

SERMONS

ON VARIOUS

IMPORTANT SUBJECTS.



SERMON XVI.*

*The Importance and Advantage of a thorough
Knowledge of Divine Truth.*



HEBREWS v. 12.

FOR WHEN, FOR THE TIME, YE OUGHT TO BE TEACHERS, YE HAVE NEED THAT ONE TEACH YOU AGAIN WHICH BE THE FIRST PRINCIPLES OF THE ORACLES OF GOD ; AND ARE BECOME SUCH AS HAVE NEED OF MILK, AND NOT OF STRONG MEAT.

THESE words are a complaint, which the apostle makes of a certain defect in the Christian Hebrews, to whom he wrote. Wherein we may observe,

1. What the defect complained of is, viz. A want of such a proficiency in the knowledge of the doctrines and mysteries of religion, as might have been expected of them. The apostle complains of them, that they had not made that progress

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in their acquaintance with the things of divinity, or things taught in the oracles of God, which they ought to have made. And he means to reprove them, not merely for their deficiency in *spiritual* and *experimental* knowledge of divine things, but for their deficiency in a *doctrinal* acquaintance with the principles of religion, and the truths of Christian divinity ; as is evident by several things.

It appears by the manner in which the apostle introduces this complaint or reproof. The occasion of his introducing it, is this : In the next verse but one preceding, he mentions Christ's being an high priest after the order of Melchizedek : " Called of God an high priest after the order of Melchizedek." This Melchizedek being in the Old Testament, which was the oracles of God, held forth as an eminent type of Christ, and the account we there have of Melchizedek containing many gospel mysteries, these the apostle was willing to point out to the Christian Hebrews. But he apprehended, that through their weakness in knowledge, and little acquaintance in mysteries of that nature, they would not understand him ; and therefore breaks off for the present from saying any thing about Melchizedek. Thus, in verse 11, " Of whom we have many things to say, and hard to be uttered ; seeing ye are dull of hearing ;" i. e. there are many things concerning Melchizedek, which contain wonderful gospel mysteries, and which I would take notice of to you, were it not that I am afraid, that through your dullness and backwardness in understanding these things, you would only be puzzled and confounded by my discourse, and so receive no benefit ; and that it would be too hard for you, as meat that is too strong.

Then come in the words of the text : " For when, for the time, ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God ; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat." As much as to say, Indeed it might have been expected of you, that you should have known enough of divinity, and the holy scriptures, to be able to understand and digest such mysteries : But it is not so with you."

Again, The apostle speaks of their proficiency in such knowledge as is conveyed and received by *human* teaching ; as appears by that expression, “ When for the time ye ought to be teachers ;” which includes not only a practical and experimental, but also a doctrinal knowledge of the truths and mysteries of religion.

Again, The apostle speaks of such a knowledge, whereby Christians are enabled to digest strong meat ; i. e. to understand those things in divinity which are more abstruse and difficult to be understood, and which require great skill in things of this nature. This is more fully expressed in the two next verses : For every one that useth milk, is unskilful in the word of righteousness ; for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who, by reason of use, have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.”

Again, It is such a knowledge, that proficiency in it shall carry persons beyond the first principles of religion. As here ; “ Ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God.” Therefore the apostle, in the beginning of the next chapter, advises them, “ to leave the first principles of the doctrine of Christ, and to go on unto perfection.”

2. We may observe wherein the fault of this defect appears, viz. in that they had not made proficiency according to their time. For the time, they ought to have been teachers. As they were Christians, their business was to learn and gain Christian knowledge. They were scholars in the school of Christ ; and if they had improved their time in learning, as they ought to have done, they might, by the time when the apostle wrote, have been fit to be teachers in this school. To whatever business any one is devoted, it may be expected that his perfection in it shall be answerable to the time he has had to learn and perfect himself....Christians should not always remain babes, but should grow in Christian knowledge ; and, leaving the food of babes, which is milk, should learn to digest strong meat.

DOCTRINE.

Every Christian should make a business of endeavoring to grow in knowledge in divinity.

This is indeed esteemed the business of divines and ministers : It is commonly thought to be their work, by the study of the scriptures, and other instructive books, to gain knowledge ; and most seem to think that it may be left to them, as what belongeth not to others. But if the apostle had entertained this notion, he would never have blamed the Christian Hebrews for not having acquired knowledge enough to be teachers : Or if he had thought, that this concerned Christians in general, only as a thing by the by, and that their time should not, in a considerable measure, be taken up with this business ; he never would have so much blamed them, that their proficiency in knowledge had not been answerable to the time which they had had to learn.

In handling this subject, I shall show,

1. What divinity is.
2. What kind of knowledge in divinity is intended in the doctrine.
3. Why knowledge in divinity is necessary.
4. Why all Christians should make a business of endeavoring to grow in this knowledge.

I. I shall very briefly show what divinity is.

Various definitions have been given of it by those who have treated on the subject. I shall not now stand to enquire which, according to the rules of art, is the most accurate definition ; but shall so define or describe it, as I think has the greatest tendency to convey a notion of it to this auditory.

