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**Communications.**

*Revelation accordant with Reason.*

Paganism in ancient and modern times, is equally calculated to enhance the guilt, and multiply the miseries of men. Mahometanism, though grafted upon revelation, is a monstrous corruption, evidently aiming at political subjugation, and the debasement of the human mind. The philosophy of Zeno had little influence upon the world; and that of Epicurus rendered its votaries addicted to the vilest practices. The schemes of modern infidelity have derived their lustre from light purloined from the gospel; they are, in all their forms, the offspring of prejudice and pride, and exist by excluding the truth.

Having the idea of God, our reason can establish the truth of his existence, ascertain many of his perfections, natural and moral, discern our dependance on and obligations to him, and discover outlines of his law, or rules of moral conduct, which we ought to pursue. Those, who are not able to think, or speak clearly of the nature of virtue, and the origin of vice, can nevertheless distinguish right from wrong, and feel a sense or consciousness of guilt, as well as infer from their miseries, a state of opposition to the Creator. In apostasy, it is fit we should be separated from holy and happy beings, and deprived of the sensible presence of the perfectly pure and holy God.

The degradation of an innocent creature implies losses which are immense. Immured in the dark prison of the body, we are excluded from intercourse with separate spirits, and justly treated as convicts, banished from the presence of the Judge. Repentance and faith are at best an imperfect righteousness, and accompanied by propensities to sin, which deserve misery and death.

Against death, the probable evidence of immortality affords, to mere human reason, very slight grounds of comfort. Without a hereafter, man is indeed a mystery; justice has failed; the idea of a future life a tantalizing evil; the faculties of the human mind are misplaced and useless. Yet immortality admitted, a future state, without a revelation, must fill the mind with fearful apprehensions. For although justice requires a distinction to be made between characters, yet the universality of guilt, and the strictness of the claims of justice, seem to exclude hope.

Reason admits, that he who formed the mind, can reveal himself to it; and that he may, if he chooses, remove our uncertainties and fears. The goodness of the Creator, evinced by our present comforts, and even the miseries of man warrant some expectation, that he would do this. The books, which claim the character of a revelation, receive the fullest support from the history of past ages, the manners and languages of the nations. The simplicity of their unadorned narratives, their impar-

blance of the moral image of his Saviour. In both, the world is left out of sight. On earth, the worshipper abandons every other plea, but that of Christ's righteousness; in heaven, he gives him all the glory of his salvation, and casts his crown at his feet. On earth, the saint enters into rest, and has peace; a few weep all along the road to the heavenly Canaan. But in heaven, all is peace and joy, without temptation or interruption.

The confidence of their own safety, which some persons of defective character possess, who are evidently self deceived, possessing no more than a natural love of God, gives much encouragement to the impenitent. Even the desirable experience of others, whose change is the more discernible, because they have been reclaimed from extremes of sin, and sometimes also the false raptures of enthusiasm, produce an imputation of superstition; and thus prevent the investigation of the truth. There are many whose faith is weak, love languid, joy not great, comforts few; who experience dullness in duties, and barrenness in prayer; who come to the communion, merely because afraid to abstain, and who daily doubt, whether they have been renewed and justified. Yet there may be something of the savour of spiritual things in them, and a determination, if they must perish, that it shall be in seeking Christ.

This undesirable state of weakness, which is neither remarkable for keen distress, nor exulting joys, may nevertheless, be upon the whole conducive to vigilance, and progressive in holiness. Those who are thus sensible of their imbecility, are often alert to exclude the usual encouragements and consolations of the gospel, and to decide against themselves. Nevertheless, where there is such a sense of unworthiness; where even the feebleness of hope produces an accession of humility, and leads to a close walk: or where

the mere probability of arriving at the possession of a saving interest in Christ, animates to seek more purity of heart, and a nearer approach to God, there may be room to conclude, that the work is a saving one, which is begun in the soul, and that the individual will at length arrive at the haven of eternal rest.

