

THE  
SUFFICIENCY  
OF THE  
SPIRIT'S TEACHING,  
WITHOUT  
HUMAN LEARNING.

---

2 Pet. III. 16.

“As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures; unto their own destruction.”

THESE words, that I am allotted by J. Goodwin, and S. B. ministers of London, to speak from at this time, have respect as it should seem, to such things as the apostle had spoken of before; which things seem to me to be those that are contained from the beginning of the second chapter, to the end of the 13th verse of the third chapter; and the 14th verse contains Peter's exhortation, strengthened in the 15th verse, by his brother Paul's writings; who, in all his epistles, speaks of these things, as of the coming of the Lord Jesus, and other things, such as are herein contained; among the which, that is, Paul's writings in his epistles, some things were hard to be understood.

And so indeed was the coming of Christ Jesus, which it should seem was hard of them to be understood, and that appears by his earnest writing to the Thessalonians, where he exhorts them, that they should not suddenly be moved, neither by word, nor epistle, as it were from him; as if the day of Christ were at hand, 2 Thess. ii. at the beginning, for there were many things to be fulfilled first; as a departure from the faith, the rising up, the perfection, and the consumption of the man of sin; and this it seems, though he had told them of it before, yet to them it was hard to be understood, notwithstanding they had the true learning here meant, which they who had not, but were unlearned, and consequently unstable, perverted, as they did other scriptures, to their own destruction; therefore the great thing here to be minded, is to find out what is this true learning that Peter here intends. And, secondly, who they be that are the unlearned ones; and by that we shall easily find who they be that pervert the scriptures to their own destruction. For this end, therefore, I will consider what this learning is not, and then what it is.

First, It is not human learning. That I may not be misconceived about it, I will here lay down my understanding in it; and by human learning, I do not mean the knowledge and understanding of our own language, which every man, of what tongue soever he be, might in some measure be taught of another, as parents teach their children,

and they learn of them; of this there is a natural necessity, as the apostle saith, "How shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard?" Rom. x. 14. Now the hearing there mentioned must be a natural hearing, seeing it is set before faith; and this hearing must needs consist in the understanding the sound of words spoken. Thus Peter and John, and all the rest, learned the foolish things spoken of, 1 Cor. i. 21; and thus I acknowledge that there is none but in some measure have this learning, and must of necessity have it, to understand God's mind and man's, in an ordinary way. But by human learning, all along in this matter which I oppose, is intended the knowledge of arts and sciences, divers tongues, much reading, and a persisting in these things, so as thereby to be made able to understand the mind of God in his word. This is it that I condemn from the word of truth, as being that, by which any are made able spiritually to understand the mind of God, which, the apostle saith, cannot be attained to by the "words which man's wisdom teacheth," 1 Cor. ii. 13; all which, these excellencies are said to be; so that by human learning, I here mean, that whereby certain men do excel, and are far above and beyond other ordinary men; and in this sense do I understand that the council judged Peter and John to be no such learned men, Acts iv. 13. For we, in common speech, do oppose a learned man to one that otherwise can read and

write only in his own tongue, though he do not understand the grounds of his own speech as another man that is learned doth; as may appear by a book called the English School Master: but such learning I do not conceive to be here meant: which I conclude for these reasons.

1. Because that Peter must then of necessity have condemned himself, for he was a man, that in the council's knowledge was such an unlearned man, and so must needs himself lie under the blame that he lays upon others: therefore human learning is not here that which he intends.

2. Because human learning is a rudiment of this world; hence it is that our Saviour acknowledgeth that his mysteries were hid from the learned, Luke x. 21, but they were not from his disciples, "For unto them it was given to know the mysteries of his kingdom," Matt. xiii. 11. The rudiments of this world are not after Christ, Col. ii. 8, the apostle tells us; therefore human learning cannot be it that Peter here intends.

3. Because the natural man cannot perceive the things of God, 1 Cor. i. 21; but a mere natural man may be a great worldly learned man, as were the Egyptians and Babylonians, and as are many of the Romish priests and jesuits; therefore, for this cause, that is not the learning here meant.

