

ΣΥΝΕΣΙΣ ΠΝΕΥΜΑΤΙΚΗ:
OR THE
CAUSES, WAYS, AND MEANS,
OF
UNDERSTANDING THE MIND OF GOD,
AS REVEALED IN HIS WORD, WITH ASSURANCE THEREIN:
AND
A DECLARATION OF THE PERSPICUITY
OF THE SCRIPTURES, WITH THE EXTERNAL MEANS OF
THE INTERPRETATION OF THEM.

Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law.—PSAL. cxix. 18.
Give me understanding, and I shall live.—Ver. 144.

IMPRIMATUR,

Guil. Sill. May 13, 1678.

THE PREFACE.

I SHALL, in a few words, give the reader an account of the occasion and design of the small ensuing discourse. Some while since I published a treatise about the reason of faith, or the grounds whereon we believe the Scripture to be the word of God, with that faith which is our duty, and pre-required unto all other acceptable obedience. But although this be the first fundamental principle of supernatural religion, yet is it not sufficient unto any of the ends thereof (that we believe the Scripture to be a divine revelation), unless we understand the mind and will of God therein revealed. At least the knowledge and understanding of those things wherein our present duty and future state of blessedness or misery are immediately concerned, are no less indispensably necessary unto us, than is the belief of the Scripture to be the word of God. To declare the way and means whereby we may assuredly attain that understanding, is the design of the ensuing discourse; as those whereby we come infallibly to believe the Scripture with faith divine and supernatural, are the subject of the former. My principal scope in both hath been to manifest that such is the abundant goodness, wisdom, and grace, of God, in granting unto us the inestimable benefit of his word, that no persons whatever, shall or can come short of the advantage in-

tended by it, but through their own sinful negligence and ingratitude, the highest crimes in things of a spiritual and eternal concernment. For he hath given such convincing evidences of the procedure or emanation of the Scripture from himself, by the divine inspiration of the penmen thereof; and so plainly declared his mind and will therein, as unto the faith and obedience which he requires of any or all sorts of persons, in their various circumstances, that every one who takes care of his own present and eternal welfare, may, and shall, in the due use of the means by him appointed, and discharge of the duties by him prescribed, unto that end, with a due dependance on the aid and assistances, which he will not withhold from any who diligently seek him, infallibly attain that measure of the knowledge of his mind and will, with full assurance therein, as will be sufficient to guide him unto eternal blessedness. The same measure of divine knowledge is not required in all and every one, that they may live unto God, and come unto the enjoyment of him. The dispensation of God towards mankind in nature, providence, and grace, is an invincible spring of such variety among them, as will not allow a prescription of the same measures of knowledge unto all who have a consistency with divine wisdom and goodness; and a supposition of it would bring confusion into all the order of things and persons which is of divine constitution. Nor is it pretended that any one man may or can have, in the use of any means whatever, a full comprehension of all divine revelations in this life, nor perhaps of any one of them; or that all men, in the use of the same means prescribed unto them, shall

have the same conceptions of all things revealed. The Scripture was given for the use of the whole church, and that in all ages, states, and conditions, with respect unto that inconceivable variety of circumstances, which all sorts of causes do distribute the whole multitude of them into. Wherefore the wisdom of God therein, hath suited itself unto the instruction of every individual believer, unto the moment of his entrance into eternity. That any one of them, that any society of them, should have a perfect comprehension of the entire revelation of God, or a perfect understanding of the whole Scripture, and every part of it, with all that is contained therein, was never required of them in a way of duty, nor ever designed unto them in a way of privilege. For besides that he hath replenished it with unfathomable stores, unsearchable treasures of divine mysteries, wherein we cannot find out the Almighty unto perfection, and hath provided another state for the comprehension of that by sight, which is the object of adoration and admiration in believing; such knowledge is not necessary unto any, that they may lead the life of faith, and discharge the duties thereof, in all holy obedience unto God. Yea, such a knowledge and comprehension would be inconsistent with that state and condition wherein we are to walk with God, according to the tenor of the covenant of grace, and during the continuance thereof. But the substance of what we plead for is, that such is the wisdom, goodness, and love of God towards mankind, in the grant that he hath made unto them of the revelation of himself, his mind and will in the Scripture, as that no one person doth or can fail from attaining all that under-

standing in it and of it, which is any way needful for his guidance to live unto God in his circumstances and relations, so as to come unto the blessed enjoyment of him, but by the sinful neglect of the means and duties prescribed by him for the attainment of that understanding, and want of a due dependance on those spiritual aids and assistances which he hath prepared for that end. By what ways and means he hath thus provided for the assurance and security of all men, in things of their eternal concernment, and what are those acts of his wisdom, power, and grace, which he exerts for that end, namely, that they may both believe the Scripture to be his word, and understand his mind revealed therein, both according unto what is required of them in a way of duty, so as in both they may be accepted with him, is the design of this and the other forementioned discourse to declare. And they are both of them principally intended for the use of the ordinary sort of Christians, who know it their concernment to be established in the truth of those things wherein they have been instructed. For they are frequently attacked with those questions, How do you know the Scripture to be the word of God? And what assurance have you that you understand any thing contained in them, seeing all sorts of persons are divided about their sense and meaning, nor do you pretend unto any immediate inspiration to give you assurance? And if on these insnaring inquiries they are cast under any doubts or perplexities in their minds, as it often falls out amongst them who have not diligently weighed the principles of their own profession, the next insinuation is, that they ought to betake themselves either to

some other present guide, as their own light and reason, or make a complete resignation of themselves and the conduct of their souls unto the pretended authority and guidance of other men. To give assurance and security unto their minds, that they neither are nor can be deceived in the belief of the Scriptures to be the word of God, and the understanding of his mind and will therein, so far as their present obedience and eternal happiness are concerned, and that unto this end they need not be beholding unto any, nor depend on any but God himself, in the use of known and obvious means or duties, is designed in these small treatises. And upon the principles evinced and confirmed in them, I have yet proposed a farther inquiry, namely, What conduct in these times of great contests about the assurance of faith, and the causes of it, every one that takes care of his own salvation, ought to betake himself unto, that he may not be deceived nor miscarry in the end? And this is designed with especial respect unto the church of Rome, which vehemently pretends unto the sole infallible conduct in these things. But probably the near approach of the daily expected and earnestly desired hour of my discharge from all farther service in this world, will prevent the accomplishment of that intention. In the continual prospect hereof do I yet live and rejoice, which, among other advantages unspeakable, hath already given me an unconcernment in those oppositions, which the passions or interests of men engage them in, of a very near alliance unto, and scarce distinguishable from, that which the grave will afford. I have but one thing more to acquaint the reader withal, wherewith I shall close this preface,

and it is the same with that wherewith the preface unto the former discourse is concluded. This also belongeth unto the second part of my discourse, concerning the Dispensation and Operations of the Holy Spirit. The first volume on that subject, some years since published, having found good acceptance among them that are godly and learned, both at home and abroad, I have been desired to give out what yet remaineth for the complete accomplishment of what I had designed thereon, in this way of lesser discourses, that may have their use, before the whole be finished, or whether ever it be so or no.

ΣΥΝΕΣΙΣ ΠΝΕΥΜΑΤΙΚΗ.

CHAP. I.

Usurpation of the church of Rome, with reference unto the interpretation of the Scripture, or right understanding of the mind of God therein. Right and ability of all believers as to their own duty herein asserted. Importance of the truth proposed. The main question stated. The principal efficient cause of the understanding which believers have in the mind and will of God as revealed in the Scriptures, the Spirit of God himself. General assertions to be proved. Declared in sundry particulars. Inferences from them.

OUR belief of the Scriptures to be the word of God, or a divine revelation, and our understanding of the mind and will of God as revealed in them, are the *two springs* of all our interest in Christian religion. From them are all those streams of light and truth derived, whereby our souls are watered, refreshed, and made fruitful unto God. It concerneth us, therefore, greatly to look well to those *springs*, that they be neither stopped nor defiled, and so rendered useless unto us. Though a man may have pleasant streams running by his habitation, and watering his inheritance, yet if the springs of them be in the power of others, who can either divert their course or poison their waters, on their pleasure he must always depend for the benefit of them.

Thus hath it fallen out in the world in this matter; so hath the *church of Rome* endeavoured to deal with all Christians. Their main endeavour is to seize those *springs* of religion into their own power. The Scripture itself, they tell us, cannot be believed to be the word of God, with faith divine, but upon the proposal and testimony of their church; thereby is one *spring* secured. And when it is believed so to be, it *ought* not to be interpreted, it *cannot* be understood, but according to the mind, judgment, and exposition, of the same

church; which in like manner secures the other. And having of old possessed these *springs* of Christian religion, they have dealt with them according as might be expected from unjust invaders of other men's rights, and *malæ fidei possessoribus*. So when the Philistines contended for the wells which Abraham and Isaac had digged, when they had got possession of them, they stopped them up. And when the Scribes and Pharisees had gotten the *key of knowledge*, they would neither enter into the kingdom of God themselves, nor suffer those that would, so to do; as our Saviour tells us. For the one of these *springs*, which is the letter of the Scripture itself, when it ought to have gone forth like the *waters of the sanctuary*, to refresh the church and make it fruitful unto God, they partly stopped it up, and partly diverted its course, by shutting it up in an *unknown tongue*, and debarring the people from the use of it. And in the exercise of their pretended right unto the other *spring*, or the *sole interpretation* of the Scripture, they have poisoned the streams with all manner of errors and delusions, so as that they became not only useless, but noxious and pernicious unto the souls of men. For under the pretence hereof, namely, that their church hath the *sole power of interpreting the Scriptures*, and *cannot err* therein, have they obtruded all their errors with all their abominations in worship and practice on the minds and consciences of men.

The first of these *springs* I have in a former discourse on this subject taken out of their hand, so far as we ourselves are concerned therein, or I have vindicated the just rights of all Christians thereunto, and given them possession thereof. This I did, by declaring the true grounds and reasons whereon we do, and whereon any can, truly *believe the Scripture to be the word of God*, with faith divine and supernatural. For besides other advantages wherewith the knowledge of that truth is accompanied; it dispossesseth the Romanists of their claim unto this fountain of religion, by evidencing that we do and ought thus to believe the divine original of the Scripture, without any regard to the testimony or authority of their church.

That which now lieth before us, is the vindication of the right of all believers unto the *other spring also*, or a right understanding of the mind and will of God, as revealed in

the Scripture, suitably unto the duty that God requireth of them in their several capacities and conditions.

What is necessary unto the *interpretation of difficult places* and passages in the Scripture, what measure of understanding of the mind and will of God as revealed therein, is required of persons in their various conditions, as they are teachers of others, or among the number of them that are to be taught; shall, among other things, be afterward spoken unto. My principal design is to manifest, *That every believer may, in the due use of the means appointed of God for that end, attain unto such a full assurance of understanding in the truth, or all that knowledge of the mind and will of God revealed in the Scripture, which is sufficient to direct him in the life of God, to deliver him from the dangers of ignorance, darkness, and error, and to conduct him unto blessedness.* Wherefore, as unto the belief of the Scripture itself, so as unto the understanding, knowledge, and faith of the things contained therein, we do not depend on the *authoritative interpretation* of any church or person whatever. And although ordinary believers are obliged to make diligent and conscientious use of the *ministry of the church* among other things, as a means appointed of God to lead, guide, and instruct them in the knowledge of his mind and will revealed in the Scripture, which is the principal end of that ordinance; yet is not their understanding of the truth, their apprehension of it, and faith in it, to rest upon, or to be resolved into, their authority, who are not appointed of God to be *lords of their faith*, but *helpers of their joy*. And thereon depends all our interest in that great promise, that we *shall be all taught of God*. For we are not so, unless we do learn from him, and by him, the things which he hath revealed in his word.

And there is not any truth of greater importance for men to be established in. For unless they have a *full assurance of understanding in themselves*, unless they hold their persuasion of the sense of Scripture revelations from God alone, if their spiritual judgment of truth and falsehood depend on the authority of men, they will never be able to undergo any suffering for the truth, or to perform any duty unto God in a right manner. The truths of the gospel, and the ways of religious worship, for which any believer may be called to suffer in this world, are such as about *whose sense and re-*

velation in the Scripture, there is great difference and controversy among men. And if there be not an assured, yea, infallible way and means of communicating unto all believers, a knowledge of the mind and will of God in the Scripture, concerning those things so controverted, the grounds whereof are fixed in their own minds, but that they do not wholly depend on the expositions and *interpretations* of other men, be they who they will, they cannot *suffer* for them either cheerfully or honourably, so as to give glory to God, or to obtain any solid peace and comfort in their own souls. For if a man under his *sufferings* for his profession, can give himself no other account but this, That what he suffers for, is the truth of God revealed in the Scripture, because such or such whom he hath in veneration or esteem do so affirm, and have so instructed him; or, because this is the doctrine of this or that church, the *papal* or the *reformed church*, which it hath prescribed unto him: he will have little joy of his suffering in the end. Yea, there is that which is yet worse in this matter as things are stated at this day in the world. Truth and error are promiscuously *persecuted* according unto the judgment, interest, and inclinations, of them that are in power. Yea, sometimes both truth and error are persecuted in the same place, and at the same time, upon errors differing from both. Dissent is grown almost all that is criminal in Christian religion all the world over. But in this state of things, unless we grant men an immediate *understanding of their own* in the mind and will of God, yea, a *full assurance* therein, there will be nothing whereby a man who suffers for the most important truths of the gospel, can, in his own soul and conscience, distinguish himself from those who suffer, in giving testimony unto the most pernicious errors; for all outward means of confidence which he hath, they may have also.

It behoveth, therefore, all those who may possibly be called to *suffer for the truth* in any season, or on any occasion, to assure their minds in this fundamental truth; that they may have in themselves a certain undeceiving understanding of the mind and will of God, as revealed in the Scripture, independent on the authority of any church or persons whatsoever; the use of whose ministry herein we do yet freely and fully allow.

Nor, indeed, without a supposition hereof, can any man perform any duty to God, in an acceptable manner, so as that his obedience may be the *obedience of faith*, nor can upon good grounds die in peace, since the *just shall live by his own faith alone*.

Wherefore, our present inquiry is ;

How believers, or any men whatever, may attain a right understanding in their own minds, of the meaning and sense of the Scriptures, as to the doctrine or truths contained in them, in answer unto the design of God, as unto what he would have us know or believe ; or,

How they may attain a right perception of the mind of God in the Scripture, and what he intends in the revelation of it, in opposition unto ignorance, errors, mistakes, and all false apprehensions ; and so in a right manner to perform the duties which by them we are instructed in.

In answer unto the inquiry proposed concerning the knowledge and understanding of believers in the mind of God, as revealed in the Scriptures ; I shall consider,

First, The *principal efficient cause*. And,

Secondly, *All the means*, internal and external, which are appointed of God thereunto.

As to the first of these, or the principal efficient cause of the due knowledge and understanding of the will of God in the Scripture, it is the *Holy Spirit of God himself alone*. For,

There is an especial work of the Spirit of God on the minds of men, communicating spiritual wisdom, light, and understanding unto them, necessary unto their discernment and apprehending aright the mind of God in his word, and the understanding of the mysteries of heavenly truth contained therein ; and I shall add hereunto ; that among all the false and foolish imaginations that ever Christian religion was attacked or disturbed withal, there never was any, there is none, more pernicious than this, That the mysteries of the gospel are so exposed unto the common reason and understanding of men, as that they may know them and comprehend them in a useful manner, and according to their duty, without the effectual aid and assistance of the Spirit of God.

It is the fondest thing in the world to imagine, that the Holy Ghost doth any way teach us, but *in and by our own*

reasons and understandings. We renounce all *enthusiasms* in this matter, and plead not for any immediate *prophetical inspirations*. Those who would prohibit us the use of our reason in the things of religion, would deal with us as the Philistines did with Samson, first put out our eyes, and then make us grind in their mill. Whatever we know, be it of what sort it will, we know it in and by the use of our reason, and what we conceive, we do it by our own understanding. Only the inquiry is, whether there be not an especial work of the Holy Spirit of God, *enlightening our minds*, and enabling our understandings to perceive and apprehend his mind and will as revealed in the Scripture, and without which we cannot so do. The substance, therefore, of the ensuing discourse, may be reduced unto these heads.

I. That we stand not in need of any new divine *afflictions*, or immediate *prophetical inspirations*, to enable us to understand the Scripture, or the mind and will of God as revealed therein. Neither did the prophets or holy penmen of the Scripture *learn the mind of God* in the revelations made unto them, and by them unto the church, merely from the *divine inspiration* of them. Those immediate inspirations unto them, were in the stead and place of the *written word*, and no otherwise. After they did receive them, they were by the same means to inquire into the mind and will of God in them, as we do it in and by the written word; 1 Pet. i. 10, 11.

II. That as to the right understanding of the mind of God in the Scripture, or our coming unto the *riches of the full assurance of understanding in the acknowledgment of the mystery of God*; we do not, nor need to, depend on the *authoritative instruction* or interpretation of the Scripture by *any church* whatever, or all of them in the world, though there be great use of the true ministry of the church unto that end.

III. That in the *mere exercise of our own natural reason and understanding*, with the help of external means, we cannot attain that knowledge of the mind and will of God in the Scripture, of the sense and meaning of the Holy Ghost therein, which is required of us in a way of duty, without the special aid and assistance of the Holy Spirit of God. Wherefore, principally, it is asserted,

IV. That there is an especial work of the Holy Spirit in the *supernatural illumination* of our minds, needful unto the end proposed ; namely, that we may aright, and according unto our duty, understand the mind of God in the Scripture ourselves, or interpret it unto others.

V. That hereby alone is that full *assurance of understanding in the knowledge of the mystery of God*, his truth and grace to be obtained, whereby any man may answer the mind and will of God, or comply with his own duty in all that he may be called to do or suffer in this world, in his especial circumstances. Wherefore,

VI. The certainty and assurance that we may have and ought to have of our right understanding the mind of God in the Scripture, either in general, or as to any especial doctrine, doth not depend upon, is not resolved into, any *immediate inspiration or enthusiasm* ; it doth not depend upon nor is resolved into the *authority of any church* in the world ; nor is it the *result of our reason and understanding* merely in their natural actings, but as they are elevated, enlightened, guided, conducted, by an internal efficacious work of the Spirit of God upon them.

VII. That whereas the means of the right interpretation of the Scripture, and understanding of the mind of God therein, are of two sorts : first, such as are prescribed unto us in a way of duty, as *prayer, meditation* on the word itself, and the like ; and, secondly, *disciplinary*, in the accommodation of *arts and sciences* with all kind of learning unto that work ; the first sort of them doth entirely depend on a supposition of the spiritual aids mentioned, without which they are of no use ; and the latter is not only consistent therewith, but singularly subservient thereunto ; wherefore the nature and use of all these means shall be afterward declared.

This being the substance of what is designed in the ensuing discourse, it is evident, that the positions before laid down concerning the *especial work* of the Spirit on the minds of men, in communicating spiritual wisdom, light, and knowledge unto them, is in the first place and principally to be confirmed, as that whereon all the other assertions do absolutely depend.

It is the Scripture itself alone from whence the truth in this matter can be learned ; and by which alone what is pro-

posed concerning it must be tried ; therefore, as unto this first part of this work I shall do little more than plead the express testimonies thereof. When we come to consider the way and manner of the communication of these spiritual aids unto us, the whole matter will be more fully stated, and such objections as may be laid against our assertion be removed out of the way.

And there are two ends designed in this undertaking.

First, That which the evangelist Luke proposed in his writing the Gospel unto Theophilus ; namely, ‘ That he might know the certainty of the things wherein he had been instructed ;’ Luke i. 4. When we have been instructed in the truth of the gospel, and do give our assent thereunto, yet it is needful that we should examine the grounds and reasons of what we do believe thereon, that we may have a *certainty* or *full assurance* of them. This therefore we shall direct ; namely, How a man may come to an *undeceiving persuasion* and *full assurance* that the things wherein he hath been instructed, and which he knows, are true and according to the mind of God, so as that he may thereon be ‘ no more tossed to and fro with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive.’

Secondly, We design to inquire what *conduct* unto this end a man that takes care of his salvation, and who is convinced that he must give an account of himself unto God, ought in this matter, as to the right understanding of the mind and will of God in the Scripture, *to betake himself unto*. And as I shall shew that there is no safety in depending on *enthusiasms*, or immediate pretended infallible inspirations ; nor on the *pretended infallibility* of any church : *so the Holy Spirit of God enlightening our minds in the exercise of our own reason or understanding, and in use of the means appointed of God unto that end, is the only safe guide to bring us unto the full assurance of the mind and will of God as revealed in the Scripture.*

Wherefore, the whole foundation of this work lies in these two things :

1. That there is such an *especial work* of the Holy Spirit on our minds, enabling them to understand the Scriptures in a right manner, or to know the mind of God in them.

2. In shewing what is the *especial nature* of this work, what are the effects of it upon our minds, and how it differs from all *enthusiastical inspirations*, and what is the true exercise of our minds in compliance therewith; and these things we shall first inquire into.

CHAP. II.

The general assertion confirmed with testimonies of the Scripture. Psal. cxix. 18. opened at large. Objections answered; 2 Cor. iii. 13—18. explained. Isa. xxv. Luke i. 24. 45. opened. Eph. i. 17—19. explained and pleaded, in confirmation of the truth. Hos. xiv. 9.

THE whole of our assertion is comprised in the prayer of the psalmist; Psal. cxix. 18. גִּדְעֵנִי וְאֲבִיטָה נִפְלְאוֹת מִתּוֹרַתְךָ. ‘Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wonderful things out of thy law.’ The same request for the substance of it is repeated sundry times in the same Psalm, ver. 33, 34, &c. Thus he prayed; That it may be esteemed our duty to pray in *like manner*, is the substance of what we plead for. What we pray for from God, that we have not in and of ourselves; as the ancient church constantly pleaded against the Pelagians. And what we pray for according to the mind of God, that we do receive. Wherefore, our discerning, our understanding, of the wonderful things of the law, is not of ourselves; it is that which is given us, that which we receive from God.

But that the force of our argument from this testimony may be the more evident, the words or terms of it must be explained, that we may see whether they be equivalent unto, or of the same signification with, them laid down in our assertion.

1. That which is the *object* of the understanding prayed for, that in the knowledge whereof the psalmist would be illuminated, is תּוֹרָה. The word signifies instruction; and being referred unto God, it is his teaching or instruction of us by the revelation of himself, the same which we intend by the Scripture. When the books of the Old Testament were completed, they were, for distinction-sake, distributed into תּוֹרָה — and נְבוֹאִים — or the ‘Law,’ the ‘Psalms,’ and

the ‘Prophets;’ Luke xxiv. 44. Under that distribution *Torah* signifies the five books of Moses. But whereas these books of Moses were, as it were, the foundation of all future revelations under the Old Testament, which were given in the explication thereof: all the writings of it are usually called ‘the Law;’ Isa. viii. 20. By the *law*, therefore, in this place, the psalmist understands all the books that were then given unto the church by revelation for the rule of its faith and obedience. And that by the *law*, in the psalms, the written law is intended, is evident from the first of them, wherein he is declared blessed, who ‘meditateth therein day and night;’ Psal. i. 2. which hath respect unto the command of reading and meditating on the *books thereof* in that manner; Josh. i. 8. That, therefore, which is intended by this word, is the entire revelation of the will of God, given unto the church for the rule of its faith and obedience; that is, the Holy Scripture.

2. In this law there are נפלאות—‘wonderful things:’ פלא—signifies to be ‘wonderful,’ to be ‘hidden,’ to be ‘great’ and ‘high:’ that which men by the use of reason cannot attain unto or understand. Hence נפלאות—are things that have such an impression of divine wisdom and power upon them, as that they are justly the object of our admiration. That which is too hard for us; as Deut. xvii. 8. כי יפלא—‘ממך דבר’—‘If a matter be too hard for thee,’ hid from thee. And it is the name whereby the miraculous works of God are expressed; Psal. lxxvii. 11. lxxviii. 11. Wherefore, these wonderful things of the law, are those expressions and effects of divine wisdom in the Scripture, which are above the natural reason and understandings of men to find out and comprehend. Such are the mysteries of divine truth in the Scripture; especially, because Christ is in them, whose name is פלא, or ‘wonderful;’ Isa. ix. 6. For all the great and marvellous effects of infinite wisdom meet in him. These things and doctrines God calls רבו תורתִי, Hos. viii. 12. ‘I have written unto him the great things of my law; and they were counted by them כמו זר—as a strange thing.’ Because they were ‘wonderful’ in themselves, they neglected and despised them, as that which was foreign and *alien* from them, which belonged not unto them. So deal many with the mysteries of the gospel at this day; because they are

heavenly, spiritual, in themselves marvellous, hidden, and above the understanding of the natural reason of men; that is, they are נפלאות—they reject and despise them as things *alien* and foreign unto their religion. Wherefore, the ‘wonderful things’ of the Scripture, are those mysteries of divine truth, wisdom, and grace, that are revealed and contained therein, with their especial respect unto Jesus Christ.

3. Three things are supposed in the words concerning these wonderful things:

(1.) That they are *recorded*, laid up or treasured, in the law or Scripture, and nowhere else; so as that from thence alone, are they to be learned and received. ‘Behold wonderful things out of the law.’ That alone is the sacred παρακαταθήκη, or repository of them. There are wondrous things in the works of nature and providence; and much of them is contained in the treasury of reason, wherein it may be discerned. But these are stored in the law only, and nowhere else.

(2.) That it is our duty to *behold*, to *discern*, to *understand* them, to have an inspection into them, and our great privilege when we are enabled so to do. This makes the psalmist pray so frequently, so fervently, that he may have the discerning of them, or come to an acquaintance with them. Those, therefore, by whom they are neglected, do both despise their duty, and forsake their own mercy.

(3.) That we are not *able of ourselves* thus to discern them without divine aid and assistance. For the psalmist who was wiser than the wisest of us, and who had so earnest a desire after these things, yet would not trust unto his own reason, wisdom, ability, and diligence, for the understanding of them, but betakes himself unto God by prayer, acknowledging therein that it is *the especial work of God by his Spirit, to enable us to understand his mind and will as revealed in the Scripture*.

4. There is expressed in the words the *act of God* towards us, whereby he enableth us to behold, discern, and understand the wonderful effects of divine wisdom, which are treasured up in the Scripture, which the psalmist prayeth for. This is called his ‘opening of our eyes,’ גלֵעֵי: ‘reveal mine eyes,’ uncover, unveil my eyes. There is a light in the word; all truth is light; and sacred truth is sacred light.

Yea, the word of God is expressly called ‘light;’ Psal. xxxvi. 9. xliii. 3. cxix. 105. But there is by nature a *covering*, a *veil*, on the eyes of the understandings of all men, that they are not able of themselves to behold this *light*, nor to discern any thing by it in a due manner. With respect hereunto the psalmist prays that God would ‘reveal his eyes.’ *Revelare* is *velamentum levare*; to reveal is to take off the veil or covering. And this veil is that of our natural darkness, blindness, and ignorance; whereof we have treated elsewhere.

I see not what is wanting unto the explanation or confirmation of the position before laid down. The communication of spiritual light from God, is the peculiar work of the Holy Ghost. He is the immediate author of all spiritual illumination. But hereby alone, or by virtue hereof, can we know or understand the mind of God in the Scripture, in such a manner as God requireth us to do; and whosoever hath received the grace of this divine *illumination*, may do so, so far as he is concerned in point of faith or obedience.

The *law* is the *Scripture*, the written word of God. Therein are ‘wonderful things,’ or mysteries of divine wisdom contained and revealed. To *behold these things*, is to discern and understand them aright, with respect unto our own faith and obedience. This we cannot do without a *supernatural act* of the Spirit of God upon our minds, enabling them to discern them, and understand them; these things are in the text, *ἀναντιρρήτως*. And we hence farther argue, that, which is our duty to pray for *spiritual supernatural aid*, to enable us to do, that of *ourselves* we are not able to do, without that aid and assistance; at least we may do it by virtue of that aid and assistance; which includes the substance by just consequences of what is pleaded for. But such *aid*, it is our duty to pray for, that we may understand aright the revelations of the mind and will of God in the Scriptures, the only thing to be proved.

There is but one thing which I can foresee, that may with any pretence of reason be objected unto this testimony of the psalmist in particular. And this is that he speaks of the times and writings of the *Old Testament*. Now it is confessed that there was in them a *darkness* and obscurity, and such as needed *new revelations* for the understanding of them. But since all things are ‘brought to light by the gospel,’

there is no need of any special aid or assistance of the Holy Spirit by *supernatural illumination* for the understanding of them. In answer hereunto I shall consider the discourse of the apostle, wherein he stateth this whole matter; 2 Cor. iii. 13—18. ‘And not as Moses who put a veil over his face, that the children of Israel could not steadfastly look to the end of that which is abolished. But their minds were blinded: for until this day remaineth the same veil untaken away, in the reading of the Old Testament, which is done away in Christ. Nevertheless, when it shall turn unto the Lord (or they be turned unto the Lord) the veil shall be taken away. Now the Lord is that Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all with open face behold as in a glass the glory of the Lord.’

When Moses had received the *revelation* of the law from God, ‘his face shone;’ Exod. xxxiv. 29. For there were wonderful things contained in that revelation with respect unto Jesus Christ; he was in them all, and the end of them all. The whole ministry of Moses was but a testimony given unto the things that were *afterward to be spoken* concerning him, as the apostle declares; Heb. iii. 5.

On the receipt of this revelation ‘his face shone;’ because there was a light, a lustre, a glory, in the things revealed unto him; and by them reflected on his ministry, which was so represented. Nevertheless, this *light* did not shine immediately into the hearts and minds of the people. They did not see or discern the glorious and ‘wonderful things’ that were in the law. For there was a *double veil* or covering that hindered them. One that was put on *Moses’ face*; another that was on their own *hearts*. Some dark apprehensions and glances of light they had; but ‘they could not look steadfastly unto the end of that which was to be abolished;’ they could not comprehend the truth concerning Christ, which was the substance and end of the law.

The *first veil*, that which was on the face of Moses, was the obscurity of the instructions given them as wrapped up in *types*, *shadows*, and *dark parables*. This they could not see through as clearly to discern the ‘wonderful things’ contained in and under them. This *veil* is quite taken off, in the revelation, or *doctrine of the gospel*, wherein life and immortality are brought to light, and the wonderful things of the

mystery of God in Christ are fully declared, and plainly expressed. Herein, therefore, it is acknowledged, that there is a great difference between those under the *Old Testament*, and those under the *New*.

But, saith the apostle, there is *another veil*; a *veil upon the heart*. And hereof he declareth two things: 1. That this veil is *done away only in Christ*; and, 2. That, therefore, it is not taken away from any, but those who are *converted unto God*. This is the *covering* of ignorance, darkness, blindness, that is on men by nature. The *former veil* is taken away by the *doctrine of the gospel*. This latter is to be removed only by an *effectual work of the Spirit of Christ*, in the conversion of the souls of men unto God.

And two things do ensue on the removal of this *double veil*. 1. That as unto the doctrine itself concerning the mystery of God in Christ; it is no more represented unto us in *types, shadows, and dark parables*; but in the clear *glass of the gospel*, whereon the glory of Christ is reflected. Hereby the *veil* is taken off from the *face of Moses*. 2. That we have *πρόσωπον ἀνακεκαλλυμένον*, an ‘open uncovered face;’ or, as the Syriac reads it, a ‘revealed eye,’ whereby we are enabled to discern the wonderful mysteries of God so revealed. This ensues on the taking away of the *second veil* of darkness and blindness, which is on the hearts of all by nature.

The removal and destruction of this *double veil* by the Spirit and grace of the gospel, is that which is prophesied of, Isa. xxv. 7. ‘And he shall destroy in this mountain the face, הלוט הלוט the covering, covered, or the double veil, that is on the face of all people; and הַמַּסְכָּה הַנִּסְכָּחַה, the veil veiled over all nations.’

