

3. Remember your spiritual conflict. You never give your enemy so great an advantage as by falsehood and guile of spirit. Satan's weapons against you are wiles and darts: 'wiles,' Eph. vi. 11, and 'fiery darts,' ver. 16. Against his darts or blasphemous thoughts you oppose faith, and against his wiles your strength lieth in downright honesty. Righteousness is your breastplate, and truth your girdle, ver. 14. This will guard you against his temptations, and give you strength and courage in the day of sore trial; it is strength against him both as a tempter and an accuser.

4. Heedfulness, or a constant watch over your tongue: Ps. xxxix. 1, 'I said, I will take heed to my ways, that I sin not with my tongue. I will keep my mouth with a bridle, while the wicked is before me;' Ps. cxli. 3, 'Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips.' And this watch is quickened by the fear of God, in whose sight and hearing we always are.

5. Avoid the causes of lying. I shall mention some of them—

[1.] Pride and self-esteem. We all affect to seem better than we are, and what we want in real worth we make up by lying and foolish boasting. The 'lying tongue,' and 'the tongue that speaketh proud things,' are joined together, Ps. xii. 3.

[2.] Flattery, or a desire to ingratiate ourselves with great ones: Ps. xii. 2, 'With flattering lips and with a double heart do they speak.' A self-seeker is apt to flatter and fawn upon all that is rich and great and mighty, and to smooth them up with falsehoods and applauses. Flattering and tale-bearing is many men's trade.

[3.] Fear of men and distrust of God. This puts many upon their shifts to avoid their displeasure: Deut. xxxiii. 29, 'Thine enemies shall be found liars unto thee;' that is, feignedly submit themselves to thee.

[4.] Covetousness: Prov. xxi. 6, 'The getting of treasures by a lying tongue is a vanity tossed to and fro of them that seek death.'

[5.] Doing that which we are ashamed to own; as naughty children and servants commit faults, and then cover them with a lie. Now it is dangerous to stand in need of a lie to help us out; the devil hath a tie upon you.

SERMON XII.

Proving what is acceptable to the Lord.—Eph. v. 10.

THE apostle goeth on further to declare what is required of them that walk as children of the light. Our duty consists of two parts—eschewing evil and doing good. How to do good is shown in this verse; what eschewing evil is required of us, the next verse showeth.

In the words observe—

1. The act, *δοκιμάζοντες*, 'Proving.'

2. The object, *τὸ εὐάρεστον τῷ κυρίῳ*, 'What is acceptable (or well-pleasing) to the Lord Christ.'

I. The act, 'proving.' The word signifieth so to prove as to approve and practise.

1. Sometimes it signifieth bare searching or examining: 1 Thes. v. 21, 'Prove all things.' So it noteth an accurate and continual study and endeavour to know God's will, by reading and meditating: Ps. i. 2, 'And in that law doth he meditate day and night.' By hearing and trying, as the Bereans are commended, Acts xvii. 11, 'In that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.' By praying and earnest seeking: Prov. ii. 3, 4, 'Yea, if thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding; if thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasure.' This, and the use of all other holy means, is the searching and examining commended to us.

2. Proving is put for approving: Rom. ii. 18, 'And knowest his will, and approvest the things that are more excellent.' We must not examine only, but approve what is good and true.

3. Taking upon ourselves an obligation to practise it: Rom. xii. 2, 'And be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.' The meaning is, that you may understand and perform your duty: Phil. i. 10, 'That ye may approve things that are excellent, that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ.' Approve by adopting into your manners and practices: it is *δοκιμάζετε*, the same word. Therefore, besides proving and approving, there must be performing, at least an endeavour; otherwise it is a ridiculous thing, and that which will never stand us in any stead, to examine what is pleasing to God, and practise the contrary.

II. The object, that which is pleasing or 'acceptable to the Lord.' There is a difference between things.

1. Some things utterly displease God, as sin: 2 Sam. xi. 27, 'But the thing that David had done displeased the Lord.'

2. Some things are not displeasing unto God, as all natural and indifferent actions, which are not forbidden, but allowed by him: Eccles. ix. 7, 'Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart; for God now accepteth thy works.'

