holiness? Therefore certainly we need no other rule; for it layeth down whatsoever men are bound to do in all

ages and places of the world, and in whatsoever circumstances God shall put them. And so it is fit to be the law of the universal King and Lawgiver: yea, it is so perfect, that whatever other way is set up, it presently dasheth against those notions that we have, or should have, of God and his service and worship; or it infringeth or perverteth the liberty and nature of man.

(3.) *For our happiness.*—That doctrine and institution “which is able to make us wise unto salvation,” is enough for us: But so the holy scriptures are said to do: “Thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation, through faith which is in Christ Jesus.” (2 Tim. iii. 15.) Nay, afterward: “The man of God” is by them made “perfect, thoroughly furnished to every good work.” (Verse 17.)

If the scriptures do thoroughly direct men to know God in Christ, and save their own souls, why should we look any further? Now they do not only furnish every private Christian with this knowledge, but the man of God, who is to instruct others,—he needeth look no further, but is furnished out of the scripture with all things necessary to discharge his office. Therefore here we fix and rest; we have a sufficient rule, and a full record of all necessary Christian doctrines.

## USES.

USE 1. The use of all is, *Let us not seek another rule than the word of God.*—Papists cry-up unwritten traditions to be received with equal respect and reverence as we receive the holy scriptures; but you, brethren, “stand fast,” holding the apostolical tradition. You cannot have it by word of mouth from them now; therefore you must stick to what is written, or else you cannot preserve yourselves from the frauds and impostures of Antichrist. These apostolical writings have been received in all ages and times of the church from the beginning; and all disputes among Christians have been tried by them. None were allowed good or sincere Christians who doubted of the truth of them. But because we have to do with a people that will sacrifice all to the honour and interest of their church; and, knowing they are not able to stand before the light of scriptures, have, to the no little prejudice of the Christian cause, done all that they can to weaken the authority, sufficiency, and perspicuity of them, that we might have no religion without the testimony and recommendation of their church; therefore I shall resume the matter and declare it afresh.

1. *Mankind lying in darkness and in the shadow of death, it was necessary that, one way or another, God should reveal his mind to them, that we may know what belongeth to our duty and happiness, for our chief good and last end.*—Being altered by sin, we strangely mistake things, and put light for darkness, and darkness for light; good for evil, and evil for good; weighing all things in the balance of the flesh, which we seek to please. We confound both the names and natures of things, and wander in a maze of a thousand perplexities: therefore God, in pity to mankind, hath given us a sure

direction in his word, which is "a lamp unto our feet, and a light unto our paths." (Psalm cxix. 105.) Mark the words of "light" and "lamp:" the use of a *lamp* is by night, and in the day we have the *light* of the sun: whether it be day or night with us, here we are taught how to carry ourselves. Mark again the words of "path" and "feet:" the one signifieth our *way* and general course; the other, all our particular *actions*: so far as religion is concerned in them, we have directions in the word about them. Besides, man's condition is such that he needeth a supernatural remedy by a Redeemer, which, depending upon the mere love and free grace of God, cannot be found out by natural light left to us; for that only can judge of things necessary, but not of such things as depend upon the mere pleasure of God. Therefore a divine revelation there must be.

2. Since it is necessary that God should some way or another reveal his mind to his people, *it must be done by oracles, visions, dreams, or by extraordinary messengers*, who by word of mouth might convey it to us; *or else by writing, and by ordinary teachers*, whose lips may preserve knowledge in the church. (Mal. ii. 7.)—The former ways might suffice, while God saw fit to reveal but a few truths, and such as did not burden the memory, and men were long-lived and of great simplicity, and the church was confined within a small compass of ground, and not liable to so many miseries and changes as now in the latter ages; but when once God had spoken to us by his Son, these extraordinary ways ceased: "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son." (Heb. i. 1, 2.) As formerly God did speak *πολυτροπως*, "in divers manners," that is to say, by visions, oracles, dreams, &c.; so *πολυμερως*, "at sundry times," by several steps and degrees, he acquainted the world with the truths necessary for man to know; delivering them out by portions, not all together at once, till He came who had the Spirit without measure. (John iii- 34.) The prophets to whom God revealed himself before by visions, oracles, dreams, or the coming of the Spirit upon them, had the Spirit *εκ μετρου*, "by measure," to fit them for some particular errand or message, on which God sent them; but when God sent his Son out of his bosom to reveal the whole doctrine of faith at once, and to declare his Father's will with full authority and power, he fixed and closed up the rule of faith. So it was not fit that after him there should come any extraordinary nuncios and ambassadors from heaven, or [that] any other should be owned as infallible messengers, but such as he immediately sent abroad in the world to disciple the nations. Therefore all former extraordinary ways ceased, and we are left to the ordinary rule stated by Christ.