This being the design of the discourse of the apostle, it is evident that although there be a difference between them under the *Old Testament* and us, as to the *veil* that was on the *face of Moses*, which is destroyed and removed by the *doctrine of the gospel*; yet there is none, as to the *veil* which is on the *hearts* of all by nature, which must be removed by the *Holy Spirit*, or we cannot with *open face* behold the glory of the Lord; the thing which the psalmist prayeth for in the place insisted on. That is, that God by his Spirit would more and more renew his mind, and take away his natural darkness and ignorance, that he might be able to behold,

perceive, and understand, the mind of God as revealed in the Scripture. And if any shall suppose or say, that for their parts they need no such especial *aid* and *assistance* to enable them to understand the mind of God in the Scripture, which is sufficiently exposed to the common reason of all mankind; I shall only say at present, I am afraid they do not understand those places of Scripture, where this *aid* and *assistance* is so expressly affirmed to be necessary thereunto.

But the meaning of the psalmist will the better appear, if we consider the communication of the grace, which he prayed for, unto others. This is expressed, Luke xxiv. 45. ‘Then opened he their understandings, that they might understand the Scriptures.’ A needless work if some men may be believed. But our Lord Jesus Christ thought not so. The truths concerning him were revealed in the Scripture, that is, of the law and the prophets, and the psalms; ver. 44. These they read, these they were instructed in, these were preached unto them every day. And probably they were as well skilled in the *literal sense* of Scripture propositions, as those who pretend highest amongst us, so to be. Howbeit they could not understand those wonderful things in a way of duty, and as they ought to do, until the Lord Christ *opened their understandings*. There was needful unto them an immediate gracious act of his divine power on their minds to enable them thereunto. And I cannot yet much value those men’s understanding of the Scripture, whose *understandings are not opened* by the Spirit of Christ.

If we need the *openings of our understandings* by an act of the power and grace of Christ, that we may *understand the Scriptures*, then without it we cannot so do, namely, so as to believe and yield obedience according unto our duty; the consequence is evident; for if we could, there is no need of this act of Christ towards these disciples, who were not destitute of any *rational abilities*, required in us thereunto. And the act of Christ in *opening their understandings*, is openly distinguished from the proposition of the doctrine of the Scripture unto them. This was made two ways: first, In the *Scripture* itself; secondly, In the oral discourse of our Saviour upon it. Distinct from both these is that act of his whereby he *opened their understandings*, that they might understand the Scripture. Wherefore, nothing but a *real inter-*

nal act of grace, in the illumination of their minds can be intended thereby, the nature whereof shall be farther explained afterward.

But there is an eminent place that must be pleaded distinctly to this purpose. Eph. i. 17—19. ‘That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him: the eyes of your understandings being enlightened, that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe.’

This is the whole of what we would assert, and nothing else.

And if men would acquiesce by faith in what is here declared, we need to plead this cause no farther. For the *words and expressions* of the truth here used, are more *emphatical* unto a spiritual understanding, than any we can find out. And I shall only shew in the opening of them, how our position and sense is contained in them. And, 1. what the apostle doth here for others, it is unquestionably our duty to do for ourselves. We are then to pray, that God *would enable us by his Spirit to know and understand his mind and will, as revealed in the Scripture*. This, therefore, without especial aid and assistance from him by his Spirit, we cannot do. And the *aid* he gives us consists in the *effectual illumination* of our minds, or the enlightening of the eyes of our understandings. These things are plain, and not liable, as I suppose, to any exception. And these are all we plead for. Let them be granted without any other distinctions or limitations, but what the Scripture will justify, and there is an end of this difference. But some particular passages in the words may be considered for the better understanding, and farther confirmation of the truth contained therein.

1. It is a *revelation* that the apostle prays for; or a *Spirit of revelation* to be given unto them. This greatly offends some at first hearing, but wholly without cause. For he understands not new *immediate external revelation from God*. Believers are not directed to look after such revelations for their guide: ever since the Scripture was written, the generality of the church was obliged to attend thereunto alone,

as their only rule of faith and obedience. And although God reserved unto himself a liberty under the Old Testament, and until the completing of all the books of the New, to add *new revelations* as he pleased; yet he always bound up the faith and obedience of the *present church*, unto what he had already revealed. And he hath now by the Spirit of his Son, put an end unto all expectation of any *new*, of any *other* revelations, wherein the faith or obedience of the church should be concerned. At least we take it for granted in this inquiry; that *infallible inspirations* in the discovery of things not before revealed, are ceased in the church. Nor do the *Papists* extend their *infallibility* thereunto, but only unto things already revealed in the Scripture or tradition. What some among ourselves do ascribe of this nature unto their *light*, I do not well know, nor shall now inquire.

But there is an *internal subjective revelation*, whereby no *new things* are revealed unto our minds, or are not outwardly revealed *anew*, but our minds are enabled to discern the things that are revealed already. All the things here mentioned by the apostle, which he desires they might *understand*, were already revealed in the Scriptures of the Old Testament, and the New that were then written, and the infallible declaration of the gospel in the preaching of the apostles. But there was a new work of revelation required, in, and unto, every person, that would understand and comprehend these things in a due manner. For ἀποκάλυψις, or ‘revelation,’ is the *discovery* of any thing, whether by the *proposal* of it unto us, or the *enabling* of us to discern it when it is so proposed. In the first sense it is used, Rom. xvi. 25. 2 Cor. xii. 1. 7. Gal. i. 12. ii. 2. In the latter, Luke ii. 32. Eph. i. 11. As when God opened the eyes of the servant of Elisha on the prayer of his master, to see the horses and chariots of fire, that were round about him; 2 Kings i. 6. 17. They were not brought thither by the opening of his eyes; only he was enabled to discern them which before he could not do. Or, as when any one maketh use of a *telescope* to behold things afar off, no object is presented unto him, but what was really in the same place before, only his *visive faculty* is assisted to discern them at that distance, which without that assistance it could not reach unto. And the Holy Spirit is here called the Spirit of revelation, *causally*;

as he is the author or principal efficient cause of it: so in his communication unto the Lord Christ himself, he is called ‘the Spirit of wisdom and understanding; the Spirit of counsel and might; the Spirit of knowledge, and of the fear of the Lord; that should make him of quick understanding in the fear of the Lord;’ Isa. xi. 2. 3.

2. What the psalmist in the place before insisted on calleth in general נפלאות ‘wonderful things,’ the apostle expresseth in particular, and distributes them under sundry heads as they were more clearly revealed in the gospel. Such are, ‘the hope of God’s calling,’ ‘the riches of his glory,’ and the ‘exceeding greatness of his power in them that do believe.’ These are some of the principal and most important mysteries of the gospel. No other understanding can we have of these things, but only as they are *revealed* therein, or of the revelation of them. And in the manner of his expression he declares these things to be ‘wonderful,’ as the psalmist speaks. For there is in them *πλοῦτος τῆς δόξης* ‘the riches of glory;’ which is beyond our comprehension. So he expressly affirms, that it is *ἀνεξιχνίαστος*, chap. iii. 8. ‘past all investigation’ or search; the same word that he useth to set forth the ways of God, when his design is to declare them *wonderful*, or the object of our admiration; Rom. xi. 33. ‘O the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God, how unsearchable are his ways, and his judgments past finding out.’ And there is in them, *ὑπερβάλλον μέγεθος* ‘an exceeding or inexpressible greatness of power.’

Such are the things that are proposed unto us in the Scripture. And the principal reason why some men judge it so easy a matter to understand and comprehend by *the innate abilities* of their own minds the revelations that are made in the word of God unto us; is, because they do not apprehend that there is any thing *wonderful*, or truly great and glorious in them. And, therefore, because they cannot raise their minds unto a comprehension of these mysteries as they are in themselves; they corrupt and debase them, to suit them unto their own low carnal apprehensions, which is the principle that works effectually in the whole of *Socinianism*. For grant that there are such ‘wonderful things,’ such mysteries in the gospel as we plead, and the men of that persuasion will not deny, but that our minds do stand

in need of a heavenly assistance to comprehend them aright. For they deny them for no other reason, but because their reason cannot comprehend them.

3. Concerning these things so revealed in the word; the apostle prays for these Ephesians, that they might *know them*; as also he expresseth the way whereby alone they might be enabled so to do. Εἰς τὸ εἰδέναι ὑμᾶς that they might have a sight, perception, or understanding of them. This he denies a *natural man* to have, or that he can have; he ‘cannot know them;’ 1 Cor. ii. 14. It is true, it may be said, he cannot know them unless they are *clearly* and fairly proposed unto him; no, nor then neither, by the light and power of his own natural faculties. He cannot do so by the use of any outward means alone. It is futile to imagine that the apostle intends only, that a *natural man* cannot know things that are never proposed unto him, which is neither weakness nor discommendation. For neither can the *spiritual man* so know any thing.

Because it is thus with men by nature, therefore doth the apostle so earnestly pray, that these Ephesians might be enabled to understand and know these things, and he doth it with an unusual solemnity, invoking the ‘God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory:’ which argues both a great intension of spirit in him, and great weight laid upon the matter of his request.

But what reason is there for this earnestness? What is wanting unto these Ephesians? what would he yet have for them? were they not *rational men* that had their eyes in their heads as well as others? nay, were not many of them learned men and skilled in all the curious arts of those days? for here it was, that so many upon their first conversion burnt their books to the value ‘of fifty thousand pieces of silver;’ Acts xix. 19. Probably they were many of them very knowing in the *new and old philosophy*. Had they not the Scripture also; that is, all the books of the Old Testament, and those of the New which were then written? Did not the apostle and others preach the doctrine of the gospel unto them, and therein the things which he here mentioneth? He declareth, and expressly testifieth, that he did; Acts xx. 20, 27. Speaking unto these very persons, that is, the leaders of them; he saith, ‘I have kept back nothing which was pro-

fitable unto you, but declared unto you all the counsel of God; namely, what is the hope of his calling, and what the greatness of his power: were not these things sufficiently revealed, and clearly proposed unto them? If they were not, it was because the apostle *could not* so reveal and propose them, or because he *would not*. If he *could not*, then he prays, that that might be revealed unto them which was not so to him; or that they might learn what he *could not teach them*, which is foolish and impious to imagine. If he *would not*, then he prays, that they may know, that which he would not teach them, which he could easily have so done; which is equally foolish to suppose. What, therefore, do they yet lack? What is yet farther needful, that they might know and understand these things? For we must know, that we understand no more of the mind of God in the revelations that he makes unto us, than we understand of the *things themselves* that are revealed by him.

I am persuaded, that these Ephesians were generally as *wise*, and some of them as *learned*, as any in our days, let them have what conceit of themselves they please. Yet grant some of ours but thus much, that they have their wits about them, and the use of their reason; and let them have the things of the gospel, or the doctrines of it rationally proposed unto them, as they are in the Scripture, and they defy the world to think that they yet want any thing to enable them to *know*, and rightly to understand them. To fancy any thing else to be necessary hereunto is *fanatical* madness. For what would men have? what should ail them? Are not the doctrines of the gospel highly *rational*? are not the things of it eminently suited unto the *reason* of mankind? are not the books of the Scripture written in a style and language *intelligible*? Is there any thing more required unto the understanding of the mind of any author, but to conceive the *grammatical* sense of the words that he useth, and the nature of his propositions and arguings? And although St. Paul, as some say, *be one of the obscurest writers they ever met with*; yet surely by these means some good shift may be made with his writings also. It is, therefore, *canting and nonsense*, a reproach to reason and Christian religion itself, to think that this is not enough to enable men to understand the mind of God in the Scriptures.

Well, be it so, at present, unto the highly *rational abilities* of some persons ; it cannot be denied, but that the apostle judged it necessary, that these Ephesians should have the *special aid of the Spirit of God* unto this end, which he prayeth for. And we may be excused if we dare not think ourselves better than they ; nor to have a sufficiency of learning, wisdom, and reason above others, or less to need prayers of this nature than they did. And we find that the apostle reneweth his prayer for them again unto the same purpose, with great fervency ; chap. iii. 14—19. All the difference ariseth from hence, that the apostle judgeth, that over and above the utmost exercise of our natural faculties and abilities in the use of outward means that we may know the mind of God in the Scripture, wherein these Ephesians were not wanting ; it is necessary that the ‘ eyes of our understanding ’ should be spiritually opened and enlightened ; but other men it seems think not so.

But yet if men should be allowed to suppose, that our minds were no way vitiated, depraved, or darkened by the fall, which supposition is the sole foundation of these assertions ; yet it is most irrational to imagine, that we can comprehend and understand *the mysteries of the gospel* without especial *spiritual illumination*. For the original light and abilities of our minds was not suited or prepared for the receiving and understanding of them. For neither their being nor revelation was consistent with the state of integrity. Wherefore, although our minds should be allowed to be as wise and perspicacious with respect unto that natural knowledge of God and all that belongs unto it, which was proposed unto us, or necessary for us in the state of nature ; yet would it not follow, that we are able to discern the *mysteries of grace* when proposed unto us. The truth is, if our minds be not corrupted or depraved, there is no need of the gospel nor its grace ; and if they are, we cannot understand the mind of God therein, without especial illumination.

But it may be said, that these things are consistent. For notwithstanding men’s *rational abilities*, and the use of means, yet it is meet that they should both pray for themselves, and that others, whose duty it is, should pray for them also. It is so, that they may be *diligent* in their inquiries, and obtain

the *blessing of God upon their diligence*. But this doth not prove at all, that they are *not able of themselves* to apprehend and know the mind and things of God in the Scripture, or that any thing is wanting in them, or to them, which is absolutely necessary thereunto.

I answer, That on these suppositions; there is indeed nothing wanting, but that which the apostle moreover prayeth for, which is none of them. And if that be not also requisite unto this end, his prayer is vain and useless. That men be diligent in the discharge of their duty herein, and that they may have the especial blessing of God thereon, are here supposed, and we shall speak unto them afterward. These are not the things that the apostle here prayeth for; but that God would give them the ‘Spirit of wisdom and revelation to enlighten the eyes of their understandings,’ that they may know them, as shall be immediately declared. And indeed, I understand not how this prayer can be suited unto the principles of any who deny the necessity of this internal spiritual aid.

For they cannot but think it strange to pray for a ‘Spirit of wisdom and revelation’ to be given unto their *whole congregations*, which were a dangerous way to make them wiser than their teachers. And for themselves, using diligence, and praying for a blessing in their diligence, they disavow any farther concernment in this matter.

4. The thing in especial prayed for, in order unto the end proposed, is, that the ‘eyes of our understandings may be enlightened.’ This is the same which the psalmist prayeth for in the place before insisted on, that God ‘would open his eyes.’ And it is the *internal work of illumination* that is intended. Now, although the main force of the argument depends on these words, yet shall I not insist here upon them; because I must speak somewhat more in particular unto the nature of this work afterward. Besides, what is that darkness which is here supposed to be on our minds or understandings; what is its nature, efficacy, and power; how it is taken away and removed; what is the nature of that spiritual light which is communicated unto us, in and for the removal thereof, I have at large elsewhere declared. All that at present I shall observe from these words, is, in general, that there is an *especial work of the Spirit of God in the enlightening*

the eyes of our understandings, necessary unto our discerning of the mysteries of the gospel in a due manner; which was to be proved.

5. What is declared concerning the author of this work in us, or the principal efficient cause of it, doth farther confirm the same truth. And this is the *Holy Spirit*; 'that he would give unto you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation.' That the Holy Spirit is the immediate author of all supernatural effects and operations in us, hath been elsewhere proved at large. And what he is promised or given in the gospel so to effect, is not any thing that is in our own power. Wherefore, the ascription of the *communication of this ability* unto the Holy Ghost, is a sufficient evidence that we want it in ourselves. And all things here affirmed concerning the manner of his communication unto us, and his properties as communicated, do evidence the nature, and evince the truth, of the work ascribed unto him. As for the first, it is by the *grant, donation, or free gift*, of God the Father; ver. 17. 'That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, would give unto you.' God is called, the 'King of glory;' Psal. xxiv. 7, 8. and the 'God of glory;' Acts vii. 2. with respect unto his own glorious majesty. But he is the 'Father of glory,' as he is the eternal spring and cause of all glory, unto the church. And these titles are prefixed unto this grant or the request of it, 'the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory,' to intimate that it proceeds from his relation unto us in Christ, with that love and bounty wherein he is the cause of all grace and glory unto us. Wherefore, receiving this Spirit by *free donation*, as we do, Luke xi. 13. all that we receive from him and by him, we have it by the way of *free gift* or donation also. Therefore is this ability of *understanding the Scripture*, and the mysteries of the truth contained therein, a mere *free gift of God*, which he bestows on whom he will. So our Saviour told his disciples, 'unto you it is given to know the mysteries of God, but to them (to others) it is not given;' Matt. xiii. 11. who yet heard his words, and understood the literal sense of the propositions used by him as well as the disciples did. Whoever, therefore, hath this ability to know the mysteries of the gospel, he hath it by *free gift*, or donation from God. He hath received it, and may not boast as if it were from himself, and

that he had not received it, as the apostle speaks; 1 Cor. iv. 7. Again, the properties ascribed unto him, as thus communicated for this end, are *wisdom* and *revelation*.

(1.) He is the 'Spirit of wisdom.' So in the communication of him in all fulness unto the Lord Jesus Christ, the head of the church, he is called the 'Spirit of wisdom and understanding;' Isa. xi. 2. and that because he was to make him of 'quick understanding in the fear of the Lord;' ver. 3. He is a 'Spirit of wisdom' essentially in himself; and *causally* or *efficiently* unto others. And these things do mutually demonstrate each other. That he is the cause of all wisdom in others, is a demonstration that he is *essentially* wise in himself. 'For he that planted the ear shall he not hear? He that formed the eye, shall he not see?' And because he is essentially wise, he must be the author of all wisdom unto others. For all good must come from that which is infinitely, eternally, unchangeably so; James i. 17. He is, therefore, called the 'Spirit of wisdom,' on both these accounts; as he is *essentially* so in himself, and as he is the *efficient cause* of all wisdom unto others. And it is in the latter way immediately that he is here so termed. And this property is peculiarly ascribed unto him, as thus given unto us, to 'open our eyes,' with respect unto the work which he is to do. For wisdom is required hereunto. That wisdom which may deliver us from being really *fools* ourselves, and from judging the things of God to be folly.

There is a wisdom required hereunto: 'Who is wise, and he shall understand these things; prudent, and he shall know them; for the ways of the Lord are right, and the just shall walk in them; but the transgressors shall fall therein;' Hos. xiv. 9. Want of this wisdom is the cause that wicked men take offence at, and dislike the ways of God, because they do not spiritually understand them, and so cast themselves into destruction. And it is of the same things that the prophet affirms, that none 'of the wicked shall understand, but the wise shall understand;' Dan. xii. 10. And it is called, the 'wisdom of the just;' Luke i. 17.

This wisdom is not in us by nature. Men are naturally wise in their own conceit; which if continued in, is a hopeless frame of mind; Prov. xxvi. 12. And in nothing doth it more evidence itself, than in apprehensions of their own abi-

lity to comprehend spiritual things, and in their contempt of what they do not so, as folly; 1 Cor. i. 18. 23. And with respect hereunto, doth the apostle give that advice unto us, as our duty; ‘ Let no man deceive himself, if any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise;’ 1 Cor. iii. 18. This is a matter wherein men are very apt to deceive themselves; even to conceit themselves wise, and to trust thereunto in the things of God, whereof alone he there treats. Whereas, therefore, the especial promise of God is to teach the *meek* and the *humble*, there is nothing that sets men at a greater distance from divine instruction, than a proud conceit of their own wisdom, wit, parts, and abilities. Wherefore, this wisdom which is the daughter of natural darkness, and the mother of proud spiritual ignorance, the Spirit of wisdom freeth the minds of believers from, in the way that shall be afterward declared; and therein is he unto us, a ‘ Spirit of wisdom.’ Moreover, he gives us that ‘ wisdom which is from above,’ which we are directed to ask of God; James i. 5. Without this wisdom which he works in us, no man can understand the wisdom of God in the mystery of the gospel; whoso is thus made wise, shall understand these things, and none else. There is, therefore, a *gift of spiritual wisdom* and understanding necessary hereunto, that we may discern the ‘ wonderful things’ that are in the word of God. To whom this is not given, they know not the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven. Let men please or pride themselves whilst they will in their own wisdom and learning, and explode the consideration of these things in our inquiries after the mind of God, the meanest believer who hath received this wisdom from above, according unto the measure of the gift of Christ, knoweth more of the mind of God in a due manner than they do.

When our Lord Jesus Christ affirmed that he came into the world, ‘ that they which see not, might see,’ or to communicate spiritual saving light into the minds of men, the Pharisees who had great apprehensions of their own *wisdom* and understanding in the law, replied with scorn, ‘ And are we blind also?’ John ix. 33. 40. It proved no otherwise, and that to their eternal ruin; yet do I not judge all them to be *practically* blind, who do not *doctrinally* own the receiving of

this wisdom and light from above. For, although we make not ourselves to differ from others, nor have any thing in a way of spiritual ability, but what we have received, yet are some apt to *glory* as if they had not received, as the apostle intimates ; 1 Cor. iv. 7. Wherefore, the Holy Spirit, as given unto us, is said to be a ‘ Spirit of wisdom,’ because he *maketh us wise* or worketh wisdom in us. This wisdom we have not of ourselves ; for to suppose it, renders the word of God of none effect. And this spiritual wisdom, thus to be bestowed upon us, thus to be wrought in us, is necessary that we may know the mysteries of the gospel, or understand the mind of God therein ; which is all that we plead for.

I have insisted the longer upon this testimony, because the whole of what we assert in general, in the nature, causes, and effects of it, is fully declared therein. And this was the way whereby they of old came to understand divine revelations, or the mind of God as revealed in the Scripture. If others who seem to scorn all mention of the *teaching of the Holy Ghost*, have found out a course more expedite unto the same end, it is what I understand not, nor do desire to participate in.

CHAP. III.

Other testimonies pleaded in the confirmation of the same truth; John xvi.

13. *opened. How far all true believers are infallibly led into all truth, declared. And the manner how they are so. 1 John ii. 20. 27. explained. What assurance of the truth they have who are taught of God. Eph. i. 5, 6. John xxx. 22. vi. 45. Practical truths inferred from the assertion proved.*

THERE are yet other testimonies which may be pleaded unto the same purpose. For unto this end is the Holy Ghost promised unto all believers; John xvi. 13. ‘When the Spirit of truth is come, he shall guide you into all truth.’

The Holy Spirit is called the ‘Spirit of truth,’ principally on the same account as God absolutely is called ‘the God of truth;’ he is so *essentially*. He is the first, absolute, divine, eternal verity; so he is originally called the Holy Spirit on the account of his *essential* holiness. But it is not on that account solely that he is here called the ‘Spirit of truth.’ He is so as he is the *revealer* of all divine supernatural truth unto the church. As he is also called the Holy Spirit, as he is author of all holiness in others; therefore is he here promised unto the church as it is his work to *lead us into all truth*.

And two things are considerable in this promise: 1. What is intended by *all truth*. 2. How the Holy Spirit *guides* or *leads* us into it.

1. With respect unto the *object*, it is not *all truth absolutely* that is intended. There is truth in things natural, civil, and stories of things that are past; nothing of this nature is comprised in this promise. We see believers of all sorts as ignorant of, as unacquainted with, many of these things, as any other sort of men whatever. Yet doth not one word of the promise of Christ fall unto the ground. Wherefore, *all that truth*, or all truth of that nature whereof our Saviour there speaketh, is alone intended. The mysteries of the gospel, of the kingdom of heaven, the counsel of God about the salvation of the church by Christ, and concerning their faith and obedience, are the truth which he is promised to guide us into. This the apostle calleth ‘all the

counsel of God;’ Acts xx. 27. namely, which respects all the ends of our faith and obedience ; ver. 21.

2. It admits of a *limitation* with respect unto the diversity of subjects, or the persons unto whom this truth is to be communicated. They are not all of them, as to the *degrees* of light and knowledge, *equally* to be led into all truth. Every one unto whom he is thus promised, shall be so far led into the knowledge of it, as is necessary unto his own estate and condition, his duty and his work. For unto ‘ every one of us is given grace according unto the measure of the gift of Christ ;’ Eph. iv. 7. It is Christ alone, who in the free gift of all grace, *assigns the measures* wherein every one shall be made partaker of it. In his sovereign will he hath allotted the measures of grace, light, and knowledge, unto all the members of the church. And there is no less difference in *these measures*, than in the knowledge of the most glorious apostle, and that of the meanest believer in the world. The duty, work, and obedience of every one, is the *rule of the measure* of his receiving these gifts of Christ. None shall want any thing that is necessary unto him ; none shall receive any thing that he is not to use and improve in a way of duty.

2. Our second inquiry is, how the Spirit doth thus *lead us* into all truth. The external revelation of truth is herein supposed. This he is promised to instruct us in the knowledge of, in a spiritual manner, whereby I understand no more, but so as it is required of us in a way of duty. To clear the truth hereof, some things must be observed. As,

1. The promises concerning the *mission of the Holy Spirit* in these chapters of the Gospel, xiv. xv. xvi. are not to be confined unto the *apostles*, nor unto the *first age or ages of the church*. To do so is expressly contradictory unto the discourse and whole design of our Lord Jesus Christ unto that purpose. For he promiseth him in opposition unto his own temporary abode in the world ; namely, that this of the Spirit should *be for ever* ; chap. xiv. 16. that is, *ἕως τῆς συντελείας τοῦ αἰῶνος*, Matt. xxviii. 20. unto the *consummation* of the whole state of the church here below. And to suppose the contrary, is to overthrow the foundation of all truth and comfort in the church. For their preservation in the one, and the administration of the other, unto them, depend on the

accomplishment of this promise alone. And so also do all the benefits of the intercession of Christ, which are no otherwise communicated unto us, but by the *Holy Spirit*, as given in pursuit of this promise. For what herein he prayed for his apostles, he prayed 'for all them that should believe in him through this word unto the end of the world;' John xvii.

2. It is granted, that sundry things in the promises of the Holy Ghost were peculiar unto the apostles, and had their accomplishment on the day of Pentecost, when he descended on them in that glorious visible manner; Acts ii. 1—4. For as they were commanded by our Saviour *to wait for this his coming* before they engaged in the discharge of that office whereunto he had called them; Acts i. 4. so now they were fully empowered and enabled unto all that belonged thereunto. But their peculiar interest in these promises, respected only things that were peculiar unto their office; such as that mentioned in this place is not.

3. It is not an *external guidance* into the truth by the objective revelation of it, that is intended; for such revelations are not granted unto all believers unto whom this promise is made, nor are they to look for them. And the revelation of truth in the ministerial proposal of it, is common unto all the world unto whom the word is preached, and so is not the subject of an especial promise.

4. Wherefore, it is the *internal teaching* of the Holy Ghost giving an understanding of the mind of God, of all sacred truths as revealed, that is intended. For, (1.) it is the same with that other promise, we 'shall be all taught of God.' For we are thus taught of God by the 'Spirit's leading us into all truth,' and no otherwise. (2.) This the word enforceth; the Spirit of truth, *ὁδηγήσει ὑμᾶς*, shall lead and guide you in the right way to the knowledge of the truth. So when Philip asked the eunuch whether he understood the things which he read out of the prophet Isaiah, he replieth, 'How can I?' *ἂν μή τις ὁδηγήσῃ με*; Acts viii. 31. 'unless one lead me' to the sense of it; that is, by his interpretation give me an understanding of it. Thus the Holy Spirit leads us into all truth by giving us that understanding of it, which of ourselves we are not able to attain. And other interpretations the words will not admit. It is, there-

fore, his work to give us a useful saving understanding of all sacred truth, or the mind of God as revealed in the Scripture. All spiritual *divine supernatural truth* is revealed in the Scripture. Herein all are agreed. The knowledge, the *right understanding* of this truth as so revealed, is the duty of all, according unto the means which they enjoy, and the duties that are required of them. Neither can this be denied. Unto this end that they may do so, the Holy Spirit is here *promised unto them that do believe*. His divine aid and assistance is, therefore, necessary hereunto. And this we are to *pray for*, as it is promised. Wherefore, of ourselves, without his especial assistance and guidance, we cannot attain a due knowledge of, and understanding in, the truth revealed in the Scripture. As unto the especial nature of this assistance it shall be spoken unto afterward.

This is again affirmed concerning all believers; 1 John ii. 20. 27. 'You have an unction from the Holy One, and you know all things; the anointing which you have received of him abideth in you; and ye need not that any man teach you, but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie; and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in it.'

1. That by the *unction* and anointing in this place the Spirit of God and his work, with respect unto the end mentioned, are intended, is not questioned by any that are conversant about these things with sobriety. And it is plain in the text. For, (1.) That the Holy Spirit in his especial operations, is called an *unction*, or is said to *anoint* us, is evident in many places of the Scripture; see Heb. i. 9. 2 Cor. i. 22, 23. Neither is a spiritual unction ascribed unto any thing else in the whole Scripture. (2.) That expression, 'which you have from the Holy One,' (Acts iii. 14. Rev. iii. 7.) that is, *Jesus Christ*, doth expressly answer unto the promise of Christ, to send his Holy Spirit unto us, and that for the end here mentioned, namely, to teach us, and lead us into all truth; whence he is called 'the Spirit of the Lord,' or of Christ; 2 Cor. iii. 17, 18. Eph. iii. 16. Phil. i. 19, &c. (3.) That also, of his 'abiding in us,' is nothing but an expression of the same promise of Christ, that he shall 'abide with us for ever;' John xiv. 16. (4.) The work here assigned unto this unction, is expressly assigned unto the Holy Spi-

rit ; John xvi. 13. The ‘ Spirit of truth shall guide you into all truth.’ (5.) What is said of it, namely, not only that *it is true, and not false*, but that it is *truth and no lie*, doth plainly intimate his *essential* verity. And I cannot but wonder that any persons should against this open and plain evidence, ascribe the things here mentioned unto any thing else, and that exclusively unto the Holy Ghost. For so do some contend (Episcop. in loc. after Socin. on the same place), that by this unction the *doctrine of the gospel only* is intended. It is true that the doctrine of the gospel in the preaching of it, is the means or instrumental cause of this teaching by the Holy Ghost. And on that account what is spoken of the teaching of the Spirit of God, may be spoken in its place of the doctrine of the gospel, because he teacheth us thereby. But here it is spoken of *objectively*, as what we are to be taught, and not *efficiently*, as what it is that teacheth us. And to say as they do, it is the instruction which we have by the gospel that is intended, is to assert the *effect* only, and to exclude the cause. For that signifies no more, but the effect of the unction here ascribed unto believers, as that which they had received from the Holy One. Dydimus, an ancient learned writer, interpreteth this *unction* to be the *illuminating* grace of the Spirit, and the *Holy One* to be the *Spirit himself*; lib. 2. de Spir. Sanct. But the other interpretation is more proper and consonant unto the use of the Scripture. The expression is taken from the institution of God under the Old Testament, whereby kings and priests are *anointed* with oil, to signify the gifts of the Spirit communicated unto them for the discharge of their office. And thence believers who are real partakers of the internal *unction* in the graces and gifts of the Holy Ghost, are said to be ‘ made kings and priests unto God.’ It is, therefore, the work of the Holy Spirit that is here described. He alone with his gifts, graces, and privileges, that ensue thereon, are so expressed, here or any where else in the whole Scripture.

2. Two things are to be observed in what is here ascribed unto this unction. (1.) What is the *effect* of his work in believers. (2.) What is the *nature* of it, or how he produceth that effect.

(1.) For the first, there is a double expression of it; [1.] ‘ That they know all things.’ [2.] That they ‘ need not that

any should teach them;' both which expressions admit of, yea require, their limitations.

[1.] The 'all things' intended, come under a double restriction: the first taken from the *nature* of the things themselves; the other from the *scope* and circumstances of the place: or, the one from the general end, the other from the special design, proposed.

1st. The *general end* proposed, is our 'abiding in Christ.' So 'ye shall abide in him;' which the apostle expresseth, ver. 24. by 'continuing in the Son, and in the Father.' Wherefore, the *all things* here mentioned, are all things necessary unto our ingrafting into and continuance in Christ. Such are all the fundamental, yea, important truths of the gospel. Whatever is needful unto our communion with Christ, and our obedience to him, this all true believers are taught; however they may mistake in things of *lesser moment*, and be ignorant in the doctrine of some truths, or have but mean degrees of knowledge in any thing, yet shall they all know the mind and will of God as revealed in the Scripture, in all those things and truths which are necessary, that they may believe unto righteousness, and make confession unto salvation.