By divinity is meant, That science or doctrine which comprehends all those truths and rules which concern the great business of religion. There are various kinds of arts and sciences taught and learned in the schools, which are conversant

about various objects ; about the works of nature in general, as philosophy ; or the visible heavens, as astronomy ; or the sea, as navigation ; or the earth, as geography ; or the body of man, as physic and anatomy ; or the soul of man, with regard to its natural powers and qualities, as logic and pneumatology ; or about human government, as politics and jurisprudence. But there is one science, or one certain kind of knowledge and doctrine, which is above all the rest, as it is concerning God and the great business of religion : *This is divinity ;* which is not learned, as other sciences, merely by the improvement of man's natural reason, but is taught by God himself in a certain book that he hath given for that end, full of instruction. This is the rule which God hath given to the world to be their guide in searching after this kind of knowledge, and is a summary of all things of this nature needful for us to know. Upon this account divinity is rather called a doctrine, than an art or science.

Indeed there is what is called *natural religion or divinity*. There are many truths concerning God, and our duty to him, which are evident by the light of nature. But Christian divinity, properly so called, is not evident by the light of nature ; it depends on revelation. Such are our circumstances now in our fallen state, that nothing which it is needful for us to know concerning God, is manifest by the light of nature in the manner in which it is necessary for us to know it. For the knowledge of no truth in divinity is of any significance to us, any otherwise than, as it some way or other belongs to the gospel scheme, or as it relates to a Mediator. But the light of nature teaches us no truth of divinity in this manner. Therefore it cannot be said, that we come to the knowledge of any part of Christian divinity by the light of nature. The light of nature teaches no truth as it is in Jesus. It is only the word of God, contained in the Old and New Testament, which teaches us Christian divinity.

Divinity comprehends all that is taught in the scriptures, and so all that we need know, or is to be known, concerning God and Jesus Christ, concerning our duty to God, and our

happiness in God. Divinity is commonly defined, *the doctrine of living to God*; and by some who seem to be more accurate, *the doctrine of living to God by Christ*. It comprehends all Christian doctrines as they are in Jesus, and all Christian rules directing us in living to God by Christ. There is nothing in divinity, no one doctrine, no promise, no rule, but what some way or other relates to the Christian and divine life, or our living to God by Christ. They all relate to this, in two respects, viz. as they tend to promote our living to God here in this world, in a life of faith and holiness, and also as they tend to bring us to a life of perfect holiness and happiness, in the full enjoyment of God hereafter....But I hasten to the

II. Thing proposed, viz. To show what kind of knowledge in divinity is intended in the doctrine.

Here I would observe,

1. That there are two kinds of knowledge of the things of divinity, viz. *speculative* and *practical*, or in other terms, *natural* and *spiritual*. The former remains only in the head. No other faculty but the understanding is concerned in it. It consists in having a natural or rational knowledge of the things of religion, or such a knowledge as is to be obtained by the natural exercise of our own faculties, without any special illumination of the Spirit of God. The latter rests not entirely in the head, or in the speculative ideas of things; but the heart is concerned in it: It principally consists in the sense of the heart. The mere intellect, without the heart, the will or the inclination, is not the seat of it. And it may not only be called seeing, but feeling or tasting. Thus there is a difference between having a right speculative notion of the doctrines contained in the word of God, and having a due sense of them in the heart. In the former consists speculative or natural knowledge of the things of divinity; in the latter consists the spiritual or practical knowledge of them.

2. Neither of these is intended in the doctrine exclusively of the other: But it is intended that we should seek the former in order to the latter. The latter, even a spiritual and prac-

tical knowledge of divinity, is of the greatest importance ; for a speculative knowledge of it, without a spiritual knowledge, is in vain and to no purpose, but to make our condemnation the greater. Yet a speculative knowledge is also of infinite importance in this respect, that without it we can have no spiritual or practical knowledge ; as may be shown by and by.

I have already shown, that the apostle speaks not only of a spiritual knowledge, but of such knowledge as can be acquired, and communicated from one to another. Yet it is not to be thought, that he means this exclusively of the other. But he would have the Christian Hebrews seek the one, in order to the other. Therefore the former is first and most directly intended ; it is intended that Christians should, by reading and other proper means, seek a good rational knowledge of the things of divinity. The latter is more indirectly intended, since it is to be sought by the other, as its end....But I proceed to the

III. Thing proposed, viz. To show the usefulness and necessity of knowledge in divinity.

1. There is no other way by which any means of grace whatsoever can be of any benefit, but by knowledge. All teaching is in vain, without learning. Therefore the preaching of the gospel would be wholly to no purpose, if it conveyed no knowledge to the mind. There is an order of men whom Christ has appointed on purpose to be teachers in his church. They are to teach the things of divinity. But they teach in vain, if no knowledge in these things is gained by their teaching. It is impossible that their teaching and preaching should be a mean of grace, or of any good in the hearts of their hearers, any otherwise than by knowledge imparted to the understanding. Otherwise it would be of as much benefit to the auditory, if the minister should preach in some unknown tongue. All the difference is, that preaching in a known tongue conveys something to the understanding, which preaching in an unknown tongue doth not. On this account, such preaching must be unprofitable. Men in such

things receive nothing, when they understand nothing; and are not at all edified, unless some knowledge be conveyed; agreeably to the apostle's arguing in 1 Cor. xiv. 2....6.

