

then deliver faithfully what we have learned. We do not pretend to inspiration—we know no way of forming correct notions of religion, except a diligent study of God's Holy Word, and of those helps to the right understanding of it with which we have been supplied by the learning and piety of ancient and modern Divines—together with prayer for heavenly guidance and direction; and while we are conscious to ourselves that we do not neglect those means of right information, we may trust that we shall be preserved from leading any one astray. Some may preach with greater power and effect than others—for there is a difference in men's capacities and gifts;—but none who take the course I have described can, I should think, so far fail of what they aim at, that it may be truly asserted of them that they do not preach the gospel. Some may teach, as essential parts of the gospel, doctrines which others do not consider as belonging to it; but none, I hope, will fail to deliver any of those truths, the belief of which was deemed necessary to salvation in the primitive times, although through human infirmity, some may do so with a mixture of other doctrines of a questionable nature which they erroneously believe to be contained in Scripture; and those who have thus added to the faith once delivered to the saints are necessarily apt to consider others, who hold themselves bound to adhere strictly to it, as not preaching the gospel fully, in proportion to the importance they attach to their own additions to it. But if the doctrines which any of us omit to teach be only such as rest upon no certain ground of holy scripture, and cannot be proved to have formed part of the catholic and primitive faith, the omission of them can at all events do no harm, neither can it afford sufficient ground for charging the preacher with unfaithfulness in the delivery of the gospel.

Deficiency and imperfection must be expected in the doctrine of every uninspired teacher, and those who are the best qualified for their office will be the last to boast, or even to think highly, of their own performance. We are all open to censure; and in the present state of society, it would be folly to hope that we can escape it, be our performance what it may. I am not sure that we ought even to desire to escape it; for if we receive it properly, it is better for us than praise. Its effect, even when uncharitably administered, ought to be that of exciting us to more earnest endeavours to be found faithful stewards of the mysteries of God, and safe guides for the people to follow. It is only when we have reason to fear that the interests of truth and godliness may suffer from our silence under reproach, whether it be just or unjust, that we should be prompt and eager to