

A
PRELIMINARY DISCOURSE
TO
CATECHISING.



COL. i. 23.

If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled.

INTENDING the next Lord's day to enter upon the work of catechising, it will not be amiss to give you this preliminary discourse, as preparatory to it; shewing you how needful it is for Christians to be well instructed in the grounds of religion. 'If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled,'—Two propositions:

First, It is the duty of Christians to be settled in the doctrine of faith.

Second, The best way for Christians to be settled, is to be well grounded.

DOCT. I. *That it is the duty of Christians to be settled in the doctrine of faith.* It is the apostle's prayer, 1 Pet. v. 10. 'The God of all grace, stablish, strengthen, settle you.' That they might not be meteors in the air, but fixed stars. The apostle Jude speaks of 'wandering stars,' verse 13. They are called wandering stars, because, as Aristotle saith, "They do leap up and down, and wander into several parts of the heaven; and being but dry exhalations, not made of that pure celestial matter as the fixed stars are, they often fall to the earth." Now, such as are not settled in religion, will, at one time or other, prove wandering stars; they will lose their former strictness, and wander from one opinion to another. Such as are unsettled are of the tribe of Reuben, 'unstable as water,' Gen. xlix. 4. like a ship without ballast, overturned with every wind of doctrine. Beza writes of one Belfectius, whose religion changed as the moon. The Arians had every year a new faith. These are not pillars in the temple of God, but reeds shaken every way. The apostle calls them 'damnable heresies,' 2 Pet. ii. 1. A man may go to hell as well for heresy as adultery. To be unsettled in religion, argues want of judgment: if their heads were not giddy, they would not reel so fast from one opinion to another. It argues lightness: feathers will be

blown every way; so will feathery Christians: *Triticum non rapit ventus inanes paleæ jactantur*, Cypr. Therefore such are compared to children, Eph. iv. 14. 'That we be no more children, tossed to and fro.' Children are fickle, sometimes of one mind, sometimes of another; nothing pleases them long: so unsettled Christians are childish; those truths they embrace at one time, they reject at another; sometimes they like the Protestant religion, and soon after they have a good mind to turn Papists. Now, that you may labour to be settled, (as Ignatius) in the faith, in unsettled times of settled judgments.

1. It is the great end of the word preached, to bring us to a settlement in religion: Eph. iv. 11, 13. 'And he gave some, evangelists, and some, pastors and teachers, for the edifying of the body of Christ; that we henceforth be no more children.' The word is called an hammer, Jer. xxiii. 29. Every blow of the hammer is to fasten the nails of the building; the preacher's words are but to fasten you the more to Christ; they weaken themselves to strengthen and settle you. This is the grand design of preaching, not only for the enlightening, but for the establishing of souls; not only to guide them in the right way, but to keep them in it. Now, if you be not settled, you do not answer God's end in giving you the ministry.

2. To be settled in religion: it is both a Christian's excellency and honour: it is his excellency; when the milk is settled, it turns to cream; now, he will be something zealous for the truth, walk in close communion with God. And his honour, Prov. xvi. 31. 'The hoary head is a crown of glory, if it be found in the way of righteousness.' It is one of the best sights, to see an old disciple; to see silver hairs adorned with golden virtues.

3. Such as are not settled in the faith, can never suffer for it; sceptics in religion will hardly ever prove martyrs; they that are not settled do hang in suspense; when they think of the joys of heaven, then they will espouse the gospel; but when they think of persecution, then they desert it. Unsettled Christians do not consult what is best, but what is safest: "The apostate (saith Tertullian) seems to put God and Satan in balance, and having weighed both their services, prefers the devil's service, and proclaims him to be the best master: and, in this sense, may be said to put Christ to open shame," Heb. vi. 6. They will never suffer for the truth, but be as a soldier that leaves his colours, and runs over to the enemy's side; he will fight on the devil's side for pay.

4. Not to be settled in the faith, is highly provoking to God: to espouse the truth, and then to fall away, brings an ill report upon the gospel, which will not go unpunished: Psal. lxxviii. 57, 59. 'They turned back, and dealt unfaithfully; when

God heard this, he was wroth, and greatly abhorred Israel.' The apostate drops as a windfall into the devil's mouth.

5. If ye are not settled in religion, you will never grow: we are commanded 'to grow up into the head, Christ,' Eph. iv. 14. But if we are unsettled, no growing: 'the plant which is continually removing never thrives.' He can no more grow in godliness, who is unsettled, than a bone can grow in the body that is out of joint.

