

THE
CLAIMS OF THE BIBLE

URGED UPON THE ATTENTION OF
STUDENTS OF THEOLOGY.

A LECTURE, DELIVERED NOVEMBER 6, 1831,

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INTRODUCTORY LECTURE.

MY YOUNG FRIENDS, CANDIDATES FOR THE HOLY MINISTRY.

MY object in the present lecture will be to recommend to you the diligent study of the Bible, and to put you in mind, so far as my limits may permit, of the way in which this study is to be conducted. Some persons might suppose that it was hardly necessary to enter into a formal statement of motives and rules on a subject of this kind, when addressing a company of theological students; whose character carries with it a pledge that they reverence and love the sacred volume, and who are bound by their profession to make it the text-book of all their studies. The church, however, has had sad experience, in every age, that such an imagination *may* be far from the truth. I am deeply persuaded, that the Bible is yet far from possessing, even among ministers, the honor and authority to which it is entitled, and which it is destined hereafter to receive, when truth and holiness shall prosper more than they do now.

I. *The Bible recommends itself to your diligent and careful study by its literary value.* In this respect it is superior to all other volumes. The proud monuments of classic Italy and Greece bear no comparison with it. And so far as the literature of modern nations rises in excellence above that of the ancients, it is not too much to assert, that the advantage is in a great measure owing to the part which this sacred volume has contributed directly and indirectly to its formation.

The Bible contains the most ancient and authentic *history*, the most sublime and beautiful *poetry*, the most profound and useful lessons of moral *philosophy*, that are any where to be found. It does not unfold the mysteries of natural science, for that was not the object for which it was given; but it unfolds to man his own nature, his origin, his relations to the God that made him, his duties, his dangers, and his destiny beyond the grave. And in doing this, it opens to him a range of mental improvement more broad and vast than is presented without it by all the sciences joined together; and introduces him to a world of thought, which eclipses with its bright-

ness, and by its magnificence and grandeur degrades into insignificance, all the greatness and glory that learning can have besides.

In point of *taste and literary refinement*, the sacred volume holds a high place. It does not indeed, like the Koran of Mohammed, found its pretensions to inspiration upon the super-human character of its language and style; it affects not to wear in this respect any other costume but what is earthly and human. But still it abounds with specimens of the finest writing that is known in the world. No themes can be imagined, better fitted to wake up all the latent energies of genius, to move the deeper sensibilities of the soul, or to kindle into poetic fervor the visions of fancy, than those which occupied for the most part the attention of the Jewish prophets; and it is abundantly manifest from what they have left us of their writings, that in the case of many of them the minds to which these themes were presented were minds of the very first order. Such themes transmitted to the sacred page through the channel of such minds, in which the accomplishments of nature were all refined by the habitual spirituality of piety and by the consciousness of a heavenly inspiration at the time, could not fail to produce much that is beautiful and moving, and grand in composition and style. We need only to remember, that every language and region of country has its own distinctive order of taste in this matter, and that it can never be fair to try what is produced in one by the standard that prevails in another; and then when we shall have come up to the examination of this point, as we should, with minds properly imbued with the associations and habits of oriental thought, we shall not be slow in according to the Bible all the merit of classic excellence in this respect, which the taste and admiration of a Lowth or a Herder have ever ventured to assert.

But the literary value of the scriptures is found pre-eminently in that of which style is but the outward and comparatively unessential dress. In the language of another,* “the predominant feature of the Bible is **THOUGHT**, universal in its operation, imperishable in its character, endless in its varieties, and unbounded in its relations.”

* Mr. Grimke', of Charlestown, S. C. in a small work entitled, “Reflections on the character and objects of all science and literature, and on the relative excellence and value of religious and secular education, and of sacred and classical literature, in two addresses, and an oration with additions and improvements.” A work full of interest and instruction, which ought to be read by all to whom the prosperity of learning or religion is an object of concern.

I agree with him in believing that it is on this account the only storehouse of *universal literature*, of a literature that will stand amid all revolutions, fitted to every clime and every age, to every state of society and form of government. The classic writings of all other nations fall exceedingly short of the excellence which belongs to the sacred volume in this respect. The beauties of the Roman and Grecian writers are chiefly to be found in the structure of their compositions, and in the mere external forms of style; while in regard to the richer and only enduring beauties of thought they are necessarily defective to a very great extent. The *materials* of their literature are altogether jejune and contemptible when compared with the rich stores of thought which are comprehended in the Jewish and christian scriptures.

And what, I may ask, is literature, except as it embodies throughout all its proportions vigorous and enduring thought? Can any outside tinsel compensate for the absence of this? Can any splendor of external form make up for a mean and shrivelled nature within? The proper object of Literature is to enlarge and elevate the powers of the mind itself; to give the utmost comprehension to that world of thought in the midst of which it resides; and to incorporate into its very nature all that is high and pure and noble and invigorating in the universe of truth which it is called to explore. No literature, then, can be healthy or deserving of the name, that does not occupy itself mainly with thought; and as the Bible excels incomparably all other books in richness and fulness of thought, the most vigorous and healthy literature of which men are capable must be that which, in its foundation and in its whole structure, is most truly Biblical.

It is well remarked by the writer from whom I quoted a little while ago, that even in regard to mere style, the best cultivation which the mind can have is that which tends to provide it with the materials of thought. "Thought is the only fountain of taste, the only parent of style. Thought is the living soul, invisible, intangible; style is the speaking features of the human countenance divine." How absurd then it must be to think of cultivating style, except by cultivating thought! Let the mind be furnished with the materials of a correct and ample and vigorous literature, and it will without trouble find out the proper way of clothing them with the drapery of a dignified and agreeable style.