3. Other things are commanded by him by a positive law, but have no natural goodness in themselves, setting aside God's command. Now these things are pleasing to God, as man performeth his required duty; but not so pleasing as the weighty things of the law, which have a moral good in them, if God had given no express command in the case. So it is said, Rom. xiv. 17, 18, 'For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost; for he that in these things serveth Christ is acceptable to God and approved of men.' Mercifulness, peaceableness, delight to do good one to another, these are acts of obedience to Christ, and for his sake will be accepted with God, and are of good report with men. So morals must be preferred before rituals, and the great evangelical duties before moral; as love to God and faith in Christ before acts of goodness and righteousness to men; 'For without faith it is impossible to please God,' Heb. xi. 6. So Acts x. 35, 'But in every nation he that feareth him and worketh righteousness is accepted of him.'

4. There are some things which do most please God, as things eminently good are acceptable to him in the highest degree; as, for instance, faith in Christ is pleasing to God, but a strong faith is more acceptable than a weak, which needeth props and crutches: John xx. 29, 'Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed; blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed;' that is more pleasing and acceptable to God. So love to God is also an acceptable thing, but a fervent love doth more please him: John xiv. 21, 'He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me; and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and manifest myself to him;' Ps. cxlvii. 11, 'The Lord taketh pleasure in them that fear him, in those that hope in his mercy.' So for obedience to God: 1 Thes. iv. 1, 'Furthermore then, we beseech you, brethren, and exhort you by the Lord Jesus, that as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk, and to please God, so ye would abound more and more.' So for duties to men; the apostle had mentioned 'goodness, righteousness, and truth,' now 'proving what is acceptable to God;' that is, what is the eminent discovery of any of these graces, that you may excel in all goodness, righteousness, and truth. A renewed man should practise all christian graces and virtues in the highest degree, that he may be more pleasing unto God, that he may be eminent in the faith and love of Christ, and goodness and righteousness to men. Therefore we should not barely inquire what is our duty, but what is well-pleasing and most acceptable to God.

Doct. That proving what is acceptable to God is one great duty which belongeth to the children of light.

I shall explain this point by these considerations—

First, Our great end and scope should be to please God, and be accepted with him. The apostle speaketh in his own name, and in the name of all that are like-minded with himself: 2 Cor. v. 9, 'Wherefore we labour, that whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him.' That is a christian's scope and work, and this he carrieth on living or dying. In the body it is his business to please God, out of the body it is his happiness to be accepted with him. While he is in the body, he would be found still in a course of pleasing God; and when he goeth out of the body, he would be found in a state of well-pleas'dness and acceptation; one cannot be without the other. And it must needs be so—

1. With respect to God, whose favour is our happiness, whose wrath is our misery, upon whom we depend for life and being and all things. Dependence begets observance. Men take themselves to be obliged to please those on whom they have their whole dependence, and are very careful not to offend them, if possible; and if they be offended, to be speedily reconciled to them. As the men of Tyre, Acts xii. 20, when Herod was highly displeas'd with them, 'They came with one accord to him, and having made Blastus the king's chamberlain their friend, desired peace, because their country was nourished by the king's country.' The matter stands thus between us and God, his displeasure is our destruction: 1 Cor. x. 5, 'And with many of them God was not well pleas'd, for they were overthrow'n in the wilderness.' His being pleas'd is our

happiness, both here and hereafter. Here we need him, his presence with us, to direct us in our doubts, to relieve us in our straits, to supply us in our wants, to comfort us in all our troubles, and to strengthen us against our weaknesses. Now they that would have the comfort of God's presence and company in all conditions, and have so much to do with God in the world, they ought to set themselves to please God, and observe his will in all things according to his word: John viii. 29, 'And he that hath sent me is with me: the Father hath not left me alone, for I do always the things that please him;' 1 John iii. 22, 'And whatsoever we ask we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things which are pleasing in his sight.' And hereafter our happiness lieth in our presence with God; and indeed the one cannot be without the other. None can live with God hereafter but those that take care to please God before they go hence: Heb. xi. 5, 'By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death, and was not found, because God had translated him; for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God.'

2. With respect to man, who may be considered either as to his first creation or renovation by Christ. The first creation infers an obligation, our renovation by Christ an inclination to do things *grata Deo*, acceptable and well-pleasing to God.