6. What great need is there to be settled? because there are so many things to unsettle us, and make us fall away from the truth. Seducers are abroad, whose work is to draw away people from the principles of religion, 1 John ii. 26. 'Those things have I written unto you concerning them that seduce you.' Seducers are the devils factors; they are of all others the greatest felons, that would rob you of the truth: seducers have silver tongues; a fair tongue can put off bad wares; they have a slight to deceive, Eph. iv. 14. The Greek word there is taken from those that can cog a die, and cast it for the best advantage: so seducers are impostors, they can cog a die; they can so dissemble and sophisticate the truth, that they can deceive others. Now, the style by which seducers use to deceive, is,

1. By wisdom of words, Rom. xvi. 18. 'By good words and fair speeches they deceive the hearts of the simple.' They have fine elegant phrases, flattering language, whereby they work on the weaker sort, as being christed with Christ, and the light within them.

2. Another slight, is a pretence of extraordinary piety, that so people may admire them, and suck in their doctrine. They seem to be men of zeal and sanctity, and to be divinely inspired: they pretend revelations, as Munster, Michael Servetus, and other of the Anabaptists in Germany, though they were tainted with pride, lust, and avarice.

3. A third slight or cheat seducers have, is a labouring to vilify and nullify sound orthodox teachers; they would eclipse those that bring the truth, like unto the black vapours that darken the light of heaven: they would defame others, that themselves may be more admired. Thus the false teachers cried down Paul, that they might be received, Gal. iv. 17.

4. The fourth slight or cheat of seducers, is by "preaching doctrine of liberty:" as the Antinomian preacheth, that men are freed from the moral law, the rule as well as the curse. He preacheth that Christ hath done all for them, and they need to do nothing. So he makes the doctrine of free grace a key to open the door to all licentiousness.

5. Another thing to unsettle Christians, is persecutors, 2 Tim. iii. 12. The gospel is a rose cannot be plucked without prickles. The legacy Christ hath bequeathed is the *Cross*: while there is

a devil and a wicked man in the world, never expect a charter of exemption from trouble; and how many fall away in an hour of perfecution? Rev. iii. 4. 'There appeared a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns; and his tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven:' the red dragon, the heathenish empire; and his tail, viz. his power and subtilty, drew away stars, viz. eminent professors, that seemed to shine as stars in the firmament of the church. Therefore we see what need there is to be settled in the truth, for fear the tail of the dragon cast us to the earth.

6. To be unsettled in good, is the sin of the devils, Jude 6. They are called 'morning stars,' Job xxxviii. 7. but 'falling stars;' they were holy, but mutable. As the vessel is overturned with the sail, so their sails being swelled with pride, were overturned, 1 Tim. iii. 6. By unsettledness, who dost thou imitate but lapsed angels? The devil was the first apostate. So much for the first proposition, that it is a great duty of Christians to be settled: the sons of Sion should be like mount Sion, which cannot be removed.

Second, The second proposition is, that the way for Christians to be settled, is to be well grounded: 'if ye continue grounded and settled.' The Greek word for *grounded*, a metaphor, it alludes to a building that hath the foundation well laid; so Christians should be grounded in the essential point of religion, and have their foundation well laid.

Here let me speak to two things: 1. That we should be grounded in the knowledge of fundamentals. 2. That this grounding is the best way to settling.

(1.) That we should be grounded in the knowledge of fundamentals: the apostle speaks of the 'first principles of the oracles of God,' Heb. v. 13. In all arts and sciences, logic, physic, mathematics, there are some *præcognita*, some rules and principles that must necessarily be known to the practice of those arts; so, in divinity, there must be the first principles laid down: the knowledge of the grounds and principles of religion is exceeding useful.

1. Else we cannot serve God aright; we can never worship God acceptably, unless we worship him regularly; and how can we do that, if we are ignorant of the rules and elements of religion? We are bid to give God a 'reasonable service,' Rom. xii. 1. If we understand not the grounds of religion, how can it be a reasonable service?

2. Knowledge of the grounds of religion much enricheth the mind: it is a lamp to our feet; it directs us in the whole course of Christianity, as the eye directs the body. Knowledge of fundamentals is the golden key that opens the chief mysteries of religion; it gives us a whole system and body of divinity, ex-

actly drawn in all its lineaments and lively colours: it helps us to understand many of those difficult things, which do occur in the reading of the word; it helps to untie many scripture knots.

