

THE
FOUNTAIN OF LIFE.

SERMON I.

Opens the EXCELLENCY of the SUBJECT.

1 COR. ii. 2.

For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified.

THE former verse contains an apology for the plain and familiar manner of the apostle's preaching, which was not (as he there tells them) with excellency of speech, or of wisdom; *i. e.* he studied not to gratify their curiosity with rhetorical strains, or philosophical niceties. In this he gives the reason, "for I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ," &c. *

"I determined not to know." †] The meaning is not, that he simply despised, or contemned all other studies and knowledge; but so far only as they stand in competition with, or opposition to the study and knowledge of Jesus Christ. And it is as if he should say, it is my stated, settled judgment; not a hasty, inconsiderate censure, but the product and issue of my most serious and exquisite enquiries. After I have well weighed the case, turned it round, viewed it exactly on every side, balanced all advantages and disadvantages, pondered all things, that are fit to come into consideration about it; this is the result and final determination, that all other knowledge, how profitable, how pleasant soever, is not worthy to be named in the same day with the knowledge of Jesus

* *Νον τεχνολογειν, sed θεολογειν, i. e.* Not to teach arts and sciences, but religion.

† *Ου εκρινα τα ειδειναι τι εν υμιν,*—I did not judge it equitable to know with marked regard any thing among you.—He does not condemn all other knowledge except when it rivals the knowledge of Christ, &c.

Christ. This, therefore, I resolve to make the scope and end of my ministry, and the end regulates the mean; such pedantic toys, and airy notions as injudicious ears affect, would rather obstruct than promote my grand design among you; therefore, wholly waving that way, I applied myself to a plain, popular, unaffected dialect, fitted rather to pierce the heart, and convince the conscience, than to tickle the fancy. This is the scope of the words, in which three things fall under consideration;

First, The subject matter of his doctrine, to wit, *Jesus Christ*. "I determined to know nothing," *i. e.* to study nothing myself, to teach nothing to you, but "Jesus Christ." Christ shall be the centre to which all the lines of my ministry shall be drawn. I have spoken and written of many other subjects in my sermons and epistles, but it is all *reductively* the preaching and discovery of Jesus Christ: of all the subjects in the world, this is the sweetest; if there be any thing on this side heaven, worthy our time and studies, this is it. Thus he magnifies his doctrine, from the excellency of its subject-matter, accounting all other doctrines but airy things, compared with this.

Secondly, We have here *that special respect or consideration of Christ*, which he singled out from all the rest of the excellent truths of Christ, to spend the main strength of his ministry upon; and that is, *Christ as crucified*: and the rather, because hereby he would obviate the vulgar prejudice raised against him upon the account of his cross; "For Christ crucified was to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness," chap. i. 23. This also best suited his end, to draw them on to Christ; as Christ above all other subjects, so Christ crucified above all things in Christ. There is, therefore, a great emphasis in this word, "and him crucified."*

Thirdly, The manner in which he discoursed this transcendent subject to them, is also remarkable; he not only preached Christ crucified, but he preached him assiduously and plainly. He preached Christ frequently; "and whenever he preached of Christ crucified, he preached him in a crucified stile."† This is the sum of the words; to let them know that his spirit was intent upon this subject, as if he neither knew, nor cared to speak of any other. All his sermons were so full of Christ, that his hearers might have thought he was acquainted with no other doctrine. Hence observe,

* *Vehementem habet εμφασιν quod adjecit, & hunc crucifixum.* He writes with peculiar emphasis—*And him crucified.* Pet. Martyr in Loc.

† *Christum crucifixum stylo crucifixo prædicabat.*

Doct. *That there is no doctrine more excellent in itself, or more necessary to be preached and studied, than the doctrine of Jesus Christ, and him crucified.*

All other knowledge, how much soever it be magnified in the world, is, and ought to be esteemed but dross, in comparison of the excellency of the knowledge of Jesus Christ, Phil. iii. 8. "In him are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge," Col. ii. 3.*

Eudoxus was so affected with the glory of the sun, that he thought he was born only to behold it; much more should a Christian judge himself born only to behold and delight in the glory of the Lord Jesus.

