

SERMON XVII.

CHRIST THE SUM OF THE SACRED
SCRIPTURES.

JOHN V. 39.

SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES; FOR IN THEM YE THINK
YE HAVE ETERNAL LIFE; AND THEY ARE THEY
THAT TESTIFY OF ME.

I NOW stand up among you to preach the last of these Lectures. The first of them, may be considered as a kind of introduction to the following *fifteen*, and this, as concluding with an inference from what I have ventured to advance on the character of Christ. For I now infer, and I think my present text warrants the inference, that CHRIST IS THE SUM OF THE SACRED SCRIPTURES.

The

The scriptures which our Lord exhorted the Jews to search, were undoubtedly, those scriptures which they allowed to be canonical, and which they considered as divine.

These scriptures have been thus divided :

I. The *Pentateuch*, or five books of Moses : the names of them, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy.

II. The *anterior* prophets : the names of these books, Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings.

III. The *posterior* prophets : the names of these books, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi.

IV. The *Hagiographa* : which contains the books of the Psalms, Proverbs, Job, the Song of Solomon, Ruth, the Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther, Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah, Chronicles.

According

According to this division, if we reckon Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles, each of them as containing two books, the whole number of the books in the Old Testament is, *thirty-nine*. For there are *five* books in the *Pentateuch*, *six* in the *former* prophets, *fifteen* in the *latter* prophets, and *thirteen* in the *Hagiographa*.

But that division which our Lord himself made of the Old Testament, is more simple. All things, said he, to his disciples, must be fulfilled which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the Psalms concerning me. Where, by the law of Moses, the whole *Pentateuch* is intended; by the prophets, the former and the latter; and by the Psalms, all the books of the *Hagiographa*.

The text I have read contains an exhortation, an argument to regard it, and an application of the argument; from which, it will, I hope, appear, that Christ is the sum of the sacred scriptures.

I. The

I. The EXHORTATION is this, *Search the scriptures.*

This exhortation permits us to suppose, that the Jews to whom our Lord spake, were superficial readers of those books which they allowed to be divine : and the fact was, that they notoriously preferred perverse comments of *modern* date, and idle tales, then recently reported, to the great things contained in their sacred writings.

When our Lord said to these Jews, *Search the scriptures*, the word which we have translated *search*, seems to be so emphatical, and to injoin such diligence and care in scrutinizing into the scriptures, in order to their forming just notions of the promised Messiah, that we cannot imagine it was their usual practice. This not only seems to justify our translation of this part of our text, in the imperative mood, but to teach us, that Christ was better satisfied with the integrity of the Hebrew scriptures than many learned men now are in this country. He did not say to
the

the Jews, *Correct the scriptures; but search them*; that is, investigate their meaning.

To be sure, many centuries are elapsed since our Lord thus addressed the litigious Jews: and, as those copies of the Hebrew bible which are now in the world, are none of them, as I suppose, the autographs of the inspired penmen, it is probable, that the most correct copies of it now existing, are stained with some mistakes. Truth, however, on this subject, is to be sought for, by keeping a just medium between superstition and extravagance.

A superstitious regard for the text of the Old Testament, has long since been treated with contempt; but the contemptuous have, I fear, indulged an extravagance as idle, as that false devotion over which they loudly boast of being victorious. If you will believe some of our learned men, a few thousand pounds must yet be spent, and a few years at least must yet be given to laborious travail abroad, before we can hope to see a
correct

correct copy of the sacred text. *Then* indeed—but, I am by no means convinced, we shall *then* be much better accommodated than *now*.

One of the most learned, and diligent of our modern *correctors* of the sacred text, has said THAT, however, on this subject, which you will be pleased to hear. His words are these: “Notwithstanding all the various corruptions of whatever sort, that now disfigure the Hebrew scriptures; it is as certain, as any position of this kind can possibly be, that they are still essentially the same; and that the whole historical tenor of the divine œconomy towards man has been preserved in them, without any important alteration, to the present time. Take, adds the learned Doctor, the most modern and most imperfect transcript of their originals, that now exists; or even the most erroneous copy of the most erroneous version, that ever was made from them; and you shall find in it every thing that is absolutely necessary to constitute an authentic writing; and to answer all

D d

the

the great purposes for which they were intended ?

I shall draw no such ridiculous conclusion from this pleasing concession, as that of which this learned writer complains, namely, that it is therefore, unnecessary to correct at all ; but, I shall venture to infer, that if some of the most *modern* transcripts of the Hebrew scriptures are, probably, the most imperfect, should the present rage for correction, and for liberal translations somewhat subside, the *great* purposes which the sacred writings were intended to answer, would be as conspicuous as could be wished, and perhaps more regarded, than they will be when various readings are swelled to the most enormous size.

