
A Discourse concerning the use of the Holy Scriptures.

Colossians III. 16.

*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all
Wisdom.*

THIS Epistle, if any other, is a rich mine of Heavenly Treasure, and abounds both in the discovery of Gospel Mysteries, and the injunction of Christian Duties. It is furnisht throughout with that which may either instruct us in Knowledge, or direct us in Practice: And the Apostle having already laid down many Excellent things in order to both these; and seeing it would be an endless task to discourse unto them all the Truths, or exhort them to all the Duties of Religion in particular; he therefore speaks compendiously in the words of my Text, and refers them to the perfect Systeme in which is contained an account of what a Christian ought to know or do; and that is the Holy Scriptures. *Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly.*

The words of this Exhortation are very full and laden with weighty Sence. We may resolve them into two parts.

First, Here is the Nature and Substance of the Exhortation, which is to a diligent Study, and plentiful knowledge of the Holy Scriptures.

Secondly :

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Secondly, The manner how we ought to be Con-
stant in them; *So that it may dwell in us richly in all Wis-
dom.*

In the former, we may take notice that the Scripture
is called the word of Christ; and that upon a double ac-
count: both because he is the Author that composed it,
and likewise, he is the subject matter of which it princi-
pally treats. Now though in both these respects, the Scrip-
tures of the New Testament be more especially the word
of Christ; yet also may the Scriptures of the Old Testa-
ment as truly and properly go under his Name. For,

First, He is the Author of them all: He may well write
this Title upon our Bibles, *The Works of Jesus Christ*. All
the Prophets before his Incarnation, were but his A-
manueries, and wrote only what he by his Spirit dictated to
them, *2 Pet. 1. 21. Prophecy came not in old time by the
will of Man, but holy Men of God spake as they were moved
by the Holy Ghost*, and certainly the Holy Ghost inspired
them by Christ's Authority and Commission; and what
he declared, he took from him, *and shewed it unto them*,
*John 16. 14, 15. He shall receive of mine, and shall shew it
unto you.*

Secondly, Christ also is the principal subject and matter
of the whole Scripture. The sending Christ a Saviour in-
to the World, is that great Business which hath employed
the Counsel of the Father, the Admission and Ministrati-
on of Angels, the Tongues and Pens of Prophets, Apo-
stles, and holy Men of all Ages, before the Scriptures
were Written, when Revelation or Tradition were yet the
only positive Rules for Faith and Practice. The Patriarchs
saw him by these. *Abraham saw my day and was glad, Joh.*
8. 56. Afterwards the People of the Jews saw him by
Types, Promises, and Prophecies recorded in the Scrip-
tures. He was that Excellent Theme that hath filled up
many Chapters of the Old Testament; as the first draught
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of a Picture represents the features and proportion of the Person, but afterwards is added the complexion and life to it. So is it here, the Pens of the Prophets drew the first Lineaments and Proportion of Christ in the Old Testament, and the Pens of the Apostles and Evangelists have added the Life and Sweetness to it in the New. Yea, Christ is so truly described in the Old Testament, by his Life, by his Death, by all the greater Remarks of either, that in his Contest with the Jews, he appeals thither for a Testimony, *John 5. 39. Search the Scriptures, for they are they which testify of me.* And St. Peter, *Acts 3. 24. Affirms, That all the Prophets, as many as have spoken, have foretold of these days.* And *Acts 10. 43. To him give all the Prophets Witness.* Christ who is the true Expofitor, being himself the true Author, makes them all speak his Sense. *Luke 24. 27. Beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, he expounded to them in all the Scriptures, the sayings concerning himself.* So that St. Chrysostom's Observation holds true, that the Gospel was in the World before Christ. ἔργον αὐτοῦ μὴ ἐν τοῖς βιβλοῖς τῶν προφητῶν, ἐβλάστησε ὃ ἐν τῷ Κηρύγματι τῶν ἀποστόλων. It took root in the writings of the Prophets, but flowed forth in the preaching of the Apostles; so that in both these respects, the Holy Scripture may well be called the Word of Christ; of Christ as the Author, and as the Subject of it.

And in both these lies coucht a very cogent Argument, that may inforce this exhortation of the Apostle, and excite them to a diligent study of the Scriptures. For,

First, Is Christ the Author of them, and shall we not with all care and diligence peruse these Books which he hath Compos'd? The writings of Men are valued according to the Abilities of their Authors. If they be of approved Integrity, profound Knowledge, solid Judgment, their works are Esteemed and Studied. And shall we not be much more Conversant in these, which are set forth by

the Author, who is truth it self, and the essential wisdom of the Father? These that were dictated by the immediate inspiration of the Holy Ghost, and writ as it were with a Quill of the Heavenly Dove?

Secondly, Christ is the subject of the Scriptures: And what is all other Learning and Knowledge but beggarly Elements, if compared with this? Here we have the Cabinet of God's Counsels unlockt, the Eternal purposes of his Grace, in sending his Son into the World publicly declared. Here we have the Stupendous History of God's becoming Man, of all the Miracles this God-man did upon Earth; of all the Cruelties he Suffered. Here we have the Description of his Victory in his Resurrection, of his Triumph in his Ascension, of his Glory in his Session at the right hand of the Majesty on High. *Surely, great is the Mystery of Godliness, God manifested in the Flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of Angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the World, received up into Glory,* as the Apostle with admiration recounts it, *1 Tim. 3. 16.* And of all these wondrous passages, the Scripture gives us a perfect Narrative. And what have the great Wits of the World ever treated on like this, either for Strangeness or Truth? All their Learning is but idle and contemptible Speculation, compared to this great Mystery of a Crucified Saviour; who subdued Death by dying, and without force, converted the World to believe a Doctrine above Reason. It was a very odd saying of *Tertulian, de carne Christi cont. Marc.* and yet there is something in it that strikes, *Natus est Dei filius, non pudet, quia pudendum est,* the Son of God was Born, we blush not at it, because it is shameful. *Mortuus est Dei filius, prorsus credibile est, quia ineptum est:* The Son of God dyed; it is credible, because it is unfit and unlikely it should be so: *Sepultus resurrexit, certum est, quia impossibile est;* he rose from the Dead, it is certain, true, because it is impossible. Now these unlikely and

and impossible things, judged so by humane Reason; these deep things of God, the Scripture declares, and declares them in such a manner as convinceth even Reason it self to assent to them, though it cannot comprehend them. If therefore you desire to know Christ and him Crucified, and those Mysteries Doctrines which the Wit of Man could not invent, for it can hardly receive them, be conversant in the Holy Scriptures; for they are the word of Christ, and reveals all the wonders of Wisdom and Knowledge, to which all the Wisdom of the World is but folly. This therefore I suppose lies in the expression, the word of Christ, *viz.* the word of which he is both the Author, and the Subject.

Secondly, We may observe in the Text, the manner how we ought to be Conversant in the Scriptures, and that is set forth very significantly.

First, Let the Word of Christ dwell in you. Do not only give it the hearing, as a strange and marvellous story: let not the memory of it vanish out of your minds, as soon as the sound of the Words vanisheth out of your Ears, but lay it up and lodge it in your Hearts, make it familiar and Domestick to you; that it may be as well known to you, as those that live in the same House with you. Read it, ponder and meditate upon it, till you have transcribed the Bible upon your hearts, and Faithfully printed it in your memories.

