

NATIONAL PREACHER.

Go....Teach all Nations....Matt: xxviii. 19.

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SERMON XXXIX.

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PHILADELPHIA.

THE EFFICACY OF DIVINE TRUTH.

PSALM CXIX. 130.—*The entrance of thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding to the simple.*

IN these words the inspired Psalmist describes the efficacy of revealed truth on the human mind. He affirms that the entrance of it gives light and understanding even to the simple. In this instance, as in many others, experience and observation confirm, what revelation declares. Men of inferior natural powers, or of little learning, are frequently seen to obtain, by a diligent perusal of the Sacred Scriptures, a far better knowledge of God, of true religion, and of sound morality, than is ever acquired by the ablest philosopher, or the most erudite scholar, who rejects revelation. Thus it is shown by obvious facts, that the entrance of God's word introduces into the mind light, or knowledge, of the most important kind. Its effect is much like that which strikes us when we let sun-beams into a dark apartment; to which, indeed, there seems to be an allusion in the text.

As not only light, but understanding also, is here mentioned, we may remark that this latter word, in the language of Scripture, and by the Psalmist himself, is sometimes put for moral qualities, as well as for intellectual attainments. In the Psalm before us, the term appears to be several times used, so as at least to include *this sense*. We may therefore consider the writer, not merely as repeating or explaining, in the second member of the sentence, what he had affirmed in the first; but as distinctly referring, in the term understanding, to the sanctifying influence of the word of God. Such an influence we certainly know that word often has. "Sanctify them through thy truth," said the Saviour, "thy word is truth:" and David himself elsewhere declares, "The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul."

It is however important to remember, that the divine word itself possesses no saving influence, until it is effectually applied to the conscience, and to the heart, by the same Holy Spirit by whom it was at first indited. Still, it is His own *written*, revealed truth, which the Spirit uses for this

purpose ; and which, for this very reason, is called, “ the sword of the Spirit.”

It appears, then, that the divine word is productive of two most salutary effects on the human kind ; the first on the *understanding*, the second on the *heart*. The first introduces the light of *knowledge*, the second the lustre of *holiness*. The one makes us *wise*, the other makes us *good*. This may suffice for the general explanation of the text.

But it may be proper farther to premise, that revealed truth may gain an entrance into the mind, by several modes or methods of introduction. Sometimes by reading or hearing it attentively, just as it is recorded in the Bible ; sometimes by listening to it when faithfully preached—since preaching is nothing more than declaring, explaining, and enforcing the truths of Scripture ; sometimes by reading pious books—by which means revealed truth is admitted by the eye, as in preaching it is communicated by the ear ; sometimes by catechetical instruction, and familiar conversation, by which, not only children, and the heathen, but the uninformed generally, may most advantageously be imbued with the life-giving truths of the sacred oracles.

In all these ways then, or by all these means, the word of God is made to enter, both into the understanding and the hearts of men. Words are but the arbitrary signs of thought—the vehicle by which truth and knowledge are communicated : and by whatever words, or other intelligible signs, they are communicated, if the leading ideas, the principal facts, doctrines, and information of Holy Scripture, are clearly presented to the view of the mind, light is introduced ; and, under the influence of divine grace, the heart may be transformed and rendered holy.

I shall now proceed to show, in two or three particulars, how the text has been, and still is, verified in fact—verified in producing both the effects to which we consider it as having reference.

1. By the entrance of revealed truth into the world, all the just knowledge of God, and of our duty to him, which has ever existed among mankind, has been imparted. The Deity manifested himself, and made known his will to our first parents, at their creation in innocence. By the fall they lost the moral image of their Maker ; but they certainly did not lose all speculative knowledge of his being and attributes. This knowledge they must, in some good degree, have retained ; and there can be no reasonable doubt that they imparted it, as fully as they could, to their descendants. Without this traditionary revealed information, some have maintained that the posterity of Adam never could have had any idea whatever of a spirit, nor any right notions of a Supreme Being. The advocates of this opinion must of course believe, that the apostle Paul presupposes this traditionary revelation to have reached all mankind, when he says—“ The invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things which are

made, even his eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse." Be this as it may, the truth is, as the apostle asserts, that "they did not like to retain God in their knowledge;" and therefore—the aid of tradition notwithstanding—they lost all just and accurate conceptions of the true God, and of their duty to him. For it is a fact beyond reasonable controversy, that there is not now, and within the memory of history there never was, a people, who were not given up to gross idolatry, or totally ignorant of God, and destitute of all religious worship, except those who have manifestly been saved from this dreadful state of ignorance and error, by the light of revelation. Yes—this Holy Bible is demonstrably the sun of the moral system. Take it from any people, and that people is in darkness; take it from the world, and the world is blind. "God said let there be light, and there was light."—It is as true of revelation, as of the radiance that beamed upon chaos. "The entrance of thy word" into the world "giveth light; it giveth understanding to the simple." It enlightens, elevates, and purifies society, wherever it is introduced.

