

# THE CHRISTIAN ADVOCATE.

FEBRUARY, 1824.

## Religious Communications.

LECTURES ON THE SHORTER CATECHISM OF THE WESTMINSTER ASSEMBLY OF DIVINES—ADDRESSED TO YOUTH.

### LECTURE V.

We now proceed to discuss the third answer of our catechism. It is stated thus—"The scriptures principally teach what man is to believe concerning God, and what duty God requires of man."

You ought to be distinctly apprized, my young friends, that our shorter catechism was intended to contain only a compendious and connected system of revealed truth—That is, it was not intended either to go into long explanations, or to take in all the subordinate parts of the system, but only those things which are of leading importance. Neither was it intended to consider any point of what has been called *natural religion*, in any other view than as it is found stated in the Bible. Hence, after having explained what is the chief end or design of man, and recognised the holy scriptures as the only rule of direction in religious duty, the answer before us makes a *distribution*, or lays down the *method*, of the following treatise. The distribution or method is very short and summary, and yet very expressive and complete. It is—I. What we are to believe. II. What we are to do.—Or, as it would be technically termed, the *credenda* and *agenda* of the revealed system.

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As the answer before us was intended to specify the plan or method of the following part of the catechism, and as this has just been stated, it would seem that we had nothing more to do, but to proceed immediately to the next question. But in reality, as the authors of the catechism intended it to be as compendious as possible, so they appear to have designed that their very *arrangement* should have a significant import; and on considering it, I find that some points of much importance, especially to young persons, must be introduced here, or not find so suitable a place in any other part of our course. I shall proceed, then, to notice these points; and shall show, as I proceed, how they arise out of this answer.

My first remark shall be on the word *principally*.—"The scriptures principally teach" certain truths, or doctrines. It is here intimated that the sacred writings teach some things beside what we are to believe in regard to God, and what we are to consider as our duty to him. The Bible contains a good deal of biography, and history, and many genealogies; and all that it contains is un-mixed verity, and none of it is without its use. But the word we consider intimates, and the fact is unquestionably so, that some parts of the scripture are much more important than others. The most *important*, that is, the *principal* parts, are those which teach us *faith* and *duty*. If

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extreme, and of agony inconceivable. There is no other imaginable object, however benevolent in itself, for which the Son of God would have done this, or for which it would have been necessary that he should do it. From his throne in heaven, he could have given the command, as he now gives it, and empires would have risen or fallen, nations have been emancipated, slaves have become freemen, wise laws have been enacted, and social happiness, in every form, have been effectually advanced. But to redeem and evangelize a world, it behoved him to come in person into that world; and to labour and suffer and die. This, therefore, is the most important concern or cause in the world—the greatest in its design, the noblest in its nature, and the happiest in its effects. Every real Christian is solemnly enlisted to support this cause, and to endeavour its extension, by the exertion of all his powers and the employment of all his means. If he refuse to do this, he acts beneath his character, he dishonours his profession, he dishonours his Saviour, he violates his covenant vows. He is not to consider this as a by-business, but the main concern of life. He is, therefore, not to content himself with giving it a cold good wish, and a pittance of his property. He is to be more anxious for its success than for the success of any other cause or business. He is to pray for it when he lies down and when he rises up; he is to countenance and recommend it by the whole weight of his character and influence; he is to plead for it with all the eloquence he possesses; he is to defend it with all his energies, and in opposition to all the scorn and hostility of its enemies; and he is to contribute to it liberally, and cheerfully, and joyously—of his abundance, if he possess abundance, and if poverty be his lot, every mite that of his poverty he can save and spare. EVANGELIST.

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FOR THE CHRISTIAN ADVOCATE.

“Te Regem Dominumque canam, dum  
 lucida volvet  
 Lucidus astra polus,  
 Et unicum colam Deum.  
 Luce canam te, nocte canam te; nulla  
 carebit  
 Laudibus hora tuis,  
 Rerum Creator et salus.”—BUCHANAN.

The whole universe, material as well as spiritual, was called into existence for the purpose of manifesting and declaring the glory of God. This grand object is attained in different methods, according to the different nature of various beings. The irrational part of the vast creation praises the Most High by affording indications of his power and glory, and thus conducting more exalted beings up to the great First Cause. But intellectual creatures have a higher office; it is their province not only to perceive the existence of God, but to adore and praise him. They are endowed with faculties by which they may see in some measure the character of their Maker, and with powers for proclaiming his praise, and magnifying his glorious name.

Such, however, is the degraded state of that race of intelligences to which we belong, that this great end of their being is generally forgotten and disregarded—every other object is preferred before it. An agonizing struggle is required to unlink the mind from the massy fetters that chain it to earth, and no inherent power can give it sufficient buoyancy to make it mount, in acts of worship, towards the seat of the Almighty. Its fates are vitiated, so that sin seems sweet, and the soul closes its eyes upon God, and will not be persuaded that he is infinitely lovely, but pertinaciously continues to fasten its longing regards and warmest affections upon the objects which gratify that host of unrighteous desires which gained access at the fall.

But thanks be rendered to our God, that all the natives of our  
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world are not left in this state of degradation and ruin. There is a scattered and despised people even on this globe (which we would fain hope is the only province of our King's dominions which has forsaken its allegiance), even here there is a race whom God has chosen as the heralds of his character and attributes; whom he has called by his name, and permitted to commune with himself. The adopted child of grace is sometimes enabled to see things as they really exist, and to estimate justly the pleasures which are the idols of the ungodly; to perceive their emptiness, their inadequacy to render happy a soul born from heaven, and to catch a transient but enrapturing glimpse of the divine loveliness. The sight is transforming, and the soul seems to beam forth, as if by reflection, some faint resemblance of the brightness of Jehovah, and to be changed into the same image. At such a moment, the world, as it regards his perceptions, is annihilated; or rather he is dead to all carnal impressions, and is alive to nothing but that flood of bliss poured out upon him by the blessed Spirit.