Secondly, Let it dwell in you Richly or Copiously, which may be taken either Objectively, or Subjectively: Objectively, and so the sense is, that all the word of God should dwell in us. Content not your selves with some part of it; that you read the Gospel, or New Testament, but neglect the Old, as is the practice of some flush Notionists. Or that you know the Historical part of both, but neglect the Doctrinal, which is the fond and Childish custom of some, who read the Scripture as they would Ro-

mances, skipping over the moral discourses as impertinent to the story. But when we receive the whole Doctrine contained in it, and are diligent in revolving the Prophets, Evangelists, Apostles, every part and parcel of the Heavenly revealed truth.

Again the Word of Christ may dwell in us richly in the latter sense, or Subjectively. And so it doth when not only every part of it dwells in us, but when it dwells also in every part of us. In our memories to retain, it in our minds to meditate on it, in our affections to love it, and in our Lives to practise it. Then doth the Word of Christ dwell richly, or abundantly in us.

Thirdly, Let it dwell richly in all Wisdom.

The highest Wisdom is truly to know, and to serve God in order to Eternal Life.

Now saith the Apostle, so acquaint your selves with the Scriptures, that you may from thence learn true Wisdom, the saving knowledge both of what is to be believed, and what is to be done, in order to the obtaining of everlasting happiness.

To be conversant in it only, to know what it contains, is not Wisdom but folly. But then it dwells in you in Wisdom, when you study it, to practise it, when you endeavour to know the rule that ye may obey it. This is Wisdom here, and will end in happiness hereafter. And thus you have the words of my Text explained.

In handling this Subject, I shall only pursue the design of the Apostle, and endeavour to press those exhortations upon you. And indeed I need not many Arguments to persuade those who have already any acquaintance, with these Sacred Oracles, still to be conversant in them. Have you not your selves found such clear light, such Attractive sweetness, and persuasive Eloquence in the words of God, that all that the Tongue of Man can utter for it, falls infinitely short of what it speaks on in its own behalf? Who

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of us have not found direction from it in cases of difficulty, Solution of doubts, support under Afflictions, comfort under sadness, strength against temptation, quicknings of Grace, warmth of affection; and in brief, whatsoever we could expect from the mercy of God have we not found it in the Scriptures? And shall we need further to commend it to you by Arguments, since it hath commended it self by manifold experiences? But so it is that the Devil knows we are disarmed and disabled if once he can wrest the Sword of the Spirit from us, as the Apostle calls it, and therefore labours all he can to strike the Bible out of our hands: Or if we do read it, he strives to put on such false Spectacles as shall misrepresent every thing to us, and possess us with prejudice and Objections against it. I shall therefore before I proceed any farther, encounter with some of those prejudiced opinions, which make this a Clasp'd and Sealed Book to many.

First, Some may fear lest the study and knowledge of the Scriptures, should only aggravate their Sin and Condemnation. On the one hand the precepts of the Law are so various, the duties so difficult, and Flesh and Blood so infirm and opposite; that they cast a despairing look at them, as impossible to be fulfilled. On the other hand they have been told that knowledge without practice will expose them to damnation without excuse. They have read, *Ja. 4. 17. To him that knoweth to do good, and doth it not, to him it is Sin*: it is an Emphatical and weighty Sin, and *Luke, 12. 47. He that knew his Masters Will, and did it not shall be beaten with many stripes*. This they have read, and this deterrs them from reading any farther. If they cannot practise what they know; and if to know and not practise, be only to inflame their last reckoning, and make their torments more intolerable, it is best for them to muffle up themselves in a safe ignorance.

To this I Answer.

First, Though the word abounds with multitudes of sublime precepts, and difficult duties, yet this is no discouragement from the study of it. For consider that this same word is not only a light to discover what you ought to do, but an help to enable you to do it. It is the very means that God appointed to overcome your averfeness, and assist your weakness. And if ever this be effected, it must in an ordinary way, be by conversing with the Scriptures. That Sick Man hath lost his Reason, as well as his Health, who should refuse to take Physick, because if it doth not work, it will but make him the worse. Why the way to make it work is by taking it. So it is a distempered kind of arguing, against the word of God, the Physick of our Souls, that it is mortal and deadly if it doth not work into practice. The way to make it work into practice, is to take it first into our knowledge; 'tis true, it were a great discouragement if the Scripture only shewed you how much work you have to do, what Temptations to resist, what Corruptions to mortifie, what Graces to exercise, what duties to perform, and left all that upon your own hands. But the Leaves of the Bible, are the Leaves of the Tree of Life, as well as of the Tree of Knowledge; they strengthen as well as enlighten, and have not only a Commanding, but an assisting Office. And this the Scripture doth two ways.

First, It directs where we may receive supplies of ability for the performance of whatsoever it requires. It leads thee unto Christ, who is able to furnish thee with supernatural strength, for supernatural duties. His treasury stands open for all concerns; and his Almighty Power stands engaged to assist those who relie upon it. Be not discouraged therefore, he that finds us work, finds us strength: and the same Scripture that enjoyns us obedience, exhibits God's promise of bestowing upon us the power of obeying. *Thou who werkest all works in us and for us, Isaiah, 26.*

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12. *And work out your own Salvation*, for it is God that worketh in you both to will and to do, *Phil. 2. 12, 13.* Why then should we so complain of hard sayings, and Grievous Commandments? Have we not God's Omnipotence obliged by promise to assist in the same words, wherein we are commanded to obey? What saith the Apostle, *I am able to do all things through Christ strengthening me*, *Phil. 4. 13.* When in reading the Scripture, thou meetest with difficult and rigorous Duties, the severity of Mortification, the self-cruelty of plucking out right Eyes, and cutting off right Hands; commend they self to these promises of aid and assistance, that the same Scripture holds forth, and lift up thy heart in that divine Meditation of *St. Augustine*, *Lord, give what thou Commandest, and command what thou pleasest.* Whilst thou thus duly dependest on Christ's strength, and makest use of thine own, it is as much his Honour and Office to inable thee, as it is thy Duty to perform what he requires.

Secondly, The Scripture as it directs us to rely on the strength of Christ; so it is a means that God hath appointed to quicken and excite our own strength and Power, to the discharge of those Duties it Discovers. Wherefore are those pressing Exhortations, and those dreadfull Threatnings, every where so dispersed up and down in the Book of God, but that when we are slow and dull and drowsie, the Spirit may by these, as by so many goads, rowze us, and make us start into Duty? Such a spiritual sloath hath benumb'd us, that without this quickening, we should not be diligent in the Work of the Lord, and therefore *David* prays, *Psal. 119. 88. Quicken me, so shall I keep the Testimonies of thy Mouth*, but yet it is also the word it self that quickens us to the Obedience of the word, *Psal. 119. 50. Thy word hath quickened me.* And indeed, if you can come from reading the word, that so abounds with Promises, with Threatnings, with rational

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Arguments, with pathetick Expostulations, winning Insinuations, importunate Intreaties, heroick Examples propounded to our Imitation, with all the perswasive Art and Rhetorick that becometh the Majesty of the great God to use; if you can read this word, and yet find from it no warmth of Affection, no quickening to Duty; let me tell you, you either read it without attending to it, or else attend without believing it. It is therefore no discouragement from searching and studying the Scriptures, that its commands be many and difficult, for it directs you whither to go for promised strength, and the more you converse with it, the more will you find your hearts quickened to a due Obedience of it. That's the first Answer.