II. The ARGUMENT by which our Lord enforced his exhortation, was an argument properly applied to the Jews. *In them*, said he, *ye think ye have eternal life*. On this principle therefore, they must admit the propriety of his address to them, as they could not prove
they

they had sufficiently regarded either the law, or the prophets.

Some have concluded, from this address, that the *Jews* to whom our Lord spake, entertained an opinion, that they *merited* eternal life by their sedulous, but superficial attention to the scriptures. This is possible: as most of them were infatuated with self-righteous singularities. But it seems more probable, that when Christ argued with them in this manner, that he stated it as their common opinion, that the doctrine and promise of *eternal life*, were contained in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms.

The famous question which was put to Him, Good master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life, at once shews their common belief of a future state, and the manner in which they perverted the scriptures by their unwise constructions. To teach them better, Christ did in effect inform them, that if they searched the scriptures, they would find, that as eternal life was re-

vealed therein, so the promise of it, was every where closely connected with his mediation, and was to be received as an unmerited gift, and not to be obtained by the good works of sinful men.

Our Lord was pleased to add, for their further conviction, these words, *And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life.* From this rebuke we may infer, that the Jews did not sin through ignorance, or for want of proper information, but in a manner that was obstinately outrageous. They professed to believe in a future state. The ground of their belief was the scriptures. Those very scriptures testified of Christ. To him gave all their prophets witness. Yet, said our Lord unto them, *Ye will not come unto me that ye might have life.* This seems strange: and the more so since he also said, *I am come in my Father's name, and ye receive me not. If another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive.*

How are we to account for such strange
behaviour?

behaviour? Were we utterly unable, the fact would merit our attention; and to use our best efforts to avoid a judaizing temper, would be our constant duty. But he who hath felt the force of a self-righteous disposition, and imbibed a strong passion for the pride of life, may more than guess at the leading error of the Jews. If *another* came in his own name, he came to aggrandize himself: but then, coming without authority, he was obliged to divide the spoil among his followers; so that they who adhered to his interest had whereof to glory. This our Lord, who came in his Father's name, would not permit: and how difficult it is to receive that Messiah, whose grace excludeth boasting, and whose kingdom is not of this world, all that are brought to obey the gospel of Christ are compelled to confess.

From the manner in which our Lord enforced his exhortation, it appears that we are allowed to argue with men upon their own principles, and that the worst of men some-

times hold, even while they pervert them, principles of real importance.

The argument of Christ would have been of no force, if the Old Testament had not contained the doctrine and promise of eternal life. But we are sure it did. For the scriptures, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee, shall all nations be blessed. Yes, and unto the sons of Abraham also, was the gospel preached, as well as unto us, though the word preached did not profit all of his posterity, not being mixed with faith in many of them that heard it.

Here I am obliged to quit the learned bishop whom I have more than once mentioned with respect. The concluding position in his most capital performance is this: That a doctrine of future rewards and punishments, is not to be found in, nor did it make a part of, the Mosaic dispensation. On the contrary, I believe, not only that the gospel of Christ
was

was published to Adam, on that very day on which he sinned and came short of the glory of God; not only that the patriarchs before and after the flood, were acquainted with it, and relieved by it, but that under the Mosaic dispensation, the joyful sound of the gospel did not cease to be heard, and that in every age, in proportion as it was heard, the blessing of eternal life was believed and enjoyed.

The translation of ENOCH, (who, by the way, prophesied of Christ, saying, Behold, the Lord cometh, with ten thousand of his saints,) this translation gave to the antediluvian patriarchs, an assurance of a blissful immortality; which, all of them that walked with God, and confided in the covenant of his grace, expected.

The scenical exhibition of the day of Christ, made to ABRAHAM, when he offered up his only-begotten Son, ill agrees with mere temporal promises to the whole of his posterity. No doubt the covenant of grace under

the Mosaic, intervening state of things, was somewhat obscured ; but that it still existed, and was by many enjoyed, a long list of able advocates have sufficiently shewn.

The words of Paul are, in my opinion, unanswerable. He argues thus : Brethren, I speak after the manner of men ; though it be but a man's covenant, yet if it be confirmed, no man disannulleth, or addeth thereto. Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many ; but as of one, and to thy seed, which is Christ. And this I say, that the covenant which was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect.

In short, if we may so express it, God would be ashamed to be called their God, unto whom he had not exhibited a better country, that is an heavenly, and for whom he had not prepared a celestial city.

III. The

III. The APPLICATION of our Lord's argument to the Jews to search the scriptures, is thus expressed: *They are they which testify of me.*

From these words we may infer, that Christ cannot be known by us without the medium of testimony; that the testimony of the scriptures cannot be contradicted; and, that he Himself, is the sum of them.