2. The text is often remarkably verified in men, who are at length induced to attend carefully to the revealed will of God, after having long neglected or refused to show it regard. The entrance of divine truth into their minds, brings light into their understandings, and holiness into their hearts.

As truth and light resemble each other in many respects, so in this, that all their benefits may be refused and lost, by those who are placed in the midst of them. A man may madly put out his own eyes, or he may wilfully shut them when surrounded by the splendours of noon-day: and so, in regard to spiritual things, men may "love darkness rather than light;" and may close their minds against the effulgence of gospel day, while it is shining all around them. In both cases, indeed, the exclusion is commonly not so complete as to prevent all consciousness that light is present; but still it is such as to prevent the distinct vision of any object.

My Brethren, it is a melancholy fact, often witnessed, that men live a great part of their lives, and sometimes the whole of life, among Christian institutions and privileges of every kind—among Bibles, and sabbaths, and sermons, and sacraments, and religious books, and religious conversation—and, after all, these men have scarcely any more distinct and definite knowledge of the great truths of religion, than a man blind from his birth has of colours.—Of the moral glory of the revealed system they are as totally without ideas as the blind man is of the beauty of an exquisite painting. They may have heard others speak of it with delight; but perceptions of their own they have absolutely none.

Now let us suppose, that one who has been thus accustomed to neglect the contents of the Sacred Volume, is at length roused, by whatever

cause, to inquire into them, diligently and perseveringly. Such a man will experience and exemplify the truth of the text, in a striking and wonderful manner. He will himself be surprised to find how light is poured in upon his mind. One new perception after another he will rapidly gain, of spiritual and eternal realities—of the truths which God has revealed; of the requisitions he has made; of the doctrines he has taught; of the duties he has enjoined; of the hopes and expectations he has set before us; of the reasonableness of his commands; of the sinfulness and awful danger of disobeying them; and of the importance and the ineffably happy consequences of yielding to them a cordial obedience. These things will excite and interest him deeply; and every addition of light will only make him solicitous to obtain more. He will perceive some difficulties, and he will be greatly anxious to have them explained and removed. Hence he will read more, and with more care and closeness. He will reflect and meditate much, and listen earnestly to all discourse on the subject of religion. The preaching of the word, conversation with judicious and candid Christians, and the perusal of well written treatises on the chief points of doctrinal and practical piety, will be sources of knowledge and improvement which he will highly prize, and to which he will zealously resort. In pursuing this course, one obscurity after another will be removed; one difficulty after another will vanish; the beauty and fair proportions of the revealed system will begin to rise to his view; and he will have no small sense both of astonishment and shame, that he should have passed so much of his life with these important objects offered to his consideration, and yet that he should never have known what they were till now.

It must not be overlooked, that, long before the process which we have been tracing has reached the point to which we have carried it, he who has been concerned in it will have begun to pray. He cannot have gone half the length to which we have followed him, without much and very earnest prayer. He will have seen something of his guilt, and misery, and danger; and he will have cried to God for mercy and forgiveness. He will also have felt his ignorance, and blindness, and absolute dependence, and will have asked counsel, and help, and direction from on high. He will have entreated importunately for divine aid; and, although he may not have been very sensible of it at the time, he will have received this aid. God shines on his word in answer to prayer, and the word becomes luminous. Then, emphatically, the entrance of his word gives light, and understanding, and guidance to the benighted soul.

Brethren, it is not easy for me to say—it is not easy, nor perhaps practicable for any one to say—how far the train of exercises we have considered, may go on, while as yet the understanding only has been entered by the light of truth, and the heart in no degree changed—while the

man is only better instructed, and not in any measure renewed.—I say it is not easy, and I am sure it is not necessary, to ascertain and mark the precise confines of illumination and regeneration. It is clear, that there is a difference between knowledge and sanctification, and it is very important to make and keep up the distinction; but it is not important to know exactly the limits and boundaries of each. Men are enlightened before they are sanctified; but they are still more enlightened after they are sanctified; and when the mind is passing from knowledge to holiness, who shall draw the line and say—all on this side was mere speculation, or the exercise of intellect only; but on that side the affections followed the dictates of the understanding, and the heart was formed to holiness.