But then secondly, Whereas many think that it is better not to know, than not to practise; we must here distinguish of Ignorance, which is of too kinds, either invincible, or else affected: Invincible ignorance is such as is conjoynd with, and proceeds from an utter impossibility of right information, and it ariseth only from two things.

First, Absolute want of necessary Instruction: or,

Secondly, Want of natural capacity to receive it.

Affected Ignorance, is an ignorance under the means of Knowledge, and always ariseth from the neglect, or contempt of them. Such is the ignorance of those who do, or may live where the Gospel is preached, and where by pains and industry they may arrive to the knowledge of the truth.

Now here for ever to answer this Objection, and to shew you how necessary knowledge is, I shall lay down these two particulars.

First, I grant indeed, that unpractis'd knowledge is a far greater sin than invincible Ignorance, and exposeth to a much sorer Condemnation. Hell Fire burns with Rage, and meets with fuel fully prepared for it, when God

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dooms unto it an head full of Light, and an heart full of Lusts. Those who know God's will, but do it not, do but carry a torch with them to Hell, to fire that Pile that must for ever burn them. We have a common Proverb, That knowledge is no Burthen: But believe it, if your knowledge in the Scripture be merely Speculative, and overborn by the violence of unruly Lusts; this whole Word will be no otherwise to you, than the burthen of the Law, as the Prophets speak, a Burthen that will lie insupportably heavy upon you for ever. Better far you were born under Barbarism in some dark Corner of the Earth, where the least gleame of Gospel-light never shone, and where the name of Christ was never mentioned, than to have this weighty Book, a Book which you have read and known, hung about you to sink you infinitely deeper in the Burning Lake, than a Mill-stone hung about you can do in the midst of the Sea. What St. Peter speaks of Apostates, 2 Pet. 2. 21. is but too well applicable to the knowing Sinner. *It had been better for them not to have known the way of Righteousness, than after they have known it, to turn aside from the Commandments delivered to them.* How? Better not to have known it? Why, is there any possibility to escape the Condemnation of Hell without the knowledge of the way of Righteousness revealed in the Scriptures? No, Damnation had been unavoidable without this knowledge; yet it had been better they had not known it. For here is the Hyperbole of their Misery; better they had been Damned than to have known these Truths, and this rule of Righteousness, and yet turn from the Obedience and practice of it. O fearful state! O dreadful doom! when a simple and genuine damnation shall be reckoned a gain and favour in comparison of that exquisite one which God will with all his Wisdom prepare, and all his power inflict on those who knowing the righteous Judgment of God, *that they who commit such things are worthy of*

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Death, do notwithstanding, persevere in them, *He that knew his Masters will and did it not, shall be beaten with many stripes, Luke 12. 47.* And, *if I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had Sin, but now they have no Cloak for their Sins, saith our Saviour, John, 15. 22.* The Sin and punishment of those who are invincibly ignorant, is as nothing compared to what the knowing Sinners lie under.

But do not flatter your selves, your ignorance is not invincible. Are you not called to the knowledge of Christ? Do you not read or hear the Scriptures? Do you not enjoy Gospel Ordinances and Ministry? May you not, if you will be but diligent and industrious, understand what you are ignorant of? Certainly there is nothing that can prove your ignorance invincible, unless it be your obstinacy, that you will not be prevailed with to be instructed by all the means of Instruction. Your Ignorance must therefore be affected. Well then attend unto

The second particular. Affected Ignorance is a greater Sin, and will be more sorely punished at the day of Judgment, than unpractised knowledge. This kind of ignorance is so far from being pleadable as an excuse, that it is an aggravation of Mens guilt, and will be so of their Condemnation. There be but two things that compleat a Christian, Knowledge and Practice. Both these God doth strictly require. Knowledge may be without practice, but the practice of Godliness cannot be without knowledge. God, I say, requires them both. Now Judge ye which is the greater Sinner, he that labours after knowledge, though he neglect practice, or he that neglects them both: He that fulfills some part of God's will, or he that fulfills nothing of it. Certainly in your own Judgment, this latter deserves to be doubly punish'd; once for not doing his duty, and again for not knowing it when he might. Truly it is but just, and righteous that God should with
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the highest disdain and indignation, say unto them, Depart from me, ye Cursed, I know you not, since they have audaciously said unto him, Depart from us, we desire not the knowledge of thy ways. The Apostle, speaking of God's patience towards Heathens, who were invincibly ignorant of the truth, tells us, *Acts 17. 30. That the times of this ignorance* (and yet an ignorance it was that put them upon no less than brutish Idolatry) *God winked at.* Ignorant persons, in ignorant times, whilst as yet the World was destitute of the means of knowledge, and darkness over-spread the face of it, God connived and winked at. But ignorant persons in knowing times, God doth not wink at but frown upon. I am the more earnest in pressing this, because I perceive that vile and rotten principle, unworthy of a Christian who is a Child of light and of the day, is taken up by many, That it is no matter how little we know, if we do but practise what we know. What a cheat hath the Devil put upon them! Hath not God commanded you to know more, as well as to practise what you know? Is it likely you should practise what you know upon God's command, who will not upon his command increase your knowledge? And yet this is the usual Plea of profane Men. Ask them why they frequent the publick Ordinances so seldom, they will tell you, they know more by one Sermon, than they can practise. But how can such make Conscience of practising, who make none of knowing, though the same God hath enjoined them both? Yea, though they cannot practise what they know, yet let me tell them, that for those who live under the means of Grace, and may be instructed if they will, it may be as great a Sin to omit a duty out of neglect of knowing it, as out of neglect of doing it; yea and much greater. We should our selves Judge that Servant, who while we are speaking to him, stops his Ears on purpose that he might not hear what we command him; we should, I say, Judge

him worthy of more stripes, than he who gives diligent ear to our commands, although he will not obey them. So it is in this Case. Thou who stoppest thine Ears, and will not so much as hear what the will of thy Lord and Master is, deservest much more punishment, than he who takes pains to know it, although he doth it not. It is damnable not to give God the service that he requires. But O Insolence! not to give God thy Lord and Master so much as the hearing? Hath God sent Man into the World, and sent the Scriptures after, as Letters of instruction, what we should do for him here, and will it think'st thou be a sufficient excuse when thou returnest to thy Lord, that it is true thou hadst instructions, but never opened'st them, never looked'st into them? What a fearful contempt is this cast upon the great God, never so much as to enquire what his will is? Whether or no he commands that which is fit and reasonable for us to perform? And therefore refuse not to search and study the Scriptures, upon pretence that the knowledge of what you cannot fulfill, will but aggravate your Sin and Condemnation. For be assured of it, greater Sin, and sorer Condemnation can no Man have, than he who neglects the means of knowledge, thereby to disoblige himself from practice. And again the Scriptures were given to assist us in the performance of those duties which it requires from us. They do not only inform the judgment, but quicken the will and affections, and strengthen the whole Soul to its duty. And this is in answer to the first Objection.