2ndly. The *especial end*, under consideration, is preservation and deliverance from the antichrists and seducers of those days, with the errors, lies, and false doctrines which they divulged, concerning Christ and the gospel. The only way and means whereby we may be so preserved from the poisons and infections of such pernicious opinions and ways, is the assured knowledge of the truths of the gospel, as they are revealed in the Scripture. All those truths which were any way needful to secure their faith, and preserve them from *mortal* seductions, they were taught and did know. And where any man knows the truths which are required unto his implantation into Christ, and his continuance with him in faith and obedience; as also, all those which may preserve him from the danger of seduction into pernicious errors; however he may fail and be mistaken in some things of less importance; yet is he secured as unto his present acceptable obedience, and future blessedness. And to speak of it by the way, this giveth us the *rule of our especial communion and love*. Where any are *taught* these things, where they

have the knowledge, and make confession of that truth, or those articles of faith whereby they may ‘abide in Christ,’ and are preserved *from pernicious seductions*, although they may differ from us and the truth in some things of less moment; we are obliged not only to forbearance of them, but *communion* with them: for who shall refuse them, whom Christ hath received? or doth Christ refuse any to whom he gives his Spirit, who have the *unction* from the Holy One? This, and no other, is the rule of our *evangelical love* and communion among ourselves. Whatever we require more of any as a necessary condition of our Christian society in point of doctrine, is an unwarrantable *imposition* on their consciences or practice, or both.

[2.] It is said, that they so know these things, as that they ‘need not that any should teach them;’ which also requireth a limitation or exposition. For,

1st. It is only the things as before declared that respect is had unto. Now besides these, there are many other things which believers stand in need to be taught continually; and whose knowledge belongs unto their *edification*. Many things are very *useful* unto us, that are not absolutely *necessary*. In natural things, and such as belong unto this present life: men would be very unwilling to be without, or part with sundry things, without which yet life might be preserved, because they value them, as of use unto themselves, so enabling them to be useful unto others. And they who understand the nature, use, and benefit of *evangelical truths*, will not be contented that their knowledge in them should be confined only unto those which are of *absolute necessity* unto the being of spiritual life. Yea, they cannot be well supposed to know those truths themselves, who pretend such a satisfaction in them as to look no farther. For all who are sincere in faith and knowledge, do aim at that ‘perfect man in Christ,’ which all the ordinances of God are designed to bring us unto; Eph. iv. 13. Wherefore, notwithstanding the knowledge of these things, there is still use and need of farther ministerial teaching in the church.

2ndly. It is spoken of the things themselves *absolutely*, and not with respect unto the *degrees* of the knowledge of them. They did so know them, as there was no need that any man should teach them unto them, as unto their *initial*

knowledge and substance of the things themselves ; and so it may be said of all believers. But yet there are *degrees of knowledge* with respect unto those very things, which they may and ought to be carried on unto, as the apostle speaketh, Heb. vi. 1. And, therefore, doth the holy apostle himself, who writes these things, *farther instruct* them in them. And herein consists the principal part of the ministry of the church, even to carry on believers unto perfection, in those things wherein, for the substance of them, they have been already instructed.

3rdly. That which is principally intended, is that they need not that any should teach them, so as that they should depend on the light and *authority* of their instruction. Others may be helpers of their joy, but none can be lords of their faith. You need no such teaching because of the *unction* which you have received.

(2.) For the general nature of the work here ascribed unto this *unction*, that is, the Holy Spirit, it is *teaching* ; ‘ the unction teacheth you.’ There are but two ways whereby the Spirit teacheth us ; nor can any other be conceived. The one is by *objective*, the other by *subjective*, revelations. For he teacheth us as a Spirit of ‘ wisdom and revelation.’ The first way of his teaching is, by immediate inspiration, communicating new sacred truths from God immediately unto the minds of men. So he taught the *prophets* and *apostles* and all the penmen of the Scripture. By him the word of the Lord came unto them, and they spake as they were *acted* by him. 1 Pet. i. 11, 12. 2 Pet. i. 21. This is not the way of teaching here intended. For, the end of this teaching of the Holy Ghost is only to make men teachers of others, which is not here intended. Nor doth the apostle discourse unto any such purpose ; as though God would grant *new revelations* unto men, to preserve them from errors and seductions, which he hath made sufficient provision for in the word ; Isa. viii. 20. 2 Pet. i. 19. By this word were they to try all doctrines and pretended revelations, yea, they which were so really before they received them ; 1 John iv. 1. Besides, what is here affirmed, is ascribed unto all sorts of believers, under the distribution which they are cast into by the apostle, namely, of ‘ old men,’ ‘ young men,’ and ‘ babes,’ which had not all of them received the Spirit of immediate revelation.

His other way of teaching is, that which we have insisted on; namely, his enabling us to discern, know, and understand the mind and will of God, as revealed in the Scripture, or as declared in any divine revelation; this alone is, or can be, here intended. Wherefore, this is the design of the apostle, in these words; *All divine truths necessary to be known, and to be believed, that we may live unto God in faith and obedience, or come unto, and abide in Christ; as also, be preserved from seducers, are contained in the Scripture, or proposed unto us in divine revelations. These of ourselves we cannot understand, unto the ends mentioned; for if we could, there would be no need that we should be taught them by the Holy Spirit. But this is so, he teacheth us all these things, enabling us to discern, comprehend, and acknowledge them.* And this is the whole of what we plead for.

For a close of our considerations on these words of the apostle, I shall only observe what assurance a man that is thus taught the truth, may have, that it is the truth which he is taught, and that he is not deceived in his apprehensions of it. For hereon depends the use of this instruction; especially in times of trial, indeed at all times and on all occasions. It is not enough that we know the truth, but we must be assured, that so we do. See Eph. iv. 14. Col. ii. 2. And there was never a greater *artifice* in the world, than that whereby the *Roman church* hath imposed an impregnable obstinate credulity on all that adhere thereunto. For it doth first fix this in their minds, that itself *cannot err*, and therefore whatever is by her authority proposed unto them, is infallibly true. Hence it comes to pass that they will abide obstinate against all convictions, and the highest evidence of truth in all particular instances, whilst this principle is firmly fixed in their minds, that the church which proposeth these things unto them *cannot err*, nor be mistaken. Yea, whilst this persuasion abides with them, they may be, and indeed accordingly are, obliged to believe contradictions; things most irrational and absurd, inconsistent with Christian piety, and the peace of human society. However, they say well in this, that it is necessary that a man should have *good assurance* of the truth which he doth profess, or of his own understanding of it, and conception about it. This the apostle calleth the ‘riches of the full assur-

ance of understanding ;' Col. ii. 2. whereof we shall speak afterward.

Wherefore, whereas the assurance of mind in other teachings depend much on the *authority* of them by whom they are taught; on a supposition that believers are taught the mind of God in the Scripture by the Holy Spirit, or are by him enabled to discern and know it; the inquiry is, how, or by what means they have an *assurance* that they have a *right understanding* of the things which they are so taught, so as to abide in them, and the profession of them, against all opposition whatever; and so as to venture the eternal condition of their souls on *that assurance* they have of the truth; which every one must do, whether he will or no. And this in the text is referred unto the author of this teaching. 'For the anointing is truth, and is no lie;' it is true and infallibly so. There is no fear of, no possibility for, any man to be deceived in what he is taught by this *unction*. And an assurance hereof ariseth in our minds, partly from the *manner* of his teachings, and partly from the *evidence* of the things themselves that we are taught. The manner and way of his teaching us in and by the Scripture, evidenceth unto us, that what we are taught is *true*, and *no lie*. He giveth a *secret witness* unto what he teacheth in his teachings. 'For it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is truth;' 1 John v. 6. And with respect unto the evidence which is so given us of the truth, it is said, that the *unction* whereby we are taught *is true and no lie*; that is, it is impossible any one should be deceived who is so taught. This will more fully appear when we have declared the whole of his work herein; something only may now be spoken on occasion of this testimony.

There is a peculiar power accompanying the teaching of God by his Spirit. 'Behold, God exalteth by his power, who teacheth like him?' Job xxxvi. 22. So our Saviour expoundeth that promise, 'They shall be all taught of God; every man,' saith he, 'therefore, that hath heard and learned of the Father cometh unto me;' John vi. 45. There is such an efficacy accompanying of God's teaching, that whosoever is so taught, doth certainly believe the things that he is taught, as having the evidence of the truth of them in himself.

When the Holy Ghost gave *new revelations* of old unto the prophets and penmen of the Scripture by *immediate inspiration*, he did therein and therewith communicate unto them an infallible evidence that they were from God. And when he doth *illuminate our minds* in the knowledge of what is revealed, he doth therein himself bear witness unto, and assure us of, the truth which we do understand. Hereby do we come to that which the apostle calleth the ‘full assurance of understanding, in the acknowledgment of the mystery of God.’ He not only enableth our minds to apprehend the truth, but he shines into our hearts, the seat of spiritual experience, to give us the ‘knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.’ And the assurance which believers have thereby, is above that which any other evidence or demonstration whatever can give. And the meanest believer hath from this teaching, a greater rest, satisfaction, and assurance, in the knowledge of the mind of God, than any can be attained by the most raised notions, or profound disputations; ‘for he that believeth, hath the witness in himself;’ 1 John v. 10. And why should others think it strange, that there should be that evidence of truth in the teachings of the Spirit, by the illumination of our minds in the knowledge of the Scripture, as to give us an assurance of the highest nature, *seeing there is none that teacheth like him?*

Want hereof, is that which makes men to fluctuate in their conceptions of spiritual things, and so ready on every occasion to part with what they have received. The church of *Rome* hath, as we observed, rather *craftily*, than *wisely* provided against any inconvenience herein. The doctrines which it teacheth are many of them false; and so the things contained in them can give no evidence unto themselves in the minds of men. For there is nothing but *imagination* in error, there is nothing of substance in it. And their *way of teaching* is not accompanied with any especial advantage; yea, it is the most vain that ever was in the world. They would have men suppose that they may advance at once in the true belief of a *hundred things* whereof they have no evidence, merely resting on the infallibility of the church, by which, they say, they are *proposed*. Wherefore, they teach men that although they receive no evidencing light,

in this way of their instruction, nor have any experience of the power or efficacy of truth in what they are taught, yet they may rest assuredly in the *infallibility of the church*. Hence the assurance they have of any thing they suppose truth, is not an act of the mind in the embracing of the truth, from any evidence that it gives of itself, but a presumption in general that the *church is infallible*, by which these things are proposed unto them. The design is to prevail with men, to suppose that they believe *all things*, when indeed they believe *nothing*: that they understand the mind and will of God, when indeed they understand nothing at all of them. For a man believes nothing but what is accompanied with an evidence whereon it ought to be believed. But this they pretend not unto, at least, not such that should give them that assurance of the truth of it, which is requisite; and, therefore, are all men by them referred for that unto the *infallibility of the church*. Persons weak, ignorant, credulous, or superstitious, either for interest, or by the craft of seducers, may be prevailed on to make their resort unto this relief; those who will not forego the rational conduct of their own souls, and leave themselves unto the guidance of others, knowing that it is they alone, who must give an account of themselves to God; will not easily be induced thereunto.

Others will resolve all into their own *rational conceptions* of things, without any respect unto a superior infallible teacher. And the minds of many influenced by this notion, *that they have themselves alone to trust unto*, are come unto the utmost uncertainty and instability in all things of religion; nor can it otherwise be. For the mind of man is in itself as indifferent and undetermined unto any thing, as true or false (unless it be in its first notions of the common principles of reason), beyond the evidence that is proposed unto it: so also is it *various, unsteady*, and apt to fluctuate from one thing to another. And there are but two ways whereby it may be naturally ascertained, and determined in its conceptions and assent. The first is by the use of the *external senses*, which will not deceive it; however it cannot but receive, believe, and comply with what it comprehends by its *senses*; as what it sees, hears, and feels. The other is by *reason*, whereby it deduceth certain conclusions, from

propositions of necessary truth ; that is, by *demonstration*. But by neither of these ways can the mind be brought unto a stability and *assurance* in or about things spiritual or supernatural. For they are neither the objects of *natural* sense, nor capable of a *scientific* demonstration. Wherefore, a man can have nothing but a probability or conjectural knowledge concerning them, unless he have some certain *infallible teaching* wherein he can acquiesce. And such is that of this *unction*, which is *truth* and *no lie*. In and by his teaching of us, namely, the mind of God as revealed in the Scripture, there is that evidence of truth communicated unto our minds and hearts, as giveth us an immoveable assurance of them, or the *full assurance of understanding*. For God therein ‘shines into our hearts, to give us the knowledge of his glory in the face of Jesus Christ.’

Again, there is an evidence in the things themselves, unto *spiritual sense and judgment* ; Phil. i. 9. Heb. v. last. This is that which gives the mind the highest assurance of the truth of what it doth believe, that it is capable of in this world. For when it *finds in itself* the power and efficacy of the truth wherein it is instructed, that it worketh, effecteth, and implanteth the things themselves upon it, giving and ascertaining unto it all the benefits and comforts which they promise or express, and is thereby united unto the soul, or hath a real, permanent, efficacious subsistence in it ; then, I say, hath the mind the utmost assurance in the truth of it, which it doth or can desire in the things of this nature. But this belongs not unto our present design.

The testimonies pleaded are sufficient for the confirmation of our first general assertion, namely, *That it is the Holy Spirit who teacheth us to understand aright the mind and will of God in the Scripture, without whose aid and assistance we can never do so usefully nor profitably unto our own souls*. Sundry others that speak unto the same purpose will be afterward on various occasions insisted on.

I might add unto these testimonies, the faith and profession of the church in all ages. They all believed and professed, that the Scriptures could not be understood and interpreted without his assistance and inspiration by whom they were indited. But it is not necessary so to do. For those who profess a *trust* unto their own reason and un-

derstanding only, cannot be so ignorant as not to know that they have no countenance given unto their persuasion in *antiquity*, unless it were by the *Pelagians*. But whereas there is no profitable handling of sacred truths on any pretence, but with an eye unto the guidance of Christian practice; and when that is manifest, it gives a great confirmation in our minds unto the truth itself; I shall, before I proceed unto the consideration of the *especial ways* of the *teaching of the Holy Spirit* in this matter, and the *especial duties* required of us in compliance with them, that they may be effectual, divert a little unto some such considerations of that nature, as derive from this general assertion.

It is the great promise of the New Testament, that all believers shall be διδακτοὶ τοῦ Θεοῦ, ‘taught of God;’ which our Saviour himself pleads, as the only ground of their believing; John vi. 45. And so the apostle tells the Thessalonians, that they were θεοδιδάκτοι, 1 Thess. iv. 9. ‘taught of God.’ No man is αὐτοδιδάκτορ, taught of himself, his own teacher and guide in sacred things. Neither can any man have a worse master, if he trust thereunto alone. The diligent use of all outward means appointed of God unto this end, that through the knowledge of the Scripture we may be made wise unto salvation, we always suppose. Amongst them the *ministry of the church* hath the first and chiefest place; Eph. iv. 12—15. For they are with me of no account, who think it not worth the utmost of their diligence to attain the knowledge of those ‘wonderful things’ that are in the word. Yea, I should greatly admire at their stupidity, who will not give so much *credit unto the Scripture* testifying of itself, and the suffrage of all good men with it, that there are ‘wonderful things’ contained in it, so far as to inquire with their utmost diligence, whether it be so or no, but that I know the reasons and causes of it. But a *supreme teacher* there must be, on whose wisdom, power, and authority, we ought principally to depend, as unto this end, of being taught of God. And hereunto the use of our own reason, the utmost improvement of the rational abilities of our minds, is required. Those who would take away the *use of our reason* in spiritual things, would deal with us, as we said before, as the Philistines did with Samson; first put out our eyes, and then make us grind in their mill. The Scripture we own as the only rule

of our faith, as the only treasury of all sacred truths. The knowledge we aim at, is the *full assurance of understanding* in the mind and will of God revealed therein. The sole inquiry is, whether this supreme teacher be the Spirit of God instructing us in and by the Scripture, or whether it be the authority of this or that, any or all of the churches in the world, which either are so, or pretend to be so. Which of these will it be our wisdom to choose and adhere unto? That the Holy Spirit hath taken this work upon himself, we have already proved, and shall afterward farther demonstrate. Some churches, especially that of *Rome*, assume this office unto themselves. But it is too well known to the most to be trusted herein. And a great prejudice there lieth in this cause against that church at first. The Holy Spirit leaves unto us, yea, requires of us, the *diligent* use of the Scripture, and exercise of our own reason in subserviency unto his teaching. But this church requires us to renounce them *both*, in compliance with herself. And can it stand in competition with him? He is infallible, the *unction* is truth, and it is no lie; the Spirit is truth. This also indeed that *church pretends* unto; but with such an open affront unto all evidence of truth, as the world never underwent from any of its people before. He is absolutely, infinitely, eternally *free from any design*, but the glory of God, the present and eternal good of them that are instructed by him. It will be very difficult for those of *Rome* to pretend hereunto. Yea, it is apparent, that all the exercise of their *instructing authority* lieth in a subserviency unto their own interest. When I see that men by a pretence hereof, have gotten unto themselves *wealth, power, principalities, dominions*, with great revenues, and do use them all unto their own advantage, and mostly to the satisfaction of their lusts, pleasures, pride, ambition, and the like inordinate affections, I confess I cannot be free to deliver up blindfold the conduct of my soul unto them. He is full of *divine love* and care of the souls of them whom he doth instruct; is it so with them, or can any creature participate in his love and care? He is infinitely wise, and 'knoweth all things, yea the deep things of God,' and can make known what he pleaseth of them unto us: as the apostle discourseth; 1 Cor. ii. They who preside in that church are ignorant themselves as all men are, and the less

they know it, the more ignorant they are; yea, for the most part, as unto *sacred things*, they are comparatively so, with respect unto other ordinary men. As a late *pope*, when some of their divines waited for an infallible determination of a *theological controversy* among them, confessed, that *he had not studied those things, nor had the knowledge of them been his profession*.

But yet, notwithstanding these and several other differences between these *teachers*, it is marvellous to consider how many betake themselves unto the *latter of them*, and how few unto the *former*. And the reason is, because of the different *methods* they take in teaching, and the different *qualifications* they require in them that are to be taught. For as unto them whom the Spirit of God undertaketh to instruct, he requireth that they be *meek and humble*, that they give themselves unto *continual prayer, meditation*, and study in the word *day and night*; above all that they endeavour a conformity in their whole souls and lives unto the truths that he instructs them in. These are hard conditions unto *flesh and blood*; few there are who like them, and therefore, few they are who apply themselves unto the *school of God*. We may be admitted *scholars* by the other *teacher* on far cheaper and easier rates. Men may be made good *Catholics* as to faith and understanding, without the least cost in *self-denial*, or much trouble unto the flesh in any other duty. There is no qualification required for the admission of a man into the *Catholic schools*, and barely to be there, is to be wise and knowing enough. Wherefore, although all advantages imaginable, as unto the *teachers*, lie on the one hand, yet the pretended easy way of learning casts the multitude on the other. For it requireth more wisdom than we have of ourselves, to be at all that charge and pains in spiritual duty, and diligence in the use of all means for the right understanding of the mind of God, which is required in and of all them, who will advantageously partake of the teachings of the Holy Spirit; when it is supposed we may have all the ends which we aim at thereby, in an easy and naked assent unto the proposals of the church, without the least farther charge or trouble. But these are the measures of *slothful and carnal minds*, who prefer their ease, their lusts, and pleasures, before their souls. There is difficulty in all things that are excellent. Neither

can we partake of the excellency of any thing unless we will undertake its difficulty. But although the ways whereby we may come unto a participation of the teaching of the Holy Ghost, seem at first rough and uneasy, yet unto all that engage in them, they will be found to be, ‘ways of pleasantness and paths of peace.’

It may be said, That it is evident in common experience, that many men do attain a great knowledge and skill in the things revealed in the Scripture, without any of that internal teaching by the *illumination* of their minds, which is pleaded for; especially if it be to be obtained by the means now intimated, and afterward more fully to be declared. For they themselves do renounce the necessity of any such teaching, and esteem all that is spoken of it a vain imagination; and not only so, but live some of them in an open defiance of all those qualifications and duties which are required unto a participation of these teachings. Yet it is foolish to pretend they are not skilled in the knowledge of *divinity*, seeing it is plain that they excel most other men therein; and therefore do sufficiently despise all them who pretend unto any benefit by the *supernatural illumination* contended for.

I answer briefly in this place, It is true there are, and ever were, some, yea many, who ‘profess that they know God, but in works deny him, being abominable and disobedient.’ The knowledge which such men may attain, and which they make profession of, belongs not unto our inquiry; and we may easily discern both what it is in itself, and wherein it differs from that true knowledge of God, which it is our duty to have. For,

1. There is in the Scripture with respect unto the mind and will of God revealed therein, with the mysteries of truth and grace, mention of *γνώσις* and *ἐπίγνωσις*; ‘knowledge’ and ‘acknowledgment.’ The former, if it be alone, affects only the *speculative part* of the mind with notions of truth. And it is of very little use, but subject unto the highest abuse; 1 Cor. viii. 1. *ἡ γνώσις φουσιῶν*. It is that which *puffs up* men into all their proud contentions about religion, which the world is filled withal. The other gives the mind an experience of the power and efficacy of the truth known or discovered; so as to transform the soul and all its affections

into it; and thereby to give a *full assurance of understanding* unto the mind itself; Phil. i. 9. Luke i. 4. Col. i. 6. 9, 10. ii. 2. iii. 10. Rom. x. 2. Eph. i. 17. iv. 13. 1 Tim. ii. 4. 2 Tim. ii. 25. iii. 7. Tit. i. 1. 2 Pet. i. 2, 3. 8. ii. 20. It is not worth disputing at all, what knowledge of the first kind, or what degree therein, men, any men, the worst of men, may attain by their industry and skill in other common arts and sciences. For what if they should make such a proficiency therein, as to be filled with pride in themselves, and to confound others with their subtle disputations: will any real profit redound hence unto themselves, or the world, or the church of God? It doth not, therefore, deserve the least contention about it. But that *acknowledgment* of the truth which affects the heart, and conforms the soul unto the will of God revealed, is not attainable in any degree without the *saving illumination* of the Spirit of God.

2. Men may have a knowledge of *words*, and the *meaning* of propositions in the Scripture, who have no knowledge of the *things themselves* designed in them. The things revealed in the Scripture are expressed in propositions whose words and terms are intelligible unto the common reason of mankind. Every rational man, especially if he be skilled in those *common sciences and arts* which all writings refer unto, may, without any especial aid of the Holy Ghost, know the meaning of the *propositions* that are laid down in, or drawn from, the Scripture. Yea, they can do so, who believe not one word of it to be true; and they do so, as well as the best of them who have no *other help* in the understanding of the Scripture, but their own reason, let them profess to believe what they will. And whatever men understand of the meaning of the words, *expressions*, and *propositions* in the Scripture, if they believe not the *things* which they declare, they do not in any sense *know the mind and will of God* in them. For to know a thing as the mind of God, and not to assent unto its truth, implieth a contradiction. I shall never grant that a man understands the Scripture aright, who understands the words of it only, and not the things which is the mind of God in them. For instance, the *Jews* understand the words of the Scripture of the Old Testament in its own original language. And they are able to perceive the *grammatical sense* and construction of the propositions contained

in it. They are unacquainted with them and their writings, who will not acknowledge their skill, subtilty, and accuracy in these things. Yet will not any Christian say they *understand the mind of God* in the Old Testament: the apostle sheweth the contrary, and giveth the reason for it in the place before insisted on; 2 Cor. iii. Such a knowledge of the Scripture no wise man will value, let it be attained how it will.

3. This knowledge that may be thus attained doth only *inform the mind* in the way of an *artificial science*, but doth not really *illuminate* it. And to this end men have turned *divinity* into an *art* like other common human arts and sciences, and so they learn it instead of a *spiritual wisdom and understanding of divine mysteries*. It is true, that the knowledge of common learned arts and sciences is of great use unto the understanding of the Scripture, as unto what they have in *common* with other writings, and what they refer unto that is of human cognizance; but to bring in all the terms, notions, and rules of those *arts and sciences into divinity*, and by the mixture of them with it, to compose a *scheme* of divine knowledge, is all one as if a man should design to make up his *house of the scaffolds*, which he only useth in the building of it. Such is that knowledge of the mind of God in the Scripture, which many aim at, and content themselves withal. And it may be attained as any other *art* or *science* may, without any supernatural aid of the Holy Spirit, and is sufficient to *drive a trade with*, which, as things are stated in the world, men may use and exercise unto their great advantage. But, as was said before, it was not that which we inquire after. That wisdom in the mystery of the gospel, that knowledge of the mind and will of God in the Scripture, which *affects the heart*, and *transforms the mind* in the renovation of it unto the approbation of the good, acceptable, and perfect will of God, as the apostle speaks, Rom. xii. 2. is alone valuable and desirable, as unto all spiritual and eternal ends.

4. It doth not give πάντα πλοῦτον τῆς πληροφορίας τῆς συνέσεως εἰς ἐπίγνωσιν τοῦ μυστηρίου τοῦ Θεοῦ, ‘all riches of full assurance of understanding to the acknowledgment of the mystery of God,’ as, Col. ii. 2. the apostle speaks: it gives unto men no other assurance of mind in the things that they know, but what they have from acknowledged principles

and conclusions drawn from them, in any other science. But that knowledge which men have of the mysteries of the gospel by the teaching and illumination of the Holy Spirit, gives them *the riches of assurance of understanding* of a higher nature, even the assurance of faith. That assurance, I say, which believers have in spiritual things, is of another nature and kind, than can be attained out of conclusions that are only rationally derived from the most evident principles. And, therefore, doth it produce effects of another nature both in doing and in suffering. For this is that which effectually and infallibly puts them on all those duties and that obedience in self-denial, and the mortification of sin, which the world either knoweth not or despiseth. ‘For he that hath this hope in him purifieth himself even as God is pure;’ 1 John iii. 3. And this also enables them cheerfully and joyfully to suffer all that the world can inflict on them for the profession of those truths whereof they have that assurance. But nothing of this ensues on that common knowledge which men may have from themselves of sacred things. For,

5. It doth not enable men to *trust in God*, and adhere firmly unto him by love. The psalmist speaking unto God, saith, ‘They that know thy name will put their trust in thee;’ Psal. ix. 10. ‘To know the name of God,’ is to know the revelations that he hath made of himself, his mind and his will in the Scripture. They that have this knowledge, he affirms, ‘will put their trust in him.’ Therefore, it is certain, that those who *put not their trust in God*, have not the knowledge of him. There is a *γνῶσις ψευδονόμος*, ‘a knowledge falsely so called,’ which hath nothing of real spiritual knowledge but the name. And it is generally much given to disputing, or the maintaining of antitheses, or oppositions unto the truth; 1 Tim. vi. 20. But it is *falsely called knowledge*, inasmuch as those in whom it is, do neither *trust in God*, nor *adhere* unto him in love. And we shall not much inquire, by what means such a knowledge may be acquired.

It remaineth, therefore, notwithstanding this objection, that all real useful knowledge of the ‘wonderful things’ that are in the Scripture, is an effect of God’s *opening our eyes* by the illuminating grace of his Holy Spirit.

1. And this will enable us ‘to try the spirits,’ as we are

commanded, of many amongst us. For some there are who at once have cast off a due respect unto their *rule* and *guide*, the Scripture and Holy Spirit of God. Some formerly have pretended unto such a guidance by the *Spirit*, as that they have neglected or rejected the *written word*. And some pretend such an adherence unto the *word*, and such an ability in their own minds and reasons to understand it, as to despise the *teaching of the Spirit*. Others reject both the one and the other, betaking themselves unto another *rule* and *guide*, whereunto they ascribe all that belongs unto either or both of them. But a wandering *light* it hath proved unto them, that hath lead them into a bog of many vain imaginations and corrupt opinions. And it is fallen out with them as might be expected. For although the *Holy Spirit* be promised *to lead us into all truth*, yet is he so in an especial manner unto those which concern the person, offices, and grace of our Lord Jesus Christ immediately, whose Spirit he is. See John xvi. 13—15. 1 John ii. 27. Those, therefore, who renounce a dependance on him for instruction out of the word, are either left unto palpable *ignorance* about these things, or unto *foolish corrupt imaginations* concerning them. Hence some of them openly deny, some faintly grant, but evidently corrupt, the truth, concerning the person of Christ; and as unto his offices and grace, they seem to have little regard. And what else can be expected from such who despise the *teaching of that Spirit* of Christ, who is promised to lead us into all truth concerning him. Nor will the loudest pretences of some unto *the Spirit* in this matter relieve them. For we inquire not after *every spirit*, that any one who will, may make his boast of, but of that Spirit alone which instructs us in and by the written word. Until such men will return unto the only rule and guide of Christians, until they will own it their duty to seek for the knowledge of truth from the Scripture alone, and in their so doing depend not on any thing in themselves, but the saving instructions of the Spirit of God, it is in vain to contend with them. For they and we build on divers foundations, and their faith and ours are resolved into divers principles; ours into the Scripture, theirs into a light of their own. There are, therefore, no common acknowledged *principles* between us, whereon we may convince each other. And this is the cause that disputes with

such persons are generally fruitless, especially as immixed with that intemperancy of reviling other men, wherein they exceed. For if that be a way either of learning or teaching of the truth, it is what the Scripture hath not instructed us in. When the *veil* shall be taken from their eyes, and they turned unto the Lord, they will learn more modesty and humility. In the mean time, the issue between these men and us, is this and no other. We persuade men to take the Scripture as the *only rule*, and the holy promised Spirit of God, sought by ardent prayers and supplications in the use of all means appointed by Christ for that end, *for their guide*. They deal with men to turn into themselves, and to attend unto the light within them: whilst we build on these most distant principles, the difference between us is irreconcilable, and will be eternal. Could we come to an agreement here, other things would fall away of themselves. If we shall *renounce the Scripture*, and the instruction given out of it unto the church by the Spirit of God, betaking ourselves unto *our own light*, we are sure it will teach us nothing, but either what they profess, or other things altogether as corrupt. And if they on the other hand, will forego their attendance to their pretended light, to hearken unto *the voice of God in the Scripture* only, and to beg sincerely the guidance of the Holy Spirit therein, they will learn from thence no other thing but what we profess. Until, therefore, they return unto *the law and testimony*, without which, whatsoever is pretended, there is no *light* in any, we have no more to do, but labouring to preserve the flock of Christ in the profession of the *truth once delivered unto the saints*, to commit the difference between the *word and Spirit* on the one hand, and the *light within* on the other, unto the decision of Jesus Christ at the last day.

2. It is from no other root that the contempt of the mysteries of the gospel, and the preferring of other doctrines before them, is sprung up into so much bitter fruit among us. It is by the *Spirit of wisdom and revelation* alone, that our minds are enlightened to know what is the hope of God's calling, and what are the riches of his glorious grace. What is his work herein upon our minds, and what upon the word itself, shall be afterward declared. At present, from what hath been proved, it is sufficiently evident, that without his especial gracious aid and assistance, no man can discern, like, or ap-

prove, of the mysteries of the gospel. And is it any wonder, if persons who avowedly deny most of his *blessed operations*, should be either unacquainted with, or dislike, those *mysteries*, so as to prefer that which is more suited unto their natural understanding and reason above them? For why should men esteem of those things which they do not understand, at least as they ought, nor will make use of the means whereby they may be enabled so to do? Wherefore, if there be persons of such a pride and profaneness, as to undertake an inquiry into the Scriptures, to know the mind of God in them, and teach it unto others, without prayers and supplications for the teaching, leading, guidance, and assistance of the Holy Spirit, or which is worse, contemn and despise all those things as *enthusiastical*, it may not be expected that they should ever understand, or approve of, the mysteries that are contained therein. Is it not hence that both teachers and hearers make so *slow a progress* in the knowledge of the mysteries of the gospel, or grow so little in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ? How many are there amongst us, who for the time, and outward means are become as *babes*, and have need of *milk*, and not of strong meat? Whence is it that so many teachers do so little endeavour *to go on to perfection*, but content themselves to dwell on the rudiments or *first principles* of our profession? Is there not great studying, and little profiting? great teaching, and little learning? much hearing, and little thriving? Do we abide in prayer, and abound in prayer, as we ought, for that Spirit who *alone can lead us into all truth*? for that *unction which teaches us all things* with assurance and experience. I fear here lieth our defect. However, this I shall say, that there is no duty, which in this world we perform unto God, that is more acceptable unto him, than *fervent prayers*, for a right understanding of his mind and will in his word. For herein all the glory we give unto him, and the due performance of all our obedience, do depend.