3. *Being left to the ordinary rule, it was necessary [that] it should be taught not only by word of mouth, but committed to writing.*—For Christ is ascended into heaven, and the apostles do not live for ever. And we have no men now that are immediately and divinely inspired; and ordinary pastors and teachers cannot make new articles

of faith, but do only build on the apostles' foundation, (1 Cor. iii. 10,) or that divinely-inspired doctrine which they delivered to the church. Yea, that doctrine cannot well be preserved from oblivion and corruption without writing; therefore God accounted this the safest way. Those things that are only delivered by word of mouth, or from hand to hand, may easily be changed, corrupted, or utterly lost. Certainly, if you consider man's sloth, treachery, levity, and the many vile affections which may easily induce him to extinguish or corrupt the truth which is contrary to them, you will see that it is necessary that there should be a sure authentic record, by which truth and error might be tried and distinguished; yea, that the church which is dispersed throughout the world might have truth at hand, and particular believers have this doctrine ever by them for their comfort and use; it being the property of a blessed man to "delight in the law of God," and to exercise himself therein "day and night." (Psalm i. 2.) In short: while the apostles were living, it was good to take the tradition from their mouth; but, now they are dead, we take it from their writings. Surely, if God saw some writing necessary when those extraordinary ways [which] we spake of before were in use, and the church of the Old Testament was in a much quieter state than the church of the New; I say, if some writing were necessary then, it is more necessary now; for the Christian church is more exposed to dreadful storms of persecution, the deceits of heretics of all sorts, especially to the frauds of Antichrist, which we are forewarned of in this chapter, and are detected and discovered by their contrariety to the written word.

4. *This truth being written, it is both a safe and a full rule for us to walk by.*—It is a *safe rule*, because it is written by the apostles and evangelists, "holy men moved by the Holy Ghost." (2 Peter i. 21.) The apostles did not lose their infallibility when they committed what they preached to writing: the same Spirit that assisted them in delivering the doctrine by word of mouth, assisted them also when they delivered it by writing. And it is a *full and sufficient rule*, because it containeth all things which are necessary for men to believe and do in order to eternal life. Let them name what is necessary beyond what is recommended there, or may be deduced from thence. Yea, it doth contain not only all the essential, but also the integral, parts of the Christian religion; and therefore nothing can be any part of our religion which is not there. The direction of old was, "To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them." (Isai. viii. 20.) Every thing was then tried by "Moses and the prophets;" and every thing must be now tried by "the prophets and apostles," which is our foundation of faith, worship, and obedience. (Eph. ii. 20.)

5. *That which we blame in the Papists is, that they cry up a private, unproved, unwritten tradition of their own, as of equal authority with this safe and full rule which is contained in the written word of God.*—Their crime and fault may be considered *partly with respect to the object and matter*: that these traditions are not indifferent cus-

toms, but essential points, necessary to faith and Christian practice ; and so, though a Christian be never so thorough and sound in his obedience to the word of God, and true to the baptismal covenant, yet if he submit to these unwritten traditions, he wants some point necessary to faith and practice, and so to life eternal. Which is contrary to Mark xvi. 16 : " He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved ; but he that believeth not shall be damned ;" and John xvii. 3 : " This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent." *Partly as to the subject* : as they make their own faction to be the only keepers of these things ; and that nothing is to be owned as apostolical tradition, but what is delivered as such by their authority. Which is to leave the church to the tyranny and usurpation of a corrupt faction, to declare for apostolical tradition any thing which serveth their ends and interests, and for which no true historical evidence is produced. Now the unjust and fraudulent practices which they have used to promote this usurpation over the churches of Christ, render them of all men most unfit to be trusted in this kind. *Partly with respect to the manner* : they will have these things to be received *pari reverentia et pietatis affectu*, " with the same reverence and pious affection " with which we receive the holy scripture ; and so man's post is set by God's, and unproved traditions equalled with doctrines of faith. Their opinion is bad enough, but their practice is worse ; for there they show [that] they value these things more than the scriptures ; as superstition always aboundeth in its own things. Did ever any of their doctors say the same things of traditions which they take the boldness to say of scripture ? Did they ever call them " pen and inkhorn," or " parchment divinity," " a nose of wax," " a dumb rule," " an obscure and ambiguous doctrine ?" These blasphemies they vent boldly against the scripture ; but did they ever speak thus of traditions ? And again : their common people are a thousand times better instructed in their traditions than in the doctrine of salvation : they skill more of Lent, and Ember-weeks, &c., than they truly understand the doctrine of man's misery and remedy. And call you this " equal reverence and pious affection to the scriptures and traditions ?" *Partly because they would never give us a perfect catalogue of unwritten traditions necessary to be observed by all Christians* : it may be, lest they should amaze the people with the multitude of them ; or else that the people may not know how many of their doctrines are destitute of scripture-proof, and so they plainly be discovered to be imposers on the belief of the Christian world.