Secondly, Some will say the reading of the Scriptures possesseth them with strange fears, and fills them with incredible terrors. It raiseth up such dreadful Apparitions of Hell, and the wrath of God, as makes them a terror to themselves.

To this I Answer, First, It may be thy condition is such as requires it. Possibly thou art in a state of wrath, and

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would'st thou not be under the apprehensions of it? Thou art under the guilt of thy Sins, and then no wonder that the voice of God should be terrible unto thee. It is most unreasonable to hate the word, as *Ahab* hated *Micajah*, because it prophesieth no good concerning thee. Alas! What good can it speak, as long as thou thy self continuest Evil?

Secondly, It is not so much the Scripture, as thine own evil Conscience that haunts and terrifies thee. When thou reade'st that dreadful Threatning, *Ezek. 18. 4. The Soul that sinneth it shall die*, there were nothing of terror in it, did not thy guilty Conscience witness against thee, that thou art the Man: 'Tis this that turns and levels all God's Artillery against thee. Get therefore a Conscience pacified upon good Grounds, and the very threatening of the Word will speak to thee, not so much terror from the dreadful-ness of the Wrath, and Condemnation denounced, as Joy, that thou hast escaped it.

Thirdly, It may be, the Word of God by working in thee, the Spirit of fear, is preparing thee for the Spirit of Adoption; for that usually ushers in this. We find the Gaoler trembling, before we find him rejoicing: There were mighty and rending Winds, Earth-quakes, and Fire, all Terrible; before these came *the still voice*, in which God was, *1 Kings 19. 12*. So God in Convictions many times prepares the way by Thunders, and Earth-quakes, by the Thundering of his Word, and the Trembling of our own Consciences, before he comes to us in the still and sweet voice of Peace and Comfort. And certainly they are much more afraid than hurt, whom God by his Terroures thus frights into Heaven.

But, Thirdly, Some may still say, their Fears are so strong that they will drive them into Desperation, or Distraction, if they longer pore on those dreadful things, the Scripture contains.

I answer,

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I answer, there is not one line or syllable in the whole Book of God that gives the least ground for Despair. Nay, there are the most supporting Comforts a poor Fearful Trembling Soul can desire; *Come unto me all that are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Come unto me and I will in no wise cast you out, return unto the Lord and he will abundantly Pardon,* Isaiah 55. 7. *I, even I, am he that blots out and forgets your Sins;* and innumerable such like. Now if Men will only take the Sword of the Spirit to wound them, and not also the Balm of the Spirit to heal them, they may through their own fault, especially when they read the Scriptures with the Devil's Commentaries, fret themselves into Despair.

Fourthly, Some may say, certainly it cannot be thus necessary that the word of Christ should dwell thus richly and abundantly in all Christians. It is requisite indeed for Ministers, whose calling it is to Teach and Instruct others, that they should have this abundance of Scripture dwelling in them; but for us who are to receive the Law at their Mouth, a competent knowledge in the Fundamentals of Religion may well be sufficient. We know that Christ is the Son of God, that he came into the World to save Sinners, and that if we would be saved by him, we must believe in him, and such chief points of Christianity which are sufficient to Salvation.

To this I answer, First, God may well expect a more plentiful measure of the Word to dwell in Ministers; because it is not only their General, but particular calling to peruse and study it. There is therefore a twofold fullness, a fullness of the private Christian, and a fullness of the treasurer or steward, to whose charge the Oracles of God are committed, and who is to communicate Knowledge to the People. This being the Minister's Office, it is his Duty especially to abound and be enriched in the knowledge of the Scripture.

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But Secondly, Wherefore must the word of Christ dwell so richly in Ministers, is it for themselves only, or is it to instruct their Flock? What? And can it be necessary for them to Teach, and yet unnecessary for you to Learn? Are they bound to search into the depth of Gospel Mysteries to inform you of them, and is it enough for you only to know the first Principles and Rudiments? Certainly, whatsoever God requires the Minister to Teach, that he requires you to Learn. Now would you your selves Judge the Minister to have sufficiently discharged his Duty, that should only in the general preach, that we are all Sinners; that Christ the Son of God came into the World to save us, that the Glory of Heaven, and the Torments of Hell, shall be the rewards of Obedience, or Disobedience? If these few absolutely necessary and fundamental Truths were all, you might well think the Ministry to be a very easie, or a very needless Office.

If then it is our Duty to reveal to you the whole Counsel of God, and to withhold nothing from you of all those Mysteries which the Scripture contains, whereof some give Life, others Light, some are Vital, others Ornamental; you cannot with Reason but conclude, that if we are obliged to Teach these things, you also are obliged to learn and know them.

Thirdly, It is a most destructive Principle that many have through Sloath and Laziness taken up, That a little knowledge will suffice to bring them to Heaven. Certainly God would never have revealed so many deep and profound Mysteries in his Word, if it were not necessary they should be known and believed. Shall we think all the rest of the Bible superfluous, except a few plain practical Texts? What God hath recorded in the Scripture, is written for our Instruction. 'Tis true if we have not the means of instruction, nor are in a possibility of attaining it, a less measure of knowledge, answered by a Conscientious pra-

ctice.

Grace may suffice for our Salvation. But for us we have line upon line, and precept upon precept, for us to satisfy our selves with a few of the common Principles, slighting the rest as nice and unnecessary points, for us to neglect knowledge, argues defect of Grace. For wheresoever true Grace is, there will be a most earnest endeavour to grow daily in both; and yet multitudes every where, even of those who abhor grosser Sins, as Swearing, Drunkenness and the like, yet take up with a few Notions of Religion that all are Sinners and all must perish, unless Christ save them, &c. This they knew, as soon as they knew any thing; and more than this, they will not know: They will not trouble their heads with any farther discoveries, nor look deep into the Mysteries of Godliness; contenting themselves that they have, as they think, knowledge enough to bring them to Heaven. Let me tell them, that though where there is not means of knowledge, a little may suffice for Salvation; yet where God doth afford plentiful means, the knowledge of these very things becomes necessary to them, which others might safely be ignorant of. This is in answer to the 4th. Objection.

Fifthly, Some may object that they have found by Experience, that the study of Scripture hath many times made them the worse, it hath alarmed their Lusts, and put them in an Uproar. Such and such Suits were quiet, till they read in the Word a command against them; therefore they are discouraged and think it best to forbear the study of the Scripture, since they find that by forbidding Sin, it only rowseth and awakens it.

First, I answer, First this was St. Paul's very Case, *Rom. 7. 8. Sin taking occasion by the Command, wrought in me all manner of Concupiscence*; now this effect is merely accidental, and is not to be imputed unto the Holy Word of God, but to the wicked Heart of Man, which takes an hint (so desperately corrupt is it) from God's
forbidding

forbidding Sin, to put it self in Mind of committing it.