CHAP. IV.

The especial work of the Holy Spirit in the illumination of our minds unto the understanding of the Scripture, declared and vindicated. Objections proposed and answered. The nature of the work asserted. Psal. cxix. 18. Eph. i. 18. 1 Pet. ii. 9. Col. i. 13. Luke xxiv. 25. John v. 20. opened and vindicated.

WE have, as I suppose, sufficiently confirmed our first general assertion concerning *the necessity of an especial work of the Holy Ghost, in the illumination of our minds, to make us understand the mind of God as revealed in the Scripture.*

That which we proceed unto, is to shew the *especial nature* of his work herein. And I shall take occasion thereunto from the consideration of an objection that is laid against the whole of what we affirm, which was touched on before.

For it is said, that there is no need of this endeavour : ‘ All men do acknowledge that the aid of the Spirit of God is necessary unto the study and interpretation of the Scripture. And so it is unto all other undertakings that are good and lawful. And herein consists the blessing of God upon man’s own diligence and endeavours. If this be that which is intended, namely, the blessing of God upon our endeavours in the use of means, it is granted. But if any thing else be designed, it is nothing, but to take off all industry in the use of means, to reject all helps of reason and learning, which is in the end to reduce into perfect enthusiasms.’

Ans. 1. Whether by the assignation of his *own work* unto the Spirit of God, we take away or weaken the use of *other means* for the right interpretation of the Scriptures, will be tried when we come unto the examination of those ways and means. At present I shall only say, that we establish them. For by assigning unto them their proper place and use, we do manifest their worth and necessity. But those by whom they or any of them are advanced into the place, and unto the *exclusion*, of the operation of the Holy Spirit, do destroy them, or render them unacceptable unto God, and

useless unto the souls of men. We shall, therefore, manifest that the *assignments* which we make in this matter unto the Holy Spirit, do render all our use of proper means for the right *interpretation of the Scripture*, in a way of duty, indispensably necessary; and the principal reason, so far as I can understand, why some deny the necessity of the work of the Holy Spirit herein, is because they like not those means whose necessary use doth arise from an admission thereof.

But thus it hath fallen out in other things. Those who have declared any thing either of the *doctrine*, or of the *power* of the grace of the gospel, have been traduced as opposing the principles of morality and reason, whereas on their grounds alone, their true value can be discovered, and their proper use directed. So the apostle preaching faith in Christ with righteousness, and justification thereby, was accused to have made void the law, whereas without his doctrine the law would have been void, or of no use to the souls of men. So he pleads, Rom. iii. 31. ‘Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid, yea we establish the law.’ So to this day, justification by the imputation of the righteousness of Christ, and the necessity of our own obedience, the efficacy of divine grace in conversion, and the liberty of our own wills, the stability of God’s promises, and our diligent use of means, are supposed inconsistent. So it is here also. The necessity of the communication of spiritual light unto our minds to enable us to understand the Scriptures, and the exercise of our own reason in the use of external means, are looked on as irreconcilable. But as the apostle saith, ‘Do we make void the law by faith? yea we establish it;’ though he did it not in that place, nor unto those ends that the Jews would have had and used it. So we may say, do we by asserting the righteousness of Christ, make void our own obedience; by the efficacy of grace, destroy the liberty of our wills; by the necessity of spiritual illumination, take away the use of reason? yea we establish them: we do it not, it may be, in such a way, or in such a manner, as some would fancy, and which would render them all on our part really useless, but in a clear consistency with, and proper subserviency unto, the work of God’s Spirit and grace.

2. That in particular which lieth before us is, to remove

that pretence of some, *that we need no other assistance of the Spirit of God for the right understanding of the Scripture, but only his blessing in general on our own endeavours.* To this end two things are to be inquired into : 1. What description is given of this work in the Scripture, and what are the effects of it in our minds in *general*. 2. What is the *nature of it in particular*.

1. The work itself is variously expressed in the Scripture. And it is that which, whether we will or no, we must be determined by in things of this kind. And the variety of expression serves both unto the confirmation of its truth, and illustration of its nature.

(1.) It is declared by *opening of our eyes*; Psal. cxix. 18. *The enlightening of the eyes of our understanding*; Eph. i. 18. This *opening of our eyes* consists in the communication of spiritual light unto our minds by the preaching of the word, as it is declared, Acts xxvi. 17, 18. And the expression, though in part *metaphorical*, is eminently instructive in the nature of this work. For suppose the nearest and best disposed proposition of any object unto our bodily eyes, with an external light properly suited unto the discovery of it, yet if our *eyes be blind*, or are closed beyond our own power to *open* them, we cannot discern it aright. Wherefore, on a supposition of the proposal unto our minds of the divine truths of supernatural revelation, and that in ways and by means suited unto the conveyance of it unto them, which is done in the Scripture, and by the ministry of the church with other outward means; yet without this work of the Spirit of God, called the *opening of our eyes*, we cannot discern it in a due manner. And if this be not intended in this expression, it is no way *instructive*, but rather suited to lead us into a misunderstanding of what is declared, and of our own duty.¹ So it is plainly expressed, Luke xxiv. 25. ‘Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the Scriptures.’ None, I suppose, will deny but that it is the work of the Spirit of God thus *to open our eyes*, or to *enlighten our understandings*, for this were to deny the express testimonies of the Scripture, and those frequently reiterated. But some say, he doth this by the word only, and the preaching of it. No other work of his, they affirm, is necessary hereunto, or to make us rightly to discern the mind of God

in the Scripture, but that it be proposed unto us in a due manner, provided we purge our minds from prejudices, and corrupt affections. And this is the work of the Spirit in that he is the *author of the Scriptures*, which he makes use of for our illumination. And it is granted, that the Scripture is the only external means of our illumination. But in these testimonies it is considered only as the object thereof. They express a work of the Spirit or grace of God *upon our minds*, with respect unto the Scripture as its object; ‘open my eyes that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law.’ The law or the Scripture, with the wonderful things contained therein, are the *things to be known*, to be discovered and understood. But the means enabling us thereunto, is an *internal work* upon our minds themselves, which is plainly expressed in distinction from the *things to be known*. This is the sum of what we plead, there is an efficacious work of the Spirit of God, opening our eyes, enlightening our understandings or minds, to understand the things contained in the Scripture, distinct from the objective propositions of them in the Scripture itself, which the testimonies urged do fully confirm.

(2.) It is expressed, as a *translation out of darkness into light*, he hath called us out of ‘darkness into marvellous light;’ 1 Pet. ii. 9. ‘delivered us from the power of darkness;’ Col. i. 13. whereby we who were ‘darkness became light in the Lord;’ Eph. v. 8. That in these and the like testimonies, the removal of the inward darkness of our minds, by the communication of spiritual light unto them, and not merely the objective revelation of truth in the Scripture is intended, I have proved at large elsewhere, and therefore, shall not again insist thereon.

(3.) It is directly called, *the giving of us an understanding*; ‘we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true;’ 1 John v. 20. The object of our understanding, or that which we know, is *he that is true*. God himself, even the Father, is primarily intended in this expression; for in the following words there is mention of his *Son Jesus Christ*, who is in like manner said to be *true*, because of his unity in essence with the Father. And, therefore, it is added, *That this is the true God*; ver. 21. But we are to know also what concerns *our being in*

him, and to know *him as he is eternal life*. And those things contain the substance of all evangelical revelations, which one way or other depend upon them, and are resolved into them; John xvii. 3. To know the *Father* the only true God, and the Son as the true God also in the unity of the same essence; to know that *eternal life* which was with the Father, as unto the eternal counsel and preparation of it, 1 John i. 2. and is *in the Son* for its actual communication unto us; and to know our *being in him* by a participation thereof, the things we mentioned, is to know the mind of God as revealed in the Scripture; especially these things are intended which are *foolishness* unto corrupted *reason*, and as such are rejected by it; 1 Cor. i. 23, 24. ii. 14.

And two things we are to inquire into with reference unto this knowledge :

[1.] What we are to have, to enable us unto it, and that is an *understanding*.

[2.] How we come by it, *It is given us by the Son of God*.

[1.] That which we have is *δύναμις*; this word in all other places of the New Testament, doth constantly denote the essential faculty of our souls, which we call *understanding*; Matt. xxii. 37. Mark xii. 30. Luke x. 27. Eph. i. 18. ii. 3. iv. 18. Col. i. 21. Heb. viii. 10. 1 Pet. i. 13. 2 Pet. iii. 1. And it seems in the Scripture to be distinguished from the *mind*, by respect unto *actual exercise* only. The mind in its exercise is our understanding; but it cannot be the natural and essential faculty of our souls, that is here intended; for although our natures are corrupted by sin, and not repaired but by Jesus Christ; yet doth not that corruption nor reparation denote the *destroying* or new *creation* of this being, or the nature of those faculties, which continue the same in both estates: wherefore, the understanding here mentioned is no more *but a power and ability of mind with respect unto what is proposed unto us*, to receive and apprehend it in a due manner; we are not able of ourselves *to know him that is true, and the eternal life that is in him*, but he hath enabled us thereunto; for this *understanding* is *given us* unto that end, that we may so know him. Wherefore, whatever is proposed unto us in the gospel, or in any divine revelation, concerning these things, we cannot *know them*, at least as we ought, un-

less we have the *understanding* here mentioned given unto us, for so alone do we come by it.

[2.] It is *given* us; that a real and *effectual communication* unto us of the thing said to be *given*, is intended in this word, of giving from God, is evident from every place in the Scripture where it is used. Some contend that God is said to *give things* unto us, when *he doth what lies in him* that we may enjoy them, though we are never made partakers of them. But the assignation of this way and manner of *God's doing what lieth in him*, where the effect designed doth not ensue, not strictly restrained unto outward means, is scandalous, and fit to be exploded out of Christian *theology*. God says, 'What could have been done more to my vineyard that I have not done;' Isa. v. 4. But the expression hath plainly a double limitation: 1st. Unto the *use of outward means* only, concerning which God speaks in that place, and from which he elsewhere plainly distinguisheth his *giving them a new heart*, and a *new spirit*, that they shall all know him, and be all taught of him. 2ndly. Unto the *use of those outward means* that were *then established*, as the only way for the season; for even in respect unto them he did more *for his vineyard* when he granted the gospel unto it. But is it possible that any man should think or believe that God cannot really *collate grace* and mercy on the souls of men when he pleaseth? Is it not as easy with him, on our restoration by Christ, to implant *habits of grace* on our souls, as it was at first to create us in *original rectitude* and righteousness? Wherefore, although we may inquire what God *doth*, and *hath done*, in this matter, according as he hath revealed it in his word, yet to say that he doth in any thing, *what lieth in him*, though the things which he affirms himself to do, be not effected, is defective both in truth and piety. When he saith he hath done such a thing, or will do so; for us to say, No, he hath not done so, or he will not do so, but he hath done, or will do, what lies in him, that it may be so, though it never be so, nor have so been, is to make him altogether like ourselves. But on this ground some pretend that *the Son of God* is said to have *given men understanding*, because he hath done what is *requisite on his part* in the declaration of the gospel, that we may have it, whether ever we have it or no. But, 1st. what he is said to *have done*, he had at least a design to do,

and if he had so, why doth it not take effect? It is, they say, because of the *unwillingness of men to turn unto him*, and other *vicious habits* of their minds, which hinders them from receiving instruction. But if it be so, then, (1st.) it is supposed that men also in their teachings can *give us an understanding*, as well as the Son of God; for they may teach men the knowledge of the gospel, if they are *willing to learn*, and have no darling lusts, or *vicious habits* of mind to hinder them from learning. (2ndly.) Seeing he hath taken this work on himself, and designs its accomplishment, cannot the *Son of God by his grace* remove those *vicious habits* of the minds of men, that they may have an understanding of these things? If he *cannot*, why doth he take that on him which he cannot effect? If he *will not*, why doth he promise to do that which can never be done, without doing of what he will not do? and why is he said to do (as he is according to this interpretation of the words) which he hath not done, which he will not or cannot do. 2ndly. The giving of *an understanding* is in this place plainly distinguished from the *proposition of the things to be understood*; that consists in the doctrine of the gospel, this in an ability to comprehend and know it.

Again, the words here used, of *giving understanding*, may indeed express the actings or operations of men towards others, when an external proposal of things to be understood, with the due use of means, is intended. But yet, if under their *teaching* men do not *learn* or comprehend the things wherein they are instructed by them, they cannot properly be said to have *given them an understanding of it*, with respect unto their moral operation unto that end, but only to have *endeavoured* so to do. But when this phrase of speech is used to express a *divine* operation, which questionless may be really *physical*, and so absolutely efficacious, to interpret it concerning an *endeavour* that may, or may not succeed, is not suitable unto those thoughts that become us concerning divine operations. Nor was there any reason why the apostle should *emphatically* assign this work, unto the Son of God, and that as he is the true God, and eternal life; if no more be intended but a work of the same nature and kind, with what a man might do. And if this be the sense of the words; it is from *ourselves* and not from the *Son of God*, that there is any truth in them, as unto the event. For he might

do, it seems, what lies in him to *give an understanding* ; and yet no one man in the world ever had an understanding of the nature designed ; for if it may be so with any unto whom he is said to give an understanding, as it is professedly with the most ; it may be so with *all* : not farther to debate these things at present, whereas so excellent a grace and mercy towards the souls of men, is here expressedly attributed unto the Son of God, as the author of it ; namely, that he *gives us an understanding that we may know him, which is true* ; I cannot think, that they interpret the Scripture unto his glory, whose exposition of this place consists in nothing but endeavours to prove that indeed he doth not so do.

(4.) It is expressed by *teaching, leading, and guiding into the truth* ; John vi. 45. xvi. 13. 1 John ii. 20. 27. the places have been opened before ; and two things are supposed in this expression of *teaching*. [1.] *A mind capable of instruction, leading, and conduct* : the nature must be *rational* and comprehensive of the means of instruction, which can be so *taught*. Wherefore, we do not only grant herein the use of the rational faculties of the soul, but require their *exercise* and utmost improvement : if God *teacheth* we are to *learn*, and we cannot learn but in the exercise of our minds. And it is in vain pretended, that God's communication of a supernatural ability unto our minds, and our exercise of them in a way of duty, are *inconsistent* ; whereas indeed they are *inseparable* in all that we are taught of God. For at the same time that he *infuseth a gracious ability* into our minds, he proposeth the truth unto us, whereon that ability is to be exercised. And if those things are inconsistent, the whole real efficacy of God in the souls of men, must be denied ; which is to despoil him of his sovereignty : but we speak now of natural ability to receive instruction, to be taught, with the exercise of it in learning. For these are supposed in the expression of the communication of a spiritual ability by *teaching*. [2.] *A teaching suited unto that ability is promised or asserted*. Three ways of this teaching are pleaded : 1st. That it consists in a *θεοπνευστία, an immediate infallible inspiration and afflatus*, of the same nature with that of the prophets and apostles of old. But, (1st.) this takes away the distinction between the *extraordinary* and *ordinary* gifts of the Spirit, so fully asserted in the Scripture, as we shall elsewhere declare. And if it

were so, God did not place in the church *some prophets*, seeing all were so, and were always to be so. 2ndly. It brings in a neglect of the Scripture, and a levelling it into the same state and condition with the conceptions of every one that will pretend unto this *inspiration*. 3rdly. The pretence visibly confutes itself, in the manifold mutual contradictions of them that pretend unto it. And would, 4thly. thereon be a principle, first of confusion, then of infidelity, and so lead unto atheism. 5thly. The *prophets* themselves had not the knowledge and understanding of the mind and will of God which we inquire after by their *immediate inspirations*, which were unto them as the written word unto us; but had it by the same means as we have; 1 Pet. i. 10, 11. Hence they so frequently and fervently *prayed for understanding*, as we have seen in the instance of David.

Wherefore, [2.] some say this *teaching* consists only in the outward preaching of the word, in the ministry of the church and other external means of its application unto our minds. But there is not one of the testimonies insisted on, wherein this promised *teaching of God*, is not distinguished from the proposition of the word in the outward dispensation of it, as hath been proved. Besides, every one that enjoys this teaching, that is, who is taught of God, doth really believe and come to Christ thereby. John vi. 45. 'It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God: every man, therefore, that hath heard and learned of the Father cometh unto me,' saith our blessed Saviour. But it is not thus with all, nor ever was, towards whom the most powerful and cogent means of outward instruction have been or are used.

Wherefore, [3.] this teaching is an *internal work of the Spirit*, giving light, wisdom, understanding unto our minds, so is spoken of, and promised in an especial manner, distinct from the outward work of the dispensation of the word, and all the efficacy of it singly considered. One testimony will serve to this purpose which hath been pleaded and vindicated already. It is by an *unction*, that we are thus taught; 1 John ii. 20, 21. But the unction consists in a real communication of supernatural gifts and graces; whereof *supernatural light* is that which is peculiarly necessary unto this end. The communication of them all, in all fulness unto Jesus Christ

the head of the church was his *unction*; Heb. i. 9. Isa. lxi. 1. Wherefore, in the real participation of them in our measure doth our unction, whereby we are taught, consist.

It is granted that this teaching is such as *regards our own industry* in the use of means appointed unto this end, that we may know the mind of God in the Scripture. But yet it is such as includes an *inward effectual operation* of the Holy Spirit concomitant with the outward means of teaching and learning. When the eunuch read the prophecy of Isaiah, he affirmed he *could not understand it* unless some one did *guide* him. Hereon Philip opened the Scripture unto him; but it was the Holy Ghost that opened his heart, that he might understand it; for so he did the heart of Lydia, without which she would not have understood the preaching of Paul; Acts xvi. 14. Wherefore, in our learning, under the conduct or teaching of the Spirit, the utmost diligence in the exercise of our own minds is required of us. And where men are defective herein, they are said to be *ῥωθοὶ ταῖς ἀκοαῖς*, Heb. v. 11. ‘dull in hearing,’ or slow in the improvement of the instruction given them. And it is a senseless thing to imagine that men should be diverted from the exercise of the faculties of their minds, merely because they are enabled to use them unto good purpose, or successfully, which is the effect of this internal teaching.

(5.) It is expressed *by shining into our hearts*. ‘God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined into our hearts; to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ;’ 2 Cor. iv. 6. Jesus Christ is the ‘image of the invisible God, the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person.’ And that because of the illustrious representation of all divine excellencies, that are made both in his person and his mediation. The person of the Father is the eternal fountain of infinitely divine glorious perfections; and they are all communicated unto the Son by eternal generation. In his person *absolutely* as the Son of God, they are all of them *essentially*; in his person as God-man, as vested with his offices, they are *substantially*, in opposition unto all types and shadows; and in the glass of the gospel they are *accidentally* by revelation; *really*, but not *substantially*, for Christ himself is the body, the substance of all. As the *image of God*, so is he represented unto

us in the glass of the gospel, and therein are we called *to behold the glory of God* in him; chap. iii. 18. The meaning is, that the truth and doctrine concerning Jesus Christ, his person and mediation, is so delivered and taught in the gospel, as that the glory of God is eminently represented thereby, or therein is revealed what we are to know of God, his mind and his will, as he is declared by and in Jesus Christ. But why is it then that all do not thus *behold the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ* unto whom the gospel is preached? or whence is it that all unto whom the gospel is preached or declared do not apprehend and understand the truth, and reality, and glory of the things revealed or proposed? that is, why they do not understand the mind and will of God as revealed in the gospel? The apostle assigneth two reasons hereof: [1.] From what *hindereth it in many*; [2.] From what is *necessary unto any* that so they may do.

[1.] The first is the *efficacy of the temptations and suggestions of Satan*, whereby their minds are filled with prejudices against the gospel and the doctrine of it, being blinded hereby, they can see nothing of beauty and glory in it, and so certainly do not apprehend it aright. Ver. 4. ‘The God of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ who is the image of God should shine into them.’ This is acknowledged by all to be an obstacle against the right understanding of the gospel. Unless the mind be freed from such *prejudices* as are the effects of such *blinding efficacy* of the suggestions of Satan, men cannot attain unto the true knowledge of the mind of God therein. How these prejudices are removed we shall shew afterward. But if the mind be free, or freed from them, then it is supposed by some, that there is need of no more but the due exercise of its faculties with diligence for that end, nor is any thing else required thereunto. It is true, in the ordinary dispensation of divine grace, this is required of us. But the apostle adds,

[2.] That there must, moreover, be a *divine light shining into our hearts*, to enable us hereunto. At least he doth so that this was granted unto them who *then did believe*. And if we have it not, as well as they, I fear we do not believe in the same manner as they did. Wherefore, although there be in the gospel, and the doctrine of it, an illustrious representa-

tion of the glory of God in Christ; yet are we not able of ourselves to discern it, until the Holy Spirit by an act of his almighty power do *irradiate* our minds, and implant a light upon them suited thereunto. He that doth not *behold the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ in the gospel*, doth not understand the mind and will of God as revealed therein, in a due manner. I suppose this will be granted, seeing both these things are but one and the same diversly expressed. But this of ourselves we cannot do. For there is an internal work of God upon our minds necessary thereunto. This also is expressed in the words. It is his *shining into our hearts to give the light of this knowledge unto us*: there is a light in the gospel; *the light of the glorious gospel of Christ*; ver. 4. But there must be a *light also in our hearts*, or we cannot discern it. And this is no natural light, or a light that is common unto all; but it is a light that, in a way of grace, is given unto them that do believe. And it is wrought in us by the same kind of efficiency, as God *created light* at the beginning of the world; namely, by a productive act of power. It is evident, therefore, that the *light in our hearts*, which God communicates unto us, that we may have the true knowledge of his mind and will in the gospel, is distinct from that *light of truth* which is in the gospel itself. The one is *subjective*, the other is *objective* only; the one is wrought in us, the other is proposed unto us; the one is an act of divine power in us, the other an act of divine grace and mercy towards us.

Other ways there are whereby this operation of the Holy Spirit in the illumination of our minds is expressed. The instances given, and testimonies considered, are sufficient unto our purpose. That which we are in the proof of is, that there is more required unto a useful apprehension and understanding of the mind of God in the Scripture, than the mere *objective proposal* of it unto us, and our diligent use of outward means to come to the knowledge of it; which yet as we shall shew is from the Holy Spirit also. And, as the denial hereof doth by just consequence make void the *principal means* whereby we may come unto such an understanding, namely, frequent and fervent prayers for the aid and assistance of the Holy Spirit; so no tolerable account can be given of the mind of God, and the meaning of the Scripture in the places insisted on. And certainly, if we cannot

understand the way and manner of the operation of the Holy Spirit herein, it were much better to *captive our understanding unto the obedience of truth*, than to wrest and pervert the Scripture, or debase the spiritual sense of it unto a compliance with our conceptions and apprehensions. But as we have herein the suffrage of them that do believe, in their own experience, who both value and acknowledge this grace and privilege unto the glory of God; so we have multiplied instances of such as being destitute of that skill which should enable them to make use of sundry external means, which are in their proper place of great advantage, who yet by virtue of this *divine teaching* are wise in the things of God, beyond what some others, with all their skill, can attain unto.

Moreover, the *effect* of this work of the Holy Spirit on the minds of men, doth evidence of what nature it is. And this, also, is variously expressed. As,

(1.) It is called *light*. ‘Ye were darkness, but are now light in the Lord;’ Eph. v. 8. The introduction of light into the mind is the proper effect of illumination. Men in their natural estate, are said to be *darkness*, the *abstract* for the *concrete*, to express how deeply the mind is affected with it; for as our Saviour saith, ‘If the light that is in any be darkness (as it is in them who are darkness), how great is that darkness!’ Matt. vi. 23. And because men are subject to mistake herein, and to suppose themselves, with the Pharisees, to see, when they are blind, he gives that caution, ‘Take heed, therefore, that the light which is in thee be not darkness;’ Luke xi. 35. For men are very apt to please themselves with the working and improvement of their natural light, which yet in the issue, with respect unto spiritual things, will prove but darkness. And while they are under the power of this darkness, that is, while their minds are deeply affected with their natural ignorance, they *cannot perceive spiritual things*; 1 Cor. ii. 14. no, not when they are most evidently proposed unto them. For, although *the light shine in darkness*, or cast out its beams in the evidence and glory of spiritual truth, yet *the darkness comprehendeth it not*; John i. 5. But by this work of the Holy Spirit we are made *light in the Lord*. Light in the mind is a spiritual ability to discern and know spiritual things, as is declared, 2 Cor. iv. 6. This is bestowed upon us, and communicated unto us by the

Holy Spirit. There is a real difference between light and darkness. And it is our minds that are affected with them; Luke xi. 35. The removal of the one, and the introduction of the other, are things not absolutely in our own power: he who is darkness, cannot make himself light in the Lord. Whatever he may do in way of disposition or preparation, in way of duty and diligence, in the utmost improvement of the natural faculties of his mind (which no man will ever rise unto who is under the power of this darkness, because of the insuperable prejudices and corrupt affections that it fills the mind withal), yet the *introduction of this light* is an act of him who openeth the eyes of our understandings, and shines into our hearts. Without this *light* no man can understand the Scripture as he ought; and I shall not contend about what they see or behold who are in darkness.

The expulsion of *spiritual darkness* out of our minds, and the introduction of *spiritual light* into them, a work so great, that they who were *darkness*, whose *light was darkness*, are made *light* in the Lord thereby, is an effect of the immediate power of the Spirit of God. To ascribe other low and *metaphorical* senses unto the words, is to corrupt the Scripture, and to deny the testimony of God. For this *light* he produceth in us by the same power, and the same manner of operation, whereby he brought light out of darkness at the creation of all things. But by this way and means it is, that we attain the knowledge of God in the face of Jesus Christ, or the revelation of his mind and will in the gospel.

(2.) It is called *understanding*. So the psalmist prays, ‘Give me understanding, and I shall keep thy law;’ Psal. cxix. 34. So the apostle speaks to Timothy, ‘Consider what I say, and the Lord give thee understanding in all things;’ 2 Tim. ii. 7. Besides his own *consideration* of what was proposed unto him, which includes the due and diligent use of all outward means: it was moreover necessary that *God should give him understanding* by an inward effectual work of his Spirit, that he might comprehend the things wherein he was instructed. And the desire hereof, as of that without which there can be no saving knowledge of the word, nor advantage by it, the psalmist expresseth *emphatically* with great fervency of spirit; Psal. cxix. 144. ‘The righteousness of thy testimonies is everlasting. O give me understanding

and I shall live.' Without this, he knew that he could have no benefit by the everlasting righteousness of the testimonies of God. All understanding indeed, however it be abused by the most, is the work and effect of the Holy Ghost. For 'the inspiration of the Almighty giveth understanding;' Job xxxii. 8. So is this spiritual understanding in an especial manner. And in this understanding both the ability of our minds and the due exercise of it is included. And this one consideration, that the saints of God have with so much earnestness prayed that God would *give them understanding in his mind and will*, as revealed in the word, with his reiterated promises that he would so do, is of more weight with me, than all the disputes of men to the contrary. And there is no farther argument necessary to prove that men do not understand the mind of God in the Scripture in a due manner, than their supposal and confidence that so they can do, without the communication of a *spiritual understanding* unto them by the Holy Spirit of God; which is so contrary unto the plain express testimonies thereof.

(3.) It is called *wisdom*. For by this work on the minds of men they are rendered *wise* unto salvation. So the apostle prays for the Colossians, 'That God would fill them with the knowledge of his will, in all wisdom and spiritual understanding;' chap. i. 9. These things may be the same, and the latter *exegetical* of the former. If there be a difference, *wisdom* respects things in general, in their whole *system* and *complex*; *understanding* respects particulars as they are to be reduced unto practice. Wherefore, the spiritual understanding which the apostle prays for, respects the mind of God, in especial or particular places of the Scripture; and wisdom is a skill and ability in the comprehension of the whole system of his counsel, as revealed therein. He who is thus *made wise*, and he alone, can *understand* the things of God, as he ought; Dan. xii. 10. Hos. xiv. 9. Psal. cvii. 45. Although men may bear themselves high on their learning, their natural abilities, their fruitful inventions, tenacious memories, various fancies, plausibility of expression, with long study and endeavours, things good and praiseworthy in their kind and order; yet unless they are thus *made wise* by the Spirit of God, they will scarce attain a due acquaintance with his mind and will. For this effect of that work is also

expressly called *knowledge*; Col. i. 9. 2 Cor. iv. 6. Eph. i. 17. Col. iii. 10. Wherefore, without it we cannot have that which is properly so called.

This is the second thing designed in this discourse. In the first it was proved in general, that there is an *effectual operation of the Spirit of God on the minds of men*, enabling them to perceive and understand the supernatural revelations of the Scripture when proposed unto them. And in the second is declared, what is the *nature of that work*, and what are the effects of it on our minds. Both of them have I treated merely from Scripture testimony. For in vain shall we seek to any other way or means for what we ought to apprehend and believe herein. Neither is the force of these testimonies to be eluded by any distinctions or *evasions* whatever. Nor whilst the authority of the Scripture is allowed, can any men more effectually evidence the weakness and depravation of their *reason*, than by contending that in the exercise of it, they can understand the mind and will of God, as revealed therein, without the especial aid and illumination of the Spirit of God. Nor can any man on that supposition, with any wisdom or consistency in his own principles, make use, in a way of duty, of the principal means whereby we may so understand them, as will afterward more fully appear.

CHAP. V.

Causes of the ignorance of the mind of God revealed in the Scripture; and of errors about it; what they are; and how they are removed.

THE supposition we proceed upon in this discourse is, that *God hath revealed his mind and will unto us, as unto all things concerning his worship, with our faith and obedience therein, in the Holy Scripture.* Thereon do we inquire, by what means we may attain the *saving knowledge* of the mind of God so revealed. And my principal design is to shew, what *aid and assistance* we receive of the Holy Ghost unto that end. To farther us in the knowledge hereof, I shall inquire into the *causes and reasons of that ignorance*, and those misapprehensions of the mind of God as revealed, which are amongst men, and how our minds are delivered from them.

It may be this part of our discourse might have had a more proper place assigned unto it, after we have given the truth pleaded a more full confirmation. But whereas an objection may arise from the consideration of what we shall now insist on, against the truth contended for; I thought it not amiss so to obviate it, as therewithal farther to illustrate the doctrine itself, which we labour in.

All men see, and most men complain of, that ignorance of the mind of God, and those abominable errors, attended with false worship, which abound in the world. How few are there who understand and believe the truth aright? What *divisions*, what *scandals*, what *animosities*, what *violence*, mutual rage, and persecutions, do ensue hereon, among them that are called Christians, is likewise known. Hence some take occasion to countenance themselves in an open declension unto *atheism*, some unto a great *indifferency* in all religion, some to advance themselves and destroy others, by the advantage of their opinions, according as they are prevalent in some times and places. A brief inquiry into the causes of that *darkness* and *ignorance* which is in the world amongst men outwardly owning the doctrine of the gospel, and especially of the *errors* and *heresies* which do abound above what they have done in most ages, may be of use to preserve us from those evils. A subject this is, that would require much time and diligence unto the handling of it in a due manner. I intend only at present to point at the *heads of some few things*, the observation whereof may be of use unto the end designed.

Those of the Roman church tell us, that the cause hereof is the *obscurity, difficulty, and perplexity of the Scripture*. If men will trust thereunto as their only guide, they are sure to miscarry. Wherefore, the only relief in this matter is, that we give up our souls unto the *conduct of their church*, which neither can err nor deceive. So indeed said Adam of old, when he was charged with his sin and infidelity; ‘The woman that thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat.’ But whereas it is an evil, yea, the greatest of evils, whose causes we inquire after, it seems in general more rational that we should seek for them in *ourselves*, than in any thing that God hath done. For he alone is good and we are evil.