I cannot quit this part of my subject, without contributing my

voice in the most solemn and decided manner, to that testimony which is beginning to be lifted up by a few in the land against the prevailing systems of education, as being any thing but Biblical in their character. If the value of the Bible in respect of mere literature be such as I have represented it to be, and such as all who have any apprehension of its true character must allow it to be, is it not manifest that it ought to be the grand text-book of all education, and the basis of all learning, in every christian community? And yet, most strange to tell, the established system of education, in all its progress from the primary school to the university, is so framed as to exclude the Bible, as it were with the most careful design, from all place among its provisions for the improvement of mind; and learning is regarded as a thing that owes scarce any obligation whatever, to this great storehouse of thought, and may be thoroughly cultivated independently altogether of its resources. It is not needful, that we should at present, trace this abuse to its dark and corrupt origin; let it suffice to say, that it is contrary to all reason and propriety, and must be, from the very nature of the case, most seriously detrimental to the interests of sound knowledge. The more it is looked at, the more glaring do the inconsistency and shame of it appear. The *moral* evils which result from the present practice are, no doubt, immense. Who can doubt whether a better tone of morality, and a more general spirit of piety, would not prevail in society, if our schemes of education were such as to incorporate more of the Bible into the general intellectual character which they are employed to form? Who can doubt whether a more christian aspect would not characterize the cultivated walks of life, the various departments of professional science, and the whole compass of polite learning, if those who receive instruction in our colleges were imbued with the sentiments and modes of thought that reign through the Bible, as carefully as they are now trained in all that pertains to the corrupt mythology of pagan Greece and Rome? But it is not morality and religion alone, that suffer by the present practice; the interests of *literature* are miserably consulted while it is upheld. Most assuredly we should have a literature of a vastly higher order, more comprehensive, and more worthy of the name, if its elements were drawn forth from the volume of inspiration, instead of being collected, as they now for the most part are, from other quarters, where littleness and darkness and confusion reign over all that is of an opposite cha-

racter. Literature, when it is thus cultivated, will put forth its proper perfection, and show itself in fuller beauty and strength than the world has yet formed a conception of.

II. *The Bible recommends itself to your diligent study as the great text-book of all true theology.* Theology is the science to which you are particularly devoted—the highest of all sciences to which the mind can apply itself—the science of God, and of human happiness. The elements of it are unfolded to some extent in the volume of nature; but only partially and obscurely. It becomes a real science to man in his present state only by the aid of that revelation which is contained in the bible. This interprets nature, so far as her manifestations reach, and at the same time unfolds a new world of higher, brighter, and more interesting truth, from which the richest materials of divine knowledge are to be derived.

Consider, now, 1st. That the bible presents itself to us as a book from God. It claims to be all truth without any error; written by men who wrote as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.

2nd. It teaches that men are incapable of learning any correct theology except from itself; inasmuch as they are blinded by sin and alienated from the life of God in the whole natural spirit of their minds. This representation, moreover, is abundantly confirmed by the experience of the world in all ages. Left to themselves, men have never made any progress at all in divine knowledge.

3rd. It proclaims itself all-sufficient for the purposes of such knowledge—full of light and truth and life; so that nothing is wanted to make its revelations complete; so that all necessary instruction in theology may be had by those who have recourse to its pages for that end.

4th. As a condition of coming fairly into the possession of those treasures of wisdom which it contains, it requires a man to abandon his confidence in other resources of knowledge. He must learn to cease in despair from the wisdom of this present world, and from the unassisted powers of his own mind, and to commit himself as a little child in simple confidence to the teaching of the bible itself; and only in proportion as this is done, will he come to the clear and full and satisfying apprehension of that infallible truth which it reveals for his instruction.

How vain, then, must it be to think of becoming a real theologian, except by the diligent study and interpretation of this book! The man who leans on mere *authority* in making up his creed, who is sa-

tified to receive his faith on trust from his parents or his teachers or his sect, may happen in some instances to acquire a system of notions substantially correct. But that system cannot be said to constitute to him any science of theology in the proper sense of the term. Science is a thing that exists only by incorporation with the mind itself; the knowledge of truth apprehended and received into the soul on its own proper evidence. But where mere authority is the basis on which a structure of opinions is made to rest, however lofty and gigantic, and fair in its visible proportions that structure may seem to be, it cannot be said to have any incorporation with the mind, or to be in any true sense its own. If I embrace a creed in this way, it is only the creed of another man and not my own; and so far as the enlargement or invigoration of my own mind is affected by it, it might just as well have been deposited in my library, or in my note book, as in my head.

The man who thinks to become wise in divinity by his own *speculations*, as many in every age have seemed to think, must be disappointed. The imbecility and darkness of the human mind, when left to itself to make inquiries concerning moral truth and duty, are deplorably great. We need only to trace the history of moral opinions in times past, to perceive that the wisdom of men is for the most part folly, and their boasted light but little better than thick darkness. It is enough to shake one's confidence almost entirely in all the results of knowledge pertaining to moral subjects to which they seem to come independently of the word of God, only to consider what absurd notions have put on in ages past the guise of profound wisdom, and into what contradictory extremes the opinions of men have been carried at different times on the most important points. To confide in a man's own philosophical speculations, or in the philosophical speculations of any other man, for the erection of a scheme of divine truth is therefore always presumptuous and extremely unsafe. Show me a theologian who does not in practice, as well as in profession, make the bible the authoritative text-book of his studies, and I care not what may be his powers of intellect or his resources of learning, you show me a man whose theological views are after all but little better than fancy, without the vigor, the stability, or the substance of truth. Let it be deeply impressed upon our minds, that the great business of a divine is to understand what is written; we can make no progress in the knowledge of divinity, except as we be-

come instructed in the meaning of God's holy word, and the best interpreter of that word, not the profound master of dialectics, must always be the best theologian.