No speech can be any mean of grace, but by conveying knowledge. Otherwise the speech is as much lost as if there had been no man there, and he that spoke, had spoken only into the air; as it follows in the passage just quoted, verse 6....10. He that doth not understand, can receive no faith, nor any other grace; for God deals with man as with a rational creature; and when faith is in exercise, it is not about something he knows not what. Therefore hearing is absolutely necessary to faith; because hearing is necessary to understanding, Rom. x. 14. "How shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard?"

So there can be no love without knowledge. It is not according to the nature of the human soul, to love an object which is entirely unknown. The heart cannot be set upon an object of which there is no idea in the understanding. The reasons which induce the soul to love, must first be understood, before they can have a reasonable influence on the heart.

God hath given us the Bible, which is a book of instructions. But this book can be of no manner of profit to us, any otherwise than as it conveys some knowledge to the mind: It can profit us no more than if it were written in the Chinese or Tartarian language, of which we know not one word.

So the sacraments of the gospel can have a proper effect no other way, than by conveying some knowledge. They represent certain things by visible signs. And what is the end of signs, but to convey some knowledge of the things signified? Such is the nature of man, that nothing can come at the heart, but through the door of the understanding: And there can be no spiritual knowledge of that of which there is not first a rational knowledge. It is impossible that any one should see the truth or excellency of any doctrine of the gospel, who knows not what that doctrine is. A man cannot see the wonderful excellency and love of Christ in doing such an^d

such things for sinners, unless his understanding be first informed how those things were done. He cannot have a taste of the sweetness and divine excellency of such and such things contained in divinity, unless he first have a notion that there are such and such things.

2. Without knowledge in divinity, none would differ from the most ignorant and barbarous Heathens. The Heathens remain in gross Heathenish darkness, because they are not instructed, and have not obtained the knowledge of the truths of divinity. So if we live under the preaching of the gospel, this will make us to differ from them, only by conveying to us more knowledge of the things of divinity.

3. If man have no knowledge of these things, the faculty of reason in him will be wholly in vain. The faculty of reason and understanding was given for actual understanding and knowledge. If a man have no actual knowledge, the faculty or capacity of knowing is of no use to him. And if he have actual knowledge, yet if he be destitute of the knowledge of those things which are the last end of his being, and for the sake of the knowledge of which he had more understanding given him than the beasts; then still his faculty of reason is in vain; he might as well have been a beast, as a man with this knowledge. But the things of divinity are the things to know which we had the faculty of reason given us. They are the things which appertain to the end of our being, and to the great business for which we are made. Therefore a man cannot have his faculty of understanding to any purpose, any further than he hath knowledge of the things of divinity.

So that this kind of knowledge is absolutely necessary. Other kinds of knowledge may be very useful. Some other sciences, such as astronomy, and natural philosophy, and geography, may be very excellent in their kind. But the knowledge of this divine science is infinitely more useful and important than that of all other sciences whatever.

IV. I come now to the fourth, and principal thing proposed under the doctrine, viz. to give the reasons why all Christ-

ians should make a business of endeavoring to grow in the knowledge of divinity. This implies two things.

1. That Christians ought not to content themselves with such degrees of knowledge in divinity as they have already obtained. It should not satisfy them, that they know as much as is absolutely necessary to salvation, but should seek to make progress.

2. That this endeavoring to make progress in such knowledge ought not to be attended to as a thing by the by, but all Christians should make a business of it: They should look upon it as a part of their daily business, and no small part of it neither. It should be attended to as a considerable part of the work of their high calling. The reason of both these may appear in the following things.

(1.) Our business should doubtless much consist in employing those faculties, by which we are distinguished from the beasts, about those things which are the main end of those faculties. The reason why we have faculties superior to those of the brutes given us, is, that we are indeed designed for a superior employment. That which the Creator intended should be our main employment, is something above what he intended the beasts for, and therefore hath given us superior powers. Therefore, without doubt, it should be a considerable part of our business to improve those superior faculties. But the faculty by which we are chiefly distinguished from the brutes, is the faculty of understanding. It follows then, that we should make it our chief business to improve this faculty, and should by no means prosecute it as a business by the by. For us to make the improvement of this faculty a business by the by, is in effect for us to make the faculty of understanding itself a by faculty, if I may so speak, a faculty of less importance than others; whereas indeed it is the highest faculty we have.

But we cannot make a business of the improvement of our intellectual faculty, any otherwise than by making a business of improving ourselves in actual understanding and knowledge. So that those who make not this very much their bus-

ness ; but instead of improving their understanding to acquire knowledge, are chiefly devoted to their inferior powers, to provide wherewithal to please their senses, and gratify their animal appetites, and so rather make their understanding a servant to their inferior powers, than their inferior powers servants to their understanding ; not only behavethemselves in a manner not becoming Christians, but also act as if they had forgotten that they are men, and that God hath set them above the brutes, by giving them understanding.