[1.] As we are creatures. We were made and sent into the world for this end, that we might approve ourselves by a constant course of obedience to the God that made us, and finally be accepted with him, and received into his glory. The wise God made nothing in vain; and surely he made not man to fill up the number of things, as stones; nor to increase in growth and stature, as plants; nor to eat and drink, and serve appetites, as beasts; but he made us to serve and please and glorify him: Prov. xvi. 4, 'The Lord hath made all things for himself.' All creatures were made to glorify him in their several capacities: Rom. xi. 36, 'For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things; to whom be glory for ever. Amen.'

[2.] As we are new creatures we own the old obligation; for we enter into covenant with God to become his servants; and faithful servants have this only aim, to please their master. Therefore all our aim must be, that we may be acceptable unto the Lord; for by entering into covenant we 'choose the things that please him,' Isa. lvi. 4. This is the fixed determination of our souls. We enter into covenant with God that we may become his and do his will. So that we do not only own the obligation, but by the grace of renovation we receive both direction and inclination to do what is pleasing to God. Direction, this is the effect of the renovation of our minds: Rom. xii. 2, 'But be ye transformed by the renewing of your minds, that ye may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.' A man in his pure naturals is neither able savingly to understand or do the will of God, but by grace he is fitted for both. Take grace as light, and it fits us to receive God's counsel and direction; and therefore the apostle saith here, 'Ye are light in the Lord; walk as children of the light, proving what is acceptable to the Lord.' Take grace as strength, and it enableth and inclineth us to do what is pleasing in his sight: Heb. xii. 28, 'Let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably, with rever-

ence and godly fear.' For it inclineth us to make his glory our scope, and his will our rule; for the tendency of the new creature is to live to God.

3. With respect to the thing itself. The seeking to please God and be accepted with him is so necessary and profitable to us that—

[1.] We cannot be sincere unless this be our aim and scope. One main difference between the sincere and hypocrite is in the end and scope. The one seeketh the approbation of men, the other the approbation of God; the one is fleshly wisdom, the other is godly simplicity and sincerity: 2 Cor. i. 12, 'For our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world.' Godly sincerity is making God our witness, approver, and judge. He is sincere whose religion beginneth and endeth in God, acts in truth from God, and purely for God.

[2.] This maketh us serious and watchful, and to keep close to our duty; for the aptitude and fitness of the means is judged of and measured by the end. When we have fixed our end and scope to please God, we will address ourselves to such means as are fitted to that end, and make straight towards it without any wandering. If it be our great end to be accepted with God, and please God, we will take the more care of our actions, that they be agreeable to his will. Whereas otherwise we live at peradventure, neither taking care that we may not offend: Ps. xxxix. 1, 'I said, I will take heed to my ways, that I sin not with my tongue; I kept my mouth with a bridle while the wicked is before me.' Nor humbling ourselves when we have offended: Jer. viii. 6, 'No man repented him of his wickedness, saying, What have I done?' So that the exercise both of watchfulness and repentance dependeth on frequent reflections upon our end.

[3.] This will solace and comfort us under the difficulties of obedience. As (1.) When it is troublesome to confine our desires and actions within the compass of our rule; but when we consider we are not to please the flesh, but to please God, it will help us to mortify the deeds of the body, and to live in a constant course of self-denying obedience. Otherwise, Rom. viii. 8, 'They that are in the flesh cannot please God.' They have another master, the corrupt nature within them, the desires of which they seek to gratify; they are debtors to another lord, ver. 12. So (2.) In reproaches. Men are displeased with a faithful thorough obedience to God, which not only the carnal world, but the spiritual part of the world, so far as it is carnal, disliketh. Therefore when we are censured and traduced, 1 Cor. iv. 13, 'Being defamed, we entreat: we are made as the filth of the world, and the off-scouring of all things unto this day.' If God will count me faithful, it is no matter what the world thinketh of me. So (3.) In an afflicted estate. The desire and aim to please God maketh us indifferent to all conditions: Phil. i. 20, 'So Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life or by death.' As a traveller taketh the way as he findeth it, foul or fair, so it conduceth to the end of his journey. So that it is absolutely necessary to fix this as our end and scope.

Secondly, We please God by doing what he hath required of us in his word. There are certain things evident by the light of nature

which belong to our duty ; these must not be overlooked : Micah vi. 8, 'He hath showed thee, O man, what is good ; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God ?' The things there mentioned are evident by the light of nature. That we should carry ourselves justly towards men, and with reverence and obedience to the divine majesty, is evident by the light of nature, as well as scripture. But the revelation that he hath made of our duty to us by the word is more clear, full, and certain.