It is granted that God hath given us his word, or the holy Scriptures as a declaration of his mind and will; and therefore, he hath given it unto us for this very end and purpose, that we may know them and do them. But whereas many men do fail herein, and do not understand aright what is revealed, but fall into pernicious errors and mistakes unto his dishonour and their own ruin, is it meet to say unto God, that this comes to pass from hence, because the revelation he hath made of these things is *dark, obscure, and intricate?* or the Scripture which thou hast given us doth deceive us? would a due reverence or deferency unto the wisdom, goodness, and love of God unto mankind be preserved therein;

Audax omnia perpeti
Gens humana ruit per vetitum nefas.^a

What will not the prejudices and corrupt interests of men carry them out into? God will for ever preserve those that are his, in an abhorrency of that religion, be it what it will, that by any means leads unto an undervaluation of that revelation of himself, which in infinite wisdom and goodness he hath made unto us.

But is it because there is *no reason* to be given of this evil from the minds of men themselves, that it is thus ascribed unto God? May not as well all the wickednesses that the world is filled withal be ascribed unto him and what he hath done? Doth not each one see a *sufficient cause* hereof even in himself, if he were not delivered from it by the power of the Spirit and grace of God? Do not other men who fail in the right knowledge of God, especially in any important truths, sufficiently evidence in other things, that the root of this matter is in themselves? Alas! how dark are the minds of poor mortals, how full of pride and folly? I shall say with some confidence, he who understands not that there is reason enough to charge all the errors, ignorance, and confusions in religion, that are, or ever were, in the world, without the least censure of obscurity, insufficiency, or intricacy in the Scripture, *on the minds of men*, and those depraved affections whose prevalency they are obnoxious unto, are themselves profoundly ignorant of the state of all things above and here below.

We must, therefore, inquire after the causes and reasons of these things among ourselves, for there only they will be found.

^a Horat. Od. lib. I. 3. 25.

And these causes are of two sorts: 1. *That which is general*, and the spring of all others; 2. *Those which are particular*, that arise and branch themselves from thence.

1. The first and general cause of all ignorance, error, and misunderstanding of the mind and will of God, as revealed in the Scripture, among all sorts of men, whatever their particular circumstances are, is the *natural vanity and darkness with which the minds of all men are depraved*. The nature of this depravation of our minds by the fall, and the effects of it, I have fully elsewhere declared. Wherefore, I now take it for granted, that the minds of all men are naturally prepossessioned with this darkness and vanity, from whence they are not, from whence they cannot, be delivered but by the saving illumination of the Spirit and grace of God. But because I have so largely treated of it both in the ‘Discourses of the Dispensation of the Spirit,’ Book iii. ch. 3. as also in those concerning the ‘Apostacy of these latter times,’ I shall not again insist upon it.

Two things I shall only observe unto our present purpose: namely, (1.) *That hereby the mind is kept off from discerning the glory and beauty of spiritual heavenly truth*, and from being sensible of its power and efficacy; John i. 5. (2.) That it is by the same means, *inclined unto all things that are vain, curious, superstitious, carnal*, suited unto the interest of pride, lust, and all manner of corrupt affections. Hence, whatever other occasions of error and superstition may be given or taken, the ground of their reception, and of all adherence unto them, is the *uncured vanity and darkness* of the minds of men by nature. This is the mire wherein this rush doth grow.

And the consideration hereof, will rectify our thoughts concerning those whom we see daily to *wander from the truth*, or to live in those misapprehensions of the mind of God, which they have imbibed, notwithstanding the clear revelation of it unto the contrary. Some think it strange that it should be so, and marvel at them: some are angry with them, and some would persecute and destroy them. We may make a better use of this consideration; for we may learn from it the *sad corruption and depravation of our minds in our estate of apostacy from God*. Here lies the seed and spring of all the sin, evil, and disorder, which we behold and suffer under in religious concerns in this world. And if we consider it aright, it will serve,

[1.] To impress a *due sense of our own condition upon our minds*, that we may be humbled. And in *humility* alone there is safety. ‘His soul which is lifted up, is not upright in him;’ Hab. ii. 4. for he *draws back from God*, and God hath no pleasure in him, as the apostle expounds those words; Heb. x. 38. It was in the principles of our nature, to adhere sacredly unto the *first truth*, to discern and abhor every false way: we were created with that *light of truth* in our minds, as was every way able to guide us, in all that we had to believe or do, with respect unto God, or our own blessedness for ever. But in the room thereof, through our wretched *apostacy from God*, our mind is become the seat and habitation of all vanity, disorder, and confusion. And no way doth this more discover itself, than in the readiness and proneness of multitudes, to embrace whatever is crooked, perverse, and false in religion, notwithstanding the *clear revelation* that God hath made of the whole truth concerning it in the Scripture. A due reflection hereon, may teach us *humility* and self-abasement. For we are by nature children of wrath, even as others; neither have we any good thing that we have not received. It is better, therefore, to be conversant with such thoughts on this occasion, than to be filled with *contempt of*, or *wrath against*, those whom we see yet suffering under those woful effects of the general *apostacy* from God, wherein we were equally involved with them. Yea,

[2.] It will teach us *pity and compassion* towards those whose minds do run out into the spiritual excesses mentioned. The merciful high-priest of the whole church ‘hath compassion on the ignorant, and them that wander out of the way;’ Heb. v. 2. and it is conformity unto him in all things, which ought to be our principal design, if we desire to be like unto him in glory. Want hereof is the ruin of religion, and the true cause of all the troubles that its profession is encumbered withal at this day.

It is true, for the most part, there is an interposition of corrupt affections seducing the minds of men from the truth. With these are they tossed up and down, and so driven with the winds of temptations that befall them. But is it *humanity* to stand on the shore, and seeing men in a *storm* at sea, wherein they are ready every moment to be cast away, and perish, to *storm* at them ourselves, or to shoot them to death,

or to cast fire into their vessel, because they are in danger of being drowned? Yet no otherwise do we deal with them whom we persecute, because they miss the knowledge of the truth, and it may be raise a worse *storm* in ourselves, as to our own *morals*, than they suffer under in their *intellectuals*. Concerning such persons the advice of the apostle is, 'Of some have compassion making a difference, and others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire;' Jude 22, 23. Some are so given up in their apostacy, as that they *sin unto death*, with such we are not to concern ourselves; 1 John v. 16. But it is very rare that we can safely make that judgment concerning any in this world. Sometimes, no doubt, we may, or this rule concerning them had never been given. As unto all others, the worst of them, those that *are in the fire*, the frame of our minds acting towards them, are here presented unto us; compassion of their present state, and *fear* of their future ruin, we ought to be possessed with, and acted by. But how few are they who are so framed and minded towards them, especially such as by their enormous errors seem to be fallen into the fire of God's displeasure? Anger, wrath, fury, contempt, towards such persons, men think to be their duty; more contrivances there are usually how they may be *temporally destroyed*, than how they may be *eternally saved*. But such men profess the truth as it were by chance. They never knew what it is to learn it aright, nor whence the knowledge of it is to be received, nor were ever under its power or conduct. Our proper work is to *save such persons*, what lies in us, *pulling them out of the fire*. Duties of difficulty and danger unto ourselves, may be required hereunto: it is easier, if we had secular power with us, to thrust men into *temporal fire* for their errors, than to free them from *eternal fire* by the truth. But if we were governed with compassion for their souls, and fear of their ruin, as it is our duty to be, we would not decline any office of love required thereunto.

[3.] Hath God *led us into the truth*, hath he kept us from every false way, it is evident that we have abundant cause of gratitude and fruitfulness. It is a condition more desperate than that of the most pernicious errors, to *hold the truth in unrighteousness*; and as good not know the Lord Jesus Christ, as to be barren in the knowledge of him. It is not, we see, of *ourselves*, that we either know the truth, or love

it, or abide in the profession of it. We have nothing of this kind, but what we have received; *humility* in ourselves, *usefulness* towards others, and *thankfulness* unto God, ought to be the effect of this consideration.

This is the first general cause of men's misapprehension of the mind and will of God, as revealed in the Scripture. The revelation itself is plain, perspicuous, and full of light. 'But this light shineth into darkness, and the darkness comprehendeth it not.' The natural darkness and blindness which is in the minds of men, with the vanity and instability which they are attended with, causeth them to wrest the Scriptures unto their own destruction. And for this sort of men to complain, as they do horribly in the *papacy*, of the obscurity of the Scripture, is all one as if a company of blind men should cry out of an *eclipse of the sun*, when he shineth in his full strength and glory. How this darkness is removed and taken away by the effectual operation of the Holy Spirit in our illumination, I have elsewhere at large discoursed.

2. *Corrupt affections*, prevalent in the minds of men, do hinder them from a right understanding of the mind of God in the Scripture. For hereby are they effectually inclined to wrest and pervert the truth, or are filled with prejudices against it. This is the *next cause* of all ignorance and error, where we must seek for the particular causes of them before proposed. The principal reason why the generality of men attain not a right understanding of the mind and will of God in the Scripture, is the *corrupt affections* that are predominant in their own minds, whereby they are exposed unto all sorts of impressions and seductions from Satan, and the agents for his kingdom and interest. So the apostle tells us, that 'unlearned and unstable men, do wrest the Scripture unto their own destruction;' 2 Pet. iii. 16. And another, that these 'unlearned and unstable persons, are men of corrupt minds;' 1 Tim. vi. 5. 2 Tim. iii. 8. that is, such whose minds are peculiarly under the power of perverse and corrupt affections. For these affections are *θελήματα τῆς διαβολῆς*, Eph. ii. 3. The *wills of the mind*, such as carry it with an impetuous inclination towards their own satisfaction, and such as render it obstinate and perverse in its adherence thereunto. These are the root of that *filthiness and superfluity of naughti-*

ness which must be cast out before we can 'receive the ingrafted word with meekness;' James i. 11. Some few of them may be named.

(1.) *Pride, or carnal confidence* in our own wisdom and ability of mind for all the ends of our duty towards God, and this in especial of understanding his mind and will, either keeps the souls of men under the bondage of darkness and ignorance, or precipitates them into foolish apprehensions or pernicious errors. As spiritual pride is the worst sort of pride, so this is the worst degree of spiritual pride; namely, when men do not acknowledge God in these things as they ought, but lean unto their own understandings. This is that which ruined the Pharisees of old, that they could not understand the mind of God in any thing unto their advantage. It is the *meek*, the *humble*, the *lowly in mind*, those that are *like little children*, that God hath promised to teach. This is an eternal and unalterable law of God's appointment, that whoever will learn his mind and will as revealed in the Scripture, must be *humble* and *lowly*, renouncing all trust and confidence in themselves. And whatever men of another frame do come to know, they know it not according to the mind of God, nor according to their own duty, nor unto their advantage. Whatever *knowledge* they may have, however *conspicuous* it may be made by their natural and *acquired abilities*, however it may be garnished with a mixture of secular literature, whatever contempt it may raise them unto of others, such as the Pharisees had of the *people*, whom they esteemed *accursed because they knew not the law*, yet they knew nothing as they ought, nothing unto the glory of God, nothing to the spiritual advantage of their own souls; and wherein is their knowledge to be accounted of? Indeed the knowledge of a proud man, is the throne of Satan in his mind. To suppose that persons under the predominancy of pride, self-conceit, and self-confidence, can understand the mind of God, as revealed in a due manner, is to renounce the Scripture, or innumerable positive testimonies given in them unto the contrary. Such persons cannot make use of any one means of spiritual knowledge that God requires of them in a way of duty, nor improve any one truth which they may know unto their good. Therefore our Saviour tells the proud Pharisees, notwithstanding

all their skill in the *letter* and *tittles* of the Scripture, ‘That they had not heard the voice of God at any time, nor seen his shape, neither had they his word abiding in them;’ John v. 37, 38. They had no right knowledge of him, as he had revealed and declared himself.

Men infected with this *leaven*, having their minds tainted with it, have been the great corrupters of divine truth, in all ages. Such have been the ringleaders of all *heresies*, and such were they, who have turned the knowledge of the will of God proposed in the Scripture, into a *wrangling science* filled with niceties, subtilties, curiosities, *futiles terms of art*, and other fuel for the minds of fiery contenders in wrangling disputations.

And this kind of *self-confidence* is apt to befall all sorts of men. Those of the meanest capacity may be infected with it, no less than the wisest or most learned. And we frequently see persons, whose weakness in all sound knowledge, and insufficiency for the use of proper means unto the attaining of it, might seem to call them unto *humility and lowliness of mind* in an eminent manner, yet lifted up unto such a degree of *spiritual pride* and conceit of their own understandings, as to render them useless, troublesome, and offensive unto men of sober minds. But principally are they exposed hereunto, who either really, or in their own apprehensions, are *exalted above others* in secular learning, and natural or acquired abilities. For such men are apt to think that they must needs know the meaning of the Holy Ghost in the Scriptures better than others, or at least, that they can do so, if they will but set themselves about it. But that which principally hinders them from so doing, is their conceit that so they do. They mistake that for divine knowledge which is in them the great *obstruction* of it.

(2.) The *love of honour and praise among men* is another corrupt affection of mind, of the same nature and efficacy with that before named. This is so branded by our Saviour as an insuperable obstacle against the admission of *sacred light* and truth, that no more need be added thereunto. See John v. 44. xii. 43.

(3.) A *pertinacious adherence unto corrupt traditions and inveterate errors* quite shuts up the way unto all wisdom and spiritual understanding. This ruined the church of the *Jews*

of old, and makes at present that of the Romanists incurable. What their forefathers have professed, what themselves have imbibed from their infancy, what all their outward circumstances are involved in, what they have advantage by, what is in reputation with those in whom they are principally concerned, that shall be the *truth* with them and nothing else. Unto persons whose minds are wholly vitiated with the leaven of this corrupt affection, there is not a line in the Scripture whose sense can be truly and clearly represented. All appears in the colour and figure that their prejudices frame in their minds. When the Lord Christ came forth first unto the preaching of the gospel, there 'came a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased, hear him;' Matt. xvii. 5. Neither was this command given unto them alone who heard it immediately from the *excellent glory* as Peter speaks, 2 Pet. i. 17. but as recorded in the word, is given equally unto every one, that would learn any thing of the mind and will of God in a due manner. No man can learn but by the *hearing of him*; unto him are we sent for the learning of our spiritual knowledge. And no other way doth he speak unto us but by his word and Spirit. But where the minds of men are prepossessed with apprehensions of what they have received from the authority of other teachers, they have neither desire, design, readiness, nor willingness to hear *him*. But if men will not forego all pre-imbibed opinions, prejudices, and conceptions of mind, however riveted into them by traditions, custom, veneration of elders, and secular advantages, to hearken unto and receive whatever he shall speak unto them, and that with a humble, lowly frame of heart, they will never learn the truth, nor attain a *full assurance of understanding* in the mysteries of God. These inveterate prejudices, are at this day those which principally shut out the truth, and set men together by *the ears* all the world over, about religion and the concerns thereof. Hence is all the strife, rage, tumult, and persecution that the world is filled withal. Could men but once agree to lay down all those presumptions which either wit, or learning, or custom, or interest, and advantage have influenced them withal, at the feet of Jesus Christ, and resolve in sincerity to comply with that alone which he doth teach them, and to forego whatever is

inconsistent therewith; the ways unto *truth and peace* would be more laid open than otherwise they are like to be.

(4.) *Spiritual sloth* is of the same nature, and produceth the same effect. The Scripture frequently giveth us in charge to use the utmost of our diligence in the *search* of, and for the finding out of, spiritual truth, proposing unto us the example of those that have done so before; Josh. i. 8. Psal. i. 1. Prov. ii. 2—6. John v. 39. 1 Pet. i. 11, 12. And any rational man would judge that if it had not been so expressly given us in charge from God himself, if it had not been a means appointed and sanctified unto this end, yet that the *nature of the thing* itself, with its importance unto our duty and blessedness, are sufficient to convince us of its necessity. It is *truth*, it is *heavenly truth*, we inquire after: that, on the knowledge or ignorance whereof, our eternal blessedness or misery doth depend. And in a due perception thereof alone, are the faculties of our minds perfected according to the measure which they are capable of in this life. Therein alone can the mind of man find rest, peace, and satisfaction, and without it must always wander in restless uncertainties, and disquieting vanities. It is a notion implanted on the minds of all men, that all *truth lies deep*, and that there is great difficulty in the attainment of it. The minds of most are imposed on by specious appearances of falsehood. Wherefore, all wise men have agreed that *without our utmost care and diligence* in the investigation of the truth, we must be contented to walk in the shades of ignorance and error. And if it be thus in earthly things, how much more is it so in heavenly? As spiritual *supernatural truth* is incomparably to be valued above that which relates unto things natural; so it is more abstruse, and of a more difficult investigation. But this *folly* is befallen the minds of the generality of men, that of all things they suppose there is least need of pains and diligence to be used in an inquiry after those things which *the angels themselves desire to bow down and look into*, and which the prophets of old inquired and searched after with all diligence. Whatever be their notion hereof, yet practically it is evident, that most men through *pride and sloth*, and *love of sin*, are wholly negligent herein. At least they will not apply themselves to those spiritual means, without the use whereof the knowledge of *divine truth* will

not be attained. It is generally supposed that men may be as wise in these things as they need to be, at a very easy rate. The folly of men herein can never be enough bewailed; they regard spiritual truth as if they had no concernment in it, beyond what custom and tradition puts them on, in reading chapters or hearing sermons: they are wholly under the power of *sloth*, as unto any means of spiritual knowledge.

Some indeed will labour diligently in the study of those things which the Scripture hath in common with other *arts and sciences*; such are the languages wherein it was writ, the stories contained in it, the ways of arguing which it useth with *scholastical accuracy* in expressing the truth supposed to be contained in it. These things are great in themselves, but go for nothing when they are alone. Men under the utmost efficacy of *spiritual sloth* may be diligent in them, and make a great progress in their improvement. But they are spiritual objects and duties that this sloth prevails to alienate the minds of men from, and make them negligent of; and what are those duties I shall afterward manifest.

The consideration I say, of the state of things in the world, gives so great an evidence of probability, that, what through the *pride and self-conceit* of the minds of many, refusing a compliance with the means of spiritual knowledge, and excluding all gracious qualifications indispensably required unto the attaining of it; what through *the power of corrupt traditions*, imprisoning the minds of men in a fatal adherence unto them, preventing all thoughts of a holy ingenuous inquiry into the mind of God, by the only safe infallible revelation of it; and what *through the power of spiritual sloth* indisposing the minds of the most unto an immediate search of the Scripture; partly with apprehensions of its difficulty, and notions of learning the truth contained in it by other means; and what through a *traditional course of studying divinity*, as an art or science to be learned out of the writings of men; the number is very small of them who diligently, humbly, and conscientiously endeavour to learn the truth from the voice of God in the Scripture, or to grow wise in the mysteries of the gospel by such ways as wherein alone that wisdom is attainable. And, is it any wonder, if many, the greatest number of men, wander after vain imagi-

nations of their own or others, whilst the truth is neglected or despised ?

(5.) Again, there is in the minds of men by nature a *love of sin*, which causeth them to *hate the truth* ; and none can understand it but those that love it. In the visible church most men come to know of the truth of the gospel as it were whether they will or no. And the general design of it they find to be a *separation between them and their sins*. This sets them at a distance from it in affection, whereon they can never make any near approach unto it in knowledge or understanding. So we are assured, John iii. 19, 20. ‘ Light is come into the world, and men love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved.’ Persons under the power of this frame take up under the shades of ignorance, and corrupt imaginations. And if they should attempt to learn the truth they would never be able so to do.

Lastly, Satan by his temptations and suggestions doth variously affect the minds of men, hindering them from discerning the mind of God, as revealed in the Scripture. ‘ The god of this world blinds the eyes of them that believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them ;’ 2 Cor. iv. 4. The ways and means whereby he doth so, the instruments which he useth, the artifices and methods which he applieth unto his ends, with his application of himself unto them according unto all occasions, circumstances, opportunities, and provocations, in great variety, were worth our inquiring into, but that we should too much digress from our present design.

I have but mentioned these things, and that as *instances* of the true original causes of the want of understanding, and misunderstanding of the revelation of the mind of God in the Scripture. Many more of the same nature might be added unto them, and their effectual operations unto the same end, be declared. But the mention of them here is only *occasional*, and such as will not admit of a farther discussion. But by these and the like depraved affections it is, that the *original darkness* and enmity of the minds of men against spiritual truth, and all the mysteries of it do exert themselves ;

and from them do all the error, superstition, and false worship that the world is filled withal, proceed. For,

Whilst the minds of men are thus affected, as they cannot understand and receive divine spiritual truths, in a due manner, so are they ready and prone to embrace whatever is contrary thereunto. If, therefore, it be the work of the Spirit of God alone in the renovation of our minds to free them from the power of these *vicious depraved habits*, and consequently the advantages that Satan hath against them thereby, there is an especial work of his necessary to enable us to learn the truth as we ought. And for those who have no regard unto these things, who suppose that in the study of the Scripture all things come alike unto all, to the clean and to the unclean, to the humble and the proud, to them that hate the garments spotted with the flesh, and those that both love sin and live in it, they seem to know nothing either of the design, nature, power, use, or end of the gospel.

The removal of these hinderances and obstacles is the work of the Spirit of God alone. For,

1. He alone communicates that *spiritual light* unto our minds, which is the foundation of all our relief against these obstacles of, and oppositions unto, a saving understanding of the mind of God.

2. In particular he freeth, delivereth, and purgeth our minds from all those *corrupt affections* and prejudices, which are partly inbred in them, partly assumed by them, or imposed on them. For the artifice of Satan in turning the minds of men from the truth, is by bringing them under the power of corrupt and vicious habits, which expel that frame of spirit which is indispensably necessary unto them that would learn it. It is indeed our *duty* so to purify and purge ourselves. We ought to cast out all ‘filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness,’ that we ‘may receive the ingrafted word with meekness;’ James i. 21. ‘To purge ourselves from these things, that we may be vessels unto honour, sanctified and meet for our master’s use, and unto every good work;’ 2 Tim. ii. 21. If it be not thus with us, let the pride and folly of men pretend what they please, we can neither learn, nor know, nor teach, the mind of God as we ought. And what men may do without giving glory unto God, or the

bringing of any spiritual advantage unto their own souls, we inquire not, seeing it belongeth only *equivocally* unto Christian religion. But although it is our duty thus to *purge ourselves*, yet it is by *the grace of the Holy Spirit* that so we do. Those who under a pretence of our own duty would exclude in any thing the efficacious operations of the Holy Ghost; or, on the other hand, on the pretence of his grace and its efficacy, would exclude the necessity of diligence in our duties; do admit but of one half of the gospel, rejecting the other. The whole gospel asserts and requireth them both unto every good act and work. Wherefore, the *purging of ourselves* is that which is not absolutely in the power of our natural abilities. For these corrupt affections possess, and are predominant in the mind itself, and all its actings are suited unto their nature, and influenced by their power. It can never, therefore, by its own native ability free itself from them. But it is the work of this great purifier and sanctifier of the church, to free our minds from these corrupt affections, and inveterate prejudices, whereby we are alienated from the truth, and inclined unto false conceptions of the mind of God. And unless this be done, in vain shall we think to learn the truth as it is in Jesus. See 1 Cor. vi. 11. Tit. iii. 3, 4. Rom. viii. 13. Eph. iv. 20—24.

3. He implants in our minds *spiritual habits and principles* contrary and opposite unto those corrupt affections, whereby they are subdued and expelled. By him are our minds made *humble, meek, and teachable*, through a submission unto the authority of the word, and a conscientious endeavour to conform ourselves thereunto.

It was always agreed that there were ordinarily preparations required unto the receiving of divine illuminations; and in the assignation of them many have been greatly deceived. Hence some in the expectation of receiving *divine revelations*, have been imposed on by *diabolical delusions*, which by the working of their imaginations they had prepared their minds to give an easy admission unto. So was it among the Heathen of old, who had invented many ways unto this purpose, some of them horrid and dreadful. And so it is still with *all enthusiasts*. But God himself hath plainly declared what are the *qualifications* of those souls, which are meet to be made partakers of divine teachings, or ever shall

be so. And these are, as they are frequently expressed, *meekness, humility, godly fear, reverence, submission of soul and conscience* unto the authority of God, with a *resolution* and readiness for and unto all that obedience which he requireth of us, especially that which is internal in the hidden man of the heart. It may be some will judge that we wander very far from the matter of our inquiry; namely, *How we may come unto the knowledge of the mind of God in the Scripture*, or we may aright understand the Scripture, when we assign these things as means thereof, or preparations thereunto. For although these are good things (for that cannot be denied), yet it is *ridiculous* to urge them as necessary unto this end, or of any use for the attaining of it. Learning, arts, tongues, sciences, with the rules of their exercise, and the advantage of *ecclesiastical dignity*, are the things that are of use herein, and they alone. The most of these things and sundry other of the same kind, we acknowledge to be of great use unto the end designed, in their proper place; and what is the due use of them shall be afterward declared. But we must not forego what the Scripture plainly instructeth us in, and which the nature of the things themselves doth evidence to be necessary, to comply with the arrogance and fancy of any, or to free ourselves from their contempt.

It is such an understanding of the Scripture, of the *divine revelation* of the mind of God therein, as wherein the spiritual illumination of our minds doth consist, which we inquire after; such a knowledge as is useful and profitable unto the proper ends of the Scripture towards us, that which we are taught of God, that we may live unto him. These are the ends of all true knowledge. See 2 Tim. iii. 14—17. And for this end the furnishment of the mind with the graces before mentioned is the best preparation. He bids defiance unto the gospel by whom it is denied. ‘God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble.’ Whatever be the parts or abilities of men, whatever diligence they may use in the investigation of the truth, whatever *disciplinary* knowledge they may attain thereby, the Spirit of God never did, nor ever will, instruct a *proud unhumbléd soul* in the right knowledge of the Scripture as it is a divine revelation. It is by these *gracious qualifications alone* whereby we may be enabled to cast out all filthiness and superfluity of naughti-

ness, so as to receive the ingrafted word with meekness, which is able to save our souls.

Our blessed Saviour tells us, 'that unless we be converted, and become as little children, we cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven;' Matt. xviii. 3. We cannot do so, unless we become *humble, meek, tender, weaned from high thoughts of ourselves*, and are purged from prejudices by corrupt affections, and I value not that knowledge which will not conduct us into the *kingdom of heaven*, or which shall be thence excluded. So God hath promised that 'the meek he will guide in judgment, the meek he will teach his way; the secret of the Lord is with them that fear him, and he will shew them his covenant; and what man is he that feareth the Lord, him shall he teach in the way;' Psal. xxv. 9. 12. 14. And so we are told plainly, that 'evil men understand not judgment, but they that fear the Lord understand all things;' Prov. xxviii. 5.

Now all these graces whereby men are made teachable, capable of divine mysteries, so as to *learn the truth as it is in Jesus*, to understand the mind of God in the Scriptures, are wrought in them by the Holy Spirit, and belong unto his work upon our minds in our illumination. Without this the *hearts of all men are fat, their ears heavy, and their eyes sealed*, that they can neither hear, nor perceive, nor understand the mysteries of the kingdom of God.

These things belong unto the work of the Holy Spirit upon our minds (as also sundry other instances might be given unto the same purpose); in our illumination, or his enabling of us rightly to understand the mind of God in the Scripture. But, whereas whoever is thus by him *graciously prepared* and disposed, shall be taught in the knowledge of the will of God, so far as he is concerned to know it in point of duty, if so be he abide in the ordinary use of outward means, so there are sundry other things necessary unto the attaining of farther useful degrees of this knowledge and understanding; whereof I shall treat afterward.

CHAP. VI.

The work of the Holy Spirit in the composing and disposal of the Scripture as a means of sacred illumination; the perspicuity of the Scripture unto the understanding of the mind of God declared and vindicated.

THERE is yet another part of the work of the Holy Spirit with respect unto the *illumination* of our minds, which must also be inquired into. And this concerneth the *Scripture* itself. For this he hath so given out, and so disposed of, as that it should be a moral way or means for the communication of *divine revelations* unto the minds of men. For this also is an effect of his infinite wisdom and care of the church designing to enlighten our minds with the knowledge of God, he prepared apt instruments for that end. That, therefore, which we shall declare on this head of our discourse is, that *the Holy Spirit of God hath prepared and disposed of the Scripture, so as it might be a most sufficient and absolutely perfect way and means of communicating unto our minds that saving knowledge of God and his will which is needful, that we may live unto him, and come unto the enjoyment of him in his glory.* And here sundry things must be observed.

First, The Holy Spirit hath not in the Scripture reduced and *disposed its doctrines or supernatural truths into any system, order, or method.* Into such a method are the principal of them disposed in our *catechisms*, and *systems of divinity, creeds, and confessions of faith.* For whereas the doctrinal truths of the Scripture have a mutual respect unto, and dependence on, one another, they may be disposed into such an order to help the understandings and the memories of men. There is indeed in some of the Epistles of Paul, especially that unto the Romans, a methodical disposition of the most important doctrines of the gospel. And from thence are the best methods of our teaching borrowed. But *in the whole Scripture* there is no such thing aimed at. It is not distributed into *common places*, nor are all things concerning the same truth *methodically* disposed under the same head: but its contexture and frame is quite of another nature. From this consideration some think they have an advantage to charge the

Scripture with *obscurity*: and do thereon maintain that it was never intended to be such a *revelation of doctrines* as should be the rule of our faith. Had it been so, the truths to be believed would have been proposed in some order unto us, as a *creed*, or *confession* of faith, that we might at once have had a view of them, and been acquainted with them. But whereas they are now left to be gathered out of a *collection of histories, prophecies, prayers, songs, letters, or epistles*, such as the Bible is composed of, they are difficult to be found, hard to be understood, and never perfectly to be learned. And doubtless the way fancied would have been excellent, had God designed to effect in us only an *artificial* or *methodical* faith and obedience. But if we have a due regard unto the *use of the Scripture* and the ends of God therein, there is no weight in this objection. For,

1. It is evident that the whole of it consists in the *advancement of men's own apprehensions* and imaginations against the will and wisdom of God. It is a sufficient reason to prove this the *absolute best way* for the disposal of divine revelations, because God hath made use of this and no other. One indeed is reported to have said, that had he been *present at the creation of the universe*, he would have disposed some things into a better order, than what they are in. For vain man would be wise, though he be like the wild ass's colt. And no *wiser* or better are the thoughts, that the revelation of supernatural truths might have been *otherwise disposed of*, with respect unto the end of God, than as they are in the Scripture. God puts not such value upon men's *accurate methods* as they may imagine them to deserve. Nor are they so subservient unto his ends in the revelation of himself, as they are apt to fancy; yea, oft-times, when, as they suppose, they have brought truths unto the *strictest propriety of expression*, they lose both their power and their glory. Hence is the world filled with so many *lifeless, sapless, graceless*, artificial declarations of divine truth in the *schoolmen* and others. We may sooner squeeze water out of a pumice stone, than one drop of spiritual nourishment out of them. But how many millions of souls have received divine light and consolation, suited unto their condition, in those *occasional occurrences* of truth which they meet withal in the Scripture, which they would never have

obtained in those wise *artificial disposals of them* which some men would fancy. Truths have their power and efficacy upon our minds, not only from *themselves*, but from their *posture* in the Scripture. There are they placed in such *aspects* towards, in such *conjunctions* one with another, as that their *influences* on our minds do greatly depend thereon. He is no *wise man*, nor exercised in those things, who would part with any one truth out of its proper place, where the Holy Spirit hath disposed and fixed it. The psalmist saith of God's testimonies, they are, *אֲנֹשֵׁי עֵצָה*, 'the men of his counsel;' Psal. cxix. 24. And no man will make choice of a *counsellor*, all whose wisdom consists in *sayings* and *rules* cast into a certain *order* and *method*. He alone is a good *counsellor*, who out of the largeness and wisdom of his own heart and mind, can give advice according unto all present occasions and circumstances. Such counsellors are the testimonies of God. Artificial methodizing of spiritual truths, may make men ready in notions, cunning and subtle in disputations, but it is the Scripture itself that is able to *make us wise unto salvation*.

2. In the writing and composing of the Holy Scripture, the Spirit of God had respect unto the *various states and conditions of the church*. It was not given for the use of one age or season only, but for all generations, for a guide in faith and obedience from the beginning of the world to the end of it. And the state of the church was not always to be the same, neither in light, knowledge, nor worship. God had so disposed of things in the eternal counsel of his will, that it should be carried on by various *degrees of divine revelation* unto its perfect estate. Hereunto is the revelation of his mind in the Scripture subservient and suited; Heb. i. 1. If all divine truths had from the first been stated and fixed in a *system of doctrines*, the state of the church must have been always the same, which was contrary unto the whole design of divine wisdom in those things.