4. Because such of God's servants as have had such kind of learning, when they came to know Christ, they forsook it all: as Moses, when he

came to age, though he was learned in the wisdom of the Egyptians, yet "by faith he forsook the treasures of Egypt," Heb. xi. 26, 27; and learning being one of Egypt's treasures, he forsook that also; for when he saith treasures, there is none excepted; therefore, in as much as learning was one, as well as riches and honours, he forsook that also, as seeing, by faith, a better treasure in the worst condition, among the people of God, than in the best condition in the world, suppose it to be learning.

The like is to be seen in Paul, who counted all things loss and dung that he might win Christ; even the righteousness of the law itself, which is far beyond learning; and all this, that he might win Christ: therein the apostle gives me to understand, that all such things were but hindrances, keeping him from the knowledge of Christ to salvation, which is that I here mind also; therefore this is not the learning here meant, seeing it was rejected of the apostle, as being no help nor furtherance to them to know Christ by, but a let and hindrance; and thus much appears by those converts in Acts xix. 18, 19; who, when they believed, such of them as used curious arts, burned their books; thereby declaring, that they had met with learning of far greater worth than their curious arts, and therefore burn their books, as having no more need of them; and so I conclude, that such as this was not the learning meant.

*I come now to manifest what Learning it is the  
Apostle here intended.*

The learning here intended by the apostle is, as I understand, that sound knowledge and sure information that every Christian hath in Jesus Christ, whereby he is deeply rooted and grafted into him by faith, that he abides unmoveably settled in him, as thereby he abides stable in the sure knowledge and understanding of the "word of Christ," Col. ii. 7; Eph. iii. 17, 18; 1 Pet. ii. 6. And so much here methinks the apostle gives us to understand, how that the unlearned in the word, they be unstable; then, on the contrary, the learned in the word are stable; by believing, are laid on the true foundation, they shall never be confounded or ashamed. Now such as these that are learned, in the truth as it is in Jesus, may well say to the greatest worldly learned ones, as Philip said to the Eunuch, "Understandest thou what thou readest?" And not only so, but such, understanding, may teach the mystery, seeing they are taught and instructed by the Spirit of God, agreeably to these scriptures: It hath not entered into the heart of man to conceive of that which God by his Spirit, which searcheth the deep things of God, hath revealed unto us, 1 Cor. ii. 10. And this the apostle farther explains, "That as no man knoweth the things of a man save the spirit of a man which is in him; so the things of God knoweth no man," no not a

worldly learned man, "but by the Spirit of God:" and so he goes on to distinguish the spirit of the world from God's Spirit, and shews that thereby the things of God are known, and manifested to others; so that all the things of the kingdom of God, both for matter and manner, flow from the wisdom of God's Spirit, and not from what man's wisdom teacheth; which is to compare spiritual things and carnal things together, as tongues and arts, and such like; but God's Spirit teacheth us to compare spiritual things with spiritual. Thence he goes on to declare, that only such as are taught by the Spirit, are capable of true discerning of spiritual things, without being justly condemned of any; having the mind of Christ; rightly and truly knowing the things that are of God; and with this agrees the witness of John, saying, "These things have I written unto you concerning them that deceive you," 1 John ii. 26, 27; whereby it appears they had deceivers about them, and those things were written concerning such. But the apostle, in opposition to deceivers, saith, "Ye have received the anointing of him that dwells in you;" and this anointing that they had received he doth oppose to deceivers, as being able thoroughly to teach them, "so as that ye needed not any man teach you, save as that anointing teacheth:" now, seeing that that anointing never did teach the apostles such arts as were human, therefore the saints, by the apostle's grant, had no need of any such learning, and yet this anointing taught all truth, and obedience to it also.

And yet further, our Saviour himself concludes this point, shewing, that when he hath sent the "Comforter, the Spirit of truth to them, that then he shall lead them into all truth," John xvi. 7, 13. Whence I do conclude, that for the disciples' knowledge of the truth, there was nothing more necessary, according to the mind of him that was truth, than the Spirit of God, who led them into all truth, and out of all error, teaching independent of human means; the reason why? because he is sufficient, and that is, because he speaks to the heart, agreeably to that of our Saviour taken from the prophet, "That they shall be all taught of God," John vi. 45; and so indeed, being taught of the Spirit, we are taught of God the Father, and God the Son also, which are all one; and thus our learning comes to us; being taught of Father, Son, and Spirit, for all are our instructors, and counsellors: and this is all the learning which we need, to know the things that are freely given us of God, agreeably to his will. So from the words, thus interpreted, the conclusion comes to this:

That such as are taught by the Spirit of God, though destitute of human learning, are the learned ones that truly understand the scriptures, according to Peter's mind.