God hath given to man some things in common with the brutes, as his outward senses, his bodily appetites, a capacity of bodily pleasure and pain, and other animal faculties : And some things he hath given him superior to the brutes, the chief of which is a faculty of understanding and reason. Now God never gave man those faculties whereby he is above the brutes, to be subject to those which he hath in common with the brutes. This would be great confusion, and equivalent to making man to be a servant to the beasts. On the contrary, he has given those inferior powers to be employed in subserviency to man's understanding ; and therefore it must be a great part of man's principal business, to improve his understanding by acquiring knowledge. If so, then it will follow, that it should be a main part of his business to improve his understanding in acquiring divine knowledge, or the knowledge of the things of divinity ; for the knowledge of these things is the principal end of this faculty. God gave man the faculty of understanding, chiefly, that he might understand divine things.

The wiser Heathens were sensible that the main business of man was the improvement and exercise of his understanding. But they were in the dark, as they knew not the object about which the understanding should chiefly be employed. That science which many of them thought should chiefly employ the understanding, was philosophy ; and accordingly they made it their chief business to study it. But we who enjoy the light of the gospel are more happy ; we are not left, as to this particular, in the dark. God hath told us about what

things we should chiefly employ our understandings, having given us a book full of divine instructions, holding forth many glorious objects about which all rational creatures should chiefly employ their understandings. These instructions are accommodated to persons of all capacities and conditions, and proper to be studied, not only by men of learning, but by persons of every character, learned and unlearned, young and old, men and women. Therefore the acquisition of knowledge in these things should be a main business of all those who have the advantage of enjoying the Holy Scriptures.

(2.) The things of divinity are things of superlative excellency, and are worthy that all should make a business of endeavoring to grow in the knowledge of them. There are no things so worthy to be known as these things. They are as much above those things which are treated of in other sciences, as heaven is above the earth. God himself the eternal Three in one, is the chief object of this science: In the next place, Jesus Christ, as Godman and Mediator, and the glorious work of redemption, the most glorious work that ever was wrought: Then the great things of the heavenly world, the glorious and eternal inheritance purchased by Christ, and promised in the gospel; the work of the Holy Spirit of God on the hearts of men; our duty to God, and the way in which we ourselves may become like angels, and like God himself in our measure: All these are objects of this science.

Such things as these have been the main subject of the study of the holy patriarchs, prophets, and apostles, and the most excellent men that ever were in the world, and are also the subject of the study of the angels in heaven; 1 Pet. i. 10, 11, 12.

These things are so excellent and worthy to be known, that the knowledge of them will richly pay for all the pains and labor of an earnest seeking of it. If there were a great treasure of gold and pearls hid in the earth, but should accidentally be found, and should be opened among us with such circumstances that all might have as much as they could gather of it; would not every one think it worth his while to make a

business of gathering it while it should last ? But that treasure of divine knowledge, which is contained in the Scriptures, and is provided for every one to gather to himself as much of it as he can, is a far more rich treasure than any one of gold and pearls. How busy are all sorts of men, all over the world, in getting riches ? But this knowledge is a far better kind of riches, than that after which they so diligently and laboriously pursue.

3. The things of divinity not only concern ministers, but are of infinite importance to all Christians. It is not with the doctrines of divinity as it is with the doctrines of philosophy and other sciences. These last are generally speculative points, which are of little concern in human life ; and it very little alters the case as to our temporal or spiritual interests, whether we know them or not. Philosophers differ about them, some being of one opinion, and others of another. And while they are engaged in warm disputes about them, others may well leave them to dispute among themselves, without troubling their heads much about them ; it being of little concern to them, whether the one or the other be in the right.

But it is not thus in matters of divinity. The doctrines of this nearly concern every one. They are about those things which relate to every man's eternal salvation and happiness. The common people cannot say, Let us leave these matters to ministers and divines ; let them dispute them out among themselves as they can ; they concern not us : For they are of infinite importance to every man. Those doctrines of divinity which relate to the essence, attributes, and subsistencies of God, concern all ; as it is of infinite importance to common people, as well as to ministers, to know what kind of being God is. For he is the Being who hath made us all, "in whom we live, and move, and have our being ;" who is the Lord of all ; the Being to whom we are all accountable ; is the last end of our being, and the only fountain of our happiness.

The doctrines also which relate to Jesus Christ and his mediation, his incarnation, his life and death, his resurrection

and ascension, his sitting at the right hand of the Father, his satisfaction and intercession, infinitely concern common people as well as divines. They stand in as much need of this Saviour, and of an interest in his person and offices, and the things which he hath done and suffered, as ministers and divines.