The truth of this proposition will be made out by a double consideration of the doctrine of Christ.

First, Let it be considered absolutely, and then these lovely properties with which it is naturally clothed, will render it superior to all other sciences and studies.

1st, The knowledge of Jesus Christ is the very marrow and kernel of all the scriptures; the scope and centre of all divine revelations: both Testaments meet in Christ. The ceremonial law is full of Christ, and all the gospel is full of Christ: the blessed lines of both Testaments meet in him; and how they both harmonize, and sweetly concentre in Jesus Christ, is the chief scope of that excellent *epistle to the Hebrews*, to discover; for we may call that *epistle* the sweet harmony of both Testaments. This argues the unspeakable excellency of this doctrine, the knowledge whereof must needs therefore be a key to unlock the greatest part of the sacred scriptures. For it is in the understanding of scripture, much as it is in the knowledge men have in logic and philosophy: if a scholar once come to understand the bottom-principle, upon which, as upon its hinge, the controversy turns, the true knowledge of that principle shall carry him through the whole controversy, and furnish him with a solution to every argument. Even so the right knowledge of Jesus Christ, like a clue, leads you through the whole labyrinth of the scriptures.

2dly, The knowledge of Jesus Christ is a *fundamental knowledge*; and foundations are most useful, though least seen. The knowledge of Christ is fundamental to all *graces, duties, comforts, and happiness*.

(1.) It is fundamental to all graces; they all begin in knowledge; Col. iii. 10. "The new man is renewed in knowledge."

* He that prefers any knowledge on earth, to this sacred and heavenly knowledge, chuseth trash before a treasure. *Davenant on Coloss. chap. ii. ver. 3.*

As the old, so the new creation begins in light; the opening of the eyes is the first work of the Spirit; and as the beginnings of grace, so all the after-improvements thereof depend upon this increasing knowledge, 2 Pet. iii. 18. "But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour." See how these two, grace and knowledge, keep equal pace in the soul of a Christian; in what degree the one increases, the other increases answerably.

(2.) The knowledge of Christ is fundamental to all duties; the duties, as well as the graces of all Christians, are all founded in the knowledge of Christ. Must a Christian believe? That he can never do without the knowledge of Christ: faith is so much dependent on his knowledge, that it is denominated by it, Isa. liii. 11. "By his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many;" and hence, John vi. 40. seeing and believing are made the same thing. Would a man exercise hope in God? that he can never do without the knowledge of Christ, for he is the author of that hope, 1 Pet. i. 3. he is also its object, Heb. vi. 19. its ground-work and support, Col. i. 27. And as you cannot believe or hope, so neither can you pray acceptably without a competent degree of this knowledge. The very Heathen could say, *Non loquendum de Deo sine lumine*, i. e. Men must not speak of God without light: the true way of conversing with, and enjoying God in prayer, is by acting faith on him through a Mediator: so much comfort and true excellency there is in it, and no more. O then, how indispensable is the knowledge of Christ, to all that do address themselves to God in any duty!

(3.) It is fundamental to all comforts: all the comforts of believers are streams from this fountain. Jesus Christ is the very object matter of a believer's joy, Phil. iii. 3. "Our rejoicing is in Christ Jesus." Take away the knowledge of Christ, and a Christian is the most sad and melancholy creature in the world: again, let Christ but manifest himself, and dart the beams of his light into their souls, it will make them kiss the stakes, sing in flames, and shout in the pangs of death, as men that divide the spoil.

Lastly, This knowledge is fundamental to the eternal happiness of souls: as we can perform no duty, enjoy no comfort, so neither can we be saved without it, John xvii. 3. "This is life eternal, to know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent." And, if it be life eternal to know Christ, then it is eternal damnation to be ignorant of Christ: as *Christ* is the *door* that opens heaven, so *knowledge* is the *key* that opens Christ. The excellent gifts, and renowned parts of the moral Heathens, though they purchased to them great esteem and honour among men, yet left them in a state of perdition, because of this great defect, they

were ignorant of Christ, 1 Cor. i. 21. Thus you see how fundamental the knowledge of Christ is, essentially necessary to all the graces, duties, comforts and happiness of souls.