It is then that the Christian is prompted to cry out, as did David, "I will extol thee, my God, O King; and I will bless thy name for ever and ever. Praise ye the Lord. Praise the Lord, O my soul. While I live I will praise the Lord: I will sing praises unto my God while I have any being!"

Words are insufficient to express the amount of praise which he desires to send forth towards his Lord; and the little tribute of affectionate adoration which he is able to embody in the barren language of earth, seems so insignificant, so disproportioned to the object praised, that he invokes all created things to join in his anthem, and implores the assistance of sinless beings.

"Speak ye who best can tell, ye sons of light,  
Angels; for ye behold him, and with songs,  
And choral symphonies, day without night,  
Circle his throne rejoicing; ye in heaven;  
On earth join all ye creatures to extol  
Him first, him last, him midst, and without end."—MILTON.

Or in the words of the Royal Saint whom the Christian poet has in these lines imitated, "Praise ye him, sun and moon; praise ye him, all his hosts. Praise him ye heaven of heavens.—Praise him in the heights. Praise ye him, all his angels; praise ye him, all his hosts!"—And as he rises in the work of praise, faith adds new pinions to his spirit, till he loses sight of all things below, and seems to inhale that ethereal atmosphere in which the spirits of the just reside.

This subject is one which from the nature of the Eternal, stretches to infinity, and cannot be fully unfolded by a mortal. The act of which we speak, is the highest conceivable employment that a creature can attempt. Who can describe the glories of the unsearchable God? It would be impiety in the most transcendently glorious seraph to pretend to determine how much praise God deserves. It would exceed the abilities of Gabriel to inform us of the bliss experienced in the work of celestial adoration. How low then must be our conceptions of its nature! What can we know, creatures of yesterday, blinded by sin—hemmed in by the obstructions of this world of sense.

To adore God in a perfect manner, a proper view of his character is necessary. Alas, how then in this life can we ever do more than lisp his praise? His image reaches us faint and distorted, as a ray transmitted from one to another of a thousand imperfect mirrors. Not that he is left without a witness,

for the heaven, and the earth, and all nature whisper something of his glories; and revelation portrays his character with truth, as far as is necessary for our present uses. But the loveliest scene is gazed upon in vain at midnight. Unless the Spirit of God supply us with light, all the picture is to us a blank. And even when through free acts of favour this heavenly book is rendered luminous, our minds see obscurely and in part, like a diseased eye, to which the most enchanting prospect is tinged with false hues, and enveloped in delusive mists.

If exalted exercises of praise to God be then so difficult of attainment, and so little known, and yet so important and delightful, let us strive to acquire deeper impressions of our defects in this divine science; let us wrestle with the Angel of the Covenant for heavenly aid. Let us employ ourselves in humble efforts to praise God aright, according to the measure of our present powers and knowledge, and let us look forward with brighter and more longing anticipations to that state of purity and happiness, where they rest not day nor night saying "Holy, holy, holy Lord God Almighty! which was, and is, and is to come." CYPRIAN.

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ANECDOTES OF NEWTON.

The following anecdotes of the late Rev. JOHN NEWTON, have recently been published in Britain. We believe they are not to be found in any of the printed collections of his works.

Two or three years before the death of this eminent servant of Christ, when his sight was become so dim, that he was no longer able to read, an aged friend and brother in the ministry, now living, called on him to breakfast. Family prayer

succeeding, the portion of scripture for the day was read to him. It was taken out of Bogatsky's Golden Treasury: "By the grace of God, I am what I am." It was the pious man's custom on these occasions, to make a short familiar exposition on the passage read. After the reading of this text, he paused for some moments, and then uttered the following affecting soliloquy:—"I am not what *I ought* to be! Ah! how imperfect and deficient!—I am not what *I wish* to be! I 'abhor what is evil,' and I would cleave to what is good!"—I am not what *I hope* to be!—Soon, soon, I shall put off mortality; and with mortality all sin and imperfection! Yet, though I am not what *I ought* to be, nor what *I wish* to be, nor what *I hope* to be, I can truly say, I am not what *I once* was—a slave to sin and Satan; and I can heartily join with the apostle, and acknowledge; *By the grace of God, I am what I am!* Let us pray!"

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TO MISS HANNAH MORE,

*By the Rev. John Newton, written in her Album, (at Cowslip Green, her residence,) when asked to insert his name, previous to seeing her, as was the custom.*

Why should you wish a name like mine  
Within your book to stand,  
With those who shone and those who shine  
As worthies of our land?

What will the future age have gained,  
When my poor name is seen,  
From knowing I was entertained  
By you at Cowslip Green?

Rather let me record a name  
That shall adorn your page,  
Which, like the sun, is still the same,  
And shines from age to age:

JESUS, who found me when I stray'd  
In *Affric's* dreary wild,  
Who for my soul a ransom paid,  
And made his foe a child.

He taught my wild blasphemous tongue  
To aim at pray'r and praise,  
To make his grace my theme and song,  
And guided all my ways.

A pattern now of mercy's power,  
Where'er I stand is seen,  
Such as I think was ne'er before  
Beheld at *Cowslip Green*.