3. Such a *systematical proposal of doctrines*, truths, or articles of faith, as some require, would not have answered the great ends of the Scripture itself. All that can be supposed of benefit thereby, is only, that it would lead us more easily into a *methodical comprehension* of the truths so proposed. But

this we may attain and not be rendered one jot more *like unto God* thereby. The principal end of the Scripture is of another nature. It is to beget in the minds of men, faith, fear, obedience, and reverence of God, to make them holy and righteous; and those such as have in themselves various weaknesses, temptations, and inclinations unto the contrary, which must be obviated and subdued. Unto this end every truth is disposed of in the Scripture as it ought to be. If any expect that the Scripture should be written with respect unto *opinions, notions and speculations*, to render men *skilful and cunning* in them, able to talk and dispute about *all things and nothing*, they are mistaken. It is given us to make us *humble, holy, wise* in spiritual things, to direct us in our *duties*, to relieve us against *temptations*, to comfort us under *troubles*, to make us to love God and to live unto him, in all that variety of circumstances, occasions, temptations, trials, duties, which in this world we are called unto. Unto this end there is a more glorious power and efficacy in one *epistle*, one *psalm*, one *chapter*, than in all the writings of men, though they have their use also. He that hath not experience hereof, is a stranger unto the power of God in the Scripture. Sometimes the design and scope of the place, sometimes the circumstances related unto, mostly that *spirit of wisdom and holiness* which evidenceth itself in the whole, do effectually influence our minds. Yea, sometimes an *occasional passage in a story*, a word or expression, shall contribute more to excite faith and love in our souls, than a volume of learned disputations. It doth not *argue, syllogize, or allure* the mind; but *enlightens, persuades, constrains* the soul unto faith and obedience. This it is prepared for, and suited unto.

4. The disposition of divine revelations in the Scripture is *subservient unto other ends* also of the wisdom of God towards the church, some of them may be named.

(1.) *To render useful and necessary the great ordinance of the ministry.* God hath not designed to instruct and save his church by any one outward ordinance only. The ways and means of doing good unto us, so as that all may issue in his own eternal glory, are known unto infinite wisdom only. The institution of the whole *series and complex* of divine ordinances, is no otherwise to be accounted for but by a regard and submission thereunto. Who can deny but that God might both

have instructed, sanctified, and saved us, without the use of *some* or *all* of those institutions which he hath obliged us unto. His infinitely *wise will* is the only reason of these things. And he will have every one of his appointments on which he hath *put his name* to be honoured, such is the *ministry*. A means this is not *co-ordinate* with the Scripture, but *subservient* unto it. And the great end of it is, that those who are called thereunto, and are furnished with gifts for the discharge of it, might diligently *search the Scripture*, and teach others the mind of God revealed therein. It was, I say, the will of God, that the church should ordinarily be always under the conduct of such a *ministry*. And his will it is, that those who are called thereunto, should be furnished with *peculiar spiritual gifts*, for the finding out and declaration of the truths that are treasured up in the Scripture, unto all the ends of divine revelation; see Eph. iv. 11—16. 2 Tim. iii. 14—17. The Scripture, therefore, is such a revelation as doth suppose and make necessary this ordinance of the ministry, wherein and whereby God will also be glorified. And it were well if the *nature and duties* of this office were better *understood* than they seem to be. God hath accommodated the revelation of himself in the Scripture with respect unto them. And those by whom the due discharge of this office is despised or neglected, do sin greatly against the authority, wisdom, and love of God. And those do no less by whom it is assumed, but not rightly understood, or not duly improved.

But it may be said, Why did not *the Holy Ghost dispose of all things so plainly in the Scripture, that every individual person might have attained the knowledge of them without the use of this ministry*. I answer, (1.) It is a proud and foolish thing to inquire for any reasons of the ways and works of God, antecedent unto his own will. ‘He worketh all things according to the counsel of his will;’ Eph. i. 11. and therein are we to acquiesce. Yet we may see the wisdom of *what he hath done*. As herein, (1.) he would glorify his own power, in working great effects by *vile weak means*; 1 Cor. iii. 7. 2 Cor. iv. 7. (2.) He did it to magnify his Son Jesus Christ in the communication of *spiritual gifts*; Acts ii. 33. Eph. iv. 8—12. (3.) To shew that in and by the work of his grace he designed not to destroy or contradict the faculties of our nature which

at first he created; he would work on them, and work a change in them, by means suited unto their constitution and nature; which is done in the *ministry* of the word; 2 Cor. v. 18—20.

(2.) The *disposition of the Scripture* respects the duty of all believers in the exercise of their faith and obedience. They know that all their light and direction, all their springs of spiritual strength and consolation, are treasured up in the Scripture. But in the unspeakable variety of their occasions, they know not *where every particular provision for these ends* is stored. Hence it is their duty to *meditate upon the word night and day*, to search for wisdom as silver, and to dig for it as for hidden treasure, ‘that they may understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God;’ Prov. ii. 3—5. And this being a duty whereunto the exercise of all grace is required, they are all improved thereby. The soul which is hereby engaged unto constant converse with God, will thrive more in that which is the proper end of the Scripture; namely, *the fear of the Lord*, than it could do under any other kind of teaching.

(3.) *A continual search into the whole Scripture, without a neglect of any part of it*, is hereby rendered necessary; and hereby are our souls prepared on all occasions, and influenced in the whole course of our obedience: for the whole and every part of the word is blessed unto our good, according to the prayer of our Saviour. ‘Sanctify them by thy truth, thy word is truth;’ John xvii. 17. There is power put forth, in and by every part and parcel of it, unto our sanctification. And there is such a distribution of *useful truths* through the whole, that every where we may meet with what is prepared for us, and suited unto our condition. It is to me no small argument of the *divine original of the Scripture*, and of the presence of God in it, that there is no *thought of our hearts* with respect unto the proper end of the Scripture; that is, our living unto God, so as to come unto the enjoyment of him, but that we shall find, at one time or other, a due *adjustment* of it therein, in one place or other.

There can no *frame* befall the hearts of believers, as unto spiritual things, whether it be as unto their *thriving* or *decays*, but there is a disposition of spiritual provision for it; and oft-times we shall find it then opening itself when we least

looked for it. *Powerful instructions, as unto our practice*, do often arise out of circumstances, occasional words and expressions, all arguing an infinite wisdom in their provision, whereunto every future occurrence was in open view from eternity, and a present divine efficacy in the word's application of itself unto our souls. How often in the reading of it, do we meet with, and are as it were surprised with, *gracious words*, that enlighten, quicken, comfort, endear, and engage our souls? How often do we find sin wounded, grace encouraged, faith excited, love inflamed, and this in that endless variety of inward frames, and outward occasions, which we are liable unto? I shall say with confidence, that he never was acquainted with the *excellency of the Scripture*, with its power and efficacy in any holy experience, who is capable of fancying that divine revelations might have been disposed unto more advantage with respect unto our living unto God. And these things are sufficient for the removal of the objection before mentioned.

Secondly, The Holy Spirit hath so disposed of the Scripture, *that the mind of God in all things concerning our faith and obedience, in the knowledge whereof our illumination doth consist, is clearly revealed therein*. There needs no other argument to prove any thing *not to belong* unto our religion, than that it is *not revealed*, or appointed in the Scripture; no other to prove any truth not to be *indispensably necessary* unto our faith or obedience, than that it is not *clearly revealed* in the Scripture. But in this assertion we must take along with us these two suppositions.

1. That we look on the Scripture and receive it *not as the word of men*, but as it is indeed the *word of the living God*. If we look for that *perspicuity* and *clearness* in the expression of divine revelation, which men endeavour to give unto the declaration of their minds, in things natural, by artificial methods and order, by the application of words and terms invented and disposed of on purpose to accommodate what is spoken unto the common notions and reasonings of men, we may be mistaken. Nor would it have become divine wisdom and authority to have made use of such methods, ways, or arts. There is that *plainness* and *perspicuity* in it which becomes the holy wise God to make use of, whose words are to be received with reverence, with submission of mind and

conscience unto his authority; and fervent prayer that we may understand his mind and do his will. Thus all things are made plain unto the meanest capacity; yet not so, but if the most wise and learned do not see the characters of infinite divine wisdom on things that seem most obvious and most exposed unto vulgar apprehensions, they have no *true wisdom* in them. In those very *fords* and appearing *shallows* of this river of God, where the *lamb* may wade, the *elephant* may swim: every thing in the Scripture is so plain as that the *meanest believer* may understand all that belongs unto his duty, or is necessary unto his happiness; yet is nothing so plain, but that the wisest of them all have reason to adore the depths and stores of divine wisdom in it. All apprehensions of the obscurity of the Scripture arise from one of those two causes:

(1.) That the minds of men are prepossessed with *opinions, dogmas, principles*, and practices in religion, received by tradition from their fathers; or have vehement and corrupt inclinations, unto such ways, practices, and opinions, as suit their carnal reason and interest. It is no wonder if such persons conceive the Scripture *dark and obscure*. For they can neither find that in it which they most desire, nor can understand what is revealed in it, because opposite unto their prejudices, affections, and interests. The design of the Scripture is to *destroy that frame of mind in them which they would have established*. And no man is to look for *light* in the Scripture, to give countenance unto his own *darkness*.

(2.) It will appear *obscure* unto all men who come to the reading and study of it in the *mere strength of their own natural abilities*. And, it may be, it is on this account that some have esteemed St. Paul *one of the obscurest writers that ever they read*. Wherefore, as a book written in Greek or Hebrew must be obscure unto them who have no skill in those languages; so will the Scripture be unto all, who are unfurnished with those spiritual preparations which are required unto the right understanding of it. For,

2. It is supposed, when we assert the *clearness and perspicuity* of the Scripture, that there is unto the understanding of it use made of that *aid and assistance* of the Spirit of God concerning which we do discourse. Without this the *clearest revelations* of divine supernatural things, will appear

as wrapped up in darkness and obscurity: not for want of *light* in them, but for want of *light* in us. Wherefore, by asserting the necessity of supernatural illumination, for the right understanding of divine revelation, we no way impeach the *perspicuity* of the Scripture. All things wherein our faith and obedience are concerned are clearly declared therein; howbeit when all is done, 'the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, nor can know them,' until the eyes of his understanding be enlightened.

3. The Holy Spirit hath so disposed the Scripture, that notwithstanding that *perspicuity* which is in the whole, with respect unto its proper end, yet are there in sundry parts or passages of it: (1.) *τινὰ δυσνόητα*, some things 'hard to be understood:' and, (2.) *τινὰ δυσερμήνευτα*, some things hard to be 'uttered or interpreted.' The former are the things themselves, which are so in their *own nature*; the latter are so from the *manner* of their declaration.

(1.) There are in the Scripture, *τινὰ δυσνόητα*, things *deep, wonderful, mysterious*, such as in their own nature do absolutely exceed the whole compass of our understanding or reason, as unto a full and perfect comprehension of them. Nor ought it to be strange unto any that sundry *divine revelations* should be of things in their own nature incomprehensible. For as unto us, many earthly and natural things are so, as David affirms, concerning the forming of our natures in the womb; Psal. cxxxix. 5, 6. 14—16. And our Saviour assures us, that heavenly things are much more above our comprehension than earthly; John iii. 12. Such as these are the *Trinity*, or the subsistence of one *single divine nature in three persons*; the *incarnation* of Christ, or the assumption of our human nature into personal union and subsistence with the Son of God; the *eternal decrees* of God, their nature, order, causes, and effects; the *resurrection* of the dead; the *manner* of the operations of the Holy Spirit in forming the new creature in us, and sundry others. Our rational faculties in their utmost improvement in this world, and under the highest advantage they are capable of, by spiritual light and grace, are not able, with all their *searchings*, to find out the *Almighty* unto perfection in these things. And in all disputes about the light of glory: as whether we shall be able thereby to behold the essence of God, to discern the depths of the

mystery of the incarnation, and the like; men do but darken 'counsel by words without knowledge,' and talk of what they neither do nor can understand. But yet the wisdom of the Holy Spirit hath in these two ways provided that we shall not suffer from our own weakness.

[1.] In that whatever is necessary for us to believe concerning these things is *plainly and clearly revealed* in the Scripture, and that revelation declared in such propositions and expressions, as are obvious unto our understandings. And he who thinks we can believe nothing as *unto its truth*, but what we can comprehend as unto its *nature*, overthrows all faith and reason also. And propositions may be clear unto us in their sense, when their subject matter is incomprehensible. For instance, consider the *incarnation of the Son of God*, and the *hypostatical union* therein of the divine and human natures, it is a thing above our reason and comprehension. But in the Scripture it is plainly asserted and declared, that the 'word which is God, and was with God,' 'was made flesh;' that 'God was manifest in the flesh;' that 'the Son of God was made of a woman, made under the law;' that 'he took on him the seed of Abraham;' that 'he came of the Jews according to the flesh,' 'who is over all God blessed for ever;' and that so God 'redeemed his church with his own blood.' Thus plainly and perspicuously is this great matter, as it is the object of our faith, as it is proposed unto us to be believed, declared and expressed unto us. If any one shall now say, that he will *not believe that to be the sense of these expressions*, which the words do plainly and undeniably manifest so to be, and are withal incapable of any other sense or construction, because he cannot understand or comprehend the thing itself which is signified thereby, it is plainly to say that he will believe nothing on the authority and veracity of God revealing it, but what he can comprehend by his own reason that he will believe; which is to overthrow all faith divine. The reason of our believing, if we believe at all, is God's *revelation of the truth*, and not our understanding of the nature of the things revealed. Thereinto is our faith resolved, when our reason reacheth not unto the nature and existence of the things themselves. And the work of the Spirit it is, to *bring into captivity* unto the obedience of the truth, every thought that might arise from our

ignorance, or the impotency of our minds to comprehend the things to be believed. And that new religion of *Socinianism*, which pretends to reduce all to reason, is wholly built upon the most irrational principle that ever befel the minds of men. It is this alone : *What we cannot comprehend in things divine and infinite, as unto their own nature, that we are not to believe in their revelation.* On this ground alone do the men of that persuasion reject the doctrine of the Trinity, of the incarnation of the Son of God, of the resurrection of the dead, and the like mysteries of faith. Whatever testimony the Scripture gives unto them, because their reason cannot comprehend them, they profess they will not believe them. A principle wild and irrational, and which leads unto atheism, seeing the being of God itself is absolutely incomprehensible.

[2.] That degree of knowledge which we can attain in and about these things is *every way sufficient with respect unto the end of the revelation itself.* If they were so proposed unto us, as that, if we could not fully comprehend them, we should have no benefit or advantage by them, the revelation itself would be lost, and the end of God frustrated therein. But this could not become divine wisdom and goodness to make such propositions unto us. For this defect ariseth not from any blamable *depravation of our nature* as corrupted, but from the very *essence and being* of it as created : for being finite and limited, it cannot perfectly comprehend things infinite. But whatever believers are able to attain unto, in that variety of the degrees of knowledge, which in their several circumstances they do attain, is *sufficient* unto the end whereunto it is designed ; that is, sufficient to ingenerate, cherish, increase, and preserve faith and love, and reverence with holy obedience in them, in such a way and manner as will assuredly bring them unto the end of all supernatural revelation in the *enjoyment* of God.

(2.) There are in the Scripture *τινὰ δυσερμήνευτα* : some things that are ‘hard to be interpreted ;’ not from the *nature* of the things revealed, but from the *manner* of their revelation. Such are many *allegories, parables, mystical stories, allusions, unfulfilled prophecies and predictions, references* unto the then *present customs, persons, and places, computation of times, genealogies, the signification of some single words* seldom or but

once used in the Scripture, the names of *divers birds and beasts*, unknown to us. Such things have a difficulty in them from the *manner* of their declaration. And it is hard to find out, and it may be in some instances impossible, unto any determinate certainty, the proper genuine sense of them in the places where they occur. But herein also we have a *relief* provided in the wisdom of the Holy Spirit, in giving the whole Scripture for our instruction, against any *disadvantage* unto our faith or obedience : for,

[1.] Whatever is *so delivered* in any place, if it be of importance for us to know and believe, as unto the ends of divine revelation, it is in some other place or places *unveiled* and plainly declared, so that we may say of it, as the disciples said unto our Saviour ; ‘Lo, now he speaketh plainly and not in parables.’ There can be no instance given of any obscure place or passage in the Scripture, concerning which a man may rationally suppose or conjecture, that there is any *doctrinal truth* requiring our obedience contained in it, which is not elsewhere explained. And there may be several reasons why the Holy Spirit chose to express his mind at any time in such ways as had so much *obscurity* attending of them.

1st. As for *types, allegories, mystical stories*, and *obscure predictions*, he made use of them on purpose under the Old Testament to draw a *veil* over the things signified in them, or the truths taught by them. For the church was not yet to be acquainted with the clear knowledge of the things concerning Jesus Christ and his mediation; they had not so much as a *perfect image* of the things themselves, but only an *obscure shadow* or representation of good things to come; Heb. x. 1. To have given unto them *a full and clear revelation* of all divine truths would have cast the whole design of God for the various states of the church, and the accomplishment of the great work of his grace and love, into disorder. It was not hard then for the church to be taught of old in *types and allegories*, but it was much grace and mercy that through them the light of the *sun of righteousness* so far beamed on them, as enabled them comfortably to wait until the day did break and the shadows flee away; as Cant. iv. 6. The fulness and glory of the revelation of *grace and truth*

was reserved for Jesus Christ. God did them no wrong, but reserved ‘better things for us;’ Heb. xi. 40.

2ndly. Whatever seems yet to be continued under any obscurity of revelation, it is so continued for the *exercise of our faith, diligence, humility, and dependance on God*, in our inquiries into them. And suppose we do not always attain precisely unto the proper and peculiar intendment of the Holy Spirit in them, as we can never search out his mind unto perfection, yet are there so many and great advantages to be obtained by the due exercise of those graces in the study of the word, that we can be no *losers* by any difficulties we can meet withal. The rule in this case is, that we *affix no sense unto any obscure or difficult passage of Scripture, but what is materially true, and consonant unto other express and plain testimonies*. For men to raise peculiar senses from such places, not confirmed elsewhere, is a dangerous curiosity.

3rdly. As to sundry *prophecies of future revolutions in the church and the world*, like those in the revelation, there was an indispensable necessity of giving them out in that obscurity of *allegorical expressions and representations* wherein we find them. For I could easily manifest, that as the clear and determinate declaration of *future events* in plain *historical expressions* is contrary to the nature of *prophecy*: so in this case it would have been a means of bringing confusion on the works of God in the world, and of turning all men out of the way of their obedience. Their present revelation is sufficient to guide the faith, and regulate the obedience of the church so far as they are concerned in them.

4thly. Some things are in the Scripture disposed on purpose that *evil, perverse, and proud men* may *stumble and fall at them*, or be farther hardened in their unbelief and obstinacy. So our Lord Jesus Christ affirms that he spake unto the *stubborn Jews in parables that they might not understand*. And whereas there must be *heresies*, that they which ‘are approved may be made manifest,’ 1 Cor. xi. 19. and some ‘are of old ordained unto this condemnation;’ Jude 4. Some things are so declared, that from them, proud, perverse, and wrangling spirits may take occasion to wrest them unto their own destruction. The truths of Christ as well as his person,

are appointed to be a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence, yea, a gin and a snare unto many. But this, humble teachable believers are not concerned in.

[2.] The Holy Spirit hath given us a relief in this matter, by supplying us with a *rule of the interpretation of Scripture*, which whilst we sincerely attend unto, we are in no danger of *sinful corrupting the word of God*, although we should not arrive unto its proper meaning in every particular place. And this rule is the *analogy* or proportion of faith. 'Let him that prophesieth,' saith the apostle, that is, expoundeth the Scripture in the church, 'do it according to the proportion of faith;' Rom. xii. 6. And this *analogy*, or 'proportion of faith,' is what is taught plainly and uniformly in the whole Scripture, as the rule of our faith and obedience. When men will engage their inquiries into parts of the Scripture, *mystical, allegorical, or prophetical*, aiming to find out, it may be, things new and curious, without a constant regard unto this *analogy of faith*, it is no wonder if they wander out of the way and err concerning the truth, as many have done on that occasion. And I cannot but declare my detestation of those bold and curious conjectures, which without any regard unto the *rule of prophecy*, many have indulged themselves in, on obscure passages in the Scripture. But now suppose a man brings no preconceived sense or opinion of his own unto such places, seeking countenance thereunto from them, which is the bane of all interpretation of the Scripture; suppose him to come in some measure prepared with the spiritual qualifications before mentioned, and in all his inquiries have a constant due regard unto the *analogy of faith*, so as not to admit of any sense which interfereth with what is elsewhere plainly declared, such a person shall not miss of the mind of the Holy Spirit; or if he do, shall be assuredly preserved from any hurtful danger in his mistakes. For there is that mutual relation, one to another, yea that mutual in-being of all divine truths, in their proposal and revelation in the Scripture, as that every one of them is after a sort in every place, though not *properly* and *peculiarly*, yet by *consequence* and *coherence*. Wherefore, although a man should miss of the *first proper sense* of any obscure place of Scripture, which with all our diligence we ought to aim at. Yet whilst he receiveth none but what contains a truth agreeable unto what is revealed in

other places, the error of his mind neither endangereth his own faith or obedience, nor those of any others.

[3.] For those things which are peculiarly difficult, as *genealogies, chronological computations* of time, and the like, which are accidental unto the design of the Scripture, those who are able so to do unto their own edification, or others, may exercise themselves therein; and by all others, the consideration of them in particular, may be safely omitted.

And these are the heads of the *work of the Holy Spirit* on our minds, and on the Scriptures, considered distinctly and apart, with reference unto the right understanding of the *mind of God in them*. By the former sort our *minds* are prepared to understand the Scripture; and by the latter *Scripture* is prepared and suited unto our understandings. There yet remains the consideration of what he doth, or what help he affords unto us, in the *actual application of our minds unto the understanding and interpretation of the word*. And this respecteth the means which we are to make use of unto that end and purpose, and these also shall be briefly declared.

CHAP. VII.

Means to be used for the right understanding of the mind of God in the Scripture. Those which are prescribed in a way of duty.

THE means to be used for the right understanding and interpretation of the Scripture are of two sorts.

I. That which is general and absolutely necessary.

II. Such as consist in the due improvement thereof.

The first is *diligent reading of the Scripture with a sedate, rational consideration of what we read*. Nothing is more frequently recommended unto us; and, not to insist on particular testimonies, the whole cxixth Psalm is spent in the declaration of this duty, and the benefits which are attained thereby. Herein consists the first natural exercise of our minds in order unto the understanding of it. So the eunuch read and pondered on the prophecy of Isaiah, though of himself he could not attain the understanding of what he read; Acts viii. 30, 31. Either reading, or that which is equivalent thereunto, is that whereby we do, and without which it

is impossible we should apply our minds to know what is contained in the Scriptures. And this is that which all other means are designed to render useful. Now by this *reading* I understand that which is *staid, sedate, considerative*, with respect unto the end aimed at; *reading* attended with a due consideration of the things *read*; inquiry into them, meditation on them, with a regard unto the design and scope of the place, with all other advantages for the due investigation of the truth.

Frequent reading of the word more generally and cursorily, whereunto all Christians ought to be trained from their youth (2 Tim. iii. 15.), and which all closets and families should be acquainted withal (Deut. vi. 6—9.), is of great use and advantage; and I shall, therefore, name some particular benefits which may be received thereby.

1. Hereby the minds of men are brought into a *general acquaintance* with the nature and design of the *book of God*, which some to their present shame, and future ruin, are prodigiously ignorant of.

2. They who are exercised herein, come to know *distinctly* what things are treated of in the *particular books* and passages of it; whilst others who live in a *neglect of this duty*, scarce know what books are *historical*, what *prophetical*, or what *doctrinal*, in the whole Bible.

3. Hereby they exercise themselves unto *thoughts of heavenly things*, and a holy converse with God; if they bring along with them as they ought, hearts *humble* and sensible of his authority in the word.

4. Their minds are insensibly furnished with *due conceptions about God, spiritual things, themselves, and their conditions*; and their memories with expressions proper and meet to be used about them in prayer or otherwise.

5. God oftentimes takes occasion herein, to *influence their souls* with the efficacy of divine truth in particular, in the way of *exhortation, reproof, instruction, or consolation*, whereof all who attend diligently unto this duty, have experience.

6. They come by *reason of use* to have their *senses exercised* to discern good and evil, so that if any noxious or corrupt sense of any place of the Scripture be suggested unto them, they have in readiness wherewith to oppose it, from other places from whence they are instructed in the truth.

And many other advantages there are which men may reap from the *constant reading* of the Scripture, which I therefore reckon as a *general means* of coming to the knowledge of the mind of God therein. But this is not that which at present I especially intend. Wherefore,

By this *reading* of the Scripture, I mean the studying of it in the use of means to come to a due understanding of it in particular places. For it is about the means of the *solemn interpretation* of the Scripture that we now inquire. Hereunto, I say, the general study of the whole, and in particular the places to be interpreted is required. It may seem altogether needless and impertinent to give this direction, for the understanding of the mind of God in the Scripture, namely, that we should read and study it to that end. For who can imagine how it should be done otherwise. But I wish the practice of many, it may be, of the most, did not render this direction necessary. For in their design to come to the knowledge of spiritual things, the direct immediate study of the Scripture, is that which they least of all apply themselves unto. Other *writings* they will read and study with diligence. But their reading of the Scripture is for the most part superficial, without that intension of mind and spirit, that use and application of means which are necessary unto the understanding of it, as the event doth manifest. It is the immediate study of the Scripture that I intend. And hereunto I do refer: (1.) A due consideration of the *analogy of faith* always to be retained. (2.) A due *examination* of the design and *scope of the place*. (3.) A diligent observation of *antecedents* and *consequents*, with all those general rules which are usually given as directions in the interpretation of the Scripture. This, therefore, in the diligent exercise of our minds and reasons is the first general outward means of knowing the mind of God in the Scripture, and the interpretation thereof.

II. The means designed for the improvement hereof, or our profitable use of it, are of three sorts. i. *Spiritual*. ii. *Disciplinary*. iii. *Ecclesiastical*. Some instances on each head will farther clear what I intend.

1. The first thing required, as a *spiritual means*, is *prayer*. I intend *fervent and earnest prayer* for the assistance of the Spirit of God, revealing the mind of God as in the whole

Scripture, so in particular books and passages of it. I have proved before that this is both enjoined and commanded unto us by the practice of the *prophets* and *apostles*. And this also by the way invincibly proves, that the due investigation of the mind of God in the Scripture, is a work above the utmost improvement of natural reason, with all outward advantages whatsoever. For were we sufficient of ourselves, without immediate divine aid and assistance for this work, why do we pray for them? with which argument the ancient church perpetually urged the *Pelagians*, as to the necessity of saving grace. And it may be justly supposed that no man who professeth himself a Christian, can be so forsaken of all sobriety, as once to question whether this be the *duty of every one* who hath either desire or design to attain any real knowledge of the will of God in the Scripture. But the practical neglect of this duty is the true reason why so many that are skilful enough in the *disciplinary means of knowledge* are yet such strangers to the true knowledge of the mind of God. And this prayer is of two sorts.

(1.) That which respects the *teaching of the Spirit* in general, whereby we labour in our prayers, *that he would enlighten our minds, and lead us into the knowledge of the truth*, according to the work before described. The *importance of this grace* unto our faith and obedience, the *multiplied promises* of God concerning it, our necessity of it from our natural weakness, ignorance, and darkness, should render it a principal part of our daily supplications. Especially is this incumbent on them who are called in an especial manner to *search the Scriptures*, and to declare the mind of God in them unto others. And great are the advantages which a conscientious discharge of this duty, with a due reverence of God, brings along with it. Prejudices, preconceived opinions, engagements by secular advantages, false confidences, authority of men, influences from parties and societies, will be all laid level before it, at least, be gradually exterminated out of the minds of men thereby. And how much the casting out of all this *old leaven* tends to prepare the mind for, and to give it a due understanding of, divine revelations, hath been proved before. I no way doubt, but that the rise and continuance of all those *enormous errors* which so infest Christian religion, and which many seek so sedulously to confirm

from the Scripture itself, are in a great measure to be ascribed unto the corrupt affections with the power of tradition, and influences of secular advantages, which cannot firm their station in the minds of them who are constant sincere suppliants at the throne of grace to be taught of God what is his mind and will in his word. For it includes a *prevailing resolution* sincerely to receive what we are so instructed in, whatever effects it may have upon the inward or outward man. And this is the only way to preserve our souls under the influences of divine teachings, and the irradiation of the Holy Spirit, without which we can neither learn, nor know any thing as we ought. I suppose, therefore, this may be fixed on as a *common principle of Christianity*; namely, that constant and fervent prayer for the divine assistance of the Holy Spirit, is such an indispensable means for the attaining the knowledge of the mind of God in the Scripture, as that without it all others will not be available.

Nor do I believe that any one who doth, and can thus pray as he ought, in a conscientious study of the word, shall ever be left unto the *final prevalency* of any pernicious error; or the ignorance of any fundamental truth. None utterly miscarry in the seeking after the mind of God, but those who are perverted by their own corrupt minds. Whatever appearance there be of sincerity and diligence in seeking after truth, if men miscarry therein, it is far more safe to judge, that they do so, either through the neglect of this duty, or indulgence unto some corruption of their hearts and minds, than that God is wanting to reveal himself unto those that diligently seek him. And there are unfailing grounds of this assurance. For, [1.] faith exercised in this duty will work out all that *filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness*, which would hinder us so to receive the ingrafted word with meekness, as that it should save our souls. [2.] It will work in the mind those gracious qualifications of *humility and meekness*, whereunto the teachings of God are promised in an especial manner, as we have shewed. And, [3.] our Saviour hath assured us, that his *heavenly Father will give the Holy Spirit unto them that ask him*. Luke xi. 13. Neither is any supplication for the Holy Spirit more acceptable unto God, than that which designs the knowledge of his mind and will that we may do them. [4.] All those *graces* which render

the mind *teachable*, and meet unto the reception of heavenly truths, are kept up unto a due exercise therein. If we deceive not ourselves in these things, we cannot be deceived. For, in the discharge of this duty those things are learned in their *power*, whereof we have the *notion* only in other means of instruction. And hereby whatever we learn, is so fixed upon our minds, possesseth them with such power, transforming them into the likeness of it, as that they are prepared for the communication of farther light, and increases in the degrees of knowledge.

Nor can it be granted on the other hand, that any sacred truth is learned in a *due manner*, whatever diligence be used in its acquisition; or that we can know the mind of God in the Scripture in any thing as we ought, when the management of all other means which we make use of unto that end, is not committed unto the hand of this duty. The apostle desiring earnestly that those unto whom he wrote, and whom he instructed in the mysteries of the gospel, might have a *due spiritual understanding* of the mind of God, as revealed and taught in them, prays with all fervency of mind, that they might have a ‘communication of the Spirit of wisdom and revelation from above’ to enable them thereunto; Eph. i. 17—19. iii. 14—17. For without this he knew it could not be attained. That which he did for them, we are obliged to do for *ourselves*. And where this is neglected, especially considering that the *supplies of the Spirit* unto this purpose are confined unto them that *ask* him, there is no ground of expectation, that any one should ever learn the saving knowledge of the mind of God in a due manner.

I shall, therefore, fix this assertion as a sacred truth. *Whoever in the diligent and immediate study of the Scripture to know the mind of God therein so as to do it, doth abide in fervent supplications in and by Jesus Christ for supplies of the Spirit of grace, to lead him into all truth, to reveal and make known unto him the truth as it is in Jesus, to give him an understanding of the Scriptures, and the will of God therein, he shall be preserved from pernicious errors, and attain that degree in knowledge, as shall be sufficient unto the guidance and preservation of the life of God, in the whole of his faith and obedience. And more security of truth there is herein, than in men’s giving themselves up unto any other conduct in this world whatever.*

The goodness of God, his faithfulness in being the rewarder of them that diligently seek him, the command of this duty unto this end, the promises annexed unto it, with the whole nature of religion, do give us the highest security herein. And although these *duties* cannot but be accompanied with a conscientious care and fear of errors and mistakes, yet the *persons* that are found in them, have no ground of troublesome thoughts or fearful suspicions, that they shall be deceived or fail in the end they aim at.