Secondly, Thou complaineſt that the Word exciteth to Corruptions, but it doth it no otherwiſe than the Sun draws Smoak, and ſtink out of a Dunghill. It doth increaſe but unhappily excite them. The very ſame Luſts lay hid in their Hearts before. There they lay like ſo many Vipers and Serpents aſleep till the Light and Warmth of the Word makes them ſtir and crawl about. And this Advantage thou mayeſt make of it, that when thy Corruptions ſwarm thick about thee, upon the diſturbance the Law of God hath made among them, thou mayeſt thence ſee what a wicked Heart and Nature thou haſt, how much Filth and Mud there lyeth at the bottom of it, which preſently riſeth upon the firſt ſtirring. This may make thee vile in thine own Eyes, and deeply humbled under the ſad and ſerious Conſideration of thy indwelling Sin. 'Tis the very uſe the Apoſtle makes in the ſame Caſe. *Rom. 7. 24. O wretched Man that I am, who ſhall deliver me from the Body of this Death!* When Humors are in Motion, we ſoon perceive what is the ſtate of our Body, and when Corruptions are once ſtirred, we may thereby eaſily know the State and Condition of our Souls.

Thirdly, The ſame Word that doth thus occaſionally ſtir up Sin, is the beſt means to beat it down. You may perceive by this, there is ſomewhat in the Word that is extremely contrary to their Sins, ſince they do ſo riſe and arm againſt it, their great Enemy is upon them, and this alarm that they take, is but before their overthrow. It may be the Mud is only ſtirred that it might be caſt out, and their Hearts cleaned from it. Be not diſcouraged therefore, for there is no Means in the World ſo appoſite to the deſtruction and ſubduing of Sin as the Scripture, though at firſt it may ſeem inſtead of ſubduing of Sins to ſtrengthen them.

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Sixthly,

Sixthly, Many are discouraged from studying the Scriptures, because their Memories are so treacherous and unfaithfull they can retain nothing; when they have read the Scripture, and would recollect what they have read, they can give no account of it either to themselves or others. Nothing abides upon them, and therefore they think it were as good give over as thus continually pour Water into a Sieve, and inculcate Truths upon such a leaky Memory, where all runs out. This is indeed the Complaint of many. But,

First, This should put thee on a more frequent and diligent study of the Scripture than discourage thee from it. More pains will supply this Defect, thou must the oftner prompt, and the oftner examine thy Self, the more forgetful thou art. Memory is the Soul's Steward, and if thou findest it unfaithful, call it the oftner to account. Be still following it with Line upon Line, and Precept upon Precept, and continually instill somewhat into it. A Vessel set under the fall of a Spring, cannot leak faster than it is supplied. A constant dropping of this Heavenly Doctrine into the Memory, will keep it that though it be leaky, yet it never shall be empty.

Secondly, Scripture Truths, when they do not enrich the Memory, yet they may purifie the Heart. We must not measure the Benefit we receive from the Word according to what of it remains, but according to what effect it leaves behind. Lightning you know than which nothing sooner vanisheth away, yet it often breaks and melts the hardest and most firm Bodies in its sudden Passage. Such is the irresistible force of the Word; the Spirit often darts it through us; it seems but like a flash and gone, and yet it may break and melt down our hard Hearts before it, when it leaves no impression at all upon our Memories. I have heard of one who returning from an affecting Sermon highly commended it to some, and being demanded what

what he remembred of it, answered, truly I remember nothing at all, but only while I heard it, it made me resolve to live better than ever I have done, and so by God's Grace I will. Here was now a Sermon lost to the Memory, but not to the Affections. To the same Purpose, I have somewhere read a story of one that complained to an aged Holy-Man, that he was much discouraged from reading the Scripture, because his Memory was so slippery he could fasten nothing upon it that he read. The old Hermet (for so as I remember he was described) bid him take an earthen Pitcher and fill it with Water; when he had done it, he bid him empty it again, and wipe it clean that nothing should remain in it, which when the other had done, and wondred to what this tended; now saith he, though there be nothing of the Water remaining to it, yet the Pitcher is cleaner than it was before; so though thy Memory retain nothing of the word thou readest, yet thy Heart is the cleaner for its very passage through.

Thirdly, Never fear your Memory, only pray for good and pious Affections. Affection to the truths we read or hear, makes the Memory retentive of them. Most Mens Memories are like Jett, or Electrical Bodies, that attract and hold-fast only straws or Feathers, or such vain and light things; discourse to them the Affairs of the World, or some idle and romantick story, their Memories retain this as faithfully as if it were ingraven on leaves of Brass. Whereas the great important truths of the Gospel, the great Mysteries of Heaven, and concernments of Eternity, leave no more impression upon them, than words on the Air in which they are spoken; whence is this, but only that the one sort work themselves into the Memory through the interest they have got in the Affections which the other cannot do. Had we but the same delight in Heavenly Objects, did we but receive the Truth in the love of it, and mingle it with Faith in the hearing, this would fix that

Volatileness and Flittiness of our Memories, and make every truth as indelible, as it is necessary. That's in Answer to the 6th. Objection.

Seventhly, others complain that the Scripture is obscure and difficult to be understood; they may as well, and with as good success, attempt to spie out what lies at the Centre of the Earth; as search into the deep and hidden Mysteries, which no humane understanding can fathom or comprehend. And this discourageth them.

To this I answer First, 'tis no wonder if there be such profound depths in the word of God, since it is a System and Compendium of his Infinite and unsearchable Wisdom; that Wisdom which from the beginning of the World hath been hid in God: Those deep Truths which your understanding cannot reach, require your humble Veneration.

Secondly, The Scripture is suited to every Capacity. It is (as it is commonly exprest) a Ford wherein a Lamb may wade, and an Elephant swim; and herein is the infinite Wisdom of God seen, in wreathing together plain Truths with obscure, that he might gain the more Credit to his Word, by the one instructing the ignorance of the weakest; by the other puzzling and confounding the understanding of the wisest. This also adds a Beauty and Ornament to the Scripture.

As the Beauty of the World is set off by a gracefull variety of Hills and Valleys, so is it in the Scripture. There are sublime Truths, that the most aspiring reason of Man cannot over-top, and there are more plain and easie Truths in which the weakest Capacity may converse with Delight and Satisfaction. No Man is offended with his Garden, for having a shady thicket in it, no more should we be offended with the word of God, that among so many fair and open Walks, we here and there meet with a Thicket that the Eye of Humane Reason cannot look through.

Thirdly,

Thirdly, Those Truths that are absolutely necessary to Salvation, are as plainly without either Obscurity or Ambiguity recorded in the Scripture as if they were (as the *Mahumetans* think concerning their *Alcoran*) written with Ink made of Light, there's the necessity of Faith in Jesus Christ, of repentance for dead works, of an holy and mortified Life, so clearly set down, that scarce have there any been found so impudent as to raise Controversies about them, and is it not peevish to quarrel at the word for being obscure in those things, which if thou hast used thy utmost Diligence to understand, the ignorance of them shall not at all prejudice thy Salvation? Bless God, rather that he hath so clearly revealed the necessary and practical Duties of a Christian Life, that those are not involved in any mystical or obscure Intimations, but thou mayst without doubt or dispute, know what is of absolute necessity to be either believed or practised in order to Salvation. Be assured of this, that what with all thy Labour and Diligence thou canst not understand thou needest not, and what is needful, is plain and obvious, and thou mayest easily understand it.