1. It is more clear : Ps. cxix. 105, 'Thy word is a lamp to my feet, and a light to my path.' The use of a lamp is by night, and the light of the sun shineth by day. Whether it be by day or night with us, we clearly understand our duty by the word of God ; in all conditions we may know there how to behave ourselves. Once more, the word 'path' noteth our general choice and course of life ; the word 'feet' our particular actions. Now whether the matter that we would be informed of concerneth our choice of the way that leadeth to true happiness, or else the direction of any particular action of ours, still the word directeth a humble and well-disposed mind. So that here our duty is clearly stated ; and if a man standeth in awe of the word, and be not divided between conscience on the one side, and lusts and interests on the other, he cannot easily remain in doubtfulness, or miscarry.

2. It is more full ; for the book of nature is blurred by man's apostasy from God, and degeneration from his primitive excellency ; and our chief good and last end being altered by sin, we strangely mistake things, and weighing them in the balance of the flesh, which we seek to please, we put light for darkness and evil for good : Isa. v. 20, 'Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil ; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness ; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter ;' and so miserably grope in the dark, and cannot see clearly our way to true happiness. And besides, man's condition is such, that he needeth a supernatural remedy by a redeemer, which, depending on the mere grace of God, cannot be found out by bare natural light ; for natural light can only judge of things necessary, and not of such things as depend upon the arbitrary will and love of God, as our redemption doth : John iii. 16, 'God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have everlasting life.' Besides, nature is dark in things proper to its cognisance. The great lines of our duty are fair and legible, the outward work is written upon our hearts : Rom. ii. 15, 'Which show the work of the law written in their hearts.' Abstinence from gross sins, performance of external duties, some notices of good and evil, are escaped out of the ruins of the fall, and serve in part to convince of sin and mind us of our duty ; but that full, entire, spiritual obedience which is due to God is not known by nature. Therefore, besides the candle of the Lord within us, which is reason, God hath set up a lamp in his sanctuary, which is the scripture, to direct us in the way to heaven ; and this is clear and full, and compriseth all that is necessary to our duty and happiness.

3. It is more certain, as having a greater stamp and impress of God

upon it. Everything that hath passed God's hand discovereth its author. The light of nature showeth itself to be of God, much more the light of scripture, wherein he hath discovered more of his wisdom, goodness and power, as being such a revelation of the mind of God as is fit for God to give and us to receive, suited to the nature of God, to preserve a due honour, esteem and reverence of his blessed majesty, and exactly calculated for our necessities, to teach us the way of recovering out of sin, and obtaining our true and proper happiness, and coming attested to us with such evidence from heaven as we cannot rationally withstand: 2 Peter i. 19, 'We have also a more sure word of prophecy, whereunto ye do well to take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day-star arise in your hearts.' It is surer than the light of nature, as not liable to such debate and uncertainty, which must be cleared before man's duty can be stated to him; and more sure than miracles, oracles, visions, as being put into writing; and a faithful record, as the constant measure, standard, and rule of faith and manners for the use of God's people in all ages. Now it is good to see how David compareth those two revelations of the mind of God, Ps. xix., where he first admireth the brightness of the sun, and then the purity of the law; the joining of both which meditations showeth that the world can be as ill without the word of God as without the light of the sun. What would this inferior world be without the light of the sun, but a great cave and obscure dungeon, where men would creep up and down like worms out of their holes? And besides, the comparing of both together showeth that there are two books wherein we shall do well to study, and both made by God himself, and both manifesting and discovering God to the world—the book of nature and the book of scripture. You cannot look upon the book of the creatures, but in every page and line you will find this truth presented to your eyes, that there is an infinite eternal power that made all things, and is to be owned, revered, worshipped, and obeyed by us; this is enough to leave the world without excuse. But in the book of the word you may see more of God and the way to enjoy him. This doth more powerfully convince man of his misery, and clearly show him his remedy. The use which the psalmist makes of these books is notable; of the first, to admire the glory of God by the beauty of the heavens; of the second, to humble and awe man by the purity and strictness of the law, as all religion lieth in the knowledge of God and ourselves. This latter book being more perfect, should be our daily study, to prevent error and mistake, and that we may get the true knowledge of God's will; for many do many things out of zeal and religion which God abhorreth: John xvi. 2, 'The time cometh that whosoever killeth you will think that he doth God service.' And others obtrude many things on the faith of believers without warrant: Isa. viii. 20, 'To the law and to the testimony; if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.' Examine all things by the rule of God's word, what is conformable to his will, what not, without suffering yourselves to be deceived by false opinions or persuasions. And besides, in our practice we may know what is acceptable, either as to our speeches or actions. As to our speeches: Prov. x. 32, 'The lips of the righteous know what is acceptable; but the mouth of the wicked