The same may be said of the doctrines which relate to the manner of a sinner's justification, or the way in which he becomes interested in the mediation of Christ. They equally concern all ; for all stand in equal necessity of justification before God. That eternal condemnation, to which we are all naturally exposed, is equally dreadful. So with respect to those doctrines of divinity, which relate to the work of the Spirit of God on the heart, in the application of redemption in our effectual calling and sanctification, all are equally concerned in them. There is no doctrine of divinity whatever, which doth not some way or other concern the eternal interest of every Christian. None of the things which God hath taught us in his word are needless speculations, or trivial matters ; all of them are indeed important points.

4. We may argue from the great things which God hath done in order to give us instruction in these things. As to other sciences, he hath left us to ourselves, to the light of our own reason. But the things of divinity being of infinitely greater importance to us, he hath not left us to an uncertain guide ; but hath himself given us a revelation of the truth in these matters, and hath done very great things to convey and confirm to us this revelation ; raising up many prophets in different ages, immediately inspiring them with his Holy Spirit, and confirming their doctrine with innumerable miracles or wonderful works out of the established course of nature. Yea, he raised up a succession of prophets, which was upheld for several ages.

It was very much for this end that God separated the people of Israel, in so wonderful a manner, from all other people, and kept them separate ; that to them he might commit the oracles of God, and that from them they might be communi-

cated to the world. He hath also often sent angels to bring divine instructions to men ; and hath often himself appeared to men in miraculous symbols or representations of his presence ; and now in these last days hath sent his own Son into the world, to be his great prophet, to teach us divinity. Heb. 1. at the beginning. By means of all, God hath given a book of divine instructions, which contains the sum of divinity. Now, these things hath God done, not only for the instruction of ministers and men of learning ; but for the instruction of all men, of all sorts, learned and unlearned, men, women, and children. And certainly if God doth such great things to *teach us*, we ought not to do little to *learn*.

God hath not made giving instructions to men in things of divinity a business by the by ; but a business which he hath undertaken and prosecuted in a course of great and wonderful dispensations, as an affair in which his heart hath been greatly engaged ; which is sometimes in scripture signified by the expression of God's rising early to teach us, and to send prophets and teachers to us. Jer. vii. 25. "Since that day that your fathers came forth out of the land of Egypt, unto this day, I have even sent unto you all my servants the prophets, daily rising up early, and sending them." And so, verse 13. "I spake unto you, rising up early, and speaking." This is a figurative speech, signifying, that God hath not done this as a by business, but as a business of great importance, in which he took great care, and had his heart much engaged ; because persons are wont to rise early to prosecute such business as they are earnestly engaged in....If God hath been so engaged in teaching, certainly we should not be negligent in learning ; nor should we make growing in knowledge a by business, but a great part of the business of our lives.

5. It may be argued from the abundance of the instructions which God hath given us, from the largeness of that book which God hath given to teach us divinity, and from the great variety that is therein contained. Much was taught by Moses of old, which we have transmitted down to us ; after that, other books were from time to time added ; much is

taught us by David and Solomon ; and many and excellent are the instructions communicated by the prophets : Yet God did not think all this enough, but after this sent Christ and his apostles, by whom there is added a great and excellent treasure to that holy book, which is to be our rule in the study of divinity.

This book was written for the use of all ; all are directed to search the scriptures. John v. 39. " Search the scriptures, for in them ye think ye have eternal life ; and they are they that testify of me ;" and Isaiah xxxiv. 16. " Seek ye out of the book of the Lord, and read." They that read and understand are pronounced blessed. Rev. i. 3. " Blessed is he that readeth, and they that understand the words of this prophecy." If this be true of that particular book of the *Revelation*, much more is it true of the Bible in general. Nor is it to be believed that God would have given instructions in such abundance, if he had intended that receiving instruction should be only a by concernment with us.

It is to be considered, that all those abundant instructions which are contained in the scriptures were written for that end, that they might be understood ; otherwise they are not instructions. That which is not given that the learner may understand it, is not given for the learner's instruction ; and unless we endeavor to grow in the knowledge of divinity, a very great part of those instructions will to us be in vain ; for we can receive benefit by no more of the scriptures than we understand, no more than if they were locked up in an unknown tongue. We have reason to bless God that he hath given us such various and plentiful instruction in his word ; but we shall be hypocritical in so doing, if we, after all, content ourselves with but little of this instruction.

When God hath opened a very large treasure before us, for the supply of our wants, and we thank him that he hath given us so much ; if at the same time we be willing to remain destitute of the greatest part of it, because we are too lazy to gather it, this will not show the sincerity of our thankfulness. We are now under much greater advantages to ac-

quire knowledge in divinity, than the people of God were of old, because since that time, the canon of scripture is much increased. But if we be negligent of our advantages, we may be never the better for them, and may remain with as little knowledge as they.