To be well instructed in any science it is not enough to be acquainted with the great facts which belong to it; we need to have these facts disposed in their proper order, and contemplated in their true relations. Science in the mind, should be but the reflected image of truth as it actually exists in nature, in which not only the forms and proportions of single objects are represented according to the things themselves, but the aspect and position which they bear to each other relatively are likewise clearly brought into view. The science of theology is the knowledge of the great facts which pertain to religion contemplated in their true arrangement and relation to each other. While he receives the facts themselves, a man may err most seriously by the way in which he disposes them in his theological system. Men in fact are under great liability to error in this way—so strong and constant is the tendency of our nature to undervalue the wisdom of God, and to substitute in stead of it our own. And this danger can never be guarded against by any precautions, while the bible itself is not made in very truth the authoritative rule of knowledge. I am fully persuaded, that no student of theology who does not truly and habitually labor to derive his views of truth from the direct and simple interpretation of the bible, can fail to fall into serious and hurtful errors. The most orthodox confession of faith, the most sound instructions, the most careful ecclesiastical supervision, cannot save him from such errors. He may seem to have formed his system as it should be; he may hold all that the faith of his church requires him to hold; but to the All-seeing eye the frame of his opinions will be found at variance with that frame of truth which the scriptures make known. It will be characterized by some important want of harmony or proportion; and after all will deserve to be called a distorted caricature, rather than a true and faithful transcript, of that divine religion of which it calls itself the science. As a man must devote himself to the study of nature itself to become acquainted with the philosophy of nature, and cannot truly attain to this knowledge by any other means; so to become truly acquainted with theology as it flows in its own living perfection from God, he must devote himself to the study of the bible, and have his whole spirit imbued with its lessons.

III. *The diligent study of the Bible is highly important to the formation of your own christian character.* The design of God in giving us a revelation, is not merely to make us acquainted with a science; his great purpose is our sanctification, that we may be like himself, and capable of the happiness of his own glorious heaven. Now this is accomplished mainly by the instrumentality of his word; and we must give ourselves much to the study of his word, if we would become proficient in holiness.

It is the folly of men that they are constantly prone to confide more in their own wisdom, than in that of God. Thus when they are brought to seek after righteousness, they still too generally indulge the imagination of obtaining it by methods of their own imagining, rather than by the simple methods of God's appointment. They try to become grounded in the truth, and practically alive to the sensibilities and the hopes of God's children, by having recourse mainly to human instructors, and such methods of spiritual benefit as are devised by the wisdom of men. But God's great method of working a holy nature within us, is by the simple power of his own word; and we may rest assured, that while that is neglected, we shall not succeed by any other method. The great art of advancing in the divine life consists in ceasing from our own wisdom, and giving ourselves up unreservedly as little children, to the divine plan. The weakest believer who follows after holiness in this way, is made soon to reach a degree of establishment in faith, of courage in duty, and of perfection in all christian character, which are never attained by the most mighty spirits on earth struggling after these ends in any other course. The individual who most sincerely honors the bible as the great treasury of divine light and heavenly power, and most honestly endeavors to have his soul subjected to the action of its truth, will be the christian of the most vigorous and rapid growth; while he who practically neglects it, whatever industry and zeal he may seem to possess in other ways of religion, cannot fail to suffer loss, and become woefully defective in christian character.

Would you learn more and more the evil of sin—the motives to holiness—the dangers and duties of life, that widen as they are gazed upon—the emptiness of earth and the immeasurable value of heaven? Then turn away from vanity, and study this book of truth. Here pre-eminently you are to look for light, repentance, faith, hope, peace, joy, courage, and all christian graces. Here is pure truth—

high example—living power. Oh, how we err when we lean to our own understanding, and neglect this sacred volume! In such a case, our souls cannot possibly prosper and be in health.

To find the full effect of scriptural truth upon our hearts, we must look at it in its connections and relations. It is not enough that we read the bible carelessly and superficially, or without any diligent attention to its full and extended meaning. It is not by words or letters that we can be sanctified, but by the living realities of truth, which these embody; and these realities do not exist so much in single forms of speech, or isolated declarations, as in the general texture of the thought at large, and the spirit which pervades the whole. Those who content themselves with mere fragments of truth, broken off from the connections in which they occur in the bible, may derive great benefit from the use of them; but most undoubtedly a much greater benefit will be obtained by looking at the truth in all those relations and connections in which it stands represented on the inspired page. This however cannot be done without much attention to the extended reading and sound interpretation of the bible itself; and the man who does not feel the importance of this, is not likely to have large and comprehensive views of divine truth.

IV. *The diligent study of the Bible is necessary to your success in the work of the ministry.* You are to watch and labor for souls, as those that must give account; and all your theology will be of little use except as it shall contribute to this end. Now as the bible must sanctify your own heart, so it alone can fit you to be the spiritual guides of others. There is wanted for this service a wisdom of the highest kind, and you can obtain it no where else than from the word of God.