3dly, The knowledge of Christ is profound and large; all other sciences are but shadows; this is a boundless, bottomless ocean; no creature hath a line long enough to fathom the depth of it; there is height, length, depth and breadth ascribed to it, Eph. iii. 14. yea, it passeth knowledge. There is * “ a manifold wisdom of God in Christ,” Eph. iii. 10. It is of many sorts and forms, of many folds and plates: it is indeed simple, pure and unmingled with any thing but itself, yet it is manifold in degrees, kinds and administrations; though something of Christ be unfolded in one age, and something in another, yet eternity itself cannot fully unfold him. I see something, said Luther, which blessed Austin saw not; and those that come after me, will see that which I see not. It is in the studying of Christ, as in the planting of a new discovered country; at first men sit down by the sea-side, upon the skirts and borders of the land; and there they dwell, but by degrees they search farther and farther into the heart of the country. Ah, the best of us are yet but upon the borders of this vast continent!

4thly, The study of Jesus Christ is the most noble subject that ever a soul spent itself upon; those that rack and torture their brains upon other studies, like children, weary themselves at a low game; the eagle plays at the sun itself. The angels study this doctrine, and stoop down to look into this deep abyss. What are the truths discovered in Christ, but the very secrets that from eternity lay hid in the bosom of God? Eph. iii. 8, 9. God’s heart is opened to men in Christ, John i. 18. this makes the gospel such a glorious dispensation, because Christ is so gloriously revealed therein, 1 Cor. iii. 9. and the studying of Christ in the gospel, stamps such a heavenly glory upon the contemplating soul, ver. 18.

5thly, It is the most sweet and comfortable knowledge; to be studying Jesus Christ, what is it but to be digging among all the veins and springs of comfort? and the deeper you dig, the more do these springs flow upon you. How are hearts ravished with the discoveries of Christ in the gospel? what ecstasies, meltings, transports, do gracious souls meet there? Doubtless, Philip’s ecstasy, John i. 25. εὐηξαμεν Ἰησοῦν, “ We have found Jesus,” was far beyond that of Archimedes. A believer could sit from morning to night, to hear discourses of Christ; “ His mouth is most sweet,” Cant. v. 16. †

* Πλῆθος ποικίλος σοφία Θεοῦ, *Multiformes sapientia Dei*. Caryl in Job xi. 6.

† Every discovery of thy truth is, above all, the pleasantest, most ravishing and

Secondly, Let us compare this knowledge with all other knowledge, and thereby the excellency of it will farther appear.

1. All other knowledge is natural, but this wholly supernatural, Mat. xi. 27. "No man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him." The wisest Heathens could never make a discovery of Christ by their deepest searches into nature; the most eagle-eyed philosophers were but children in knowledge, compared with the most illiterate Christians.

2. Other knowledge is unattainable by many. All the helps and means in the world would never enable some Christians to attain the learned arts and languages; men of the best wits, and most pregnant parts, are most excellent in these; but here is the mystery and excellency of the knowledge of Christ, that men of most blunt, dull and contemptible parts attain, through the teaching of the Spirit, to this knowledge, in which the more acute and ingenious are utterly blind, Mat. xi. 25. "I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes." 1 Cor. i. 26, 27. "You see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called: but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world, to confound the wise," &c.

3. Other knowledge, though you should attain the highest degree of it, would never bring you to heaven, being defective and lame both in the integrity of parts, the principal thing, *viz.* Christ, being wanting; and in the purity of its nature: for the knowing Heathens grew vain in their imaginations, Rom. i. 21. and in the efficacy and influence of it on the heart and life, *They held the truth in unrighteousness*; their lusts were stronger than their light, Rom. i. 18. But this knowledge hath potent influences, changing souls into its own image, 2 Cor. iii. 18. and so proves a saving knowledge unto men, 1 Tim. ii. 4. And thus I have in a few particulars pointed out the transcendency of the knowledge of Christ.