(2.) Prayer respects *particular occasions*, or especial places of Scripture, whose exposition or interpretation we inquire after. This is the great duty of a *faithful interpreter*, that which in, with, and after, the use of all means, he betakes himself unto. An experience of divine guidance and assistance herein, is that which unto some is invaluable; however by others it be despised. But shall we think it strange for a Christian, when it may be after the use of all other means, he finds himself at a loss about the true meaning and intention of the Holy Spirit in any place or text of Scripture, to betake himself in a more than ordinary manner unto God by *prayer*, that he would by his Spirit enlighten, guide, teach, and so reveal the truth unto him: or should we think it strange that God should hear such prayers, and instruct such persons in the *secrets of his covenant*? God forbid there should be such *atheistical* thoughts in the minds of any, who would be esteemed Christians. Yea, I must say, that for a man to undertake the interpretation of any part or portion of Scripture in a solemn manner, without *invocation of God* to be taught and instructed by his Spirit, is a high provocation of him. Nor shall I expect the discovery of truth from any one who so proudly and ignorantly engageth in a work so much above his ability to manage. I speak this of solemn and stated interpretations; for otherwise a ‘scribe ready furnished for the kingdom of God,’ may, as he hath occasion, from the spiritual light and understanding wherewith he is endued, and the stores he hath already received, declare the mind of God unto the edification of others. But this is the first means to render our *studying of the Scripture* useful and effectual unto the end aimed at.

This, as was said, is the *sheet anchor* of a faithful expositor of the Scripture, which he betakes himself unto in all

difficulties. Nor can he without it be led into a comfortable satisfaction, that he hath attained the mind of the Holy Ghost in any divine revelation. When all other helps fail, as he shall in most places find them to do, if he be really intent on the disquisition of truth, this will yield him his best relief. And so long as this is attended unto, we need not fear farther useful interpretations of the Scripture, or the several parts of it, than as yet have been attained unto by the endeavours of others. For the stores of truth laid up in it are inexhaustible. And hereby will they be opened unto those that inquire into them with humility and diligence. The labours of those who have gone before us are of excellent use herein. But they are yet very far from having discovered the *depths* of this vein of wisdom. Nor will the best of our endeavours prescribe limits and bounds to them that shall come after us. And the reason why the *generality of expositors* go in the same track one after another, seldom passing beyond the beaten path of former endeavours, unless it be in some excursions of curiosity, is the want of giving up themselves unto the conduct of the Holy Spirit in the diligent performance of this duty.

2. *Readiness to receive impressions from divine truths as revealed unto us*, conforming our minds and hearts unto the doctrine made known, is another means unto the same end. This is the first end of all divine revelations, of all heavenly truths, namely, to beget the image and likeness of themselves in the minds of men; Rom. vi. 17. 2 Cor. iii. 18. And we miss our aim if this be not the first thing we intend in the study of the Scripture. It is not to learn *the form of the doctrine of godliness*, but to get the *power* of it implanted in our souls. And this is an eminent means of our making a progress in the knowledge of the truth. To seek after mere *notions of truth*, without an endeavour after an *experience of its power* in our hearts, is not the way to increase our understanding in spiritual things. He alone is in a posture to learn from God, who sincerely gives up his mind, conscience, and affections to the power and rule of what is revealed unto him. Men may have in their study of the Scripture other ends also, as the profit and edification of others. *But if this conforming of their own souls unto the power of the word*, be not fixed in the first place in their minds, they do not *strive law-*

fully, nor will be crowned. And if at any time when we study the word, we have not this design expressly in our minds, yet if upon the discovery of any truth, we endeavour not to have the likeness of it in our own hearts, we lose our principal advantage by it.

3. *Practical obedience in the course of our walking before God*, is another means unto the same end. The gospel is the ‘truth which is according unto godliness;’ Tit. i. 1. And it will not long abide with any who follow not after godliness according unto its guidance and direction. Hence we see so many to lose that very understanding which they had of the doctrines of it, when once they begin to give up themselves to ungodly lives. The true notion of *holy evangelical truths* will not *live*, at least not *flourish*, where they are divided from a holy conversation. As we learn all to practise, so we learn much by practice. There is no *practical science* which we can make any great improvements of, without an assiduous practice of its *theorems*. Much less is *wisdom*, such as is the understanding of the mysteries of the Scripture, to be increased, unless a man be *practically conversant* about the things which it directs unto.

And herein alone we can come unto the *assurance*, that what we know and learn is indeed the truth. So our Saviour tells us, ‘That if any man do the will of God, he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God;’ John vii. 17. Whilst men learn the truth only in the notion of it, whatever conviction of its being so it is accompanied withal, they will never attain *stability* in their minds concerning it, nor come to the *full assurance of understanding*, unless they continually exemplify it in their own obedience, doing the will of God. This is that which will give them a satisfactory persuasion of it. And hereby will they be led continually into farther degrees of knowledge. For the mind of man is capable of receiving *continual supplies* in the increase of light and knowledge whilst it is in this world, if so be they are improved unto their proper end in obedience unto God. But without this the mind will be quickly stuffed with notions, so that no streams can descend into it from the fountain of truth.

4. *A constant design for growth, and a progress in knowledge, out of love to the truth, and experience of its excellency*, is use-

ful, yea, needful unto the right understanding of the mind of God in the Scriptures. Some are quickly apt to think, that they know *enough*, as much as is needful for them; some that they know *all* that is to be known, or have a sufficient comprehension of all the counsels of God as revealed in the Scripture, or as they rather judge, of the whole *body of divinity* in all the parts of it, which they may have disposed into an exact method with great accuracy and skill. No great or useful discoveries of the mind of God shall I expect from such persons. Another frame of heart and spirit is required in them who design to be instructed in the mind of God, or to learn it in the study of the Scripture. Such persons look upon it as a treasury of divine truths absolutely unfathomable by any created understandings. The truths which they do receive from thence, and comprehend according to their measure therein, they judge *amiable, excellent, and desirable* above all earthly things. For they find the fruit, benefit, and advantage of them, in strengthening the life of God in them, conforming their souls unto him, communicating of his light, love, grace, and power unto them.

This makes them with purpose of heart continually to press in the use of all means to *increase in this wisdom, to grow in the knowledge of God and our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ*. They are pressing on continually unto that measure of perfection which in this life is attainable. And every new beam of truth whereby their minds are enlightened, guides them into fresh discoveries of it. This frame of mind is under a promise of divine teachings, Hos. vi. 3. ‘Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord.’ ‘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, then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God;’ Prov. ii. 3—6. When men live in a holy admiration of, and complacency in, God, as the God of truth, as the first infinite essential truth, in whose enjoyment alone there is fulness of all satisfactory light and knowledge; when they adore the fulness of those revelations of himself which with infinite wisdom he hath treasured up in the Scriptures; when they find by experience an excellency, power, and efficacy, in what they have attained unto; and out of a deep sense of the smallness of their measures,

of the meanness of their attainments, and how little a portion it is they know of God ; do live in a constant design to abide with faith and patience in continual study of the word, and inquiries into the mind of God therein, *they are in the way of* being taught by him, and learning of his mind, unto all the proper ends of its revelation.

5. There are sundry *ordinances of spiritual worship* which God hath ordained as a means of our illumination : a religious attendance whereunto is required of them who intend to grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

And this is the first head of means for the due improvement of our endeavours, in reading and studying of the Scriptures, that we may come thereby unto a right understanding of the mind of God in them, and be able to interpret them unto the use and benefit of others. What is the work of the *Holy Spirit* herein, what is the aid and assistance which he contributes hereunto, is so manifest from what we have discoursed, especially concerning his operations in us as a Spirit of grace and supplication (not yet made public), that it must not be here insisted on.

It may be these means will be despised by some, and the proposal of them to this end looked on as weak and ridiculous, if not extremely *fanciful*. For it is supposed that these things are pressed to no other end but to decry *learning, study*, and the use of reason in the interpretation of the Scriptures, which will quickly reduce all religion into *enthusiasm*. Whether there be any thing of truth in this suggestion shall be immediately discovered. Nor have those by whom these things are pressed the least reason to decline the use of *learning*, or any rational means in their proper place, as though they were conscious to themselves of a deficiency in them with respect unto those by whom they are so highly, and indeed for the most part *vainly*, pretended unto.

But in the matter in hand we must deal with some confidence. They by whom these things are *decied*, by whom they are *denied* to be necessary means for the right understanding of the mind of God in the Scriptures, do plainly renounce the chief principles of Christian religion. For, although the Scripture hath many things in *common* with other writings wherein *secular arts and sciences* are declared, yet to

suppose that we may attain the sense and mind of God in them, by the mere use of such *ways and means* as we apply in the investigation of truths of other natures, is to exclude all consideration of God, of Jesus Christ, of the Holy Spirit, of the end of the Scriptures themselves, of the nature and use of the things delivered in them, and by consequent to overthrow all religion; see Prov. xxviii. 5.

And this first sort of *means* which we have hitherto insisted on, are *duties* in themselves as well as means unto farther ends. And *all duties* under the gospel are the ways and means wherein, and whereby, the graces of God are exercised. For, as no *grace* can be exerted or exercised, but in a way of duty, so no duty is *evangelical*, or accepted with God, but what especial grace is exercised in. As the word is the rule whereby they are guided, directed, and measured; so the *acting of grace in them*, is that whereby they are quickened, without which the best duties are but dead works. *Materially* they are duties, but *formally* they are sins. In their performance, therefore, as gospel duties, and as they are accepted with God, there is an especial aid and assistance of the Holy Spirit. And on that account there is so in the *interpretation* of the Scriptures. For if without his assistance we cannot make use aright of the means of interpreting of the Scripture, we cannot interpret the Scripture without it. The truth is, they who shall either say, that these duties are not necessarily required unto them who would *search the Scripture*, and find out the mind of God for their own edification, or so as to expound those oracles of God unto others; or that they may be performed in a manner acceptable unto God, and usefully unto this end, without the especial assistance of the Holy Spirit, do *impiously* what lies in them evert the whole doctrine of the gospel, and the grace thereof.

That which, in the next place, might be insisted on, is the consideration of the *especial rules* which have been or may yet be given for the right interpretation of the Scriptures. Such are they which concern the *style* of the Scripture, its especial *phraseology*, the *tropes* and *figures* it makes use of, the *way* of its arguing, the *times* and seasons wherein it was written, or the several parts of it; the *occasions* under the

guidance of the Spirit of God given thereunto; the *design* and scope of *particular writers*, with what is peculiar unto them in their manner of writing; the *comparing of several places*, as to their difference in things and expressions, the reconciliation of seeming contradictions, with other things of an alike nature. But as the most of these may be reduced unto what hath been spoken before, about the *disposal and perspicuity* of the Scripture, so they have been already handled by many others at large, and therefore I shall not here insist upon them, but speak only unto the general means that are to be applied unto the same end.

CHAP. VIII.

The second sort of means for the interpretation of the Scripture, which are disciplinarian.

THE second sort of means I call *disciplinarian*, as consisting in the due use and improvement of *common arts and sciences*, applied unto, and made use of in, the study of the Scriptures. And these are things which have no *moral good* in themselves, but being indifferent in their own nature, their end, with the manner of their management thereunto, is the only measure and standard of their worth and value. Hence it is, that in the application of them unto the *interpretation of the Scripture*, they may be *used aright*, and in a due manner, and they may be *abused* to the great disadvantage of those who use them; and accordingly it hath fallen out. In the first way they receive a *blessing* from the Spirit of God, who alone prospereth every good and honest endeavour in any kind; and in the latter they are efficacious to *seduce* men unto a trust in their own understandings, which in other things is foolish, and in these things pernicious.

1. That which of this sort I prefer, in the first place, is the *knowledge of, and skill in, the languages wherein the Scripture was originally written*. For the very words of them therein, were peculiarly from the Holy Ghost, which gives them to be דברי אמת *words of truth*, and the Scripture itself to

be *כתובה ישר*, a right, or upright, or perfect writing; Eccles. xii. 10. The Scriptures of the Old Testament were given unto the church whilst it was entirely confined unto one nation; Psal. cxlvii. 19. Thence they were all written in that language, which was common among, and peculiar unto, that nation. And this language, as the people itself, was called Hebrew, from Heber the son of Salah, the son of Arphaxad, the son of Shem, their most eminent progenitor; Gen. x. 23, 24. For being the one original tongue of mankind, it remained in some part of his family, who probably joined not in the *great apostacy* of the world from God, nor was concerned in their dispersion at the building of Babel, which ensued thereon. The derivation of that name from another *original*, is a fruit of curiosity and vain conjecture, as I have elsewhere demonstrated.

In process of time that people were carried into *captivity* out of their own land, and were thereby forced to learn, and use a language somewhat different from their own; another absolutely it was not, yet so far did it differ from it, that those who knew and spoke the one, commonly could not understand the other; 2 Kings xviii. 26. This was *לשון כסדים*, Dan. i. 4. 'The language of the Chaldeans,' which Daniel and others learned. But by the people's long continuance in that country it became common to them all. After this some parts of the books of the Scripture, as of Daniel and Ezra, were written in that language, as also *one* verse in the prophecy of Jeremiah, when they were ready to be carried thither, in which he instructs the people how to reproach the idols of the nations in their own language; Jer. x. 11. The design of God was that his word should be always read and used in that language, which was commonly understood by them unto whom he granted the privilege thereof, nor could any of the ends of his wisdom and goodness in that merciful grant be otherwise attained.

The prodigious conceit of *keeping the Scripture*, which is the foundation, rule, and guide of the whole church, the spiritual food and means of life unto all the members of it, by the *church*, or those who pretend themselves intrusted with the power and rights of it, in a *language unknown* unto the community of the people, had not then befallen the minds of men, no more than it hath yet any countenance given unto

it, by the authority of God, or reason of mankind. And indeed the advancement and defence of this imagination, is one of those things which sets me at liberty from being influenced by the *authority* of any sort of men in matters of religion. For what will not their confidence undertake to vent, and their *sophistical* ability give countenance unto, or wrangle about, which their interest requires and calls for at their hands ; who can openly plead and contend for the truth of such an absurd and irrational assertion, as is contrary to all that we know of God and his will, to all that we understand of ourselves or our duty, with respect thereunto.

When the New Testament was to be written, the church was to be diffused throughout the world, amongst people of all tongues and languages under heaven : yet there was a necessity that it should be written in *some one certain language*, wherein the sacred truth of it might, as in original records, be safely laid up and deposited. It was left, as καλὴ παραθήκη, ἱερὰ παρακαταθήκη, a good and sacred *depositum* unto the ministry of the church to be kept inviolate, by the Holy Ghost ; 1 Tim. vi. 20. 2 Tim. i. 14. And it was disposed into writing in *one certain language*, wherein the preservation of it in purity, was committed to the ministry of all ages ; not absolutely, but under his care and inspection. From this *one language* God had ordained, that it should be derived by the care of the ministry unto the knowledge and use of all nations and people. And this was represented by the *miraculous gift of tongues* communicated by the Holy Ghost unto the first designed publishers of the gospel. In this case it pleased the wisdom of the Holy Ghost, to make use of the Greek language, wherein he writ the whole New Testament originally. For the report, that the Gospel of Matthew and the Epistle to the Hebrews, were first written in Hebrew, is altogether groundless, and I have elsewhere disproved it.

Now this language at that season, through all sorts of advantages, was diffused throughout the world, especially in those parts of it where God had designed to fix the first and principal station of the church. For the eastern parts of the world, it was long before carried into them, and its use imposed on them by the Macedonian arms and laws, with the establishment of the Grecian empire for sundry ages

among them. And somewhere before in the western parts of the world, the same language was greatly inquired into, and generally received, on the account of the *wisdom* and *learning* which was treasured up therein, in the writings of poets, philosophers, and historians, which had newly received a peculiar advancement.

For two things fell out in the providence of God about that season, which greatly conduced unto the furtherance of the gospel. The Jews were wholly possessed of whatever was *true* in religion, and which lay in a direct subserviency unto the gospel itself. This they gloried in, and boasted of, as a privilege which they enjoyed above all the world. The Grecians on the other hand, were possessed of skill and wisdom in all arts and sciences, with the products of *philosophical inquiries*, and elegance of speech in expressing the conceptions of their minds. And this they gloried in and boasted of, above all other people in the world. Now both these nations being dispossessed of their empire, sovereignty, and liberty at home, by the Romans, multitudes of them made it their business to disperse themselves in the world, and to seek, as it were, a new empire, the one to its religion, and the other to its language, arts, and sciences. Of both sorts with their design, the Roman writers in those days do take notice, and greatly complain. And these privileges being boasted of, and rested in, proved equally prejudicial to both nations, as to the *reception of the gospel*, as our apostle disputes at large, 1 Cor. i. ii. But through the wisdom of God disposing and ordering all things unto his own glory, the design and actings of them both became an effectual means to *facilitate* the propagation of the gospel. For the Jews having planted synagogues in most nations and principal cities in the Roman empire, they had both leavened multitudes of people with some knowledge of the true God, which prepared the way of the gospel; as also they had gathered *fixed assemblies*, which the preachers of the gospel constantly took the advantage of, to enter upon their work, and to begin the declaration of their message. The Grecians, on the other hand, had so universally diffused the knowledge of their language, as the use of that one tongue alone was sufficient to instruct all sorts of people throughout the world, in the knowledge of the truth. For the *gift of tongues* was only

to be a 'sign unto believers;' 1 Cor. xiv. and not a means of preaching the gospel constantly in a language which he understood not who spake.

In this language, therefore, as the most common, diffusive, and generally understood in the world, did God order that the books of the New Testament should be written. From thence, by translations and expositions, was it to be derived into other tongues and languages. For the design of God was still the same, that his word should be declared unto the church, in a language *which* it understood. Hence is that peculiar distribution of the nations of the world, into Jews, Greeks, Barbarians, and Scythians; not accommodated unto the use of those terms in Grecian writers, unto whom the Jews were no less barbarians than the Scythians themselves; Col. iii. 11. But as the Scriptures of the Old Testament were peculiarly given unto the Jews, so were those of the New unto the Greeks, that is, those who made use of their language; from whence it was deduced unto all other nations, called Barbarians and Scythians.

It must be acknowledged that the Scripture, as written in these languages, is accompanied with many and great advantages. 1. In them peculiarly is it *γραφὴ θεόπνευστος*, a 'writing by divine inspiration;' 2 Tim. iii. 16. And ספר יהוה the 'book of writing of the Lord;' Isa. xxxiv. 16. With a singular privilege above all translations. Hence the very words themselves as therein used and placed are *sacred, consecrated by God*, unto that holy use. The *sacred sense* indeed of the words and expression is the *internum formale sacrum*, or that wherein the holiness of the Scripture doth consist. But the *writing itself* in the original languages, in the words chosen and used by the Holy Ghost, is the *externum formale*, of the Holy Scripture, and is *materially sacred*.

It is the sense, therefore, of the Scripture which principally, and for its own sake, we inquire after and into; that divine sense which, as Justin Martyr speaks, is *ὑπὲρ λόγον, ὑπὲρ νοῦν, καὶ ὑπὲρ πᾶσαν κατάληψιν*; absolutely above our natural reason, understanding, and comprehension. In the *words* we are concerned with respect thereunto, as by the wisdom of the Holy Ghost they are designed as the written signs thereof.

(2.) The *words of the Scripture* being given thus immedi-

ately from God, every apex, tittle, or iota, in the whole, is considerable, as that which is an effect of divine wisdom, and therefore filled with sacred truth according to their place and measure. Hence they are all under the especial care of God, according to that promise of our Saviour, Matt. v. 18. Verily I say unto you, ἕως ἄν παρέλθῃ ὁ οὐρανὸς καὶ ἡ γῆ ἰώτα ἢ μία κεράτα οὐ μὴ παρέλθῃ ἀπο τοῦ νόμου. ‘Till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle shall not pass from the law.’ That our Saviour doth here intend the *writing of the Scriptures* then in use in the church, and assure the protection of God unto the least letter, vowel, or point of it, I have proved elsewhere. And himself, in due time, will reprove the profane boldness of them, who without evidence or sufficient proof, without that respect and reverence which is due unto the interest, care, providence, and faithfulness of God in this matter, do assert *manifest changes* to have been made in the original writings of the Scripture.

But, as I said, divine senses, and singular mysteries may be couched in the use and disposal of a *letter*. And this God himself hath manifested, as in sundry other instances, so in the change of the names of Abram and Sarai, wherein the addition or alteration of one letter carried along with it a mysterious signification for the use of the church in all ages. In translations nothing of that nature can be observed. And hence a due consideration of the very *accents* in the original of the Old Testament, as *distinctive* or *conjunctive*, is a singular advantage in the investigation of the sense of particular places and sentences.

(3.) There is in the originals of the Scripture a peculiar *emphasis* of words and expressions, and in them an especial *energy*, to intimate and insinuate the sense of the Holy Ghost unto the minds of men, which cannot be traduced into other languages by translations, so as to obtain the same power and efficacy. Now this is not absolutely from the nature of the *original languages* themselves, especially not of the Greek, whose principal advantages and excellencies, in *copiousness* and *elegancy*, are little used in the New Testament; but from a secret impression of *divine wisdom* and efficacy accompanying the immediate delivery of the mind of God in them. There is, therefore, no small advantage hence to be obtained in the interpretation of the Scripture. For when we have

received an impression on our minds of the sense and intention of the Holy Ghost in any particular place, we shall seek for meet words to express it by, wherein consists the whole work of Scripture exposition, so far as I have any acquaintance with it. ‘Interpretis officium est, non quid ipse velit, sed quid sentiat ille quem interpretatur, exponere.’ Hieron. Apol. Adv. Ruffin. For when the mind is really affected with the discovery of truth itself, it will be guided and directed in the declaration of it unto others.

(4.) The whole course of speech, especially in the New Testament is accommodated unto the nature, use, and propriety of that language, as expressed in other authors, who wrote therein, and had a perfect understanding of it. From them, therefore, is the proper use and sense of the words, phrases, and expressions in the New Testament much to be learned. This no man can make a judgment of in a due manner, but he that is *skilled* in that language, as used and delivered by them: not that I think a *commentary* on the New Testament may be collected out of Eustathius, Hesychius, Phavorinus, Julius Pollux, and other glossaries, from whose *grammaticisms* and *vocabularies*, some do countenance themselves in curious and bold conjectures; nor from the likeness of expressions in *classic* authors; this only I say, that it is of singular advantage in the interpretation of the Scripture, that a man be well acquainted with the *original languages*, and be able to examine the use and signification of words, phrases, and expressions, as they are applied and declared in other authors. And even to the understanding of the Greek of the New Testament, it is necessary that a man have an acquaintance with the Hebrew of the Old. For although I do not judge that there are such a number of *Hebraisms* in it, in a supposed discovery whereof consists no small part of some men’s *critical observations*; so I readily grant that there is such a *cognition* and *alliance* in and between the senses of the one and the other, as that a due comparing of their expressions, doth mutually contribute light and perspicuity unto them.

By these things great advantage may be obtained unto the right understanding of the sense of the Scripture, or the mind of the Holy Ghost therein. For there is no other sense in it than what is contained in the words, whereof

materially it doth consist, though really that sense itself be such as our minds cannot receive without the especial divine assistance before pleaded. And in the interpretation of the mind of any one, it is necessary that the *words* he speaks or writes be rightly understood. And this we cannot do immediately unless we understand the *language* wherein he speaks, as also the *idiotisms* of that language, with the common use and intention of its *phraseology* and expressions. And if we do not hereby come unto a perfect comprehension of the sense intended, because many other things are required thereunto, yet a hinderance is removed, without which we cannot do so ; occasions of manifest mistakes are taken away, and the cabinet is as it were unlocked, wherein the jewel of truth lies hid, which with a lawful diligent search may be found. And what perplexities, mistakes, and errors, the ignorance of these *original languages* hath cast many expositors into, both of old and of late, especially among those who pertinaciously adhere unto *one translation*, and that none of the best, might be manifested by instances undeniable and that without number. Such is that of the gloss on Tit. iii. 10. ‘Hæreticum hominem de vita;’ which adds, as its exposition, ‘tolle.’ And those among ourselves who are less skilled in this knowledge, are to be advised, that they would be careful not to adventure on any *singular exposition of the Scriptures*, or any *text* in them, upon the credit of any one or all translations they can make use of, seeing persons of greater name and worth than to be mentioned unto their disreputation, have miscarried upon the same account. A reverential subjection of mind, and diligent attendance unto the *analogy of faith*, is their best preservative in this matter. And I fear not to add, that a *superficial knowledge in these tongues*, which many aim at, is of little use, unless it be to make men *adventurous* in betraying their own ignorance. But the sense and substance of the Scripture being contained entirely in every *good translation* (amongst which that in use among ourselves is *excellent*, though capable of great improvements), men may by the use of the means before directed unto, and under the conduct of the teaching of the Spirit of God in them, usefully and rightly expound the Scripture in general, unto the edification of others, whereof many instances may be given amongst ancient and modern expositors.

This *skill and knowledge*, therefore, is of great use unto them who are called unto the interpretation of the Scripture. And the church of God hath had no small advantage by the endeavours of men *learned* herein, who have exercised it in the exposition of the words and *phraseology* of the Scriptures, as compared with their use in other authors. But yet, as was before observed, this skill and the exercise of it, in the way mentioned, is no *duty* in itself, nor enjoined unto any for its own sake, but only hath a *goodness* in it with respect unto a certain end. Wherefore, it is in its own nature *indifferent*, and in its utmost improvement capable of *abuse*; and such in late days it hath fallen under, unto a great extremity. For the study of the *original languages*, and the exercise of skill in them, in the interpretation of the Scripture, hath been of great reputation and that deservedly. Hence multitudes of learned men have engaged themselves in that work and study, and the number of *annotations* and *comments* on the Scripture consisting principally in *critical observations* as they are called, have been greatly increased. And they are utter strangers unto these things, who will not allow that many of them are of singular use. But withal, this skill and faculty where it hath been unaccompanied with that humility, sobriety, reverence of the author of the Scripture, and respect unto the *analogy of faith*, which ought to bear sway in the minds of all men who undertake to expound the oracles of God, may be, and hath been, greatly abused unto the hurt of its owners, and disadvantage of the church.

For, [1.] by some it hath been turned into the fuel of pride, and a noisome elation of mind. Yea, experience shews, that this kind of knowledge where it is supposed signal, is of all others the most apt to puff up and swell the vain minds of men, unless it be where it is allayed with a singular modesty of nature, or the mind itself be sufficiently corrected and changed by grace. Hence the expressions of pride and self-conceit which some have broken forth into on an imagination of their skill and faculty in criticising on the Scriptures, have been ridiculous and impious. The Holy Ghost usually teacheth not such persons, neither should I expect to learn much from them relating unto the truth as it is in Jesus. But yet the stones they dig may be made use of by a skilful builder.

[2.] In many it hath been accompanied with a noxious *profane curiosity*. Every tittle and apex shall give them occasion for *fruitless conjectures*, as vain, for the most part, as those of the *cabalistical Jews*. And this humour hath filled us with *needless and futile* observations, which, beyond an ostentation of the learning of their authors (indeed the utmost end whereunto they are designed) are of no use nor consideration. But this is not all; some men from hence have been prompted unto a boldness in adventuring to *corrupt the text* itself, or the plain sense of it. For what else is done when men for an ostentation of their skill, will produce quotations out of *learned authors*, to illustrate or expound sayings in the Scripture, wherein there seems to be some kind of compliance in words and sounds, when their senses are adverse and contrary? Amongst a thousand instances which might be given to exemplify this folly and confidence, we need take that one alone of him, who to explain or illustrate that saying of Hezekiah, ‘Good is the word of the Lord which thou hast spoken: he said, moreover, For there shall be peace and truth in my days;’ Isa. xxxix. 8. subjoins, ἐμοῦ θανάτου χάρις μὲν ἔσται. So comparing that holy man’s submission and satisfaction in the peace of the church with truth, and the *blasphemous imprecation* of an impious wretch for confusion on the world, when once he should be got out of it. And such notable sayings are many of our *late critics* forced withal.

And the confidence of some hath fallen into greater excesses, and hath swelled over these bounds also. To countenance their conjectures and self-pleasing imaginations, from whence they expect no small reputation for skill and learning, they fall in *upon the text* itself. As indeed we are come into an age wherein many seem to judge that they can neither sufficiently value themselves, nor obtain an estimation in the world, without some bold sallies of *curiosity* or *novelty* into the vitals of religion, with reflection of contempt and scorn on all that are otherwise minded, as persons incapable of comprehending their attainments. Hence it is that amongst ourselves we have scarce any thing left *unattacked* in the doctrine of the reformed churches, and of that in England as in former days; neither shall he be with many esteemed a man either of parts, learning, or judgment, who

hath not some *new curious opinion* or *speculation*, differing from what hath been formerly commonly taught and received, although the universality of these renowned notions among us, are but corrupt emanations from *Socinianism* or *Arminianism* on the one hand, or from *poperly* on the other.

But it is men of another sort, and in truth of another manner of learning, than the present corrupters of the doctrines of the gospel (who, so far as I can perceive, trouble not themselves about the Scripture much one way or another), that we treat about. They are such as, in the exercise of the skill and ability under consideration, do fall in upon the Scripture itself, to make way for the advancement of their own conjectures, whereof *ten thousand* are not of the least importance, compared with the duty and necessity of preserving the sacred text inviolate, and the just and due persuasion that so it hath been preserved. For first, they command the *vowels and accents* of the Hebrew text out of their way, as things wherein they are not concerned, when the use of them in any one page of the Scripture, is *incomparably* of more worth and use, than all that they are or ever will be of, in the church of God. And this is done on slight *conjectures*. And if this suffice not to make way for their designs, then *letters and words* themselves must be corrected, upon an unproveable supposition, that the *original text hath been changed or corrupted*. And the boldness of some herein is grown intolerable, so that it is as likely means for the introduction and promotion of *atheism*, as any engine the devil hath set on work in these days wherein he is so openly engaged in that design.

There are also sundry other ways whereby this great help unto the understanding and interpretation of the Scripture, may be and hath been abused; those mentioned may suffice as instances confirming our observations. Wherefore, as *substantial* knowledge and skill in the *originals* is useful, and indeed necessary unto him that is called unto the exposition of the Scripture, so in the use and exercise of it sundry things ought to be well considered by them who are furnished therewithal. As, 1st. That the thing itself is *no grace*, nor any peculiar *gift* of the Holy Ghost, but a mere *fruit of diligence*, upon a common furniture with natural abilities. And nothing of this nature is in sacred things to be rested on, or

much trusted unto. 2ndly. That the *exercise of this skill* in and about the Scripture is not in itself as such an *especial or immediate duty*. Were it so, there would be *especial grace promised* to fill it up and quicken it. For all *gospel duties* are animated by grace in their due performance: that is, those who do so perform them have especial assistance in their so doing. But it is reduced unto the general head of duty with respect unto the end aimed at. Wherefore, 3rdly. the *blessing of God* on our endeavours, succeeding and prospering of them, as in other natural and civil occasions of life, is all that we expect herein from the Holy Spirit. And, 4thly. sundry other things are required of us, if we hope for this blessing on just grounds. It may be, some ignorant persons are so fond as to imagine that if they could understand the *original languages*, they must of necessity understand the sense of the Scripture. And there is nothing more frequent than for some, who either truly or falsely pretend a skill in them, to bear themselves high against those who perhaps are really more acquainted with the mind of the Holy Ghost in the word than themselves, as though *all things were plain and obvious unto them*, others knowing nothing but by them, or such as they are. But this is but one means of many that is useful to this purpose, and that such, as if it be alone, is of little or no use at all. It is fervent prayer, humility, lowliness of mind, godly fear and reverence of the word, and subjection of conscience unto the authority of every tittle of it, a constant attendance unto the *analogy* of faith, with due dependance on the Spirit of God for supplies of light and grace, which must make this or any other means of the same nature effectual.