But let us more distinctly consider how the text is verified, in the renovation of a sinner, through the instrumentality of revealed truth—Through the *instrumentality* of truth, I repeat it; for it must never be lost-sight of, that revealed truth itself, is only the instrument by which the Holy Spirit, as the great efficient Agent, transforms the human heart. What is strictly denominated regeneration, is, indeed, represented in Scripture as a new creation, and consequently as the effect of Almighty power, and it may be made a question, whether, in this, any secondary cause is, or can be employed. Be this as it may—and for myself, I am not fond of refining much in regard to a change, which the sure word of revelation tells us is produced, like the effects of the wind, by an invisible and inexplicable, but yet a resistless Agent—it is not to be questioned, that knowledge, in adult age, usually precedes renovation, and always follows it; and that the first actings of the new born soul are ever put forth in the view of some divine truth, by which those actings seem to be prompted, and on which they centre. It is however by no means to be understood, that the mind *always* opens to the reception of truth, exactly in the same manner. The statement which has been given, is to be considered but as the exhibition of an individual case, taken for the purpose of illustration. There is great variety and diversity, in the manner in which men are enlightened and renewed. Many also there are, who acquire no inconsiderable share of religious knowledge; and yet, so far as we can judge, it never has a lasting influence on their hearts. For years in succession, they read and study the Bible, in much the same manner as they do any other book of science, and with no more than a similar effect. The knowledge they acquire is only intellectual. If their affections are occasionally a little moved, the current of them is never changed. Thus they live—and thus, alas! we have reason to fear, they die—well read in the Scriptures, but never savingly profited by them.—From this fearful issue, even learned critics and commentators on the sacred volume may not be exempted. Others, who receive saving benefit from the word of God, make a much more rapid advance in know-

ledge than that of which the detail has been given : and others again, appear to have their hearts touched, almost as soon as divine truth dawns on their intellectual powers.

Holiness, nevertheless, is, in all cases, connected with the perception and love of what God has revealed in his holy word. The process here, as in that which relates to the understanding, is various ; but it may be illustrated in a single instance, thus :—While the truths of Scripture are in the view of the mind, and the person concerned is pondering and musing upon them, he becomes—perhaps he knows not at the time, how or why—but so it is, he becomes greatly pleased and affected with these truths. Objections to them which he had long felt, have now all vanished ; risings of heart against them are all gone ; obscurities that veiled them, have given place to clear and most impressive views of their reality, importance, and excellence ; so that while he contemplates these truths, his mind approves and assents to them, with all its powers ; and their practical importance also—the importance of having his heart and life confirmed to them—is most sensibly perceived. He therefore looks to God for assistance, and resolves to attempt this conformity.

The man whose case we are here considering has learned from his Bible the evil of sin ; and he now finds that he is chargeable with it in every act of his life, and that its pollution has reached to every part and power of his nature. He sees himself to be unspeakably guilty and vile ; and he is humbled, and mourns, and abases himself, and repents in dust and ashes. But his Bible tells him that there is salvation for sinners, although their guilt be of a crimson colour and a scarlet die : that Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, became a Substitute for sinners, and perfectly obeyed the law of God, and endured, in all its extent, the penalty of that law in their behalf ; and that any convinced and humbled sinner, even if he be the very chief of sinners, may now be pardoned, justified, sanctified, and saved, by trusting in this blessed, and all-sufficient Saviour, who freely offers himself to the guilty, and even commands them to come to him and receive salvation ; and that God may, in this way, be glorified and honoured in their eternal salvation, more than in their condemnation and everlasting perdition. In the view of these glorious Bible truths, the man whom we contemplate, is filled with gratitude, admiration, and delight ; and his soul is joyfully carried out to Christ, in faith, and trust, and love, making him “ all in all—the chief among ten thousand, and one altogether lovely.”

He who is thus brought to the Saviour, will, as the natural consequence, have great and augmented pleasure, in reading, hearing, and meditating on all the doctrines and truths of Holy Scripture, that he may apply them all to himself ; that he may learn his whole duty both to God and man,—that, in a word, he may continually grow wiser and better.

and be taught how in all things he may glorify the God and Saviour, who has "called him out of darkness into marvellous light."

In something like this manner it is, that the word of God, in the hand of the Spirit, turns the soul from sin to holiness; vitally unites it to Christ; and renders it a partaker of all the benefits of his great salvation.