speaketh frowardness ;' that is, they know what is acceptable to God ; they are instructed out of his word how to order their speech for profit, that it may be good, and minister grace to the hearers ; others easily bewray the corruption of their hearts by their tongues. So for all our actions towards God and men. For worship, God accepteth that which he hath required ; other things are vain oblations : Isa. i. 12, 13, ' When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand, to tread my courts ? Bring no more vain oblations ; incense is an abomination unto me ; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies I cannot away with ; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting.' And for our conversation with men, how to show forth righteousness, goodness and truth, we may know what is the will of God in his word ; this rule will teach us : Gal. vi. 16, ' As many as walk according to this rule,' &c. Our rule is not left indifferent for us to choose, nor arbitrary for us to impose, but it is fixed in the word of God revealed in the scripture.

Thirdly, If we would know God's mind revealed in his word, we must use search and trial. Δοκιμάζοντες, ' proving,' noteth great diligence and care that we may know the mind of God ; for it greatly importeth us, and we are often pressed to it : 1 Thes. v. 21, ' Prove all things, hold fast that which is good.' If we see but a piece of money that hath the king's image stamped upon it, we bring it to the touchstone to see if it be right : do so with doctrines and practices, bring them to the law and to the testimony, see how they agree with God's word : 1 John iv. 1, ' Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God ; because many false prophets are gone out into the world.' Every man that teacheth, some spirit or other cometh upon him ; therefore try what kind of spirit it is, whether it be a formal worldly spirit, as some fashion their religion according to the world, or a heavenly spirit, which is of God ; whether it be a spirit of bitterness against the saints, or a spirit of love, meekness, and gospel sincerity. This is the course we must take if we would know the mind of God in doubtful matters. We must seriously weigh all things in the balance of the sanctuary, read, hear, confer, pray, meditate, use all holy means to know God's will.

I will—(1.) Prove this is a christian's duty ; (2.) State it.

1. That it is every christian's duty, in reference to his own warrant and settlement of conscience, to use a judgment of discretion, and not to depend upon the judgment of others ; yea, not to satisfy himself barely with the public judgment of the church, but to try things, that he may know that he is in God's way, and wherein he shall be approved and accepted of him.

[1.] Certainly every one that feareth God should be acquainted with his word, and have his senses exercised therein, that by long conversation in holy things he may come to have a discerning faculty. The apostle speaketh of some, Heb. v. 14, ' That have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil ;' which are gotten by long use. Therefore much study, meditation, and attention is necessary to find out the true sense and meaning of God's word, that we may discern between good and evil. And still this habit is more to be increased in us. We are told in the book of Job, chap. xxxiv. 3, ' The ear trieth words,

as the mouth tasteth meat.' But it had need be a judicious ear that shall as readily distinguish doctrines as the mouth doth meats, as they are hurtful and noxious to us. Now christians being to have this ear of discretion, to try and judge of what is spoken to them, they should be much acquainted with the word of God, to get this habit of spiritual prudence: Prov. xiv. 15, 'The simple believeth every word; but a prudent man looketh well to his going.' Christians should be men of experience and knowledge, free from the itch of fancies and novelties, and free from the distempers of passions, prejudices, and interests, or whatsoever may corrupt their taste. On the other side, God complaineth that his people were strangers to his law: Hosea viii. 12, 'I have written unto them the great things of my law, but they were counted as a strange thing.' We should not be strangers to the scriptures; every one (especially in a disputing age, wherein sects abound), according to his measure, should be satisfied of the truth which he professeth, that he be not deceived, and carried away with every foolish insinuation, and so embrace Leah for Rachel, Babel for Sion, and every fond suggestion for the truths of God.