When the love of public ordinances, and practice of other religious duties, with patience, perseverance; and resignation unto the divine will, are progressively advancing, and the mind becomes more weaned from the world, and fixed on heavenly objects; the proofs of justification, and acceptance, are such, that the timid believer may venture down into the shadowy valley, and not fear to find, beyond the Jordan, the promised inheritance of ceaseless joys. J. P. WILSON.

#### *On the Importance and Practical Influence of Revealed Truth.*

Truth is a sacred thing. By many, however, it is treated in a way by no means suited to its nature and importance. Some regard it with indifference, deeming the acquisition not worthy of any pains: others deny or doubt its practical influence: while others feel disposed to call in question the practicability of obtaining the knowledge of it.

We do not intend to take any notice of those ancient philosophers, who abandoned themselves to universal skepticism, and confounded all distinction between truth and error. Few perhaps can be found in the present day who feel inclined to become disciples of Pyrrho, so far as to reject the truths of *mathematical* and *natural science*. But they are not few who wantonly indulge a skeptical turn in regard to *moral* truth. Yet moral truth rests upon as firm a basis, as mathematical or natural truth. The evidence by which it is proved, when fairly presented and duly ex-

amined, carries conviction to the human mind, as well as the demonstrations of Euclid, or the facts collected to support some general principle in natural philosophy.

The truths belonging to these several classes, differing from each other in their nature, require of course for their establishment different processes of reasoning: but it were irrational to imagine, that the great Author of our being had left unsupported by suitable evidence *moral* truth, which so intimately concerns us as intelligent and accountable creatures, both here and hereafter; while he has so constructed the human mind, and so framed the material world, that the other kinds of truth are supported by the clearest and most satisfactory evidence. The proofs connected with the former class are sufficiently plain and strong to answer the purposes of his moral government, and to render inexcusable those who neither receive nor seek after the truth. Criminal neglect of the means of information and aversion of heart to the truth, will be found at the bottom of that ignorance by which so many immortal souls are ruined. He who knew all the secrets of fallen man, and all the hidden springs of his action, has traced this matter to its proper source, in that solemn affirmation so reproachful to human nature: "This is the condemnation, that light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil." John iii. 19.

It would demand too wide a compass of discussion to meet the infidel skeptic on the proper ground, and prove the attainment of moral truth to be practicable, by demonstrating the fact, that God our Creator has blessed the world with a revelation comprising a discovery of all that is necessary to be believed and done in order to salvation. We design by the subsequent remarks to endeavour to remove

wrong impressions that may have been made on the minds of individuals who yield to us the fact that we do possess a divine revelation. Such there are, who, although they subscribe to the claims of the Bible to a heavenly origin, yet seem to imagine the revelation of God to have been made in such a manner, that the knowledge of its contents is an attainment, if not wholly impracticable, yet attended with almost insurmountable difficulties. In the belief of this notion they are confirmed by a view of the Christian world. They see one church opposing another church; one class of divines contending with another class; now one system of doctrines prevailing in a particular denomination of Christians, and then after the lapse of some time a very different system gaining the ascendant in that same denomination: and yet all professing to derive their faith from the same inspired book. Hence they are led to conclude, that the attainment of truth must be very uncertain; and that the laborious search demanded in making it, not being likely to be rewarded by success, should not be attempted.

These are delusive and dangerous impressions. If we ascribe them to the want of information, it ought not to be forgotten that this deficiency may be traced to a secret aversion from the truth that has prevented due inquiry. Let such individuals look more closely to the state of Christendom, and they will find that all who deserve the name of sincere followers of the Lord Jesus Christ, in all churches meriting the name of a Christian church, are more united in their faith than they imagine; that all such disciples agree in the belief of the fundamental doctrines of our holy religion, however divided on points of minor importance, and in respect to the principles of church government. Some indeed who assume to themselves the name of

Christians, reject what all other professing Christians regard as essential to the system of divine revelation: but by this criminal rejection of essential doctrines of the gospel, they cut themselves off from the visible church, and become nothing more than *deists*, with a Christian name. Of such we do not speak, but of sincere Christians of all other denominations: and we assert that they do agree in maintaining the *unity* and *trinity* of the Godhead, the *deity* and *mediatorial character* of Jesus Christ. They do believe that man was at first created in a pure, holy and happy state; that he fell from it by his own wilful transgression; that mankind have, in consequence of the apostacy of Adam, been involved in a state of sin and misery; that we can be justified only through the righteousness of Jesus Christ; that it is necessary to be regenerated and sanctified by the operations of the spirit of God, in order to be qualified for the holy employments and enjoyments of heaven; that good works, though not *meritorious*, yet are *indispensable* in the life of every true Christian; that there is a future state of rewards and punishments.