3. The declaration of the text, as it relates both to knowledge and to holiness, is remarkably verified in the practical Christian, through the whole of his life. The entrance of the divine word gives him more and more light; makes him increase both in knowledge and sanctification, till he enters into the "rest that remaineth for the people of God." Nay, we have reason to believe, that saints in glory, will understand their Bible better than they ever did on earth; for there they will see clearly many things referred to in divine revelation, which here they saw "through a glass darkly;" and their capacity for understanding the things of God will there be so enlarged, that their comprehension of them will exceed that of their present state, as much as the intelligence of manhood exceeds the few and feeble conceptions of infancy.

In the mean time, the people of God, while passing through this state of pupilage and discipline, this vale of tears, are continually instructed and edified, made to know their duty, to grow in grace, and to abound in divine consolation, by a constant resort to the sacred volume. After reading and hearing its truth a hundred and a thousand times, those truths are still new.—A new beauty is seen in them, and new directions, support and encouragement are drawn from them, to the very last. The facts, doctrines, precepts, promises, warnings, reproofs and threatenings, of God's holy word, are, at different times, seen in new views, and felt with a new force and influence; and substantial improvement in knowledge and holiness is the uniform and happy result. Brethren, I call you to witness, that there are seasons in the life of the practical Christian, at which, by reading a passage or portion of sacred Scripture, or by hearing it discoursed on from the pulpit, or by finding its illustration in a book, or by meditating upon it in private, some precious truth comes to the mind with a flood of new light; and this truth is, at the same time, set home on the heart, with such a power and sweetness as is literally inexpressible. Then is the happy Christian prepared to say with emphasis, "The entrance of thy words giveth light;" or with Peter on the mount, "It is good to be here;" or with the author of our text in another Psalm, "I rejoice at thy word, as one that findeth great spoil." Well may the Christian believer highly prize, as he always will, these delightful seasons of light, and enlargement, and sacred pleasure, and look for them, and pray for them earnestly, in reading, and hearing, and meditating on the word of God.

Nor am I willing to close this discussion, without a repeated notice of the well known fact mentioned at the entrance, that unlettered Christians.

who have scarcely read another book beside the Bible, do sometimes, by great familiarity with that, become so expert in all subjects of practical piety and morality, as to be able to confound and put to shame, those who have read ever so much, if they have left unread, or unremembered, the volume of inspiration.

Thus have we seen how extensively and wonderfully the text is verified—"The entrance of thy word giveth light; it giveth understanding to the simple." From what has been said we may remark,—

1. On the folly and wickedness of infidels, in their endeavours to discredit the Bible, and to banish it from the world. Their attempt is no other than to blot out the Sun of our moral system. But blessed be God, their effort is just as vain as would be an attempt to blot out the sun which shines in the firmament of heaven. Both are the work of the same God, and both equally beyond the reach of injury from puny mortals. The beams of both may be partially obstructed in their course; but their fountain remains unimpaired, and will shine on, and illumine the rest of the world, in despite of all the rage, and all the efforts of those, who "hate the light because their deeds are evil."

Could the wishes and attempts of infidels succeed, they would throw the whole human race back into all the darkness and horrors of heathen idolatry; into an utter ignorance of the true God, and of the worship which he requires; and an utter uncertainty of a future state of existence. There is in these attempts a wanton cruelty, which it is not easy to characterize as it deserves. Wretched and hard hearted men! Why will you seek to rob the miserable, of every name, of the best alleviation of all their sufferings? Why will you attempt to deprive some of the excellent of the earth of that which constitutes their highest happiness? Infidels usually avoid our assemblies, and in speaking as I do, I am perfectly aware that what I say is not likely to strike the ear of one of their order. Nor do I seek, Christian brethren, to stir you up to hate or persecute these men. No verily; but I would stir you up to pity them, to pray for them, and with Christian zeal, mingled with meekness, to labour, in every proper way, for their conversion: and I would stir you up to guard the young and the unwary against their arts and their delusions; as against a moral pestilence, poisonous to the very vitals of social happiness, and leading to all the horrors of the second death.