Fourthly, the Scripture is obscure, but hath not God offered us sufficient helps for the unfolding of it? Have you not the promise of his Spirit to illuminate you? *1 Cor. 2. 10. God hath revealed them to us by his Spirit, for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea the deep things of God.* Have we not his Minister, whose Office it is to instruct us, and lead us into the inmost Sence of the Scriptures? Nay, have we not the Scripture it self, which is the best interpreter of its own meaning; usually it it speak more darkly in one place, it speaks the same truth more clearly in another. Now compare Scripture with Scripture, you will find it holds a Light unto its self. The oftner you read, and the more you ponder on those passages that are abstruse, the more you will find them clear up to your understanding. So that neither is this any reasonable discouragement from studying the Holy Scriptures.

Eighthly,

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Eighthly, Others may say, they are doubtful, because they see many of those who have been most **Conversant** in the Scripture, how they have been perverted and carried aside into damnable Errors, and yet still have pleaded Scripture for the defence of them.

I answer, True, the Devil hath in these our days busied himself to bring a reproach upon Scripture, through the whimsies and giddiness of those who have pretended most acquaintance in it. But let not this be any discouragement, for this ariseth not directly from the influence the Scripture hath on them, which is the rule of truth only; but from the pride and self conceit of a few **Notionists**, who wrest it to their own Perdition. And though they boast much of Scripture to countenance their **Opinions**; yet Scripture misunderstood and misapplied is not Scripture. Indeed there is no other way to discern truth from Error, but only by the Scripture rightly understood, and there is no way rightly to understand it, but diligently to search it.

But to say that therefore we must not read the Scripture because some wrest it to their own Destruction, is alike reasonable, as to say that therefore we must not Eat nor Drink, because that some eat to Gluttony, and others drink to Giddiness and Madnes. The Apostle *St. Peter* tells us, *Epist. 1 Chap. 3. v. 16.* that in *St. Paul's* Epistles there were some things hard to be understood, which the unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other Scriptures, to their own destruction. Shall we therefore conclude, that neither his Epistle nor any other of the Scriptures should be read by us; because that in some, instead of Nourishment, they have occasioned onely Wind, Flatulency and ill humours? If this had been his purpose, it had certainly been very easie for him to have said, Because they are hard to be understood, and many wrest them to their own destruction, therefore beware that you read them

them not. But in stead of this, he draws another inference, *verse 17. Ye therefore beloved, beware, least ye also being led away with the Errors of the Wicked fall from your own stedfastness, but grow in grace and in the Knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.* He saith not, beware that you read them not, but, beware how you read them: This is the true Apostolical Caution, which tends not to drive us from the Scriptures, but to make us more studious and inquisitive in them, least we also be perverted by the cunning craftiness of Men, who lie in wait to deceive. And this the Primitive Parents thought the best and surest means, to preserve their People from Error and Seduction. It were almost endless to recite to you those many passages wherein they do most Pathetically exhort all, of all Ranks and Conditions, of each Sex, of all Ages, to a diligent perusal of the Holy Scriptures. And so far were they from taking it up in a Language unknown to the Vulgar, or debarring the Laity from Reading it, that the Translations of it into the common Tongue of each Country were Numerous, and their Exhortations scarce more vehement and earnest in any thing, than that the People would employ their time and thoughts in revolving them. It is therefore a most certain sign, that that Church hath false wares to put off, which is of nothing more careful than to darken the Shop. And assuredly the wresting the Scriptures by some who read them, cannot occasion the Destruction of more, than that damnable Idolatry, and those damnable Heresies have done, which have been brought into, and are generally owned and practised by the Church of Rome, through the not reading of them.

Thus you see (as it was in *Josiah's* time) how much dust and Rubbish this Book of the Law lies under. I have endeavoured to remove it. And shall now proceed to those Arguments, that may persuade you to a diligent search and perusal of the Scriptures. The Jews indeed

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were so exact, or rather Superstitious in this, that he was judged a despiser of those Sacred Oracles, who did not readily know how often every Letter of the Alphabet occurred in them. This preciseness God hath made use of to deliver down his word to us, unvaried and uncorrupted. It is not such a scrupulous search of the Scripture, I now exhort you to: but as God hath left it to us a rich Depositum, a dear pledge of his Love and care, so we should diligently attend to a rational and profitable study of it.

There are but two things in the general that commend any writing to us, either that it discovers knowledge, or directs practice; that it informs the Judgment, or reforms the Life. Both of these are eminently the Characters of this Book of God. And therefore *David* tells us, *Psal.* 19. 7. *The Law of God converts the Soul, and makes wise the simple.* It is a light not only to our heads, but it is a Lamp unto our Feet, and a light unto our paths, *Psal.* 119. 105. Let us consider it as to both.

First, In point of knowledge, as it perfects the understanding, and so it will appear in sundry particulars how excellent a study it is. For

First, The Scripture discovers unto us the knowledge of those truths that the most improved natural Reason could never sift out; and are intelligible only by Divine Revelation. God hath Composed two Books, by the diligent study of which, we may come to the knowledge of himself. The Book of the Creatures, and the Book of the Scriptures. The Book of the Creatures is written in those great Letters of Heaven and Earth, the Air and Sea, and by these we may spell out somewhat of God. He made them for our instruction, as well as our service. There is not a Creature that God hath breathed abroad upon the face of the Earth, but it Reads us Lectures, of his infinite Power and Wisdom. So that it is no absurdity to say that they are
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all the Works of his mouth. so they are all the works of his Hands. The whole World is a speaking workmanship, *Rom. i. 20. The invisible things of God, are clearly seen by the things that are made, even his eternal Power and Godhead.* And indeed when we seriously consider how God hath poised the Earth in the midst of the Air, and the whole World in the midst of a vast and boundless nothing; how he hath hung out those glorious lights of Heaven, the Sun, the Moon, and Stars, and made paths in the Sky for their several courses, how he hath laid the Sea on heaps, and so girt it in, that it may possibly overlook, but not overflow the Land, when we view the Variety, Harmony, and Law of the Creation, our Reason must needs be very short, if we cannot from these collect the infinite Wisdom, Power, and Goodness of the Creator. So much of God as belong to these two great Attributes of Creator and Governour of the World, the Book of Nature may plainly discover to us. But then there are other more retired, and reserved Notions of God, other truths that nearly concern our selves and our eternal Salvation to know and believe, which nature could never give the least glimpse to discover. What Signature is there stamp't upon any of the Creatures of a Trinity in Unity, of the eternal Generation, or temporal Carnation of the Son of God? What Creature could inform us of our first fall, and guilt contracted by it? Where can we find the Copy of the Covenant of Works, or of grace printed upon any of the Creatures? All the great Sages of the World, though they were Nature's Secretaries, and ransack'd its abstrusest mysteries, yet all their Learning and Knowledge, could not discover the Sacred Mystery of a Crucified Saviour. These are truths which Nature is so far from searching out, that it can scarce receive them when revealed. *1. Corinth. 2. 14. The natural Man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of*
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God,

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God, neither can he know them, because they are Spiritually discerned. The light that can reveal these, must break immediately from Heaven it self. And so it did upon the Prophets, Evangelists, and Apostles; the Pen-men of the Holy Scriptures.