The use of all this I shall give you in a few inferences, on which I shall not enlarge, the whole being only preliminary to the doctrine of Christ; only for the present I shall hence infer,

INFERENCE 1.

* The sufficiency of the doctrine of Christ, to make men wise unto salvation. Paul desired to know nothing else; and, indeed,

delightful, and even invites and offers itself to every one of its own accord. What exquisite pleasure is there in that, which lies concealed within the inmost recesses of your heart, and is shut up, as it were, with locks and bars? *Brightman on Cant.*

* He is completely learned, who has learned the gospel; but that person is quite

nothing else is of absolute necessity to be known. A little of this knowledge, if saving and effectual upon thy heart, will do thy soul more service, than all the vain speculation and profound parts that others so much glory in. Poor Christian, be not dejected, because thou seest thyself out-stripped and excelled by so many in other parts of knowledge; if thou know Jesus Christ, thou knowest enough to comfort and save thy soul. Many learned philosophers are now in hell, and many illiterate Christians in heaven.

INFERENCE 2.

If there be such excellency in the knowledge of Christ, let it humble all, both saints and sinners, that we have no more of this clear and effectual knowledge in us, notwithstanding the excellent advantages we have had for it. Sinners, concerning you I may sigh and say with the apostle, 1 Cor. xv. 34. "Some have not the knowledge of Christ, I speak this to your shame." This, O this is the condemnation. And even for you that are enlightened in this knowledge, how little do you know of Jesus Christ, in comparison of what you might have known of him? What a shame is it, that you should need to be taught the very first truths, "when for the time you might have been teachers of others?" Heb. v. 12, 13, 14. "That your ministers cannot speak unto you as spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ," 1 Cor. iii. 1, 2. O how much time is spent in other studies, in vain discourses, frivolous pamphlets, worldly employments? how little in the search and study of Jesus Christ.

INFERENCE 3.

How sad is their condition that have a knowledge of Christ, and yet as to themselves it had been better they had never had it! * Many there be that content themselves with an unpractical, ineffectual, and merely notional knowledge of him; of whom the apostle saith, "It had been better for them not to have known," 2 Pet. ii. 21. It serves only to aggravate sin and misery; for though it be not enough to save them, yet it puts some weak restraints upon sin, which their impetuous lusts breaking down, exposes them thereby to a greater damnation.

INFERENCE 4.

Fourthly, This may inform us by what rule to judge both ministers and doctrine. Certainly that is the highest commendation of a minister, to be an able minister of the New Testament; not

foolish and mad, who seeks for saving knowledge any where else; for here is a large field of such knowledge; here all the treasures of it. *Davenant on Coloss.*

* *Vide Zanch. in Eph. iv. p. 161. de duplici cognitione Christi.*

of the letter, but of the Spirit, 2 Cor. iii. 6. He is the best artist, that can most lively and powerfully display Jesus Christ before the people, evidently setting him forth as crucified among them; and that is the best sermon, that is most full of Christ, not of art and language. I know that a holy dialect well becometh Christ's ministers, they should not be rude and careless in language or method; but surely the excellency of a sermon lies not in that, but in the plainest discoveries and liveliest applications of Jesus Christ.

INFERENCE 5.