I. Christ cannot be known by us without the medium of TESTIMONY.

When he was in the world, the world knew him not. Had they known him, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. He came to his own nation, and his own nation, collectively considered, knew him not. But as many as received him, whether of his own nation, or of any other, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name. But, they who believed to salvation, received that report which the prophets had given of him, as it was explained and confirmed by
our

our Lord himself. It follows, that they who saw the Messiah, would not have seen him to any saving purpose, unless they had *believed*. When a certain woman lifted up her voice and said to Him, Blessed is the womb that bare thee, and the paps which thou hast sucked; he replied, Yea, rather blessed are they that hear the word of God and keep it.

As to those persons who lived before the Incarnation, and those who have lived since the Crucifixion, unless the former had believed the prophets, and the latter the apostles, it is certain that neither they, nor we, could have been properly acquainted with the character of Christ.

The supposition of an extraordinary and immediate revelation, were it granted, would not affect my argument. For they who talk of this favour must believe what is supposed to be revealed to them, or be no wiser for the indulgence; and if that revelation be from above, we may be confident it will perfectly correspond

correspond with the word of truth already in our possession. For,

2. The testimony of the scriptures cannot be *contradicted*.

If we read in the inspired volumes of some things which are spoken of, not in all the possible rigour of speech, but as they appear to us, this is no more than what we frequently meet with in many books professedly written on philosophical subjects : those things therefore, must be taken as they were intended ; and with such caution, (which is due to every writer,) it will be found the scriptures are invincible.

As to those unseen things which are peculiar to revelation, it is impossible that the reason of man should refute this original report. For, what can we reason from, but from what we know ? and what can we know of these invisible things, without the word of God ? From that indeed we may reason, with more or less of precision ; but if we make it the *root*
of

of our reasoning, we must believe it to be what it is, before we can reason from it to any beneficial purpose.

The authenticity, or genuine authority of the scriptures, is an article of very great moment. Every thing pertaining to revealed religion rests upon it. Yet, as you have perceived, in these lectures, it is generally taken for granted. Because, this was not the subject which I proposed to discuss. Because, I had no reason to conclude you were unsettled in this article of your faith. Because, I only take that for granted which hath been already so proved by many, as to satisfy every reasonable, and upright mind.

For my own part, I am not only fully convinced of the genuine authority of the scriptures, but I daily perceive, that their *fulness* is much greater than Christians, in general, are willing to admit. Their authority is not only firmly settled, but supreme. Convinced of this, I conclude that a sound interpretation of the sacred writings, taken in
their

their proper connection, and practically regarded, at all events, will make us invincible; and give us more understanding, fortitude, and peace, than is possible to be enjoyed, without such just reverence for the word of God.

3. It only remains to shew, that CHRIST is the SUM of the sacred scriptures.

It must be owned, from this fact, some have fancied that they have found Christ in certain places of the word of God, where others have not been able to discern him. This allegorizing humour has been too much indulged. Yet, I am persuaded, that an attention, professedly confined to the *literal* sense of the scriptures, ill agrees with that *search* of them which our Lord hath recommended. Nothing more absurd, or more pernicious, was ever communicated from the pulpit, or from the press, than under such professions. Transubstantiation itself, rests on a pretended regard to such impoverished interpretation. The errors of pi-
ous

ous men, who cannot be so confined, may produce a smile, or, in some instances, they may extort a sigh : but the other extreme is much more alarming.

I am not ashamed to own, I would rather read *Coccecius* than *Grotius*, and the expository notes of Mr. Hervey, than the deliberate, but dull commentaries of Mr. Locke.

If a man is well acquainted with Jesus Christ, and hath an ardent love for his person, government, and grace, though he may misapply particular passages of scripture, yet, that man will rarely err against the general tenor, and grand design of the sacred writings. But if any commentator, or preacher, is fond of his own reputation in this world ; if he shudders at the thought of following the outline of any system of religion, or of allowing there are any mysteries in Christianity ; if he thinks that whatever is beyond the literal sense of scripture must be absurd ; if he endeavours to make the sacred text a vehicle to convey his latitudinarian sentiments,
and

and is strongly inclined to meet half way, those Socinians, Deists, and Free-thinkers, who have more interest, and influence in this world, than some better characters, who are, by the wisdom of God, thrown into the shades of life; was he the most learned man in Europe, his labours would be of little value, and his example, were we able to follow it, would be unworthy of our imitation.

After these remarks, it may be expected, I should take some notice of what is said of Christ in the LAW, the PROPHEETS, and the PSALMS. But this is an expectation, if it exists, that I cannot greatly gratify in this discourse. I will however say, what is, in my own opinion, sufficient to shew, that *Christ is the sum of the sacred scriptures.*

In the LAW, or five books of Moses, we read of THAT seed of the woman which was to bruise the serpent's head; of those sacrifices which were acceptable to God, not on their own account, but on his account alone, who is the Lamb slain from the foundation
of

of the world ; of altars that prefigured his person ; of incense, that shadowed forth his intercession ; of acts that were founded on his mediation ; of a ritual that was a wall of partition between his peculiar people, and the surrounding nations of the world ; of a prophet like unto Moses, of a priest like unto Melchizedec, and of a king who was to reign for ever. In these venerable books we behold all the great men of the remotest antiquity, such as Adam, Abel, Enoch, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, and Moses, living by faith on Jesus Christ, and dying as they lived. The fair inference is, CHRIST IS THE SUM OF THE LAW.