[2.] Because we are not to take up opinions by chance, but by choice: Jer. vi. 16, 'Thus saith the Lord, stand ye in the ways, and see, ask for the good old paths, Where is the good way? and walk therein, and ye shall find rest to your souls.' Men in a tempest are sometimes cast upon a place of safety, rather than make thither out of intention and foresight; therefore a man needeth to search and try things; the more he receiveth truth upon evidence, the more firm is his assent, and the more steady and constant is his practice; for then he hath (2 Peter iii. 17) 'a steadfastness of his own;' he doth not stand by the steadfastness of others, or the common consent; he hath proper reasons within himself to sway his assent, or command his practice; therefore a christian is to prove and try all things.

[3.] The judgment of others will be no plea for us in the last day, if we be wrong; for we are to follow the dictates of our own consciences. I say not that we are to follow our own private fancies, but conscience enlightened by the word. So 'the spiritual man judgeth all things,' 1 Cor. ii. 15; that is, for his own satisfaction, otherwise it will not excuse us that we depended on the judgment of others: 'If the blind lead the blind, both fall into the ditch,' Mat. xv. 14. Not only one, but both; not only the blind leader and guide, but those that are led by them into a wrong way; it endeth at last in perdition.

2. I will state it, since many abuse this principle of trying all things, and upon the pretence of it give over themselves to a vertiginous spirit, wandering in a maze of errors, till at length they come not only to despise their guides, and all the helps which God hath offered in the church, but to cast off all fear of God, and sense of religion itself. Therefore I shall state it.

[1.] We should be so far confirmed in principles and supreme truths, that we should be more ready to maintain than examine them and commit them to the uncertainty of dispute. In things clear and evident, it is a madness to be still doubting and making inquiries: Deut. xii. 30, 'And that thou inquire not after their gods.' It is dangerous to loosen foundation-stones.

[2.] We must not be so still trying and proving as to hold nothing certain in religion. This is to be 'ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth,' 2 Tim. iii. 7, and to turn the sureness of the christian faith into a mere scepticism, and distract our minds still with new inquiries.

[3.] Not to try so as to cast ourselves on a temptation. Men take occasion hence to run through all sects and opinions in religion. Why? They say they must try all things; that is, as they interpret it, run into the mouth of danger, and think no harm will come of it. No; the meaning is, in these things which by the providence of God are propounded to you for truths, and come to you in the way of an ordinance: 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.' Or if cast by necessary ordinary conversation on differing parties; or when doubts and scruples arise in our minds. Smothering of doubts breedeth atheism and hardness of heart. Or as to the present truth: 2 Peter i. 12, 'Wherefore I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of those things, though ye know them, and be established in the present truth.' So that a man is not to seek snares, and cast himself upon temptations, but when God in his providence puts him in such places and times where satisfaction is necessary, he must exercise himself in the word of God, that he may distinguish between good and evil.

[4.] Some things are controversial in religion, and above the size and capacity of some men's gifts. Now for them to inquire too curiously, or to define rashly in such cases, is against the apostle's rule: Rom. xii. 3, 'For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith.' These presume above their measure, and are like little children, that attempt to run before they can go; and therefore they should content themselves with such truths as concern christians in their own vocation. God's gifts are divers, as their callings are in their nature and quality different. The weak in the faith must be received and owned as christians, but not to doubtful disputations: Rom. xiv. 1, 'Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations.'

[5.] When we are to prove all things, the meaning is not that we should study controversies, and be able to answer all the cavils of the adversary. That is a special gift required of the minister; he must be able, Titus i. 9, 'To hold fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and convince the gainsayers.' But every man is bound to search, so as to be resolved as to his own choice and practice. And though every christian cannot answer all things that are objected against the truth, yet he is to be 'fully persuaded in his own mind,' Rom. xiv. 5, and so far to look into things as may make for the settling of his conscience, that he may neither do things necessary to practice rashly, and without deliberation: Prov. xix. 2, 'That the soul be without knowledge is not good; and he that hasteneth with his feet sinneth;' nor after deliberation doubtfully:

Rom. xiv. 23, 'He that doubteth is damned if he eat, because he eateth not of faith; for whatsoever is not of faith, is sin.'