Let all that mind the honour of religion, or the peace and comfort of their own souls, wholly sequester and apply themselves to the study of Jesus Christ, and him crucified. Wherefore spend we ourselves upon other studies, when all excellency, sweetness, and desirableness is centered in this one? Jesus Christ is fairer than the children of men, the chiefest among ten thousands, "as the apple-tree among the trees of the wood;" *Quæ faciunt divisa beatum, in hoc mixta fluunt*: These things which singly ravish and delight the souls of men, are all found conjunctly in Christ. O what a blessed Christ is this! * whom to know is eternal life. From the knowledge of Jesus Christ do bud forth all the fruits of comfort, and that for all seasons and conditions. Hence Rev. xxii. 2. he is called "the tree of life, which bears twelve manner of fruits, and yields its fruit every month; and the very leaves of this tree are for healing." In Christ souls have, (1.) All necessaries for food and physic. (2.) All varieties of fruits, twelve manner of fruits; a distinct sweetness in this, in that, and in the other attribute, promise, ordinance. (3.) In him are these fruits at all times, he bears fruit every month; there is precious fruit in Jesus Christ, even in the black month; winter fruits as well as summer fruits. O then study Christ, study to know him more *extensively*. There be many excellent things in Christ, that the most eagle-eyed believer hath not yet seen: Ah! 'tis pity that any thing of Christ should lie hid from his people. Study to know Christ more *intensively*, to get the experimental taste and lively power of his knowledge upon your hearts and affections: This is the knowledge that carries all the sweetness and comfort in it. Christian, I dare appeal to thy experience, whether the experimental taste of Jesus Christ, in ordinances and duties, has not a

* I am sure, (saith a holy one), the saints at their best, are but strangers to the weight and worth of the incomparable sweetness of Christ; he is so new, so fresh in excellency every day to those that search more and more into him, as if heaven could furnish as many new Christs (if I may so speak) as there are days betwixt him and us; and yet he is one and the same still: O, we love an unknown lover, when we love Christ.

higher and sweeter relish than any created enjoyment thou ever tastedst in this world? O then separate, devote, and wholly give thyself, thy time, thy strength to this most sweet transcendent study.

INFERENCE 6.

Lastly, Let me close the whole with a double caution; one to ourselves, who by our callings and professions are the ministers of Christ; another to those that sit under the doctrine of Christ daily.

First, If this doctrine be the most excellent, necessary, fundamental, profound, noble, and comfortable doctrine*, let us then take heed lest, while we study to be exact in other things, we be found ignorant in this. Ye know it is ignominious, by the common suffrage of the civilized world, for any man to be unacquainted with his own calling, or not to attend the proper business of it: it is our calling, as the Bridegroom's friends, to woo and win souls to Christ, to set him forth to the people as crucified among them, Gal. iii. 1. to present him in all his attractive excellencies, that all hearts may be ravished with his beauty, and charmed into his arms by love: we must also be able to defend the truths of Christ against undermining heretics, to instil his knowledge into the ignorant, to answer the cases and scruples of poor doubting Christians. How many intricate knots have we to untie? What pains, what skill is requisite for such as are employed about our work? And shall we spend our precious time in frivolous controversies, philosophical niceties, dry and barren scholastic notions? † Shall we study every thing but Christ? revolve all volumes but the sacred ones? What is observed even of Bellarmine, ‡ that he turned with loathing from school divinity, because it wanted the sweet juice of piety, may be convictive to many among us, who are often too much in love with worse employment than what he is said to loathe. O let the knowledge of Christ dwell richly in us.

Secondly, Let us see that our knowledge of Christ be not a powerless, barren, § unpractical knowledge: O that, in its passage from

* *Peritum esse, et sine doctrina pietatis periturum*: i. e. To be skilled in other things, and not in the gospel, is to perish. *Augustin.*

† We are not to study the niceties of rhetoric, so much as plainness and perspicuity; nor are we to speak in a high florid strain, as orators; but with the earnestness and zeal, and sincerity of the apostles: we are not to talk fine things, but what may convince the understanding, and touch the heart.

‡ *Quod a studiis scholasticæ theologiæ averteretur fere nausebundus, quoniam succo creabantur liquide pietatis*, Fuligat. in vita Bel.

§ Beware, lest, while the tree of knowledge daily flourishes and thrives, the tree of practice should become barren. Take heed that ye rest not satisfied in the gifts of the Spirit, and begin to think nothing of the Spirit himself, the best gift. *Ford, amb. Sacr. p. 35.*

our understanding to our lips, it might powerfully melt, sweeten, and ravish our hearts! Remember, brethren, a holy calling never saved any man, without a holy heart; if our tongues only be *sanctified*, our whole man must be damned. "We and our people must be judged by the same gospel, and stand at the same bar, and be sentenced to the same terms, and dealt with as severely as any other men: We cannot think to be saved by our clergy, or to come off with a *Legit ut clericus*, when there is wanting the *Credit et vixit ut Christianus*;" as an eminent * Divine speaks. O let the keepers of the vineyard look to, and keep their own vineyard: we have a heaven to win or lose, as well as others.