3. Armour of proof; it doth furnish us with weapons to fight against the adversaries of the truth.

4. It is the holy seed of which grace is formed: It is the *femen fidei*, the seed of faith, Pſal. ix. 10. It is *radix amoris*, the root of love, Eph. iii. 17. 'Being rooted and grounded in love.' The knowledge of principles conduceth to the making of a complete Christian.

(2.) That this grounding is the best way to settling: 'grounded and settled.' A tree, that it may be well settled, must be well rooted: so, if you be well settled in religion, you must be rooted in the principles of it. He, in Plutarch, set up a dead man, and he would not stand. O faith he, "there must be something within:" so, that we may stand in shaking times, there must be a principle of knowledge within; first grounded, and then settled. That the ship may be kept from overturning, it must have its anchor fastened; knowledge of principles, is to the soul as an anchor to the ship, that holds it steady in the midst of all the rolling waves of error, or the violent winds of perfection. First grounded and then settled.

USE I. See the reason why so many people are unsettled, ready to embrace every novel opinion, and dress themselves in as many religions as they do fashions; it is because they are ungrounded. See how the apostle joins these two together, 'unlearned and unstable,' 2 Pet. iii. 16. Such as are unlearned in the main points of divinity, will be unstable. As the body cannot be strong that hath the sinews shrunk; so neither can that Christian be strong in religion, who wants the grounds of knowledge, which are the sinews to strengthen and stablish him.

USE II. See then what great necessity there is of laying down all the main grounds of religion in a way of catechise, that the weakest judgment may be instructed in the knowledge of the truth, and strengthened in the love of it; catechising is the best expedient for the grounding and settling of people. I fear, one reason why there hath been no more good done by preaching, hath been because the chief heads and articles in religion have not been explained in a catechistical way; catechising is the laying the foundation, Heb. vi. 7. to preach, and not to catechise, is to build without a foundation. This way of catechising, is not novel, it is apostolical: the primitive church had their forms of catechism: so much those phrases imply a 'form of sound words,' 2 Tim. i. 13. and 'the first principles of the oracles of God,' Heb. vi. 1. And since the church had their

catechimonoi, as Grotius and Erasmus observe; many of the ancient fathers have written for it, Fulgentius, Auſtin, Theodoret, Lactantius and others. God hath given great ſucceſs to it. By this laying down of grounds of religion catechiftically. Chriſtians have been clearly inſtructed, and wondrously built up in the Chriſtian faith, inſomuch that Julian the apoſtate, ſeeing the great ſucceſs of catechiſing, did put down all ſchools and places of public literature, and inſtructing of youth. It is my deſign therefore (with the bleſſing of God) to begin this work of catechiſing the next ſabbath-day: and I intend every other ſabbath, in the afternoon, to make it my whole work to lay down the grounds and fundamentals of religion in a catechiſtical way. If I am hindered in this work by men, or taken away by death, I hope God will raiſe up ſome other labourer in the vineyard, among you that may perfect this work which I am now beginning.

MAN'S CHIEF END IS TO GLORIFY GOD.

Q. 1. WHAT is the chief end of man ?

Anſ. Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him for ever.

Here are two ends of life ſpecified, 1. The glorifying of God.
2. The enjoying of God.

Fiſt, I begin with the fiſt, the glorifying of God, 1 Pet. iv. 11. 'That God in all things may be glorified?' the glory of God is a ſilver-thread which muſt run through all our actions: 1 Cor. x. 31. 'Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatſoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.' Every thing works to ſome end in things natural and artificial; now man being a rational creature, muſt propoſe ſome end to himſelf, and that is, that he may liſt up God in the world; and better loſe his life, than loſe the end of his living: ſo then, the great truth aſſerted is this, that the end of every man's living, is to glorify God; this is the yearly rent that is paid to the crown of heaven. Glorifying of God hath reſpect to all the perſons in the Trinity; it reſpects God the Father, who gave us our life; it reſpects God the Son, who loſt his for us; it reſpects God the Holy Ghoſt, who produceth a new life in us; we muſt bring glory to the whole Trinity.

When we ſpeak of God's glory, the queſtion will be moved, *what are we to underſtand by God's glory?*

Anſ. There is a twofold glory: 1. The glory that God hath in himſelf, his intrinſical glory. Glory is eſſential to the God-head, as light is to the ſun: he is called the 'God of glory,'