2. From the subject and the discussion to which your attention has been invited, we may see the importance of Bible translations, Bible societies, Missionary operations, Tract societies, and Sabbath schools. These have all the same object. They all co-operate to diffuse the light and influence of revealed truth. If I might characterize them from the metaphor furnished by our text, I would say, that the translators of the Bible are preparing lamps, or torches, fitted to enlighten all the dark

parts of the earth ; that Bible societies are forming magazines of these lamps, to be distributed, by sale or donation, in every place, and to every individual that needs them ; that Missionaries are intrusted to carry these lamps abroad, that those who want may obtain them readily for themselves,—and that the missionaries are themselves torch-bearers, throwing light into every dark path and corner of the world ; that Tracts are tapers, lighted at these lamps, and distributed gratuitously, inducing men, by their manifest utility, to seek for the lamp itself, and in the mean time enabling them to avoid the pit of perdition, and to turn their footsteps into the path of life ; and that Sabbath schools are so many moral infirmaries for the blind, into which innumerable children and many adults are kindly received, to have their blindness removed, and their eyes opened on that glorious light “ which shineth more and more unto the perfect day.” The operations and institutions which we here contemplate, are the glory of the age in which we live ; and the man or woman who does not take some part in promoting them, is not worthy of the name of a Christian.

3. Our subject shows the importance of carefully reading and hearing the word of God, and of accompanying both with much and earnest prayer for the enlightening and sanctifying influences of the Holy Spirit.

Those who neglect the perusal of the Holy Scriptures and the preaching of the gospel, are regardless of the ordinary means which God has appointed for their salvation. We do not deny that they may be arrested and brought to consideration, in some very extraordinary way ; but the hazard of this is fearful beyond expression. It is to risk eternal happiness or misery on an appalling improbability : and what is this, but the very madness of human folly ? “ Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God :” and to the word of God every soul under the light of the gospel, must at last be brought ; or its everlasting perdition is as sure as its existence. O that this were duly considered, by those in Christian communities who seldom open a Bible, and as seldom appear in a place of public worship, or hear, on any occasion, the preaching of the gospel.

But it is also of unspeakable importance to keep in mind, that even reading and hearing are not likely to be attended with a saving efficacy, if they are not accompanied with earnest prayer. Alas ! we have reason to believe, that the neglect of prayer for the teachings of the Holy Spirit, to give impression to his own truth, is the great cause, that by multitudes its influence is never felt ; or if felt at all, is speedily dissipated and lost. Could we persuade men never to open the Bible without sincere and ardent aspirations of soul, for the enlightening and sanctifying influences of the Spirit on the portion to be read, and never to close it without similar aspirations for a blessing on what has been read—and could we engage them in the like devotional exercises in their closets.

before and after every sermon they hear—O! brethren, if we could effect this, be assured it would not be long before we should see converts multiplying like drops of the morning dew; and professing Christians manifesting a growth in grace, most comfortable to themselves, most ornamental to religion, and most influential in promoting the cause of God in the world. To produce such an effect, let us withhold no effort in our power; and let us remember, that among the means to be used, none will be more important than to exemplify in ourselves, what we recommend to others.

4. Finally—This subject affords instruction and admonition to preachers of the gospel.

In much that has already been addressed to Christians in general, we who are ministers of the gospel, have more than a common interest; since to us it is peculiarly important to realize in our own souls, what we urge upon our hearers; and because it is also especially incumbent on us to take the lead in every measure, and every effort, to diffuse the light of the gospel, among those who are yet groping in the darkness of ignorance and sin.

But there is yet another, and a more exclusive application of this subject to us, as preachers of the gospel. It is summarily this—that in preaching, we look well that it be revealed truth, and that only, which we deliver to the people; and that we be much engaged in prayer for the influences of the Holy Spirit, to render effectual all that we address to our fellow-sinners.

Dear Brethren—If we rightly estimate our character as ambassadors of Christ, we shall never go into the sacred desk to deliver discourses on philosophy, or to exhibit specimens of eloquence, or samples of elegant composition. We shall be absorbed by the desire to make the truths of God's holy word enter both the understandings and the hearts of our hearers. Eyeing this great object, we shall avoid every process of abstract reasoning, and sacrifice every ornament of style, and forbear every attempt at oratory, that would hinder, and not help us, in reaching the point at which we aim. We shall use such plainness and simplicity of language and manner, that if any of our audience do not understand and profit by what we say, theirs and not ours shall be the fault. We shall, in a word, preach, in our humble measure, as Paul did—"not with enticing words of man's wisdom,—not in the words that man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth, comparing spiritual things with spiritual."