And if it were their singular Privilege, that the Holy Ghost should descend into their breasts, and so possess them with Divine inspirations, that what they spake, or wrote, became Oracular, how little less is ours; since the Scriptures reveal to us the very same truths which the Spirit revealed to them. God heretofore spake in them, and now he speaks by them unto us. Their Revelations are become ours; the only difference is, that what God taught them by extraordinary inspiration, the very same truths he teacheth us in the Scripture, by the ordinary, illumination of his Spirit. Here, therefore whilst we diligently converse in the Book of God, we enjoy the privilege of Prophets. The same word of God which came unto them, comes also unto us; and that without those severe preparations, and strong agonies, which sometimes they underwent, before God would inspire them with the knowledge of his Heavenly truth. That is the first Motive and Argument.

Secondly, The knowledge which the Scripture teacheth, is for the matter of it the most sublime and lofty in the World. All other sciences are but poor and beggarly Elements, if compared with this. What doth the Naturalist, but only busie himself in digging a little drossie knowledge, out of the Entrails of the Earth. The Astronomer, who ascends highest, mounts no higher than the Cœlestial Bodies, the Stars and Planets; which are but the out-works of Heaven. But the Scripture pierceth much farther, and lets us into Heaven it self. There it discovers the Majesty and Glory of God upon his Throne; the Eter-
nal

nal Son of God sitting at his right hand, making a prevailing and Authoritative intercession for us: The glittering train of Cherubims and Seraphims, an innumerable company of Angels, and the Spirits of Just Men made perfect. So that indeed when you have this Book laid open before you, you have Heaven it self, and all the inconceivable glories of it laid open to your view. What can be more sublime than the nature of God? And yet here we have it so plainly described by all its most glorious Attributes and Perfections, that the Scripture doth but beam forth light to an Eye of Faith, whereby it may be enabled to see him who is invisible. But if we consider those Gospel Mysteries the Scripture relates, the Hypostatical Union of the Divine, and Humane Nature in Christ's incarnation, the Mystical Union of our persons to his, by our believing, that the Son of God should be Substituted in the stead of guilty Sinners; that he who knew no sin, should be made a Sacrifice for sin, and the Justice of God become reconciled to Man, through the blood of God: these are Mysteries so infinitely profound as are enough to puzzle a whole College of Angels. Now these the Scripture propounds unto us, not only to pose, but to perfect our understanding. For that little knowledge we can attain unto in these things, is far more excellent than the most comprehensive knowledge of all things else in the World. And where our scanty apprehensions fall short of fathoming, these deep mysteries, the Apostle hath taught us to seek it out with an, *ὡς βυθός*, *Rom. 11. 33.* *O the depth of the Riches, both of the Knowledge and Wisdom of God! how unsearchable are his Judgments, and his ways past finding out!*

Thirdly, The Scripture is an inexhaustible Fountain of Knowledge, the more you draw from it, the more still springs up. It is a deep Mine, and the farther you search

into it, still the richer you find it. It is tedious to read the works and writings of Men often over, because we are soon at the bottom of what they deliver, and our understanding hath nothing new to refresh it. But in reading the Scripture it fares with us as it did with those whom Christ miraculously fed, the bread multiplied under their Teeth, and increased in the very chewing of it. So here, while we ruminate and chew on the truths of the Scripture, they multiply and rise up thicker under our meditation. One great cause of the neglect that many are guilty of in reading the Holy Scripture, is a fear that they shall but meet with the same things again; which they have already read and known; and thus they account tedious and irksome. Indeed if they read it only Superficially and slightly, it will be so. But those who fix their minds to ponder and meditate upon the word, find new truths arising up to their understanding, which they never before discovered. Look as it is in a Starry night, if you cast your Eyes upon many spaces of the Heavens, at the first glance perhaps you shall discover no Stars there; yet if you continue to look earnestly and fixedly, some will emerge to your view, that were before hid and concealed: So is it with the Holy Scriptures. If we only glance curiously upon them, no wonder we discover no more Stars, no more glorious truths beaming out their light to our Understanding. St. *Augustine*, found this so experimentally true, that he tells us in his third Epistle, that though he should with better capacity, and greater diligence, study all his Life time, from the beginning of his Childhood to decrepit Age nothing else but the Holy Scriptures; yet they are so compacted, and thick set with truths, that he might daily learn something, which before he knew not. God hath as it were studied to speak compendiously in the Scriptures. What a Miracle of brevity is it, that the whole

whole Duty of Man, relating both to God and his Neighbour, should be all comprised in ten words? Not a word but were the fence of it drawn out, were enough to fill whole Volumes, and therefore the Psalmist, *Psal. 119. 96. I have seen an end of all perfection, but thy Commandments are exceeding broad.* When we have attained the knowledge of those things that are absolutely necessary to Salvation, there yet remain such depths of Wisdom, both in the manner of Scripture expression, and in the mysteriousness of things exprest, that after our utmost industry, still there will be left new truths to become the discovery of a new search.

Fourthly, The Scripture exhibits to us that knowledge which is necessary to Eternal Salvation. *This is Life Eternal to know thee, the only true God and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent, John 17. 3. And this knowledge the Scriptures alone can afford us, John, 5. 39. So 2 Tim. 3. 15.* We need not therefore enquire after blind traditions, or expect any whimsical Enthusiasms: the written word contains whatsoever is necessary to be known in order to Eternal Salvation, and whosoever is wise above what is written, is wise only in impertinences. Now hath God contracted whatever was necessary for us to know, and summed it up in one Book, and shall not we be diligent and industrious in studying that which doth so necessarily concern us? Other knowledge is only for the adorning and embellishment of Nature; this is for the necessity of Life, of Life Eternal. I have before spoken enough concerning the necessity of knowledge unto Salvation, and therefore shall not farther enlarge. Therefore as St. Peter said to Christ, *Lord whither shall we go, thou hast the words of Eternal Life:* So let us Answer whatsoever may seem to call us off from the diligent study of the Scriptures, Whither shall we go, to this we must cleave, with this we will

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will converse, for here alone are the words of Eternal Life.

