

out of these facts and truths a systematic theology. It need hardly be said that God has not revealed truth after any logical or systematic order. He has spoken in divers manners. He has taught us by the voice and pen of His messengers in various modes; He has given us His truth in biography and history, by sermon and letter, in psalm and prayer, in visions, dreams, proverbs, and other didactic discourse; and from all these we have to draw forth what He teaches, and to classify those teachings after some logical order.

The same course has to be adopted in the study of physical phenomena. The facts of geology, botany, chemistry, and zoology are scattered through nature without order; we have to gather them and bring them under classification in order to any scientific use. And the scientist's classification is as liable to change as the theologian's. New facts or newly discovered relations of old ones must modify our generalizations. Nor are our scientific minds without their controversies and their schools of opposing views, as for example, the igneous and aqueous of former days. Sometimes, and perhaps of late rather frequently, there have been scornful utterances from pulpit and press as to systematizing the truths of theology, but we fail to discover any legitimate ground therefor. Undoubtedly *there is* a system in the Bible, which it is at once wise and legitimate to look for, but it does not follow that any church or school has perfectly discovered it.

And this leads to a remark now in place, viz., that the faith of the Gospel is not the belief in any creed or system of truth, but belief and trust in a person. The Gospel is glad tidings of the great joy unto all people, and is sent to deliver men from sin and misery. It is received by the illiterate as well as the learned, and it is received irrespective of systematic dogma, by a simple laying hold of the Lord Christ by a soul conscious of sin and needing salvation. The Jailer at Philippi had not set before him a string of abstract propositions, when he asked "Sirs, what must I do to be saved;" he was not told to study them that he and his household might be saved, but he was promptly instructed "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy household." The doctrines, the systematic teaching would come after and strengthen him in the Divine life, but the life itself was given by Christ, and in Christ through faith in Him. It had been just the same with Paul himself. He first received Christ as a Saviour, and then he was taken for three years into Arabia to learn the science of theology, that he might be built up in the faith himself and be a teacher of others. It follows that true life may exist, aye, and grow even with very imperfect apprehension of doctrines. We very often see this in the church: true, Christ-like, fervent Christians, whose systematic knowledge is defective in measure, and confused in its relations one part to another; and on the other hand it is quite possible for one to be great in doctrine and sadly defective in the Divine life; there may be a clear head and a subtle judgment combined with a cold heart—a very sad and dreary case!

Just here is the source of much uncharitableness and of many a charge of heresy loudly uttered. The mediæval church and that of Rome now, and alas! Protestant churches too, not seldom, make religion to consist in believing a creed. Orthodoxy consists in receiving just what this creed contains. To touch it in the slightest degree is to be heterodox, heretical. Except the Church of Rome, the churches would all disclaim infallibility, and yet in this matter of confessions and creeds they practically maintain infallibility. It is part of the glory of the Congregational Churches that they refuse thus to be fettered, yet, even they, are not always consistent in maintaining the liberty wherewith Christ hath made His people free. We would not have them come under a yoke of bondage. We would have them never forget the famous words of Robinson, that more light will break forth from God's Holy Word. They are for the most part commendably tolerant of differences of sentiment on the part of brethren who hold the Head, even Christ. The Lord does not ask "What think ye of this or that confession or symbol?" but "What think ye of Christ?" Do you love and serve Him? He said, "Ye are my friends if ye do whatsoever I command you." "I