I say, such only as are taught by the Spirit, though destitute of human learning, are the persons who rightly understand the word: and this, methinks, the whole council of Jerusalem, wicked as they were, did in effect conclude; considering

Peter and John, as unlearned men, they therefore knew they had been with Jesus, by their boldness, and so they had nothing to say against it: and yet, though men should oppose this, Christ Jesus our Lord justifies it, Acts iv. 13, 14, with great thankfulness to his Father, “that having hid these things from the wise and prudent, he had revealed them to babes.” Now that revealing must needs be by the Spirit, according to that 1 Cor. ii. 10. And in this manner it is that our Lord comforts his disciples, telling them that all things were given him of his Father to reveal; and so in regard of that he tells them, that blessed are the eyes that see what they saw, which was, as the apostle saith, “God manifested in the flesh, which many wise men and kings desired to see, but did not,” Luke x. 21,—24; that being now made manifest unto them, which before was hid from wise men and scribes, as it is at present also; for which of the wise could attain to the knowledge of him and his doctrine as they did? Now with this also agrees what our Saviour affirms to the Sadducees, who, by reason of their wisdom and learning, thought to have entangled him; he tells them, “That they erred, not knowing the scriptures,” Matt. xxii. 29; because, for all their great learning, they were destitute of God’s Spirit. Now by these scriptures the point thus confirmed, good reason may, by God’s word, be brought for the further justifying of it: as,

Reason 1. First, because it is the good pleasure

of God to place our salvation in contempt of, and opposition to, man's wisdom: hence it is that the apostle saith, that he preached "Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block, and to the Greeks foolishness," 1 Cor. i. 23, 24. For the Jews, we read, with great contempt refused him; as when Pilate said to them, "Behold your King," presently they cry, "Away with him, away with him, crucify him." And so when Pilate had wrote on the cross, that he was King of the Jews, they took it as a great prejudice to them, and therefore wished him to write, "That he said, I am King of the Jews," John xix. 19, 21.

And so Peter tells them in Acts iii. "They denied him, and desired a murderer to be given them:" and to this agreed the Gentiles; for they had a hand also in his death; and we find that when Paul preached him at Athens, then this saying of the apostle was made good both of Jews and Gentiles, Acts xvii. 19, 23. And indeed they both agree to hang him betwixt heaven and earth, as being in their esteem worthy of neither; and yet, even in this crucified Jesus, lies contained the salvation of all, both Jews and Gentiles, that are saved; and in this despised Jesus are all to rejoice, with the apostle, to salvation, Acts iv. 12. "For in him," thus dishonourable, and unmeet in man's wisdom, "lie hid all the treasures of wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption; he being the wisdom of God, and the power of God,"

1. Cor. i. 24; ii. 2; Gal. vi. 14; Col. ii. 3; 1 Cor. ii. 10.

Reason 2. Another reason why such as have God's Spirit, though destitute of human learning, come to know God's mind is, because, as the apostle declares, "no flesh shall glory in his presence," 1 Cor. i. 29; for human learning is but fleshly and carnal at best.

Now the apostle's advice is, though we had known Christ Jesus after the flesh, yet now, coming to be after God, we should henceforth know him no more, 2 Cor. v. 16; 1 Cor. ii. 8. And here is a sufficient reason, because knowledge is subject to puff us up, as saith the apostle, whereas love, and the learning of the Spirit, keeps us low in our own eyes, and causeth, as Solomon saith, our minds to be made good; making us suitable to the apostle's exhortations, saying, Be not high minded, but humble; make yourselves equal to them of the lower sort, Rom. xii. 16. Be not wise in yourselves, but "let every man esteem others better than himself," Phill. ii. 3. And if any glory, "let him glory in the Lord," 1 Cor. i. 31. Now he that hath these things, as human learning and wisdom, more than another, let him weigh and consider with himself, whether he doth not think, and conclude, that he, in regard of these things, is to be respected more than they that are without them. Now this boasting is not good, for it is a boasting in the flesh, and of works, not of God; and yet so it is that, for our hearts, we cannot but

think better of ourselves for these things than of those without them; so we may see the truth of the apostle's words, "The wisdom of the flesh," that is, whatsoever the flesh excelleth in, "is enmity to God; it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be."