6. However diligently we apply ourselves, there is room enough to increase our knowledge in divinity, without coming to an end. None have this excuse to make for not diligently applying themselves to gain knowledge in divinity, that they know all already; nor can they make this excuse, that they have no need diligently to apply themselves, in order to know all that is to be known. None can excuse themselves for want of business in which to employ themselves. Here is room enough to employ ourselves for ever in this divine science, with the utmost application. Those who have applied themselves most closely, have studied the longest, and have made the greatest attainments in this knowledge, know but little of what is to be known. The subject is inexhaustible. That divine Being, who is the main subject of this science, is infinite, and there is no end to the glory of his perfections. His works at the same time are wonderful, and cannot be found out to perfection; especially the work of redemption, which is that work of God about which the science of divinity is chiefly conversant, is full of unsearchable wonders.

The word of God, which is given for our instruction in divinity, contains enough in it to employ us to the end of our lives, and then we shall leave enough uninvestigated to employ the heads of the ablest divines to the end of the world. The Psalmist found an end to the things that are human; but he could never find an end to what is contained in the word of God: Psalm cxix. 96. "I have seen an end to all perfection; but thy commandment is exceeding broad." There is enough in this divine science to employ the understandings of saints and angels to all eternity.

7. It doubtless concerns every one to endeavor to excel in the knowledge of things which pertain to his profession or principal calling. If it concerns men to excel in any thing, or

in any wisdom or knowledge at all, it certainly concerns them to excel in the affairs of their main profession and work. But the calling and work of every Christian is to live to God. This is said to be his *high calling*, Phil. iii. 14. This is the business, and, if I may so speak, the *trade* of a Christian, his main work, and indeed should be his only work. No business should be done by a Christian, but as it is some way or other a part of this. Therefore certainly the Christian should endeavor to be well acquainted with those things which belong to this work, that he may fulfil it, and be thoroughly furnished to it.

It becomes one who is called to be a soldier, and to go a warfare, to endeavor to excel in the art of war. It becomes one who is called to be a mariner, and to spend his life in sailing the ocean, to endeavor to excel in the art of navigation. It becomes one who professes to be a physician, and devotes himself to that work, to endeavor to excel in the knowledge of those things which pertain to the art of physic. So it becomes all such as profess to be Christians, and to devote themselves to the practice of Christianity, to endeavor to excel in the knowledge of divinity.

8. It may be argued from this, that God hath appointed an order of men for this end, to assist persons in gaining knowledge in these things. He hath appointed them to be teachers. 1 Cor. xii. 28; and God hath set some in the church; first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers: Eph. iv. 11, 12. "He gave some apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ." If God hath set them to be teachers, making that their business, then he hath made it their business to impart knowledge. But what kind of knowledge? Not the knowledge of philosophy, or of human laws, or of mechanical arts, but of divinity.

If God have made it the business of some to be teachers, it will follow, that he hath made it the business of others to be learners; for teachers and learners are correlates, one of

which was never intended to be without the other: God hath never made it the duty of some to take pains to teach those who are not obliged to take pains to learn. He hath not commanded ministers to spend themselves, in order to impart knowledge to those who are not obliged to apply themselves to receive it.

The name by which Christians are commonly called in the New Testament is *disciples*, the signification of which word is *scholars* or *learners*. All Christians are put into the school of Christ, where their business is to learn, or receive knowledge from Christ, their common master and teacher, and from those inferior teachers appointed by him to instruct in his name.

9. God hath in the scriptures plainly revealed it to be his will, that all Christians should diligently endeavor to excel in the knowledge of divine things. It is the revealed will of God, that Christians should not only have some knowledge of things of this nature, but that they should be *enriched with all knowledge*: 1 Cor. i. 4, 5. "I thank my God always on your behalf, for the grace of God that is given you by Jesus Christ, that in every thing ye are enriched by him, in all utterance, and in all knowledge." So the apostle earnestly prayed, that the Christian Philippians might abound more and more, not only in love, but in Christian knowledge; Philip. i. 9. "And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge, and in all judgment." So the Apostle Peter advises to "give all diligence, to add to faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge." 2 Pet. i. 5. And the Apostle Paul, in the next chapter to that wherein is the text, counsels the Christian Hebrews, leaving the first principles of the doctrine of Christ, to go on to perfection. He would by no means have them always to rest only in those fundamental doctrines of repentance, and faith, and the resurrection from the dead, and the eternal judgment, in which they were indoctrinated when they were first baptised, and had the apostles' hands laid on them, at their first initiation in Christianity. See Heb. vi. at the beginning.

APPLICATION.

The use that I would make of this doctrine is, to exhort all diligently to endeavor to gain this kind of knowledge.

Consider yourselves as scholars or disciples, put into the school of Christ; and therefore be diligent to make proficiency in Christian knowledge. Content not yourselves with this, that you have been taught your catechism in your childhood, and that you know as much of the principles of religion as is necessary to salvation. So you will be guilty of what the apostle warns against, viz. going no further than laying the foundation of repentance from dead works, &c.

You are all called to be Christians, and this is your profession. Endeavor, therefore, to acquire knowledge in things which pertain to your profession. Let not your teachers have cause to complain, that while they spend and are spent, to impart knowledge to you, you take little pains to learn. It is a great encouragement to an instructor, to have such to teach as make a business of learning, bending their minds to it. This makes teaching a pleasure, when otherwise it will be a very heavy and burdensome task.