[6.] We are not so to search as to depend upon our private judgment, or slight the helps which God hath left in the church for the establishing of the truth, even pastors and teachers. Them hath God left in the church, 'that we may not be carried about with every wind of doctrine,' Eph. iv. 11, 14. Men are not to despise the judgment of their teachers in matters of faith, nor rest upon it as infallible. He that hath a bad sight should not throw away his spectacles. Where helps are instituted, and have a special calling, and a special promise of a blessing, they should not be despised. In all necessary things, 'Christ's sheep hear his voice,' John x. 3. But in lower matters, they may be shrewdly mistaken, and work great trouble to the church. Avoid these rocks, and the duty is clear, and of great importance. By searching and proving the truth loseth nothing, as gold doth not by being brought to the touchstone; but you gain much settlement, feel more power and comfort in what you know.

Fourthly, We must search and try, that we may walk as children of the light. The night was made for rest; the light is not given us for rest and idleness, but for work. The apostle prayeth for the Colossians, that they 'might be filled with the knowledge of God's will, in all wisdom and spiritual understanding, that they might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing,' Col. i. 9, 10. That is the end of knowledge: Isa. ii. 3, 'He will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths;' for the end of learning is practice.

1. The more we fix this end, the sooner shall we get knowledge, and the more will it be increased to us. John vii. 17, he that will do the will of God shall know what doctrine is of God. A humble holy heart, resolved to practise whatsoever shall be the will of God, will not be long left in doubt; the more you make conscience of knowing truths, you shall know more.

2. As we shall know sooner, so we shall know better; we shall approve the truth in our consciences, and find the comfort of what we know in our own souls, if we pursue the practice of it: Phil. i. 9, 10, 'And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment,' *αἰσθήσει*, in all sense, 'that ye may approve the things that are excellent, that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ.' We know our duty by the word, but we find the goodness of it by practice and experience.

3. We are not else good faithful servants to God: Luke xii. 47, 'And that servant which knoweth his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes.' On the other side, John xiv. 21, 'He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me; and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and manifest myself to him.' First have, and then keep. Therefore we must search out what is pleasing to God, that we may do it. Knowledge is not to be sought that we may be puffed up with it, and rest in mere knowing, and so please ourselves with idle and useless speculations, but to govern and order our practice.

Use 1. Is for information.

1. That the judgment of discretion must be allowed to all christians. In controversies about religion it is usually asked, Who shall be judge? The church hath a public judgment what doctrines are to be publicly recommended; but every man hath *judicium discretionis*, a judgment of discretion for himself. God hath given every man a taste for his body, to discern what is wholesome and to discern what is noxious, and so also for his soul and conscience.

2. That the new creature hath great advantages above others of knowing the truth. The Holy Spirit dwelleth in them: 1 John ii. 20, 'Ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things.' They are light in the Lord; they may go to God for direction with more boldness: Ps. cxliii. 10, 'Teach me to do thy will, for thou art my God; thy Spirit is good, lead me into the land of uprightness.' They have a promise: Ps. xxv. 14, 'The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him; and he will show them his covenant;' Hosea xiv. 9, 'For the ways of the Lord are right, and the just shall walk in them; but the transgressors shall fall therein.' The sanctifying Spirit is given to sanctify us, to give us the saving knowledge of God by the word. They know the truths contained there clearly and effectually, which others know superficially.

3. That it is not easy to acquit ourselves as children of the light; much study and search into the scriptures is required of us: Ps. i. 2, 'But his delight is in the law of the Lord; and in that law doth he meditate day and night. And much heedfulness, that we walk accordingly; much watchfulness over our hearts: Prov. iv. 23, 'Keep thy heart with all diligence;' and our ways, ver. 26, 'Ponder the path of thy feet, and let all thy ways be established.'

Use 2. Is for reproof to several sorts.

1. Some that take no care to know their duty. This is great negligence, or downright hypocrisy: 2 Peter iii. 5, 'But this they are willingly ignorant of;' which in a matter of such importance is damnable: Heb. ii. 3, 'How shall they escape which neglect so great salvation?' They will not inquire, because they have a mind to hate, or no mind to embrace.

2. Some that walk at peradventure, and live rashly, as governed by passion, lust, and appetite, rather than any sure and steady direction: Ps. cxix. 133, 'Order my steps in thy word, and let not iniquity have dominion over me.' These cannot escape reigning sin.

3. Some are out in the end, either please the flesh or the lusts of man. The rule is not, what will please the flesh, but to do the will of God: 1 Peter iv. 2, 'That he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God.' Not what is acceptable to men, but what is pleasing to God: Gal. i. 10, 'For if I yet please men, I should not be the servant of Christ.'