**Reason 3.** Another cause why the Spirit's teaching is sufficient without human learning is, because, as the apostle saith, "we are complete in him," Col. ii. 10, that is, perfect and full in him: and this he strengthens yet further from this consideration, that he is the head of all principalities and powers; so that if there were any thing else to make us complete, he being the head of all, we should have it: but he hath promised to give nothing but his Spirit, which is sufficient to profit withal, 1 Cor. xii. 7; therefore we are complete by him alone. Therefore it is that Paul exhorts Timothy to keep that which was committed to him, 1 Tim. vi. 20, 21; which was the faith taught by the word and Spirit, and wisheth him to avoid and beware of science; that is, all knowledge natural, which is comprehended under philosophy, Col. ii. 8, learned, prophane babblings, which are opposite to the faith of Christ; and so much respecting them is by the apostle there declared, saying, "Which, while some have lusted after, they have erred from the faith." So that it is most plain and clear, that these things are so far from perfecting men, or helping of them in the knowledge of the truth, that they hinder, and cause such as profess

them to err from the faith, even all the seven liberal sciences; for all of it is but science, and all this science or knowledge is falsely so called, falsely said to be of use in the gospel. Prophane and vain babblings, and oppositions, are far better names for them, according to Paul's teaching; and he saith of himself, "I think I have the Spirit of God:" and so indeed he had without doubt; thus our ground remains good, that we are complete in Christ Jesus, without human learning.

4. Another consideration, confirming this conclusion, is from the apostle's advice, "Let no man deceive himself;" that is, in the true way of attaining wisdom. He declares what it is to get it in these words, "That such an one is to become a fool, that he may be wise," 1 Cor. iii. 18; and how is that but by knowing and owning, that there is nothing in all man's wisdom helpful in attaining, and comprehending, the wisdom of God in Christ? Now what appears more foolish to a man than to be told, that there is nothing that all the wits of men can reach unto that can benefit him? And if nothing, then not the thing in question, but that it must needs be, that we become fools to it; and what is the true mark of a fool, but to be ignorant and without knowledge? We call them fools in the world, and so it is here. The best way for a man not to deceive himself, is to know nothing of this learning, nor any other fleshly excellency, that so he may learn true wisdom; and the apostle doth, methinks, sufficiently confirm this advice of his,

against all exceptions; “ the Lord knoweth,” saith he, “ the thoughts of the wise, that they are vain.” Men think highly of their own abilities this way; yet if no man will take the Lord’s counsel for wisdom in this kind, still he concludes the truth of it; and he knows the thoughts of men are vain, who think human learning to be some help: but let them think what they will, the Lord is against them in it; for he knows surely that they are deceived, for his thoughts be not as man’s thoughts.

5. Now another thing that confirms me in this conclusion is, that wheresoever the apostle honours the Spirit’s teaching, and prefers it, he usually at the same time casts contempt upon this learning, as is to be seen in many places. “ Christ,” saith he, “ sent me to preach the gospel, not with the wisdom of words, lest I should make the cross of Christ,” or the gospel of Christ, “ of none effect,” 1 Cor. i. 17; wherein we see that, for good reason, he rejects the wisdom of words in preaching of the gospel: and that is, lest if he should not, he should make it of no effect, because he was to declare the sincere word without the least mingling. As if he should say, such manner of preaching appears a foolish preaching, but it is so only to “ them that perish, but to such as are saved it is the wisdom and power of God,” without man’s mixture; therefore he saith again, “ he was jealous over them with a godly jealousy,” for he had prepared them, a pure virgin for Christ: “ but,” saith he, “ I fear, that as the serpent beguiled Eve, through his sub-

tilty, so your minds should be corrupted," that is, putrified and infected, "from the simplicity that is in Christ:" this we see was Paul's fear, that while he was absent, their minds should be withdrawn from what scholars call the foolishness of the gospel, i. e. the simplicity, sincerity, and truth of it; and that by the subtilty of satan, the old serpent, in his instruments, false teachers. This Paul feared, because of the fleshliness that was in them, which was ready to yield to others' wiles by reason of their subtilty that way; for by fair words and flatteries they deceived the hearts of the simple, Rom. xvi. 18; and with which craftiness they now "lie in wait to deceive," Eph. iv. 14. Thus contemptuously doth Paul speak of those things, in opposition to the true learning, as is further to be seen in many places, of which I will name one more, and that from the apostle Peter in his second epistle, chap. i. ver. 16; "For we," saith he, "followed not cunningly devised fables, when we opened unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus." Now, by such names as these are, doth the apostle choose to put to shame man's excellencies, as in divers other places, which declare what contempt is cast on human learning, when put in opposition to the Spirit of God, 1 Tim. i. 4, and iv. 7; Tit. iii. 9.