You all have by you a large treasure of divine knowledge, in that you have the Bible in your hands; therefore be not contented in possessing but little of this treasure. God hath spoken much to you in the scriptures; labor to understand as much of what he saith as you can. God hath made you all reasonable creatures; therefore let not the noble faculty of reason or understanding lie neglected. Content not yourselves with having so much knowledge as is thrown in your way, and as you receive in some sense unavoidably by the frequent inculcation of divine truth in the preaching of the word, of which you are obliged to be hearers, or as you accidentally gain in conversation; but let it be very much your business to search for it, and that with the same diligence and labor with which men are wont to dig in mines of silver and gold.

Especially I would advise those that are young to employ themselves in this way. Men are never too old to learn ; but the time of youth is especially the time for learning ; it is especially proper for gaining and storing up knowledge. Further, to stir up all, both old and young, to this duty, let me entreat you to consider,

1. If you apply yourselves diligently to this work, you will not want employment, when you are at leisure from your common secular business. In this way, you may find something in which you may profitably employ yourselves these long winter evenings. You will find something else to do, besides going about from house to house, spending one hour after another in unprofitable conversation, or, at best, to no other purpose but to amuse yourselves, to fill up and wear away your time. And it is to be feared that very much of the time that is spent in our winter evening visits, is spent to a much worse purpose than that which I have now mentioned. Solomon tells us, Prov. x. 19. "That in the multitude of words, there wanteth not sin." And is not this verified in those who find nothing else to do for so great a part of the winter, but to go to one another's houses, and spend the time in such talk as comes next, or such as any one's present disposition happens to suggest ?

Some diversion is doubtless lawful ; but for Christians to spend so much of their time, so many long evenings, in no other conversation than that which tends to divert and amuse, if nothing worse, is a sinful way of spending time, and tends to poverty of soul at least, if not to outward poverty : Prov. xiv. 23. "In all labor there is profit ; but the talk of the lips tendeth only to *penury*." Besides, when persons for so much of their time have nothing else to do but to sit, and talk, and chat in one another's chimney corners, there is great danger of falling into foolish and sinful conversation, venting their corrupt dispositions, in talking against others, expressing their jealousies and evil surmises concerning their neighbors ; not considering what Christ hath said, Matth. xii 36. "Of

every idle word that men shall speak, shall they give account in the day of judgment."

If you would comply with what you have heard from this doctrine, you would find something else to spend your winters in, one winter after another, besides contention, or talking about those public affairs which tend to contention. Young people might find something else to do, besides spending their time in vain company; something that would be much more profitable to themselves, as it would really turn to some good account; something, in doing which they would both be more out of the devil's way, the way of temptation, and be more in the way of duty, and of a divine blessing. And even aged people would have something to employ themselves in, after they are become incapable of bodily labor. Their time, as is now often the case, would not lie heavy upon their hands, as they would, with both profit and pleasure, be engaged in searching the scriptures, and in comparing and meditating upon the various truths which they should find there.

2. This would be a noble way of spending your time. The Holy Spirit gives the Bereans this epithet, because they diligently employed themselves in this business: Acts xvii. 11. "These were more *noble* than those of Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so." This is very much the employment of heaven. The inhabitants of that world spend much of their time in searching into the great things of divinity, and endeavoring to acquire knowledge in them, as we are told of the angels, 1 Pet. i. 12. "Which things the angels desire to look into." This will be very agreeable to what you hope will be your business to all eternity, as you doubtless hope to join in the same employment with the angels of light. Solomon says, Prov. xxv. 2. "It is the honor of kings to search out a matter;" and certainly, above all others, to search out divine matters. Now, if this be the honor even of kings, is it not equally, if not much more your honor?

3. This is a pleasant way of improving time. Knowledge is pleasant and delightful to intelligent creatures, and above all the knowledge of divine things ; for in them are the most excellent truths, and the most beautiful and amiable objects held forth to view. However tedious the labor necessarily attending this business may be, yet the knowledge once obtained will richly requite the pains taken to obtain it. " When wisdom entereth the heart, knowledge is pleasant to the soul," Prov. ii. 10.

4. This knowledge is exceeding useful in Christian practice. Such as have much knowledge in divinity have great means and advantages for spiritual and saving knowledge ; for no means of grace, as was said before, have their effect on the heart, otherwise than by the knowledge they impart. The more you have of a rational knowledge of the things of the gospel, the more opportunity will there be, when the Spirit shall be breathed into your heart, to see the excellency of these things, and to taste the sweetness of them. The Heathens, who have no rational knowledge of the things of the gospel, have no opportunity to see the excellency of them ; and therefore the more rational knowledge of these things you have, the more opportunity and advantage you have to see the divine excellency and glory of them.

Again, The more knowledge you have of divine things, the better will you know your duty ; your knowledge will be of great use to direct you as to your duty in particular cases. You will also be the better furnished against the temptations of the devil. For the devil often takes the advantage of persons' ignorance to ply them with temptations which otherwise would have no hold of them.