As to the prophets we have seen*, that to HIM give all the prophets witness : and surely, what they have witnessed of Christ is of the greatest importance to us ; for they bear witness, that through his name, whosoever believeth in him, shall receive remission of sins. In this belief, and by that faith

* See Sermon I.

which

which, in many other respects, God approved, they subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of the fire, escaped the edge of the sword; out of weakness were made strong; waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens: these all having obtained a good report through that faith which is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen, make it manifest, that the law and the prophets lead us to the same object, and that *Christ is the sum of BOTH.*

In the *PSALMS*, and in other parts of the *Hagiographa*, we see the faith and the patience of the saints, whether they lived before the law, or under it, to a considerable advantage. For, in those books, we have larger specimens of their devotion preserved than in any other. But who was the source and soul of that ardent, sublime, and sound devotion which is there recorded for our comfort and our imitation? *JESUS CHRIST.* In proof of
E e this,

this, let me read you a few passages from these holy writings :

I will love thee, O Lord, my strength. The Lord is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer : my God, my strength, in whom I will trust, my buckler, and the horn of my salvation, and my high tower. I will call upon the Lord who is worthy to be praised ; so shall I be saved from mine enemies.—As for God, his way is perfect ; the word of the Lord is tried : he is a buckler to all those that trust in him. For who is God save the Lord ? or who is a rock save our God ?—From the end of the earth will I cry unto thee, when my heart is overwhelmed : lead me to the rock that is higher than I. For thou hast been a shelter for me, and a strong tower from the enemy. I will abide in thy tabernacle for ever : I will trust in the covert of thy wings. Selah.

Such was the devotion of David ; which needs no comment to inform us who was become

come his strength, and song, and salvation. Such devotion, whether in the Psalms, or in any other part of the *Hagiographa*, should be to us the more acceptable, since we are told, That whatsoever things were written aforetime, were written for our learning, that we, through patience and comfort of the scriptures, might have hope. These words, in my opinion, shew us there is a close connection between the Old Testament and the New; so that if Christ is the sum of the one, he must be so of the other. He said to the Jews, Had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me, for he wrote of me: But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words?

Nobody denies, that many things once somewhat obscured by the Abrahamic covenant, and by the Mosaic dispensation, are brought into greater light, and into more immediate use, by the present *simplicity* of the gospel of Jesus Christ. But, if we have any thing in the New Testament, which was neither the subject of prophecy, nor of pro-

mise in the Old ; if we have any thing in it, which sets aside the use of *analogy*, or which has abolished all that is mysterious in our salvation, I must, for myself, declare, however degrading the declaration may be, it has hitherto escaped my notice.

But, though I think, it must be allowed, that CHRIST IS THE SUM AND SUBSTANCE OF THE SCRIPTURES, WITHOUT EXCEPTION, yet this does not imply any thing, in the least, that is partial to his praise ; or that has any tendency to degrade the FATHER, or the nature, or office, of the HOLY SPIRIT. For, whatever Christ is unto us, as our MEDIATOR, he is ALL THAT of God the FATHER ; and whatever we know and enjoy of his MEDIATION, is, most undoubtedly, through the words, the grace and energy of the HOLY GHOST.

At the close of these lectures, allow me to say my wish is, that none of us may ever be fools, and slow of heart to believe, all, or any thing, which the prophets have said of
Jesus

Jesus Christ. Yet, how can we believe, if we receive honour one of another, and seek not that honour that cometh of God only? May we, however, be guarded against *misbelief*, as well as against *unbelief*! May we imitate those noble *Bereans*, who not only received the Word with all readiness of mind, but who *searched* the scriptures daily, to see whether those things were so! May we imitate, as we can, and so far as our station will admit, those holy prophets, who inquired, and searched diligently, in order to investigate the meaning of their own prophecies, which were prophecies of that grace which should come unto us! May we search, as they searched, what manner of time, the spirit of Christ, which was in them, did signify, when it testified before-hand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow!

Thus employed, we may still hope for that assistance which will make our heart burn within us, as the scriptures are opened

to our understanding : and, thus employed, and assisted, we shall, I trust, with the heart, believe unto righteousness, and with the mouth, make confession unto salvation.

Thus I close these lectures : on which may it please God to command his blessing.—
AMEN !

ERRATA