Fifthly, The Knowledge that the Scripture discloseth is of undoubted Certainty, and perpetual Truth; it depends not upon Probabilities or Conjectures, but the infallible Authority of Christ himself; he hath dictated it, for whom it is impossible to lye. The rule of our Veracity or Truth, is the conformity of our Speech to the existency of Things; but divine Truth and Veracity hath no other Rule besides the Will of him that speaks it. He must needs speak infallible Truth, who speaks things into their beings, such is the omnipotent Speech of God. Whatsoever he declares, is therefore true, because he declares it. Never matter how strange and impossible Scripture-Mysteries may seem to Flesh and Blood, to the corrupt and captious understandings of natural Men; when the word of God hath undertaken for the Truth, it is as much impiety to doubt of them, as it is Folly to question the reality of what we see with our very Eyes. Nay the information of our Senses, what we see, what we hear, what we feel, is not so certain, as the truth of those things which God reveals and testifies in the Scriptures. And therefore the Apostle 2 Pet. 1. 18, 19. *Speaking of that Miraculous Voice that sounded from Heaven. Matth. 17. 5. This is my beloved Son in whom I am well Pleased.* We, saith the Apostle, heard this Voice when we were with him in the Holy Mount, but we have also a more sure word of Prophecy; or as the Greek may well be rendred, We account more sure the word of Prophecy, unto which ye do well, that ye take heed. What a more sure word than a Voice from Heaven? When God himself shall vocally bear witness to the Truth? Yes, we have a more sure Word, and that's the Word of Prophecie, recorded in the Old Testament. And hence it will follow, that because the Prophecies concerning Christ, may seem somewhat obscure in Comparison with this audible Voice from

from Heaven; therefore the testimony of obscure Scripture, is to be preferred before the testimony of clear Sense. Now therefore if you would know things beyond all danger, either of Falshood or Hesitation, be Conversant in the Scripture, where we may take all for certain upon the Word and Authority of that God, who neither can deceive, nor be deceived.

Sixthly, The Scripture alone gives us the true and unerring Knowledge of our Selves. Man that busies himself in knowing all things else, is of nothing more ignorant than of himself, the Eye that beholds other things, cannot see its own shape; and so the Soul of Man, whereby he understands other objects, is usually ignorant of its own Concernments. Now as the Eye that cannot see it self directly, may see it self reflexively in a Glafs; so God hath given us his Scripture, which St. James compares to a Glafs, *James 1. 23. and holds this before the Soul, wherein is represented our true State and Idea.*

There is a four-fold state of Man, that we could never have attained to know, but by the Scriptures.

His state of Integrity.

His state of Apostacy.

His state of Restitution.

His state of Glory.

The Scripture alone can reveal to us, what we were in our Primitive Constitution. Naturally, Holy bearing the Image and Similitude of God, and enjoying his Love, free from all inward perturbations or outward Miseries; having all the Creatures subject to us, and what is much more, our selves.

What we were in our state of Apostacy or Destitution, despoiled of all our Primitive Excellencies, dispossest'd of all the
Happiness,

Happiness we enjoy'd, and of all hopes of any for the future; lyable every Moment to the revenge of Justice, and certain once to feel it.

What we are in our state of Restitution, through Grace, begotten again, to a lively hope, Adopted into the Family of Heaven, Redeem'd by the Blood of Christ, Sanctified and Sealed by the Holy Spirit, restored to the Favour and Friendship of God, recovering the initials of his Image upon our Souls here on Earth, and expecting the perfection of it in Heaven.

What we shall be in our final State of Glory, cloathed with Light, Crowned with Stars, inebriated with pure spiritual Joys. We shall see God as he is, know him as we are known by him, love him ardently, converse with him eternally, yea a state, it will be so infinitely happy, that 'twill leave us nothing to hope for.

This Four-fold state of Man the Scripture doth evidently exprefs. Now these are such things as could never have entred into our Hearts to have imagined, had not the word of God described them to us, and thereby instructed us in the knowledge of our selves, as well as of God and Christ.

Now let us put these six particulars together. The Scripture instructs us in the knowledge of such things as are intelligible only by divine Revelation, it teacheth us the most sublime and lofty Truths, 'tis a most inexhaustible Fountain of Knowledge, the more we draw, the more still springs up; it teaches that Knowledge that is necessary to Salvation. It is of undoubted certainty, and perpetual Truth. And Lastly, it informs us in the knowledge of our Selves; and certainly, if there be any thirst in you after Knowledge, there needs no more be spoken to perswade you to the diligent study of the Scripture, which is a rich Store and Treasury of all Wisdom and Knowledge.

Thus

Thus we have seen how the Scriptures inform the Judgment. Let us now briefly see how they reform the Life, and what practical influence they have upon the Souls of Men. Now here the word of God hath a mighty Operation, and that in sundry particulars.

First, This is that word that convinceth and humbles the stoutest and proudest Sinners. There are two sorts of secure Sinners. Those who vaunt it in the Confidence of their own Righteousness; and those who are secure through an insensibility of their own Wickedness. Both these the word when it is set home with Power, convinceth, humbles, and brings to the Dust. It despoils the Self-Justiciary of all that false Righteousness he once boasted of and trusted to. *I was alive once without the Law* (saith St. Paul) *but when the Commandment came, sin revived and I dyed*, Rom. 7. 9. It awakens and alarms the senseless, scared Sinner. How many have there been, that have scorned God, and despised Religion, whom yet one curse or threat of this word hath made to tremble and fall down before the convincing Majesty and Authority of it?

Secondly, This is that word that sweetly comforts and raiseth them after their Dejections; All other Applications to a wounded Spirit are improper and impertinent. 'Tis only Scripture Consolation that can ease it. *The leaves of this Book are like the leaves of that Tree*, Rev. 22. which were for the healing of the Nations. The same Weapon that wounds must here work the cure.

Thirdly, This is that word that works the mighty change upon the heart in Renovation. Take a Man that runs on in vile and desperate Courses, that sells himself to do Iniquity, and commits all manner of Wickedness with Greediness, and makes use of all the Arguments that reason can suggest; these seldom reclaim any from their Debaucheries. Or if in some few they do reform the Life, yet

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they can never change the heart. But now that which no other means can effect, the Word of God can, *Psal.* 19. 7, *The Law of God is perfect converting the Soul.*

Fourthly, This is that word that strengthens and arms the People of God to endure the greatest temporal Evils, only in hope of that future reward which it punisheth.

Fifthly, This is that word that contains in it such a Collection of Rules and Duties, that whosoever observes and obeys, shall in the end infallibly obtain everlasting life. Though I can but just mention these Heads unto you, yet there is enough in them to perswade you to be diligent in the Scriptures. *In them* (saith our Saviour) *ye think to have Eternal Life.*

We are all of us guilty Malefactors; but God hath been pleased to afford us the Mercy of the Book: And what, shall we not so much as read for our Lives?

This is that Book according to which we must either stand or fall, be acquitted or condemned Eternally. The unalterable Sentence of the last day will pass upon us, as it is here recorded in this Scripture. Here we may beforehand know our Doom, and what will become of us to all Eternity. *He that believeth shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned.* 'Tis said, *Rev.* 20. 12. That when the dead stood before God to be Judged, the Books were opened: That is, the Book of Conscience, and the Book of the Scripture. Be perswaded to open this Book, and to judge your selves out of it before the last day: 'Tis not a sealed Book to you, you may there read what your present State is, and foretell what your future will be. If it be a State of Sin and Wrath, search farther; there are Directions how you may change this wretched State for a better. If it be a State of Grace and Favour, there are Rules how to preserve you in it. 'Tis a word suited to all Persons, all Occasions, all Exigencies. It informs the Ignorant,

Ignorant, strengthens the Weak, comforts the Disconsolate, supports the Afflicted, relieves the Tempted, resolves the Doubtful, directs all to those ways which lead to endless Happiness; where, as the Word of God hath dwelt richly in us, so we shall dwell for ever gloriously with God.

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F I N I S.