From the time of Paul to our own, there has been too much of "man's wisdom," in his sense of the phrase, in preaching the gospel—too much of it, not only in language and manner, but really in attempts to be wiser than the book of God—wiser than the teachings of the Holy Ghost. I will freely state what I take to be one example of this. It

seems to me, and so it has seemed to all the best expositors of Scripture, of whom I have any knowledge, that the Bible is replete with the doctrine of substitution, or imputation; that the whole Mosaic ritual taught this doctrine, and was in a great measure founded upon it; and that the same is taught by the inspired writers of the New Testament in as plain language as they could use. But no—say some—the thing is impossible. It is impossible that either guilt or righteousness should ever be imputed. They are in their own nature personal qualities, and they never can be transferred from one party to another; one party can never be a substitute for another, in relation to these qualities. Now, to this I answer in the words of Paul, in relation to a doctrine far more mysterious than that of substitution;—“Nay, but O man! who art thou that repliest against God?” Show me, if you can, that the word of God does not, by a fair construction, teach this doctrine. While you attempt this, I shall listen to you. But I will not listen, for a single moment, to your reasonings against that word; for I know that human reason, however plausible, is often fallacious; but that God can neither err nor deceive. If he has spoken clearly—reason as you may—he and not you must be believed. Yes, and away, too, with all torturing of that blessed word, with a view to make it say something, which, in its plain import, it does not say—that thus it may be forced into an alliance with a favourite system.

Brethren, let us go and sit down, like little children, at the feet of our divine Master, and take our system of doctrines, in the first place, from him alone. We will reason on them afterwards; we will reason on them all; and we will make them square with our reasons, as far as we can; and when we can go no farther, we will believe Him, and distrust ourselves. Do not say that this is to act blindfold in the matter of religion. It is not. We are neither infidels nor sceptics. We have already satisfied ourselves that God does verily speak to us in the Bible; and if so, we know that all he has there told us is consistent with the most perfect reason, although we cannot always trace it fully. On this very account it is that we ought to prefer what he says, before any of the deductions or conclusions of fallible human intellect: that is, we ought to resolve to follow an infallible guide, rather than a fallible one; and if this is not a rational resolve, let any one tell us how such a resolve may be formed.

Apart from the guidance and authority of revelation, sure I am, that if we could reason better than Locke, or Butler, or Edwards, or Reed—yea, if we could reason with the powers of an angel, instead of those of a man,—we should never be able to reason a single sinner out of his sins, and persuade him into faith in Christ and love to God. The truths of Holy Scripture, plainly stated and powerfully urged, are those only from which we can look for this effect; because every thing in this great concern depends on God's blessing; and it is his plan and purpose ordi-

narily to bless only the truths of his own word. They and they only give light and understanding to the simple. While these truths are clearly spoken, and forcibly and tenderly pressed, "He who commanded the light to shine out of darkness," makes them shine into the hearts of men, "to give them the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." Be it our care, therefore, dear brethren, to preach these truths in simplicity and godly sincerity, unadulterated by any fancies of our own, unmixed with the wisdom of this world, which is foolishness with God:—Then may we hope that he will give them an effectual entrance into the understanding of our hearers, and a transforming influence on their hearts.

Especially may we hope for this blessed fruit of our labours, if we accompany faithful gospel preaching with many and earnest supplications for those influences of the Holy Spirit, under which alone, as we well know, the truth itself becomes the power of God and the wisdom of God unto salvation. If it be, as has been shown, the duty of every reader and hearer of the word, to pray for a blessing on it, both before and after he reads and hears it—how much prayer—fervent effectual prayer—ought every minister of the gospel to offer up to the prayer-hearing God, for a divine blessing on every sermon that he prepares and delivers. Luther's maxim was certainly a just one; that "to pray well is to study well." O brethren! let every text we select for the theme of a sermon be chosen with prayer. Let every sermon we study be mingled with constant prayer. In prayer, let us dedicate and commend it to God, before we preach it: and in prayer, let us cry to God for his blessing on it after we have preached it. In special seasons of prayer, sometimes accompanied with fasting, let us earnestly entreat the Spirit of all grace to seal his own truth on the hearts and consciences of our hearers: and let us do all this in faith and hope, with a deep sense of our own nothingness—remembering that "neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth, but God that giveth the increase." AMEN.

SERMON XL.

By AUSTIN DICKINSON, A. M.

NEW-YORK.

RIGHT USE OF THE SCRIPTURES.

JOHN v. 39.—*Search the Scriptures, for in them ye think ye have eternal life.*

WHEN a letter is received from a far distant friend, or from any person of acknowledged excellence, we are sure to open and read it in good earnest. If it bring tidings that some eminent benefactor of our