Thirdly, Let us take heed that we withhold not our knowledge of Christ in unrighteousness from the people. O that our lips may disperse knowledge and feed many. Let us take heed of the napkin, remembering the day of account is at hand †. Remember, I beseech you, the *relations* wherein you stand, and the obligations resulting thence: Remember, the great Shepherd gave himself for, and gave you to the flock; your time, your gifts are not yours, but God's; remember the pinching wants of souls, who are perishing for want of Christ; and if their tongues do not, yet their necessities do bespeak us, as they did Joseph, Gen. xlvii. 15. "Wherefore should we die in thy presence? Give us food, that we may live and not die." Even the sea monsters draw forth their breasts to their young ones, and shall we be cruel! cruel to souls! Did Christ not think it too much to sweat blood, yea, to die for them? and shall we think it much to watch, study, preach, pray, and do what we can for their salvation? O let the same mind be in you which was also in Christ!

Secondly, To the people that sit under the doctrine of Christ daily, and have the light of his knowledge shining round about them.

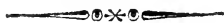
First, Take heed ye do not reject and despise this light. This may be done two ways: *First*, When you despise the means of knowledge by slight and low esteems of it. Surely, if you thus reject knowledge, God will reject you for it, Hos. iv. 6. It is a despising of the richest gift that ever Christ gave to the church; and however it be a contempt and slight that begins low, and seems only to vent itself upon the weak parts, in artificial discourses, and untaking tones and gestures of the speakers; yet,

* He approves himself a clerk,—but he neither believes nor lives as a Christian. Gildas Salvianus, p. 27.

† We may apply to ministers what Tacitus speaks of magistrates, *Ita nati estis, ut bona malaque vestra ad republicam pertineant, i. e.* On your good or bad conduct depends the good or ill of society.

believe it, it is a daring sin that flies higher than you are aware, Luke x. 16. "He that despiseth you, despiseth me; and he that despiseth me, despiseth him that sent me." *Secondly*, You despise the knowledge of Christ, when you despise the directions and loving constraints of that knowledge; when you refuse to be guided by your knowledge, your light and your lusts contest and struggle within you. O it is sad when your lusts master your light. You sin not as the heathens sin, who know not God; but when you sin, you must slight and put by the notices of your own consciences, and offer violence to your own convictions. And what sad work will this make in your souls? How soon will it lay your consciences waste?

Secondly, Take heed that you rest not satisfied with that knowledge of Christ you have attained, but grow on towards perfection. It is the pride and ignorance of many professors, when they have got a few raw and indigested notions, to swell with self-conceit of their excellent attainments. And it is the sin, even of the best of saints, when they see (*veritas in profundo*) how deep the knowledge of Christ lies, and what pains they must take to dig for it, to throw by the shovel of duty, and cry, *Dig we cannot*. To your work, Christians, to your work; let not your candle go out: sequester yourselves to this study, look what intercourses, and correspondences are betwixt the two worlds; what communion soever God and souls maintain, it is in this way; count all, therefore, but dross in comparison of that excellency which is in the knowledge of Jesus Christ.



SERMON II.

Sets forth CHRIST in his essential and primeval GLORY.

PROV. viii. 30.

Then was I by him, as one brought up with him: and I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him.

THESSE words are a part of that excellent commendation of wisdom, by which in this book Solomon intends two things; *first*, Grace or holiness, Prov. iv. 7. "Wisdom is the principal thing." *Secondly*, *Jesus Christ*, the fountain of that grace: and look, as the former is renowned for its excellency, Job xxviii. 14, 15. so the latter, in this context, wherein the Spirit of God des-