Now in the belief of these doctrines, and others that might be mentioned, all sincere disciples of Christ throughout the world are agreed: and whoever believes these doctrines with the heart, shall be saved. Christians, it must be confessed, are lamentably divided in sentiments; but they are not so greatly sundered apart in this respect as many suppose, and others would wish the world to believe. In all fundamental and essential doctrines they are united. They have *one faith*, as they have one Lord to rule over them, one Spirit to teach them, and one hope to cheer and animate them in their Christian course.

Such *unity of faith* among true Christians, we might anticipate

from the very design of a divine revelation. Unquestionably it was given for the instruction of mankind; and surely it would be unreasonable to suppose that its fundamental doctrines were delivered in a manner so obacure, that those who, with humble, teachable and prayerful minds, sought to become acquainted with them, could not discover them with sufficient clearness to produce a general harmony of faith. This would be a reflection both on the wisdom and goodness of that merciful Being, who has vouchsafed his light and instruction to our benighted and ignorant world. We open the Bible, and rejoice to find there is no ground for such a reflection. Its pages are luminous. Its great doctrines are delivered with much perspicuity. Any man of candour, not blinded by preconceived notions, and willing to learn the truth, may, with proper diligence, and in the use of those helps which God has provided, acquire a knowledge of the great and leading doctrines of the gospel, and, by a divine blessing sought with earnest prayer, may become wise unto salvation.

The attainment of revealed truth is then *practicable*: and as it may be gained, so the acquisition is *important* on account of its **PRACTICAL INFLUENCE**.

With many it is a favourite maxim, "No matter what a man's creed is, provided his life be good." It is possible to put on this maxim a construction that will render its meaning less mischievous. It might be interpreted to signify that it is not important what may be the sentiments of a man on certain controverted points of subordinate consequence, provided his conduct be such as becomes the gospel of Christ. But if any be disposed to use it in this qualified sense, it is plain enough that many adopt it on the broad principle, that the belief of the doctrines of divine revelation is not essential to a good life. In-

deed there are some who maintain one religion to be as good as another for all necessary purposes; and that if men be only sincere in the practice of the religion they profess, they will be accepted by the Judge of all. From this opinion it will follow, that the Hindoo prostrating himself before the idol Juggernaut, and defiling himself with its impure and filthy rites, pleases his Maker, as well as the humble believer, who lies, with penitential shame, at the foot of the cross of Christ, and fervently supplicates the purifying influence of that precious blood which cleanseth from all sin! It will follow, that those infatuated savages, who worship the *Devil*, will meet with approbation in the final day, as well as those holy Christians who worship Jehovah alone, and abhor the ascription of divine honours to any but the Supreme Being, who made, upholds and governs the world! Such wretched absurdities have actually been published in one of the newspapers of this city.

In opposition to all loose opinions in regard to the *practical* influence of the truth, we maintain, *that if a man's creed be essentially defective, his life can not be good.* We speak not of that exterior morality, which many wish to substitute in place of inward piety. By a good life we mean a life of holiness; a course of action flowing from a regenerated heart. All works proceeding from any inferior principle, how lovely and praiseworthy soever in the estimation of men, are in the sight of God *dead* works, which he will not accept. An inspired writer has plainly taught this truth: "They that are in the flesh cannot please God:" Rom. viii. 8.; that is, all who act merely from the principles of their depraved nature, being destitute of a living faith in Christ, and a holy love to God, can not yield the obedience which is demanded; and of course the eye of infinite Purity

cannot look upon them with approbation. A life of holiness, which alone is worthy of being denominated a good life, springs from a belief of the truth, and is never seen in persons who reject the *essential* doctrines of the gospel.