6. Though we blame this in Papists, yet *we reject not all tradition.*

(1.) *Because scripture itself is a tradition*, as we proved before, and is conveyed to us by the most credible means, which we have no reason to doubt of.—The scriptures of the Old Testament were preserved by the Jews, to whom " were committed the oracles of God." (Rom. iii. 2.) And Protestants receive all the books which they admitted into their canon. And for the books of the New Testament, the Christian church hath received them as the writings of those whose names they

bear; and by the constant universal tradition of the church they are transmitted to us. And we have no more reason to doubt of them, than we do of statutes and laws made by kings and parliaments who lived long before we had a being. Yea, we may be much more confident, as the matter is of greater weight and consequence; and these writings have the signature and stamp of God's Spirit on them, and have been blessed by God to the converting and sanctifying of many souls, and have been delivered down to us by a succession of believers unto this very day; and by them Christianity hath been preserved in the world, notwithstanding the wickedness of it, and hath held up head against all the encounters of time. The persecutions of adverse powers have not suppressed it, nor the disputes of enemies silenced the profession of it; but still from age to age God's truth is received and transmitted to posterity.

(2.) *Because the proof of Christianity depending upon matter of fact, chiefly Christ's rising from the dead, it can only be proved by a testimony, which in so extraordinary a case must be made valuable and authorized to the world by the miracles accompanying it.*—Now the notice of these things is brought to us by tradition; which, being unquestionable, giveth us as good ground of faith as it did to them that lived in the apostles' time, and heard their doctrine, and saw their miracles. God's wonderful works were never intended for the benefit of that age only in which they were done; but for the benefit also of those that should hear of them by any credible means whatsoever. (Psalm cxlv. 4; Joel i. 3.) These things were told them, "that they might set their hope in God," &c. (Psalm lxxviii. 3—7.)

(3.) *Because there are some doctrines drawn by just consequence from scripture, but are the more confirmed to us when they are backed with constant church-usage and practice.*—As baptism of infants, Lord's day, singing of psalms in our public worship, &c.

(4.) *Because there are certain words which are not found in scripture indeed, yet agreeable thereunto, and are very useful to discover the frauds of heretics.*—As Trinity, divine providence, consubstantial, procession of the Holy Ghost, satisfaction, &c.

(5.) *We reject not all church-history, or the records of ancient writers concerning the providences of God in their days, in owning the gospel.*—Which make much for our instruction in manners, and are helps to encourage us to put our trust in God.

(6.) *There are certain usages and innocent customs or circumstances, common or sacred, and other actions, which we despise not, but acknowledge and receive as far as their own variable nature and condition requireth.*—Not rejecting them because anciently practised; nor regarding them when the general law of edification requireth the omission of them. But that which we detest is, that the traditions of men should be made equal in dignity and authority with the express revelation of God; yea, that manifest corruptions and usurpations—as making Rome the mistress of other churches, and superintending the Pope as the head of the universal visible church, and the vicar of Christ, without his leave and appointment, and such-like

other points—should be obtruded upon the world as apostolical traditions, and to be received with like religious reverence as we do articles of faith set down in scripture : this is that [which] we cannot sufficiently abhor, as apparently false, and destructive to Christianity.

The propositions drawn out of the text in this sermon are these :—

1. *Whatever assurance we have of God's preserving us in the truth, yet we are bound to use diligence and caution.*
2. *Our diligence and caution are to be employed about this,—that we may stand fast in the faith of Christ, and the profession and practice of godliness.*
3. *That the means of standing fast in the faith of Christ, and the profession and practice of godliness, is by holding the traditions which were taught by the holy apostles.*
4. *That while the apostles were in being, there were two ways of delivering the truth,—by word of mouth, and writing.*
5. *That now when they are long since gone to God, and we cannot receive from them the doctrine of life by word of mouth, we must stick to the scriptures, or written word.*

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### SERMON III. (X.)

BY THE REV. JOHN OWEN, D.D.

FORMERLY DEAN OF CHRIST CHURCH, AND VICE-CHANCELLOR OF THE  
UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD.

THE TESTIMONY OF THE CHURCH IS NOT THE ONLY NOR THE  
CHIEF REASON OF OUR BELIEVING THE SCRIPTURE TO BE  
THE WORD OF GOD.

*They have Moses and the prophets ; let them hear them.—*  
Luke xvi. 29.

As everlasting blessedness (men's greatest and most desirable good) is that which God only can bestow, and the way to it that which he only can discover ; (who knows the Lord's mind like himself ? Who is so sure a guide in the way as he who is himself the end ? Nature can neither direct us to nor fit us for a supernatural happiness ; ) so it is not only our interest to seek it, but likewise to see whether what pretends to be the rule of our walking, in order to our obtaining of it, be indeed the right one ; which we can no otherwise be assured of, than by seeing that it be such an one as is given us by Him to whom alone it belongs to prescribe us the way, and who, being infinitely good, as well as infinitely wise, will no more deceive us, than he can be himself deceived. Now the holy scripture of the Old and New Testament is that which we profess to own as the rule of our faith and life, in relation to our future glory. It is then the wisdom of