2. An acquaintance with the *history and geography of the world*, and with *chronology*, I reckon also among *disciplinarian* aids in the interpretation of the Scripture. For as time is divided into what is past, and what is to come, so there are sundry things in the Scripture which in all seasons relate thereunto. For, (1.) God hath therein given us an account of the course and order of all things (which the Jews call סדר עולם), from the foundation of the world. And this he did for sundry important reasons, as incident with the general end of the Scripture. For hereby hath he secured the testimony that he hath given to his being, power, and

providence, by the *creation* and rule of all things. The evidences in them given thereunto, are those which are principally attacked by atheists. And although they do sufficiently manifest and evince their own testimony unto the common reason of mankind, yet sundry things relating unto them are so involved in darkness, and inextricable circumstances, as if all their concernments had not been plainly declared in the Scripture, the wisest of men had been at a great loss about them; and so were they always who wanted the light and advantage hereof. But here, as he hath plainly declared the *original emanation* of all things from his eternal power, so hath he testified unto his constant rule over all in all times, places, ages, and seasons, by instances incontrollable. Therein hath he treasured up all sorts of examples, with such impressions of his goodness, patience, power, wisdom, holiness, and righteousness upon them, as proclaim his almighty and righteous government of the whole universe. And, in the whole, he hath delivered unto us such a *tract and series of the ages of the world*, from its beginning, as *atheism* hath no tolerable pretence, from tradition, testimony, or the evidence of things themselves, to break in upon. Whatever is objected against the beginning of all things, and the course of their continuance in the world, delivered unto us in the Scripture, which is secured not only by the authority of divine revelation, but also by a universal evidence of all circumstances, is fond and ridiculous. I speak of the account given us in general, sufficient unto its own ends, and not of any men's *deductions* and applications of it unto minute portions of time, which probably it was not designed unto. It is sufficient unto its end, that its account, in general, which confounds all *atheistical* presumptions, is not to be impeached. And although the authority of the Scripture is not to be pleaded immediately against *atheists*, yet the matter and reason of it is, which from its own evidence renders all contrary pretensions contemptible.

(2.) God hath hereby given an account of the *beginning, progress, trials, faith, obedience*, and whole proceeding of the church in the pursuit of the first promise, unto the actual exhibition of Jesus Christ in the flesh. Hereunto were all things in a tendency for four thousand years. It is a glorious prospect we have therein, to see the call and foundation

of the church in the first promise given unto our common parents ; what additions of light and knowledge he granted unto it successively by new revelations and promises ; how he gradually adorned it with gifts, privileges, and ordinances ; what ways and means he used to preserve it in faith, purity, and obedience ; how he chastened, tried, punished, and delivered it ; how he dealt with the nations of the world with respect unto it, raising them up for its affliction, and destroying them for their cruelty and oppression of it ; what were the ways of wicked and sinful men amongst them, or in it, and what the graces and fruits of his saints, how by his power he retrieved it out of various calamities, and preserved it against all opposition unto its appointed season ; all which, with innumerable other effects of divine wisdom and grace, are blessedly represented unto us therein.

Now besides that spiritual wisdom and insight into the great design of God in Christ, which is required unto a right understanding in these things, as they were types of better things to come, and examples of gospel mysteries ; there is a skill and understanding in the records and monuments of time, the geographical respect of one nation unto another, the periods and revolutions of seasons and ages required, to apprehend them aright in their first literal instance and intention. And besides what is thus historically related in the Scripture, there are prophecies also of things to come in the church, and amongst the nations of the world, which are great evidences of its own divinity, and supporting arguments of our faith. But without some good apprehension of the *distinction of times, seasons, and places*, no man can rightly judge of their accomplishment.

Secondly, There are, in particular, prophecies in the Old Testament which reach unto the times of the gospel, upon the truth whereof the whole Scripture doth depend. Such are those concerning the *calling of the Gentiles*, the *rejection* and recovery of the Jews, the erection of the glorious kingdom of Christ in the world, with the oppositions that should be made unto it. And to these many are added in the New Testament itself ; as Matt. xxiv. 25. 2 Thess. ii. 1 Tim. iv. 1—3. 2 Tim. iii. 1—3. iv. 3. But especially in the whole book of the Revelation, wherein the state of the church and of the world are foretold unto the consummation of all things. And how can

any man arrive unto a tolerable acquaintance with the *accomplishment of these prophecies* as to what is already past, or have a distinct grounded expectation of the fulfilling of what remains foretold, without a prospect into the state of things in the world, the revolutions of times past, with what fell out in them, which are the things spoken of? Those who treat of them without it, do but feign *chimeras* to themselves, as men in the dark are apt to do, or corrupt the word of God, by turning it into senseless and fulsome *allegories*. And those, on the other side, by whom these things are wholly *neglected*, do despise the wisdom and care of God towards the church, and disregard a blessed means of our faith and consolation.

Some things of this nature, especially such as relate unto *chronological computations*, I acknowledge are attended with great and apparently inextricable difficulties. But the skill and knowledge mentioned will guide humble and modest inquirers into so sufficient a satisfaction in general, and as unto all things which are really useful, that they shall have no temptation to question the verity of what in particular they cannot assail. And it is an *intolerable pride and folly* where we are guided and satisfied infallibly in a thousand things, which we know no otherwise, to question the authority of the whole, because we cannot comprehend one or two particulars which perhaps were never intended to be reduced unto our measure. Besides, as the investigation of these things is attended with difficulties, so the ignorance of them or mistakes about them, whilst the minds of men are free from pertinacy and a spirit of contention, are of no great *disadvantage*. For they have very little influence on our faith and obedience, any otherwise than that we call not into question what is revealed. And it is most probable that the Scripture never intended to give us such *minute chronological determinations*, as some would deduce their computations unto, and that because not necessary. Hence we see that some who have laboured therein unto a *prodigy of industry* and learning, although they have made some useful discoveries, yet have never been able to give such evidence unto their *computations*, as that others would acquiesce in them; but by all their endeavours have administered occasion of *new strife* and contention, about things it may be of no great

importance to be known or determined. And, in general, men have run into two extremes in these things; for some pretend to frame an *exact computation* and *consent of times* from the Scripture alone, without any regard unto the records, monuments, histories, and *signatures* of times in the world. Wherever these appear in opposition or contradiction unto the *chain* and *links* of time which they have framed to themselves (as they suppose from the Scripture), they reject them as matters of no consideration. And it were well if they could do this unto satisfaction. But how evidently they have failed herein, as for instance in the computation of *Daniel's weeks*, wherein they will allow but four hundred and ninety years from the *first of Cyrus unto the death of our Saviour*, contrary to the common consent of mankind about things that fell out, and their continuance, between those seasons, taking up five hundred and sixty-two years, is manifest unto all. The Scripture, indeed, is to be made the only *sacred standard* and measure of things in its proper sense and understanding; nor is any thing to be esteemed of, which riseth up in contradiction thereunto. But as a due consideration of *foreign testimonies* and monuments doth oft-times give great light unto what is more generally or obscurely expressed in the Scripture; so where the Scripture in these things, with such allowances as it every where declares itself to admit of, may be interpreted in a fair compliance with *uncontrolled foreign testimonies*, that interpretation is to be embraced. The question is not, therefore, whether we shall regulate the computation of times by the Scripture, or histories and marks of time in the world; but whether, when the sense of the Scripture is *obscure* in those things, and its determination only general, so as to be equally capable of various senses, that (all other things being alike) is not to be preferred which agrees with the *undoubted monuments* of times in the nations of the world? For instance, the angel Gabriel acquaints Daniel that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and build Jerusalem, unto *Messiah the prince* and his cutting off, should be *seventy weeks* (to speak only of the whole number in general), that is, *four hundred and ninety years*; now there were sundry commandments given, or decrees made, by the kings of Persia who are intended, to this purpose; of these two were the most famous, the one granted by Cyrus in the *first year of his empire*;

Ezra i. 1. The other by Artaxerxes in the seventh year of his *reign*; Ezra vii. 12—14, Between the first of these and the death of Christ, there must be allowed five hundred and sixty-two years, unless you will offer violence unto all monuments, records, and circumstances of times in the world. It is, therefore, safer to interpret the general words of the angel of the *latter decree* or commandment, whose circumstances also make it more probable to be intended, wherein the spaces of time mentioned fall in exactly with other approved *histories* and records. Neither would I disallow another computation, which, contending for the first *decree of Cyrus* to be the beginning of the time mentioned, and allowing the whole space from thence to be really five hundred and sixty-two years, affirms that the Scripture excludes the consideration of the years *supernumerary* to the four hundred and ninety, because of the interruptions which at several seasons were put upon the people, in the accomplishment of the things foretold for so many years, which some suppose to be signified by the distribution of the whole number of *seventy weeks*, into *seven, sixty-two, and one*, each of which fractions hath its proper work belonging unto it. For this computation offers no *violence* either to sacred or unquestionable human authority.

But, on the other extreme, some there are who observing the difficulties in these accounts, as expressed in the Scripture from the beginning; having framed another *series of things* to themselves, openly diverse from that exhibited therein, and raked together from other authors, some things giving countenance unto their conjectures, do profanely make bold to break in upon the *original text*, accusing it of *imperfection* or *corruption*; which they will rectify by their *fine inventions*, and the aid of a *translation*, known to be mistaken in a *thousand places*, and in some justly suspected of wilful depravations. But this presumptuous confidence is nothing but an emanation from that *flood of atheism* which is breaking in on the world in these declining *ages* of it.

3. The third aid or assistance of this kind is a skill in the *ways and methods of reasoning*, which are supposed to be common unto the Scriptures with other writings. And this, as it is an *art*, or an *artificial faculty*, like those other means before mentioned, is capable of a right improvement, or of

being abused. An *ability to judge of the sense of propositions*, how one thing depends on another, how it is deduced from it, follows upon it, or is proved by it, what is the design of him that writes or speaks in any discourse or reasonings, how it is proposed, confirmed, illustrated, is necessary unto any rational consideration to be exercised about whatever is so proposed unto us. And when the minds of men are confirmed in a good *habit of judgment by the rules of the art of reasoning*, about the ordinary ways and methods of it, it is of great advantage in the *investigation of the sense* of any writer even of the Scripture itself. And those ordinarily who shall undertake the interpretation of any *series of Scripture* discourse, without some ability in this science, will find themselves oftentimes *entangled* and at a loss, where by virtue of it they might be at liberty and free. And many of the *rules* which are commonly given about the interpretation of the Scripture, as, namely, that the *scope* of the *author* in the place is duly to be considered, as also things *antecedent* and *consequent* to the place and words to be interpreted, and the like, are but directions for the due use of this *skill* or faculty.

But this also must be admitted with its limitations. For whatever perfection there seems to be in our art of reasoning, it is to be subjected to the wisdom of the Holy Ghost in the Scripture. His way of reasoning is always his own, sometimes *sublime* and *heavenly*, so as not to be reduced unto the common rules of our arts and sciences, without a derogation from its *instructive*, *convictive*, and *persuasive* efficacy. For us to frame unto ourselves *rules of ratiocination*, or to have our minds embondaged unto those of other men's invention and observation, if we think thereon absolutely to reduce all the reasonings in the Scripture unto them, we may fall into a presumptuous mistake. In the consideration of all effects of infinite wisdom there must be an allowance for the deficiency of our comprehension, when humble subjection of conscience, and the captivating of our understandings to the obedience of faith, is the best means of learning what is proposed unto us. And there is nothing more contemptible than the *arrogancy* of such persons, who think by the shallow measures and short lines of their own weak, dark, imperfect reasoning, to fathom the depths of Scripture senses.

Again, What sense soever any man supposeth or judgeth this or that particular place of Scripture to yield and give out to the best of his rational intelligence, is immediately to give place unto the *analogy of faith*, that is, the Scripture's own declaration of its sense in other places, to another purpose or contrary thereunto. The want of attending unto men's duty herein, with a *mixture of pride and pertinacy*, is the occasion of most errors and noxious opinions in the world. For when some have taken up a *private interpretation* of any place of Scripture, if before they have thoroughly imbibed and vented it, they do not submit their conceptions, although they seem to be greatly satisfied in it and full of it, unto the authority of the Scripture in the declaration of its own mind in other places, there is but small hope of their recovery. And this is that pride which is the source and original of *heresy*; namely, when men will prefer their *seemingly wise* and rational conceptions of the sense of *particular places*, before the *analogy of faith*.

Moreover, there is a pernicious mistake that some are fallen into about these things. They suppose, that taking in the help of *skill in the original languages* for the understanding of the words and their use, whether proper or figurative, that there is nothing more necessary to the understanding and interpretation of the Scripture, but only *the sedulous and diligent use of our own reason*, in the ordinary way, and according to the common rules of the *art of ratiocination*. For what, say they, can be more required, or what can men more make use of? By these means alone do we come to understand the meaning of any other *writer*, and, therefore, also of the Scripture. Neither can we, nor doth God require, that we should receive or believe any thing but according to our own reason and understandings. But these things, though in themselves they are, some of them, partly true, yet as they are used unto the end mentioned, they are perniciously false. For, (1.) it greatly unbecometh any Christian once to suppose that there is need of *no other assistance*, nor the use of any other means, for the interpretation of the oracles of God, or to come unto the understanding of the *hidden wisdom of God in the mystery of the gospel*, than is to the understanding or interpretation of the writings of men, which are the product of a finite, limited, and weak ability. Were

it not for some secret persuasion that the Scripture indeed is not what it pretends to be, *the word of the living God*, or that it doth not indeed express the *highest effect of his wisdom*, and deepest counsel of his will, it could not be that men should give way to such foolish imaginations. The principal matter of the Scripture is *mysterious*, and the mysteries of it are laid up therein by God himself, and that in a way *inimitable* by the skill or wisdom of men. When we speak of, and express the same things, according unto our measure of comprehension, wherein, from its agreement with the Scripture, what we say is *materially divine*, yet our words are not so, nor is there the same respect to the things themselves, as the expressions of the Scripture have, which are *formally divine*. And can we ourselves trace these paths of wisdom without his especial guidance and assistance? It is highly *atheistical* once to fancy it. (2.) We treat of such an interpretation of the Scripture as is *real*, and is accompanied with an understanding of the things proposed and expressed; and not merely of the *notional sense of propositions and expressions*. For we speak of such an interpretation of the Scripture as is a sanctified means of our *illumination*; nor any other doth either the Scripture require, or God regard. That to give in this unto us, notwithstanding the use and advantage of all outward helps and means, is the peculiar work of the Spirit of God, hath been before demonstrated. It is true, we can receive nothing, reject nothing, as to what is true or false, nor conceive the sense of any thing but by our own *reasons* and understandings. But the inquiry herein is, what *supernatural aid and assistance* our minds and natural reasons stand in need of, to enable them to receive and understand aright things spiritual and supernatural. And if it be true, that no more is required unto the due understanding and interpretation of the Scriptures, but the exercise of our *own reasons*, in and by the helps mention; namely, *skill in the original languages, the arts of ratiocination*, and the like, which are exposed unto all in common, according to the measure of their natural abilities and diligence, then is the sense of the Scripture, that is, the mind of God and Christ therein, *equally discernible*, or to be attained unto, by all sorts of men, good and bad, holy and

profane, believers and unbelievers, those who obey the word, and those who despise it; which is contrary to all the promises of God, and innumerable other testimonies of Scripture.

CHAP. IX.

Helps ecclesiastical in the interpretation of the Scripture.

THIRDLY, There are means and helps for the interpretation of the Scripture, which I call *ecclesiastical*. Those I intend which we are supplied withal by the *ministry of the church*, in all ages. And they may be referred unto three heads, under which their usefulness to this purpose is pleaded. As, 1. *Catholic or universal tradition*. 2. *Consent of the fathers*. 3. *The endeavours of any persons holy and learned*, who have gone before us in the investigation of the truth, and expressed their minds in writing, for the edification of others, whether of *old* or of *late*. These things belong unto the ministry of the church, and so far as they do so, are sanctified ordinances for the communication of the mind of God unto us,

1. It is pleaded by some that the Scripture is to be interpreted according to *catholic tradition* and no otherwise. And I do acknowledge that we should be inexpressibly obliged to them who would give us an interpretation of the *whole Scripture*, or of any *book in the Scripture*, or of any *one passage* in the Scripture, relating unto things of mere supernatural revelation, according unto that *rule*, or by the guidance and direction of it. But I fear no such tradition can be evidenced, unless it be of things manifest in the light of nature, whose universal preservation is an effect of the unavoidable reason of mankind, and not of any *ecclesiastical* tradition. Moreover, the Scripture itself is testified unto unanimously and uninterruptedly by all Christians to be the word of God; and hereby are all divine truths conveyed down from their original and delivered unto us. But a *collateral tradition* of any one truth or doctrine besides, from Christ and the apostles, cannot be proved. And if it could be so, it would be

no means of the interpretation of the Scripture, but only *objectively*, as one place of Scripture interprets another; that is, it would belong unto the *analogy of faith*, contrary to which, or in opposition whereunto, no place ought to be interpreted. To pretend this, therefore, to be the rule of the interpretation of Scripture *actively*, as though thereby we could certainly learn the meaning of it in *part* or in *whole*, is fond. Nor, whatever some do boast of, can any man living prove his interpretation of any one place, to be dictated by, or to be suitable unto, *universal tradition*, any otherwise but as he can prove it to be agreeable to the *Scripture* itself; unless we shall acknowledge without proof, that what is the mind and sense of some men who call themselves the church, at present, was the mind of Christ and his apostles, and of all true believers since, and that infallibly it is so. But this pretence hath been abundantly and sufficiently disproved, though nothing seems to be so, to the minds of men fortified against all evidences of truth by invincible prejudices.

2. The *joint consent of the fathers*, or ancient doctors of the church, is also pretended as a rule of Scripture interpretation. But those who make this *plea* are apparently influenced by their supposed interest so to do. No man of ingenuity, who hath ever read or considered them, or any of them, with attention and judgment can abide by this pretence. For it is utterly impossible they should be an *authentic rule* unto others, who so disagree among themselves, as they will be found to do, not, it may be, so much in *articles of faith*, as in their *exposition of Scripture*, which is the matter under consideration. About the former they express themselves diversely, in the latter they *really differ*, and that frequently. Those who seem most earnestly to press this *dogma* upon us, are those of the *church of Rome*. And yet it is hard to find one learned man among them, who hath undertaken to expound or write *commentaries* on the Scripture, but on all occasions he gives us the different senses, expositions, and interpretations of the fathers, of the same places and texts; and that where any difficulty occurs in a manner perpetually. But the pretence of the *authoritative determination* of the *fathers* in points of religion, hath been so disproved, and the vanity of it so fully discovered, as that it is altogether needless farther to insist upon it. And those who would seem to have found out a

middle way, between their *determining authority* on the one hand, and the *efficacy* of their *reasons*, with a due veneration of their piety and ability, which all sober men allow, on the other, do but trifle and speak words, whose sense neither themselves nor any other do understand.

3. We say, therefore, that the sole use of *ecclesiastical means* in the interpretation of the Scripture, is in the due consideration and improvement of that *light, knowledge, understanding* in, and those *gifts* for the declaration of, the mind of God in the Scripture, which he hath granted unto, and furnished them withal, who have gone before us in the *ministry* and work of the gospel. For as God in an especial manner, in all ages, took care that the doctrine of the gospel should be preached *viva voce*, to the present edification of the body of the church; so likewise almost from the beginning of its propagation in the world, presently after the decease of the apostles, and that whole divinely inspired society of preachers and writers, he stirred up and enabled sundry persons to declare by *writing* what their apprehensions were, and what *understanding* God had given them in and about the sense of the Scripture. Of those who designedly wrote comments and expositions on any part of the Scripture, Origen was the first, whose fooleries and mistakes occasioned by the prepossession of his mind with *platonical philosophy*, confidence of his own great abilities (which indeed were singular and admirable), with the curiosity of a speculative mind, discouraged not others from endeavouring with more sobriety and better success to write entire expositions on some parts of the Scripture; such among the Greeks were Chrysostom, Theodoret, Aretine, Œcomenius, Theophylact; and among the Latins, Hierom, Ambrose, Austin, and others. These have been followed, used, improved, by others innumerable in succeeding ages. Especially since the reformation hath the work been carried on with general success, and to the great advantage of the church. Yet hath it not proceeded so far, but that the best, most useful, and profitable labour in the Lord's vineyard, which any holy and learned man can engage himself in, is to endeavour the contribution of farther light in the opening and exposition of Scripture, or any part thereof. Now all these are singular helps and advantages unto the right un-

derstanding of the Scripture, of the same kind of advantage, as to that single end of light and knowledge, which preaching of the word is, used with sobriety, judgment, and a due examination of all by the text itself. For the *exposition of the fathers*, as it is a ridiculous imagination, and that which would oblige us to the belief of contradictions, and open mistakes, for any man to *authenticate* them so far as to bind us up unto an assent unto their conceptions and dictates because they are theirs; so they will not be despised by any, but such as have not been conversant in them. And it is easy to discern from them all, by the diversity of their gifts, ways, and designs, in the exposition of Scripture, that the Holy Spirit *divided unto them as he pleased*; which as it should make us reverence his presence with them, and assistance of them, so it calls for the freedom of our own judgments to be exercised about their conceptions. And for those of *latter* days, though the names of the principal and most eminent of them, as Bucer, Calvin, Martyr, Beza, are now contemned and despised by many, mostly by those who never once seriously attempted the exposition of any one chapter in the whole Scripture; yet those who firmly design to grow in the knowledge of God, and of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, both do, and always will bless God for the assistance he gave them in their great and holy works, and in the benefit which they receive by their labours. These are the outward means and advantages which are requisite and to be used, as any one's calling, opportunity, ability, and work, do require, as helps to attain a right understanding of the mind of God in the Scripture. Now, concerning them all, I shall only say, that the Spirit of God makes them useful and prosperous according to the counsel of his own will. Some are prone in the use of them, to lean unto their own understandings, and consequently, to wander in and after the imaginations of their own minds, corrupting the word of God, and endeavouring to pervert his right ways thereby. Others he leaves in the *shell of the text* to exercise their skill about words, phrases, and expressions, without leading of them into the spiritual sense of the word, which is its life and power. In some he blesteth them to the full and proper end, but not unless they are in a compliance with the spiritual means and duties before insisted on.

From what hath been discoursed concerning the work of the Spirit of God in revealing unto believers the mind of God in the Scriptures, or the sense of that *revelation* made of it therein, two things will seem to follow. First, That those who have not that *assistance* granted to them, or that work of his wrought in them, cannot understand or apprehend the truth or doctrine of faith and obedience therein revealed. For, if that work of the Spirit be necessary thereunto, which they are not made partakers of, how can they come to any knowledge or understanding therein? Secondly, That those who are so influenced and guided, *must understand the whole Scripture aright*, and be freed from all mistakes in their conceptions about the mind of God; both which are contrary to the experience of all men in all ages; seeing many persons visibly destitute of any saving work of the Holy Ghost upon their minds, as is evident in that no renovation of them, or reformation of life, doth ensue thereon, have yet *attained a great acquaintance with the truth* as it is revealed in the word; and many who are *truly enlightened* and sanctified by him, do yet fall into sundry *errors* and mistakes, which the differences and divisions among themselves do openly proclaim. And the Scripture itself supposeth that there may be *diversity of judgments* about spiritual things, among those who are really sanctified and believers.

A brief answer unto both these exceptions will lead this discourse unto its close. I say, therefore, to the first: (1.) That there are in the declaration of the mind of God in the Scriptures sundry things that are *common unto other writings*, both as to the matter of them, and the manner of their delivery. Such are the *stories* of times past therein recorded, the *computation of times*, the use of words, *phrases of speech*, *figurative* and *proper*, *artificial* connexions of discourse, *various sorts of arguments*, and the like, all which persons may come to the understanding of, and be able to make a right judgment concerning, without any especial assistance of the Holy Spirit, the things about which they are conversant being the proper object of the reasonable faculties of the mind, provided there be a common blessing on their endeavours and exercise. (2.) The *main doctrines* of truth declared in the Scripture are proposed in such distinct, *plain enunciations*, in propositions accommodated unto the understandings of

rational men, that persons who in the use of *disciplinary* and *ecclesiastical helps*, attend unto the study of them without prejudices, or prepossession with false notions and opinions, with freedom from the bias of carnal or secular interests and advantages, and the leaven of tradition, may learn, know, and understand the sense, meaning, and truth of the doctrines so proposed and declared unto them, without any especial work of *saving illumination* on their minds. The propositions of truth in the Scripture, I mean those which are necessary unto the great ends of the Scripture, are so plain and evident in themselves, that it is the fault and sin of all men endued with rational abilities, if they perceive them not, and assent not unto them upon the evidence of their truth, or of the mind of God in those places of Scripture wherein they are declared; which is the substance of what we plead concerning the *perspicuity of the Scripture* against the *Papists*. (3.) Considering the *natural vanity* of the mind of man, its proneness to error and false imaginations, the weakness of judgment wherewith it is in all things accompanied, whatever it attains in the knowledge of truth is to be ascribed unto the guidance of the Spirit of God, although not working in it or upon it by a communication of saving light and grace. For, (4.) the knowledge of truth thus to be attained is not that *illumination* which we are inquiring after, nor doth it produce those effects of renewing the mind, and transforming it into the image of the things known, with the fruits of holy obedience, which are inseparable from saving illumination.

In answer unto the second pretended consequence of what we have discoursed, I say, (1.) That the promise of the Spirit, and the communication of him accordingly, to *teach, instruct, guide, and lead us into truth*, is suited unto that *great end* for which God hath made the revelation of himself in his word; namely, that we might live unto him here according to his will, and be brought into the enjoyment of him hereafter unto his glory. (2.) That unto this end it is not necessary that we should understand the *direct sense and meaning of any single text, place, or passage* in the Scripture, nor yet that we should obtain the knowledge of every thing revealed therein. It sufficeth in answer to the promise and design of the work of the Holy Ghost, that the *knowledge of all truth* necessary to be known unto that end, be communi-

cated unto us ; and that we have so far a right understanding of the sense of the Scripture, as to learn that truth by the use of the means appointed unto that end. (3.) We are not hereby *absolutely secured* from particular errors and mistakes, no more than we are from all actual sins, by the work of the Spirit on our wills ; that of both kinds, whilst we live in this world, being only in a tendency towards perfection. There is no faculty of our souls that is absolutely and perfectly renewed in this life. But as the *wills* of believers are so far renewed and changed by grace as to preserve them from *such sins*, as are inconsistent with a holy life according to the tenor of the covenant, which yet leaves a possibility of many infirmities and actual sins ; so their *minds* are so far renewed as to know and assent to all truths *necessary to our life of obedience*, and a right understanding of the Scripture wherein they are revealed, which yet may be consistent with many mistakes, errors, and false apprehensions unto our great damage and disadvantage. But withal this must be added, that such are the teachings of the Spirit of God, as to all divine truths whatever, both in the *objective revelation* of them in the word, and in the *assistance* he gives us by his light and grace to perceive and understand the mind and whole counsel of God in that revelation, that it is not without our own *guilt*, as well as from our own *weakness*, that we fall into errors and misapprehensions about any Scripture proposals that concern our duty to God. And if all that believe, would freely forego all prejudices or preconceived opinions, and cast off all impressions from worldly considerations and secular advantages, giving themselves up humbly and entirely to the teachings of God in the ways of his own appointment, some whereof have been before insisted on, we might all come ‘in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ ;’ Eph. iv. 13. And these things may suffice to illustrate the work of the Holy Ghost in our *illumination*, with respect unto the external objective causes thereof, or the holy Scripture itself.

There is yet another work of the Holy Ghost with respect unto the Scripture, which although it fall not directly under the present consideration of the *ways and means of saving illumination*, yet the whole of what we have discoursed is so

resolved into it in the order of an external cause, as that it may justly claim a remembrance in this place ; and this is, his *watchful care over the written word*, in preserving it from destruction and corruption, from the first writing of it unto this very day. That it hath been under the especial care of God, not only the event of its entire preservation, considering the opposition it hath been exposed unto, but also the testimony of our Saviour, as to the *books of the Old Testament*, than which those of the New are certainly of no less esteem or use, do sufficiently evince ; Matt. v. 18. ‘Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or tittle shall in no wise pass from the law.’ That by the *law* the whole writings of the Old Testament are intended, the context doth declare. And what he affirms, that it shall not by any means pass away, that is, be abolished or corrupted, that he taketh on himself to preserve and secure. Two things the Scripture in itself is subject unto : (1.) *Destruction or abolition*, as unto the whole or any necessary part thereof. (2.) *Corruption of the writing* by changes, alterations, and falsifications of the copies of it. And by both of these it hath been attempted, and that both before and since the time of the promulgation of the gospel ; the stories whereof are known. And yet is it come safe off from all, not only without *ruin*, but without *wound* or *blemish*. For any one to suppose that this hath been done by chance, or by the care of men alone, without the especial watchful providence and powerful actings of the Spirit of God, in the pursuit of the promise of Christ that it should not fail, which expressed a care that God had taken on himself to make good from the beginning, is not only to neglect the consideration of the nature of all human affairs, with the revolutions that they are subject unto, and the deceit and violence wherewith the Scriptures have been attacked, with the insufficiency of the powers and diligence employed for their preservation ; but also to countenance *atheistical notions*, that God hath no especial regard to his word and worship in the world. Indeed, for a man to think and profess that the Scripture is the word of God, given unto men for the ends which itself declares, and of that use which it must be of in being so, and not believe that God hath always taken, and doth take, especial care of its preservation, and that in its purity and integrity, beyond the ordinary ways of his

providence in the rule of all other things, is to be sottish and foolish, and to entertain thoughts of God, his goodness, wisdom, and power, infinitely unworthy of him and them. There have of late been some opinions concerning the *integrity and purity* of the Scriptures, invented and maintained, that I conceive take off from the reverence of that relation which the Scripture hath, in its integrity and purity, unto the care and glory of God. Hence it is by some maintained that some books written by divine inspiration, and given out unto the church as part of its *canon*, or rule of faith and obedience, are utterly lost and perished. That the *law* and *Scripture* of the Old Testament before the *captivity*, were written though in the Hebrew *tongue* (which they say was not originally the language of Abraham derived from Heber, but of the posterity of Cham in Canaan), yet not in the *letters* or *characters* which are now in use, but in those which a few wicked idolaters, called Samaritans, did use and possess, being left unto them by Ezra, and new characters invented by him, or borrowed from the Chaldeans for the use of the church. That the *vowels and accents*, whereby alone the true reading and sense of it is preserved, are a late invention of some Masorethical Rabbins; and that the *original text* is in many places corrupted, so as that it may and ought to be corrected by translations, especially that of the LXX, with sundry other such imaginations, which they countenance with uncertain conjectures, and fabulous stories. And I cannot but wonder how some seem to take *shelter unto their opinions*, especially that of preferring the *translation of the LXX* unto the original Hebrew text, or as they fondly speak, the present copy of it, in the church of England, whose *publicly authorized and excellent translation*, takes no more notice, nor hath any more regard unto that translation, when it differs from the Hebrew, as it doth in a thousand places, than if it had never been in the world. And as no translations are in common use in the whole world, but what were immediately traduced out of the Hebrew original, excepting only some *part of the vulgar Latin*; so I verily believe, that those very Christians who contend for a *preference* to be given unto that of the LXX, now they have got their ends, or at least attempted them in procuring a reputation of learning, skill, and cunning, by their *writings about it*, would not dare to

advise a translation out of that to be made and composed for the use of that *church* which they adhere unto, be it what it will; to the rejection and exclusion of that taken out of the original. And to have two recommended unto common use, so discrepant as they would be found to be, would certainly be of more disadvantage to the church, than by all their endeavours otherwise they can compensate. Yea, I am apt to think, that they will not be very urgent for an alteration to be made in the *church's translation* in those particular instances wherein they hope they have won themselves much reputation, in proving the *mistakes of the Hebrew*, and manifesting how it may be rectified by the *translation* of the LXX. For whatever thoughts may be in their minds concerning their learned disputes, I doubt not but they have more reverence of God and his word, than to break in upon it with such a kind of violence, on any pretence whatsoever. As therefore, the integrity and purity of the Scripture in the *original languages* may be proved and defended against all opposition, with whatever belongs thereunto, so we must ascribe their preservation to the watchful care, and powerful operation of the Spirit of God absolutely securing them throughout all generations.

END OF VOL. III.