No mere *speculatist*, however orthodox, can use truth as it ought to be used for the conversion and spiritual edification of souls. A man may seem to have the theory of practical religion well digested and well settled in his mind; he may be able to distinguish with metaphysical accuracy between true and false views of the nature of regeneration and holiness; he may be skilled in all questions of abstract casuistry, and expert in all argument about the powers and operations of the human soul: and yet, notwithstanding all, he may be most poorly qualified for descending into the real walks of life in the character of a pastor and spiritual teacher; and thus poorly qualified for such business he will most assuredly be, if he have not actually drawn

his theory of religion from the diligent use of the bible, and had it incorporated into the very constitution of his own mind by the living spirit of the bible itself. Without this he may seem to be wise in the knowledge of the will of God, and in the discrimination of good from evil; but he cannot be truly a guide of the blind, or a light of them which are in darkness, an instructor of the foolish, or a teacher of babes. There is a knowledge requisite for this which is not to be acquired by any discipline in the schools; a practical skill, an indescribable tact in the employment and application of divine truth, which distinguishes the minister who has it from him who has it not, as far as the practitioner of many years in medicine, who has verified all his knowledge from the experience of real life, is distinguished from the mere theorist in the same profession. We are all made to *feel* this, though we may find it hard to point out precisely in what the secret of their superiority particularly consists, in reading the pages of such men as Baxter, Owen, Howe, Leighton, Flavel, Henry, Edwards, Payson, as contrasted with the writings of others like Grotius, Clarke, Tillotson, Whitby, Warburton, or Paley. The former are pervaded by an unction and power, which we miss altogether in the latter. The same difference we are made to feel in sitting under the preaching, and observing the pastoral character, of ministers in our own time.

As this heavenly skill is not to be obtained by any mere speculation, so neither can it be taken up by mere *imitation*. It does not consist, as some appear to fancy, in adopting a certain style of religious speech denominated evangelical, or in using abundantly the technical phraseology of experimental piety. It is not to be acquired by simply breathing the atmosphere, and participating in the excitement, of awakenings and revivals. Experience fully justifies the remark, that a man may have his mouth full of evangelical language, and be able to talk much to anxious persons in the current phrase of the anxious meeting, or to press upon impenitent sinners, the dangers of their situation in the current style of revival-exhortation; and yet all the while be a very smatterer in the real knowledge of piety, and most unskilful in the proper administration of the word of life. In such a case, the phraseology of evangelical and spiritual religion is made to degenerate into downright *cant*; and the ministration of divine truth, instead of being what it ought to be, the treatment of a wise and judicious physician, is turned into the miserable empiricism of a spiritual quack. The heavenly skill of which we are speaking,

can never be acquired then, by mere imitation; it must be sought from God in the closet, by the prayerful study of his word.

As far as *preaching* is concerned, that man undoubtedly, will be the best qualified to do it well, who possesses the largest and most comprehensive views of scripture truth; and whose mind has been most thoroughly moulded by the bible into a correspondence with its own character of high and vigorous thought. We hear it sometimes complained, that our ministers do not show themselves apt enough, and accurate enough, in bringing quotations from the sacred volume; there prevails, however, a greater defect than this. They too often rest in mere texts, and evince but little acquaintance with the extended sense of scripture. We need to be clothed with its very habit of mind; we need to have imbibed the very spirit of its writers. A man may make his sermon to abound with texts, without making it, after all, very scriptural. One relevant passage, judiciously brought forward, so as that it shall be exhibited in the actual light in which it is presented in the bible, and tell with direct and clear authority on the subject in hand, is worth more than any number of texts by which the sound only of scripture is produced, without its true sense, or light, or power. But this cannot be done without much knowledge of the word of God. In order to draw forth from the treasury of that word in this skilful and seasonable way, the preacher must be intimately familiar with the rich resources it contains. It will not do to have stored his memory merely with a multitude of single texts, or even to have committed to it, all the proof passages contained in Brown's "Body of Divinity;" nor will it answer to turn over, as occasion may require, the leaves of a reference bible, or to waste himself over the pages of Cruden's Concordance. All such mechanical assistances will contribute to his sermons but little of that truly scriptural character, which they ought to possess. The only possible way of securing this, is to study the bible itself, as it ought to be studied—to make all parts of it familiar ground—to be conversant with its several books, as each of them is a whole—to be exegetically acquainted with the extended argument of all. Thus *things* will come to be regarded more than *words*; and the mind will be a treasure-house where the materials of thought will always be at hand as they are wanted for use.

I now proceed to offer some thoughts on the manner in which this duty of studying the bible ought, in your case, to be discharged.

The duty itself, all persons are ready to admit; but the notions which many seem to have of what it involves, are very inadequate.

I. It requires you in the first place, *to make yourselves acquainted, as far as you have it in your power, with that particular medium of thought through which it has pleased the Holy Ghost to publish his revelations to the world.* Under this general requisition is comprehended a knowledge of the original languages of the bible, of sacred history, geography, and antiquities, and of the principles of interpretation. The reason of such knowledge being required, may be clearly represented in a few words.

When God condescended to speak to men, the nature of the case required that he should employ for the purpose their own medium of thought. He spake in the language of men, and not in the language of angels. Had he not done so, it would have been to the world of mankind no revelation at all. But as the case required in this way the employment of human speech and human writing, it became still farther necessary to clothe the revelation with the distinctive dress in which thought was accustomed to show itself among the people to whom, in particular, it was first published. Unless he chose to repeat his revelation in a distinct form to every nation under heaven, the Author of it was under a necessity of addressing it in the first instance to some one particular people; and in doing this, it became necessary as a matter of course, to adopt the language they were in the habit of using, and the style of thinking with which they were familiar. Otherwise what was published would have found no access to their minds, and the purposes of a revelation would not have been answered. In addressing himself to the Jewish people, accordingly, he did it in that language which they were accustomed to speak, and in that style of thought which was characteristic of their age and place.

Here it may be well to say a little more explicitly, what we mean when we speak of a particular style of thought being characteristic of a particular people. Though the general laws by which the human mind puts forth its action, are the same in all places and at all times, its operations are still modified to a very considerable extent, by the influence of the particular circumstances under which the development of its powers takes place. That world of thought in which it moves, and in which it may be said to have its very being, is constructed in a great measure out of the materials with which it

is supplied from the scenes of natural and moral life around it, and the manner of education bestowed upon it by others. A large portion of its ideas are direct transcripts of the objects of nature and art, with which it is surrounded, or notices of facts that have occurred in the history of that society to which it more immediately belongs; and where its thoughts ascend from that which is sensible and outward, to the sphere of moral and abstract truth, it still assists itself in its flight by the conceptions with which it has been first supplied from the world of sense, and acts continually through the medium of those material images with which it has become already conversant. In this way the mind puts on its distinctive character of thought under the education of the circumstances in which it is placed. The natural scenery of the country, the structure of the government, the domestic, social, and moral habits of the people, the notions of religion, philosophy and science at large, already received and incorporated into the common systems of education, the history, traditionary or written, of past times; all these contribute their influence to the formation of this character, and unite to stamp upon it the impression of their own distinct and peculiar individuality. Hence among each people, a distinct world of thought, a peculiar structure of mind, by which they are distinguished from each other not less than they are by the differently sounding languages by which their thoughts are expressed. The developments of mind, as they thus take place under the influence of different forms of education, are just as much diversified as the developments of nature in the physical world, under the influence of different skies, and in different latitudes of the earth. We mean, then, by the style of thought which characterizes a particular people, that peculiar structure of mind, thus wrought out of the circumstances of their condition, by which they are distinguished from the people of other nations, who have learned to think under the tuition of a different state of life.

Now we say, that the Spirit of God, in giving his revelations, accommodated himself to the particular style of thought, as well as to the particular speech, of the people to whom his revelations were at first addressed. There was just as much reason for the accommodation in the one case as in the other; and just as much reason for the accommodation in both these cases, as that he should accommodate himself to any human medium of thought at all, instead of addressing men in a way intelligible only to seraphim and cherubim on high.

The bible was published for the use of the whole world; but God in his wisdom has given it to the world through that particular medium of thought which was in use at the time among the Jews. Had he chosen a different nation to be the organ for transmitting the benefit, he would have accommodated himself in like manner to *their* distinctive style of thought; and most undoubtedly in that case we should have had the same revelation, exhibited in a somewhat different form. It is a mistake to suppose, as some seem to suppose, that the bible, by reason of its inspiration, must needs have the very form in which it is now published; and that this form would have been one and the same, whatever nation in the east or in the west, in the former or in the latter ages of the world, might have been selected as the organ of its publication. Each single book, as every one at all competent to form a judgment must allow, bears upon itself a distinct impression from the mind of the writer who was employed to publish it, and all, as a whole, are characteristically Jewish in their complexion of thought. This is a fact that stands forth from the very face of the bible itself; which it must be vain therefore to call in question. And surely it is a fact in conformity with all reason; though the thoughts of men, which are not like the thoughts of God, might have fallen perhaps on a different method. A revelation, to be any revelation at all, must be particular; and the only proper way of publishing it to the world, was that of conveying it in the first place intelligibly to the people, through whom it was to be published, by that medium of thought through which alone their minds could be successfully approached.

But if the case be as we have now represented it to be, it is plain that a man cannot be a skilful interpreter of the bible unless he put on to some considerable extent the mind of the ancient Jew, and learn to look at its revelations of truth through the same medium of thought by which they were originally presented to those who first received them; and the more completely any student of the bible can accomplish this object, the more successful will he be in discovering and exhibiting the true sense of the scriptures. Every man, therefore, who aspires to the office of a divine, teacher is bound to secure to himself this general qualification for rightly interpreting the bible, just as far as his opportunities allow him to do it. It is his duty to acquaint himself with the languages in which the sacred volume has been given from God, and to make himself at the same time familiar

with the elements out of which the Jewish nation had constructed for itself its own distinctive world of thought.

In times past there was an excuse for students of theology neglecting the study of the Hebrew language; but at present there is none. All have it in their power to acquire a knowledge of it, and all accordingly ought to feel it a duty to improve the privilege they enjoy of doing so. It is sometimes asked, why it is necessary to study the Hebrew language, when we have the scriptures so ably translated into our own, and possess so many learned expositions of their meaning, to which we may at all times have access? Waiving all argument at large on this point, I merely reply at present, that we cannot fully possess ourselves of the characteristic style of thought which belongs to the bible, without an acquaintance with the language in which it was first published. A language is far more than the mere sounds and forms of the words that compose it. It is, in every instance, a specific development of the particular structure of mind which belongs to the nation that uses it. When we become fairly acquainted with a language, we have become acquainted with the national mind itself; and without a knowledge of the language, we never can have an intimate knowledge of the mind it embodies. No man can put on the Jewish mind, so as to contemplate the scriptures through their own proper medium of thought, without being master of the Jewish language. The character of thought which prevails in one language, cannot be accurately and fully transfused into another; because each language is but the expression of its own character of thought. If we would enter, then, into any particular world of thought, we must do it by studying the language in which it has its range.

This must be accompanied, in the case before us, with the study of all that pertains to the archaeology and history of the people through whom we have received the scriptures. In fact this knowledge is essentially connected with the thorough knowledge of their language itself; since it is not possible to arrive at an accurate acquaintance with the elements of thought which enter into the composition of any language, without becoming conversant with the particular world of life from which those elements have been originally supplied. To understand the Hebrew tongue, the student must throw around himself the physical and moral scenery of ancient Palestine, and enter into the very structure of thought in which the Jewish mind resided when the Hebrew was its vernacular speech. He must

be at home in the Jewish commonwealth and in the Jewish church; intimate with the history of both, and familiar with the relation of both to the nations dwelling round about. He must be at home in the Jewish country, and an inmate, as it were, in the Jewish dwelling. He must transport himself in spirit over oceans of intervening space and oceans of intervening time, and take up his abode among the hills and flocks and vines of Canaan, and mingle with its inhabitants as one of themselves in their labors of the field, in their social assemblies, at their marriages, their funerals, and their feasts, and go up with them in their solemn gatherings to the city of the Great King, to take part from time to time in all the grand and imposing ceremonial of their ancient heaven-instituted, though now heaven-abrogated, worship.

It will be seen, that when I urge the importance of becoming acquainted with the Jewish medium of thought for the purpose of biblical interpretation, I speak of something more than a partial or superficial knowledge. A mere smattering of Hebrew letters will answer very little if any valuable purpose. Some students seem to fancy they have done all that is necessary in this department of knowledge, when they have taken a general survey of the grammar, and read perhaps fifty chapters in the bible, and are able by the help of a lexicon and the English version to make out, as they suppose, the sense of all ordinary passages, when they have occasion to refer to them. They will tell us they are satisfied to be able to appeal in this way when necessary to the original text, and to assure themselves that the rendering of the text on which they mean to preach, is correct. But it is really ridiculous, to hear persons talk in this style of their knowledge of the Hebrew language, when the peculiar genius and structure of the language have never at all been studied, and the particular range of thought which the language occupies as its own native home, continues still a "terra incognita" throughout almost all its extent. Such persons forget that a language does not consist so much in distinct forms of *speech*, as it does in distinct forms of *thought*; and that to become master of its whole vocabulary of terms, without becoming acquainted with the particular organization of mind of which it is but the outward costume, is to be in a great measure ignorant as before of all that made it worthy of being studied. A man might have the lexicons of a hundred different languages by heart, and be able to run any given word at once through the whole extent of their various

phraseology, and yet be truly acquainted only with his vernacular language after all; since whatever speech he might use, if he were ignorant of the particular genius of that speech, it would be but his own language uttered only with a foreign sound.

Yet of all persons, these 'sciolists in the ancient literature of the bible are most apt to be bold and confident in their own learning. Ignorant of almost all that pertains to correct interpretation, they yet interpret most dogmatically, and are ready to display their strength on this field whenever occasion presents, as if they had all the powers and resources of an Ernesti or a Morus or a Stuart at their command. Such persons are invincible in philological argument, being cased against the power of every weapon in the impenetrable mail of their own ignorance. They stand just in that position, however, which is most favorable to their falling into any error or heresy into which their hearts may tempt them. There is nothing settled and secure about their exegesis of the scriptures. When they venture upon this sea, they do it without rudder or compass or ballast, and they are liable accordingly to be driven about with every wind of doctrine that may blow. Fancies and conceits take hold of their minds in interpretation more readily than solid reasons, and the little glimmering light they possess serves to present things to them in strange and false shapes rather than in such as are true. On this account, I am not sure whether such a defective acquaintance with the original scriptures as many content themselves with, is of any use at all. A flickering, faint and unsteady light in a dark place, is sometimes worse than none. The principal use which I can see in it, is merely in the *name*. It gives a minister some authority among his people, when he is supposed to understand Greek and Hebrew; and it operates "in terrorem" upon upstart heretics around him, who are very fond of appealing in all cases to the original languages, whether they know any thing about them or not, but are likely to be a little cautious, if they think the minister in the neighborhood more at home in this kind of learning than themselves.*

* The claims of the Hebrew, have been *specially* insisted upon, because they have been specially neglected. But the fault of superficial study has not been confined in its mischief to the interpretation of the Old Testament. The interpretation of the New has felt its influence full as much. The attention paid to the Greek language is too generally of the most defective kind; and few feel sufficiently the importance of making themselves familiar with the structure of

But it may be asked, if all this be true, will it not follow that every person, layman as well as minister, should qualify himself for the study of the scriptures in the same way? And if it require all this learning to reach the sense of what God has revealed, how can it properly be said to be a revelation for common people of all nations? Are not the scriptures designed for universal use? and if so, can it be so necessary as we have represented it for understanding them, that we should study them thus laboriously through the medium of a strange language, and a style of thought so different from our own?

In answer to all this sort of reasoning, I reply, that the argument which it involves proves a great deal too much, and consequently destroys itself. The argument is, that a revelation given by God, because it is designed for the use of all, must needs be equally accessible to all minds, and of such a character as to require no learning for its interpretation. But is this true in fact? Can the bible be read by any one without some knowledge of letters; and is it as accessible to the man who cannot read as it is to the man who can? Again, is it not admitted on all hands, that God gave it originally only in a single language, and thus made it necessary for the people of all other languages to have it translated for their use by the help of learning? And if it be a fact thus notorious, that the aid of learning to *some* extent has been made necessary for reaching the truth which the bible reveals, who can affirm without presumption that it is useless in that extent for which we now plead? Who can affirm that the interests of truth and piety would not be greatly promoted, if all the public teachers of religion were qualified in the way we recommend to interpret what God has spoken; or that God in his wisdom

mind which it embodies in the New Testament. In fact, there is no way of attaining to an adequate knowledge of the New Testament Greek, except by studying the Old Testament Hebrew. The forms of thought which predominate in the New Testament are Hebrew; and without a knowledge of these, it is vain to pretend to a knowledge of the writers. At the same time, the costume of the Jewish mind at the time of our Saviour, was not precisely what it had been before the captivity, or in the age of Moses. The power of moral and political circumstances had, as is usual in the history of nations, modified in some respects its ancient form. The progress of this change, the eye of the student should follow. He should pass onward with the nation through its varying destinies, till he has learned to think and feel like a Jew in the age of the Roman Cesars; and then he will be prepared to interpret the New Testament.

has not made it necessary to approach the task of interpretation just in this way, in order to be at all successful?

Men without learning may understand enough of the bible to secure their own salvation and to regulate their lives according to godliness. The truth which is necessary for this, lies on the very face of the sacred volume, and can hardly be obscured by the worst translation. A single page of the word, or a mere tract to which a few essential truths have been transferred from it, without the word itself, may make the soul wise in this way unto eternal life. But what then? Do the *whole* meaning and power of the scriptures lie thus exposed upon the surface to the most rude and unlettered reader? Is this a reason why the minister of religion should not endeavor to become more intimately acquainted with the genius and character of the revelation he is set to expound and vindicate for the use of the church? It is surely meet that he at least should qualify himself to take the most large and comprehensive views of that divine science which the scriptures embody. In this way only may he hope to have much success as a teacher of others. For although it be true that any exhibition of truth *may* answer the purpose of bringing souls to God, it is not true that one exhibition will answer this purpose just as well as another. The ministration of the word by one hand may be vastly more productive of good than the ministration of it by another; and other things being equal, that man will always do it with the greatest effect whose mind has become most thoroughly conversant with the whole structure of the word as it came originally from God.

It is in this case just as it is in the science of nature. The great truths which are necessary to life are within the easy reach of all. A man needs no elaborate process of inquiry to satisfy himself that the sun shines in the heavens, or that his happiness depends on his being conformed to the known laws of nature and not opposed to them. He may shelter himself from the storm and turn aside from the precipice—he may please himself with the fragrant breath of spring, or feed upon the fruits of autumn, without the aid of science. But what then? Is there no use in science? Does it bring no advantage to the ordinary condition of life? Has it no power to shed new light upon the book of nature, or to draw forth from it richer treasures of entertainment and instruction? Does it kindle no additional glory in the heavens? Does it confer no additional brightness

upon the scenery of earth? Does it contribute no additional comfort or enjoyment to the experience of life? And if one were called to be a teacher of others in any department of natural knowledge, would he require no help of science for the purpose? Surely the more intimate and profound his acquaintance with the laws and relations of nature, the more skilful and successful would he be likely to be in the exhibition and application of all, even the most ordinary and well known truths. Nobody denies that study and learning are necessary to the interpreter of nature. Why then should it be denied that they are needful to the interpreter of the bible? Both sacred volumes have been given of God for the common use of all men, and abound with living instruction to the most unlearned. By the common acknowledgment of all, however, the interpretation of the one can proceed but a little way without the light of science. And when we affirm that knowledge is requisite in like manner for the interpretation of the other, what do we affirm but that the divine arrangement in one case is in analogy and harmony with the divine arrangement in another?

II. You must bear with me while I pass on from the consideration of this first general requisite, to the brief consideration of another still more important to the student of the bible. I should be greatly wanting to the subject in hand, and greatly wanting to my own sense of truth and duty, if I did not direct your attention to the great fact, *that you cannot study the bible aright, without possessing a frame of mind, in some good degree, correspondent with its own spirit.* So it is plainly declared in the scriptures themselves; and all true philosophy justifies the declaration. It is a first principle in the science of Hermeneutics, that the mind of an interpreter should be brought to occupy as far as possible, the actual position of the original writer of the book to be interpreted. Without this, he is in danger of missing in some degree, the precise meaning that the other intended, by looking at it through a different medium, or under a different relative aspect. Hence the reason of all that learning and study, which we have already recommended. The whole design of them is, to enable the mind to transport itself to the age and place of the sacred penmen, and to invest itself with the very habiliments of thought which they were accustomed to wear; so as to qualify it for contemplating what they wrote, from the same point of view, and under the same propor-

tions of light and shade, which it had to their own view. But these men, if we take their own testimony, were spiritual men, and many of the themes to which their attention was turned in writing, were themes of the highest spiritual interest. They contemplated divine truth through the medium of divine affections, and the objects of faith stood forth upon the vision of their souls, in all the reality that belongs to objects of sense. Their apprehensions of God and his glory, and the whole scheme of his religion, were high, and large, and holy. And if so, can we hope to understand them without possessing something of the same spirit? Can we see truth as *they* saw it, unless we stand in the same moral position, and gaze upon it under the same moral light? Is it reasonable to require of the interpreter, that he should clothe himself with the mere literary structure of their minds; and can it be less reasonable to insist, that he array himself also with the same conformation of heart, the same spirituality of heaven-born affections? The man who addresses himself to the interpretation of Paul, without having any thing of the spirit of Paul, must undoubtedly fall into great and serious errors. All the learning in the world cannot save him here. Where all is grand and glorious, he will see only that which is trifling and mean. The words mean not to him, what they meant to the soul of the Apostle. He moves in an entirely different world of thought. He sees all through an inadequate medium of vision; which belittles what is great, deforms what is beautiful, degrades what is high, and darkens into misty confusion the brightness of the whole scene. Interpreted under the influence of a spirit thus foreign from its own, the word of God is only travestied, as one has said, and not explained or understood.

But what frame of mind more particularly is that which is needed for the successful study of the sacred volume? To this I shall answer in a few words.

1st. *An ardent love of truth, with a desire to possess it.* "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." The love of truth for its own sake, is a rare quality in the human soul. Men for the most part, pursue knowledge, especially divine knowledge, under the influence of other feelings. Pride, under one form or another, leads ten, for one that is led by a simple and pure desire of knowing what is true. Hence so many

vain speculations, so many dogmatic prejudices, so many angry controversies. If you would become wise in the scriptures, you must cultivate the love of truth. Try to keep up in your minds an abiding sense of its unspeakable value. Watch against the insidious approach of other feelings, that are ever ready to steal in and take possession of the soul. Tolerate no indifference or sloth, and give no room to bigotry, prejudice, and pride. Pray to God, that he may form within you a right spirit on this point, and save you from the folly of those who please themselves with notions instead of things, and spend their days in pursuing after shadows instead of realities.

2nd. *A sense of the insufficiency of all human resources of knowledge.* The wisdom of this world is said to be foolishness with God, incapable of conducting men to any right apprehension of divine truth; and so long as they confide in it for this purpose, they cannot attain to this knowledge. In other words, the conceptions which men naturally form of divine things, are always inadequate and false, and they must be renounced before the soul can come to conceive of them as they really are. Hence it is said, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God; except an entire revolution take place in his way of thinking—except his old habits of thought be demolished—he cannot discern at all, the nature and character of that economy of life which the gospel makes known. Would you then grow in divine knowledge? Study the bible with the temper of little children. Cease from your own understandings, except as they are to be employed in conducting you to what the bible teaches. Cease from man, whose breath is in his nostrils. Learn to feel habitually, the danger of leaning on mere human authority. Cultivate a deep practical impression of the darkness and imbecility of the human mind, when thrown upon its own resources. When you have had the deepest sense of this, you will still have come short of the truth. The more attentively we regard the present structure of our minds, and the more extensively we consider the history of human knowledge and human opinion in all ages of the world, the deeper and darker shall we perceive the night of ignorance to be, which enshrouds our nature, and the more hopeless and desolate its condition when abandoned to itself to pursue in its own way after the knowledge of truth and peace. While thus abandoned to its own resources, and yet unwilling to give them up in despair, even the light of revelation shining around, seems but to render its darkness more vis-

ably dreadful and deep. "The light shineth in darkness, but the darkness comprehendeth it not."

3d. *A disposition to honor and magnify the Bible as an all-sufficient revelation from God.* It is not enough to despair of other resources of knowledge; we must believe this to be as full and sufficient as it claims to be; and we must resort to it accordingly with all the confidence of our hearts, to become instructed from it. This state of mind is essentially connected with the one last mentioned. Both together make up the initiatory step of true religion; and both together make up the secret of that wisdom by which the soul is conducted onward in the whole course of its divine life. The common folly of the human mind is to prefer some way of its own devising, to the simple way which God has devised. But if we become wise indeed, it must be by following after wisdom in the way which he has prescribed. This is the study of his own written word, in that temper of childlike confidence and expectation of which I now speak. Cultivate a continual reverence for the divine authority of the scriptures. When they speak, let it be to you as the very voice of God. Labor to have an abiding and unwavering conviction of their heavenly origin. Pray to be kept from all secret scepticism. It is a worm that eats at the root of the tree of grace; and often when its presence is scarcely suspected it poisons all its growth, and sends a withering blight upward through every branch.

4th. *A disposition to obey all truth.* If any man will do his will, says the Saviour, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God. Without this we cannot be honest in coming to the scriptures for instruction, and we shall not find in them the wisdom they are designed to impart. The more we become conformed to the will of God in all righteousness, the more easily and fully shall we enter into the sense of the Spirit in his own word; because the more completely we put on this character, the more truly do we come to look upon the truth through its own proper medium. Holiness gives clearness to the eye of the soul, and enables it to see wondrous things out of God's law, where to the vision of a carnal man all is dark and void of meaning. Be ye holy, then, as God is holy. Rise above the atmosphere of flesh and sense, and breathe in the pure region of a spiritual and heavenly mind. Dwell near to God, and in his light you shall see light.

5th. *A feeling of dependence upon divine aid.* Without an unction from the Holy one, you cannot become wise in the word of God. Without his aid, you cannot possess any of that spiritual frame of mind which we have seen to be so necessary for the apprehension of divine truth. David was wise therefore in praying, "Lord open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law?" Here particularly it may be said, "Bene orasse est bene studuisse." It has not been without reason that some godly persons have been in the habit of studying the bible daily upon their knees. No advantages can enable you at any time to dispense with prayer in this study, without injury. Cultivate, then, the habit of looking up to heaven, whenever you open the sacred volume. "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who giveth liberally to all men and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him." The Spirit of truth is promised to the true disciples of Christ, to lead them into all truth; but he is given only to those who *ask* for him.