6. Now one thing more, which I conceive observable for the proof of this point in hand, is drawn from 1 Cor. ii. 10, "The Spirit searcheth the deep things of God," and ver. 15, "The spi-

ritual man judgeth all things :” if then the Spirit searcheth the deep things of God, and he discerns all things, what need we more? And with this agrees the apostle John, saying, “ And ye need not that any man teach you, save as that anointing teacheth you,” 1 John ii. 27. Then I conclude, that we need not that any man teach us, no, not the doctor, nor any of his followers; for the disciples of Jesus Christ do learn as the truth is in him, and of him: and they receive the Spirit of God, that they may know the things of God; therefore we may do well without any man’s learning, having no need of it: thus the point is clear and plain, that such only as are taught by God’s Spirit, independent of human learning, do truly understand the word.

I judge it necessary also to inform the Reader, what I understand by human wisdom, as well as human learning. By human wisdom, I understand whatsoever natural acquirements appear excellent in man’s understanding, while he is without the teaching of God’s Spirit. This, the more excellent it appears to him, being carnal, so much the worse; therefore it is said of such, by the apostle, “ Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools,” Rom. i. 22. And, saith our Saviour, “ If the light which is in thee,” which I mind to be meant of men’s understanding and wisdom, “ be darkness, how great is that darkness?” Matt. vi. 23. So that by man’s wisdom, I understand whatsoever seems so excellent to him, that he would

honour God with it, though God is not the worker of; as logic, eloquence, and fair speeches, and any thing in that way; such the Greeks sought after, 1 Cor. i. 22, as men do now a-days; this I do the rather distinguish from human learning, because it seems to me that the scriptures distinguish them, Acts xxii. and the difference rightly understood, may prevent just exception, and give light to the right understanding of the whole matter; for this wisdom is made by the apostle, and that rightly, to be enmity to the Spirit of God, Rom. viii. 7, and impossible to submit to it, it being so contrary.

Now follows to be answered such objections as are made against it: as first,

Object. 1. That of Paul in 1 Tim. iii. 6, That a bishop must be no young scholar, or novice, lest he, being puffed up, fall into the condemnation of the devil.

Ans. The scholarship Paul means here, is the teaching of the Spirit, whereby the man is made sound in the faith; for that learning only will make men low in their own eyes, as before declared; and he that is unsound in the faith, will ever be found the most lofty, and puffed up in his own conceit, and so be rejected of God, as the devil was, who though he was in heaven with God, yet being puffed up, he was rejected of God, and so "cast down to hell," 2 Pet. ii. 4; to which example Paul here alludes, as I conceive, and that rightly; for a bishop in the church is, in respect of his spiritual state and place, in favour

and fellowship with God, and that in heaven, as the whole book of Revelation describes the church to be. Now should such an one be chosen by the church to that office, being a young scholar, that is, not soundly taught in the truth by the Spirit, he is in great danger; for the more of other learning he hath, the more likely is he to be puffed up. This I believe was the cause of Diotrophes' pride; he wanted this scholarship, and that caused him to seek the preeminence, 3 John, 9, 10: and this, whatsoever our great scholars may think, is the cause of the high conceits they have of themselves, and their knowledge and understanding above others that want their learning; even this, because they be but young scholars, if at all, in the school of Christ; being puffed up with the vain glory of their fleshly learning, they think that none unlike themselves are fit to be their fellows, knowing not "that they are wretched, poor, miserable, blind, and naked;" conceive themselves "to be rich, and have need of nothing," as did the Laodiceans, Rev. iii. 17; and so, indeed, are "fallen into the condemnation of the devil," and rejected of God; "for he resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble," 1 Pet. v. 5, and such as are low in their own eyes. Now whether these men, humanly learned, be they that are puffed up, or low and mean in their own eyes, as he that is unlearned, I leave to all such as have eyes to see to look into it, and determine; and then say whether such have not yet to learn Paul's scholarship.