*Truth lies at the foundation of duty.* There is a Being of infinite excellence, who made and governs all things: on this truth is founded the duty of loving, worshipping and obeying our Creator. Our glorious sovereign has given us a law for the regulation of our conduct; and hence it becomes our duty to observe all the precepts of this law. Man is a fallen and depraved creature: from this truth springs the duty of humiliation and repentance. God has appointed Jesus Christ as mediator between himself and sinful men: on this truth rests the duty of seeking intercourse with our offended Maker through the mediation of his Son. A sinner cannot possibly be justified by his own righteousness, but he may be justified by faith in the righteousness of the Redeemer: on these two important truths is founded the duty of renouncing dependence on our own righteousness for justification, and relying simply on the righteousness of Christ for obtaining this great and necessary blessing. The Holy Spirit is the efficient cause of the work of regeneration and sanctification in every Christian's heart: from this truth springs the duty of paying peculiar regards to this divine person, and of seeking his renewing and sanctifying grace. Jesus Christ is the true God: on this truth is founded that indispensable duty of honouring the Son even as we honour the Father. Thus it appears, that every truth has its corresponding duty. Let any man believe with the heart these leading truths of divine revelation, and he will in some measure perform the duties which grow out of them.

But suppose a man rejects any of

these truths, is it reasonable to expect he will regard the duties which are founded on them? Will he who denies the deity of the Lord Jesus Christ, and believes him to be nothing more than a mere man, pay to him the same divine worship which he presents to God? Will he who denies both the personality and godhead of the Holy Ghost, show him the regards that are due to this divine person, and implore his renewing and sanctifying influence? Will he who rejects the atonement of Christ, make it the foundation of his hope for eternity? Will he who believes he can by works merit the favour of God, renounce dependance on his own, and rely on the righteousness of another for acceptance at the bar of his final judge? Error leads to sin, as truth to holiness. The depravity of our nature does indeed oppose the influence of truth, so that it has not its complete effect on our hearts; and God is pleased, by various counteracting circumstances, to diminish the deleterious power of error, so as to prevent the mischief that would otherwise result from it. Still, however, the natural tendency of the one is to produce a *sinful*, and of the other to produce a *holy* life.

The sacred scriptures furnish the most conclusive evidence of the great importance of revealed truth on account of its practical influence. Indeed the very fact that we have a divine revelation does itself constitute indisputable proof, that truth is essential to our restoration from a state of sin to a state of holiness. Why did the Lord Almighty bless the world with a revelation of his mind and will? Why were such pains taken in forming the Bible? Why were prophets and apostles raised up in long succession, and inspired each to write his allotted portion of that holy book? Why did Providence watch over it with such peculiar care, preserving it from the ravages of time, and the

malice of kings and emperors who sought its destruction? Why were such astonishing miracles wrought in confirmation of its truth, and to propagate the belief of its doctrines in the world? It will not be pretended that all this was done merely to amuse the human mind, or to gratify its curiosity by supplying it with subjects for barren speculation. A nobler purpose was contemplated by the infinite Mind. The revelation of God was given for the high and holy purpose of calling sinners out of darkness into marvellous light, and of delivering them "from the *power of darkness*," and translating them "into the kingdom" of God's "dear son."

Accordingly we find, that salvation is ascribed to the truth. "I am not ashamed," declares the great apostle, "of the gospel of Christ: for it is the *power of God unto salvation* to every one that believeth." Rom. i. 16. Not only is salvation in this general manner attributed to the truth, but every essential constituent part of salvation in particular is ascribed to its influence. Is faith necessary to salvation? This is represented as a product of the truth: "So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." Rom. x. 14—17. Is repentance a part of salvation? It results from the preaching of the truth. Paul declared to king Agrippa, that he "shewed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should *repent* and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance:?" Acts xxvi. 20: and it is well known that the word of God dispensed by this great apostle, did not return void, but prospered in the accomplishment of the purpose for which it was sent, and that thousands became sincere penitents and converts to Christ. What brought the three thousand to repentance on the memorable day of Pentecost? Was