By having much knowledge, you will be under greater advantages to conduct yourselves with prudence and discretion in your Christian course, and so to live much more to the honor of God and religion. Many who mean well, and are full of a good spirit, yet for want of prudence, conduct themselves so as to wound religion. Many have a zeal of God, which doth more hurt than good, because it is not according

to knowledge, Rom. x. 2. The reason why many good men behave no better in many instances, is not so much that they want grace, as that they want knowledge.

Beside, an increase of knowledge would be a great help to profitable conversation. It would supply you with matter for conversation when you come together, or when you visit your neighbors: And so you would have less temptation to spend the time in such conversation as tends to your own and others' hurt.

5. Consider the advantages you are under to grow in the knowledge of divinity. We are under far greater advantages to gain much knowledge in divinity now, than God's people under the Old Testament, both because the canon of scripture is so much enlarged since that time, and also because evangelical truths are now so much more plainly revealed. So that common men are now in some respects under advantages to know more of divinity, than the greatest prophets were then. Thus that saying of Christ is in a sense applicable to us, Luke x. 23, 24. "Blessed are the eyes which see the things which ye see. For I tell you, that many prophets and kings have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them." We are in some respects under far greater advantages for gaining knowledge, now in these latter ages of the church, than Christians were formerly; especially by reason of the art of printing, of which God hath given us the benefit, whereby Bibles and other books of divinity are exceedingly multiplied, and persons may now be furnished with helps for the obtaining of Christian knowledge, at a much easier and cheaper rate than they formerly could.

6. We know not what opposition we may meet with in the principles which we hold in divinity. We know that there are many adversaries to the gospel and its truths. If therefore we embrace those truths, we must expect to be attacked by the said adversaries; and unless we be well informed concerning divine things, how shall we be able to defend ourselves? Beside, the Apostle Peter enjoins it upon us, al-

ways to be ready to give an answer to every man who asketh us a reason of the hope that is in us. But this we cannot expect to do without considerable knowledge in divine things.

I shall now conclude my discourse with some *directions* for the acquisition of this knowledge.

1. Be assiduous in reading the holy scriptures. This is the fountain whence all knowledge in divinity must be derived. Therefore let not this treasure lie by you neglected. Every man of common understanding who can read, may, if he please, become well acquainted with the scriptures. And what an excellent attainment would this be !

2. Content not yourselves with only a cursory reading, without regarding the sense. This is an *in* way of reading, to which, however, many accustom themselves all their days. When you read, observe what you read. Observe how things come in. Take notice of the drift of the discourse, and compare one scripture with another. For the scripture, by the harmony of the different parts of it, casts great light upon itself. We are expressly directed by Christ, to *search* the scriptures, which evidently intends something more than a mere cursory reading. And use means to find out the meaning of the scripture. When you have it explained in the preaching of the word, take notice of it ; and if at any time a scripture that you did not understand be cleared up to your satisfaction, mark it, lay it up, and if possible remember it.

3. Procure, and diligently use other books which may help you to grow in this knowledge. There are many excellent books extant, which might greatly forward you in this knowledge, and afford you a very profitable and pleasant entertainment in your leisure hours. There is doubtless a great defect in many, that through a loathness to be at a little expense, they furnish themselves with no more helps of this nature. They have a few books indeed, which now and then on sabbath days they read ; but they have had them so long, and read them so often, that they are weary of them, and it is now become a dull story, a mere task to read them.

4. Improve conversation with others to this end. How much might persons promote each others' knowledge in divine things, if they would improve conversation as they might; if men that are ignorant were not ashamed to show their ignorance, and were willing to learn of others; if those that have knowledge would communicate it, without pride and ostentation; and if all were more disposed to enter on such conversation as would be for their mutual edification and instruction.

5. Seek not to grow in knowledge chiefly for the sake of applause, and to enable you to dispute with others; but seek it for the benefit of your souls, and in order to practice. If applause be your end, you will not be so likely to be led to the knowledge of the truth, but may justly, as often is the case of those who are proud of their knowledge, be led into error to your own perdition. This being your end, if you should obtain much rational knowledge, it would not be likely to be of any benefit to you, but would puff you up with pride: 1 Cor. viii. 1. "Knowledge puffeth up."

6. Seek to God, that he would direct you, and bless you, in this pursuit after knowledge. This is the apostle's direction, James i. 5. "If any man lack wisdom, let him ask it of God, who giveth to all liberally, and upbraideth not." God is the fountain of all divine knowledge. Prov. ii. 6. "The Lord giveth wisdom: Out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding." Labor to be sensible of your own blindness and ignorance, and your need of the help of God, lest you be led into error, instead of true knowledge. 1 Cor. iii. 18. "If any man would be wise, let him become a fool, that he may be wise."

7. Practice according to what knowledge you have. This will be the way to know more. The Psalmist warmly recommends this way of seeing knowledge in divinity, from his own experience, Psal. cxix. 100. "I understand more than the ancients, because I keep thy precepts." Christ also recommends the same, John vii. 17. "If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself."