

that in the study of the Word of God the first thing is to understand its meaning. Here at the outset certain difficulties present themselves:—(1.) The Word of God comes to us through the medium of foreign tongues, the Hebrew and the Greek, an acquaintance with which is absolutely necessary. (2.) The different books of which it consists have an original connection with the times at which and the scenes amid which they were composed. It would be out of place to turn aside here to show the advantages of this, how the Word of God comes to us in this way as a living thing, and not as dry, dead dogma, as would have been the case had it been thrown into some abstract form, intelligible in itself, apart from time, place, and circumstance, but destitute of the life and power so eminently characteristic of the Word of God. But it is to the present purpose to remark that this fact calls for study, much study—of ancient history, and geography, and other cognate branches. (3.) The Word of God having come to us through existing forms of human thought,—a method of revelation which might also be shown, if this were the proper time, to be characterized by highest wisdom, and fraught with most blessed results—renders still further study necessary in order to distinguish between the form and the essence, or rather, in order to master on the one hand the ancient forms of thought, and (what is perhaps still more difficult) to emancipate ourselves from modern forms which cannot be made to fit in with the other. (4.) The nature of the truth, dealing with the very loftiest subjects of human thought, and even with subjects which are quite beyond the reach of human thought, often demands the most patient and persevering study, so as to reach that which is high, grasp that which is broad, fathom that which is deep. Just as a book of science requires more study than a book of travels, and a book of metaphysics than a book of history, so a revelation which contains not only “milk for babes,” but “strong meat for men,” not only “the first principles of the oracles of God,” but “the deep things of God,” may be expected to demand not a little study for its thorough elucidation. And (5.) The Word of God, revealing as it does truths most humbling to the pride, and most unpalatable to the depraved taste of man, has been subjected to so much perversion, and distortion, and sophistical reasoning, and unwarrantable applications, that special study is often necessary to disentangle the web of sophistry, or dissipate the haze of prejudice, or remove the stumbling-block which the adversary has put in the way.

All these general considerations, which are capable of indefinite illustration, show the necessity for much study on the part of those who would show themselves “approved unto God, workmen that need not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.” So evident is it that one would expect it to be universally assented to. But it is not. If it were, it would be unnecessary to address you on the subject we have chosen. There is however in many quarters in the present day a tendency to depreciate the value of exegetical study, and in fact to deny its necessity or even utility altogether. The explanation of this tendency is not far to seek. It is connected with a spirit of rebellion against the order which Christ has established in His church, a disposition to reject those gifts which He bestowed upon her when He ascended up on high. There are those who think they can do quite well without the pastors and teachers whom Christ has appointed, who therefore take the position, very gratifying to those who have a high idea of their own gifts, that every man is called to preach and teach and minister in holy things. But it would be