it not the plain, faithful and pungent exhibition of gospel truth by Peter and his fellow apostles? Acts ii. 37—41. Is regeneration, or being born again, a part of salvation? It is attributed to the truth: "Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the *word* of God, which liveth and abideth for ever." 1 Pet. i. 23. "Of his own will *begat* he us with the *word* of truth, that we should be a kind of first fruits of his creatures." Jam. i. 18. "For though ye have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet not many fathers: for in Christ Jesus I have *begotten you through the gospel.*" 1 Cor. iv. 15. Is progressive sanctification necessary to our salvation? It is carried on by the influence of truth: "Sanctify them through thy *truth*: thy word is truth." "And for their sake I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the *truth.*" John, xvii. 17, 19. What is it but the truth that supplies believers with consolation? "Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath; that by two immutable things in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have *strong consolation*, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us."

While we thus exhibit these indubitable proofs of the great practical influence and purifying power of the truth, it is proper to remark, that it owes *all its efficiency* to the *accompanying grace of God*. Unattended by the power of the Holy Spirit, it would never produce those mighty effects which it has produced, and still does produce, in the conversion of sinners. This fact should be ever borne in remembrance, that the glory of our salvation may be ascribed, not to means, or to instruments, but to *Him* who appointed and employs them for the accomplishment of his holy and merciful designs. "I have

planted and Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. So then, neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase." 1 Cor. iii. 6, 7. It is only when the gospel comes, "not in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Ghost," 1 Thess. i. 5, that it produces its intended effects. Still, however, it is to be remembered that God is pleased *ordinarily* to use the *truth* in effecting the salvation of sinners, from the beginning to the consummation of the mighty work. It is the *milk* by which babes in Christ are nourished; and the *strong meat* by which Christians of full age are fed. Heb. v. 13, 14.

It is manifest that truth, possessing such a powerful practical influence as to effect, through the accompanying grace of God, an entire revolution in the character and nature of man, so that the sinner is converted into a saint, and the heir of hell is made an heir of heaven, is not to be treated with *indifference*. The knowledge of it is a matter that most deeply concerns every individual; for on feeling its renovating power on the heart depends the salvation of our immortal souls. We cannot remain ignorant of it without extreme hazard. With *natural science* a man may have no acquaintance; of the first principles of *mathematics* he may have no knowledge, without endangering at all his salvation. He may be almost an idiot, and yet be so taught the fundamental doctrines of the gospel as to believe them, and obtain salvation. But of *divine truth* no one can remain ignorant without putting in jeopardy his eternal interest; and dying in this condition, he must inevitably share in the perdition of them who *know not* God, and obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. 2 Thess. i. 8. "My people," is the complaint of Jehovah, "are destroyed for lack of knowledge." Hosea, iv. 6.

The truth then ought to be prized

according to its vast importance and inestimable value. Our feelings toward it should be like those which we may suppose the royal psalmist experienced, when he penned that admirable eulogy: "The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple: the statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes: the fear of the LORD is clear, enduring forever: the judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold, sweeter also than honey, and the honeycomb. Moreover, by them is thy servant warned; and in keeping of them there is great reward." Ps. xix. 7—11.

A conviction of the unutterable value of the truth should prompt us to endeavour to make as extensive acquisitions of it as our circumstances and station in life will admit. All truths are not, it is readily conceded, equally important. Some constitute the foundation on which our holy religion is built, while others belong to a less essential part of the glorious edifice. That we are bound to partake of the two Christian rites, *baptism* and the *Lord's supper*, is a truth; but this truth is not to be compared with that fundamental truth, "He that believeth shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned." Mark, xvi. 16. While this distinction is made, let it not be forgotten, that all revealed truths are important, and that an acquaintance with every part of the inspired volume will subserve the great design of the whole, the increasing perfection of the Christian believer. "All scripture," affirms the apostle, "is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; that the man of God may be per-

fect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." No Christian should be satisfied barely with a knowledge of the fundamental doctrines of divine revelation; he should endeavour to form an acquaintance with every part of that admirable system of religious truth with which God has blest and adorned his church. By taking a view of the whole he will be able to discern the place of each part; the relation which one truth sustains to another; and how they all harmoniously unite in one glorious system of light and wisdom, holiness and consolation. It were well for the church and for its individual members, if none deserved the reproof which the apostle administered to the Hebrews: "For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again, which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat." Heb. v. 12.

Let every one then feel it an incumbent duty to increase in the knowledge of the truth. The means are ample. God has appointed a ministry for the edification of his church. All who have entered into this high and holy office are bound to endeavour by diligent study, to form an extensive and accurate acquaintance with the contents of the inspired volume; so that they may feed his people with knowledge, and out of the good treasure of their hearts bring forth, like faithful stewards of the mysteries of the kingdom, things new and old. A steady and constant attendance on the preaching of the word, then, is one appointed means for increasing in the knowledge of the truth.

In addition to the ministry, God has blest the church with the *Bible*; in which has been recorded by inspired penmen whatever his infinite wisdom deemed proper to be communicated for the faith and practice of his people. This volume, then, must be diligently and perse-

veringly studied by all who wish to obtain a clear and comprehensive knowledge of revealed truth. Those who neglect it will derive but little profit from the ministry of the word; they come with minds unprepared to hear to advantage discourses founded on passages of holy scripture. The very gift of such a book imposes on all who possess it an obligation to read and study its marvellous contents. The Bereans were commended for their diligence in comparing the addresses of Paul with the records of inspirations, to discover whether he taught true and sound doctrine. Acts, xvii. 11. Our Lord commanded the Jews, and consequently all to whom his command comes, to "search the scriptures." John, v. 35.

The scriptures, although written in perspicuous language, yet in many places need elucidation; and for the assistance of his people the Lord has furnished the writings of able divines, as well as the preaching of his ministers in general. These writings, in different forms, from the pamphlet to the folio, are a treasure to his church. All Christians should, as far as their means and opportunities for reading will allow, derive aid from these writings in their study of the Bible. Some have not leisure to peruse large volumes, but who cannot spare from his necessary avocations time enough to read a magazine, a monthly pamphlet comprising but a few pages?

Reading and hearing must be combined in the search for truth. The two great avenues of knowledge are the *ear* and the *eye*. The Lord is pleased to instruct his people through the medium of both; he addresses the ear by the preaching of his word, and the eye by his written word and the writings of learned divines.

"Buy the truth and sell it not." "Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom; and with all thy getting get understanding.

Exalt her, and she shall promote thee; she shall bring thee to honour when thou dost embrace her. She shall give to thine head an ornament of grace; a crown of glory shall she deliver to thee." "My son, if thou wilt receive my words, and hide my commandments with thee; so that thou incline thine ear unto wisdom, and apply thine heart to understanding; yea, if thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding; if thou seekest her as silver and searchest for her as for hid treasures: then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God. For the Lord giveth wisdom; out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding. He layeth up sound wisdom for the righteous: he is a buckler to them that walk uprightly. He keepeth the paths of judgment, and preserveth his saints. Then shalt thou understand righteousness, and judgment, and equity; yea, every good path." Prov. xxiii. 23. iv. 5—9. ii. 1—9.

J. J. J.

#### *Remarks on the Duration of Future Punishment.*

Few have denied, that man is an accountable being. The awful lapse of our race, and the consequent moral deterioration of our nature, are also admitted by a large proportion of professing Christians. Any plan calculated efficaciously to heal the breach, make reconciliation for transgression, and thus reinstate in the favour of heaven, must be an object of universal interest. Such a plan *Jehovah* has revealed. What it is, is a question of vast moment. The discrepancy among Christians about its nature, character and extent, has been proportioned to the magnitude of its importance. These have been subjects of tedious and accrimonious litigation. To examine closely, and reason dispassionately is more easily proposed, than executed. To discuss topics