

the perversion of them. "What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? God forbid."

From the doctrine of human depravity, also, conclusions of the most absurd nature have been drawn. Some have imagined that sin which is natural to us, deserves no punishment. The mournful falls of David, Peter, and other eminent saints, recorded for the caution of believers, have been employed for the encouragement of the sinner. The penitent malefactor gave the noblest testimony to the truth and importance of the gospel; yet how many have perverted this example of late repentance to their own ruin!

Erroneous conclusions have also been drawn from detached expressions. "There is no respect of persons with God." Hence some argue against the doctrine of election. But this text refers to God, not as a sovereign dispenser of favours, but as a judge, and means that he will deal with men with strict impartiality, without regard to their nation, rank, or wealth. A judge, dispensing the law, must have no respect of persons; he must look, not to the person, but to the facts. But none can deny that this very judge has a right to confer his favours and dispense his alms to whomsoever he will. To do a kindness to some is surely no injustice to others, when none had the least claim on his goodness.

3. *Scripture is perverted by misapplication.* Many parts of the word of God were at first addressed to particular persons, churches or nations; other parts were composed on some special occasion, and intended for some special purpose; and hence much evil has been done by rashly applying these portions to things quite different from those intended by the Holy Spirit. Thus, in the 13th and 33d chapters of Ezekiel, repentance and reformation are spoken of as the means of procuring God's favour. But these passages do not treat of the meritorious ground of justification; and hence the conclusion is false that repentance and amendment are the causes of salvation. Again, many of the promises under the Jewish dispensation refer to the temporal covenant made with Israel as a nation, and not to the eternal covenant of grace.

There is another kind of misapplication—supposing that things have no application to our case, which really have. The numerous exhortations to self denial, to come forth from the evil world, to endure hardship, to exercise watchfulness, fortitude and courage, have been said to apply only to the first Christians and the persecutions they endured from the pagan world. The strong as-

sertions in the prophets and Psalms regarding the depravity of human nature, have been alleged to apply only to the corruptions of the Jewish church and nation in those ages. The cautions against self righteousness have been said to apply only to the Pharisees, and the injunctions against idolatry only to the Gentiles and Pagans, forgetting that all are by nature Pharisees and idolaters. Again, the exhortations so often found in the Epistles, to devote our gifts and talents to the glory of God and the benefit of man, have been said to refer to the extraordinary gifts of miracles and tongues. And, to mention no more, the obligations of kings and rulers, to maintain, defend, and cherish the service and worship of God, are gravely affirmed to have ceased along with the Jewish dispensation—as if God had then also ceased to be the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

One fertile source of deception is the misapplication of parables. Few of these beautiful portions of the word of God have escaped this destructive process. The parable of the prodigal son, and of the servant who was freely forgiven his debt, have been used as arguments against the atonement. The parable of the rich man and Lazarus has been supposed by some to favour the opinion that poverty and hardship in this life will form a ground of acceptance, and a plea for mercy in the world to come. The command of the king to his servants, to compel them to come to the feast, has been construed into an argument for persecution, and conversion by fire and sword.

Great is the guilt and danger of thus perverting the scriptures. The corruption of the best things is the worst; the more excellent the use, the more pernicious is the abuse. Many consult the Bible as Balaam consulted God—not to know his will, but to gain the sanction of his authority to their folly and their vice. And as this is sinful, so it is very dangerous. Think not as many do that it will form a complete excuse for all our mistakes, that so we understood the scriptures. For if this principle is once allowed, where shall we stop? If one man believes that God's destroying both body and soul in hell signifies the destruction of all existence, if another thinks that the words eternal, everlasting, forever, mean only a certain period of time, are we to suppose that the laws of the universe, and the counsels of God are to be altered or set aside, lest these persons should suffer the consequences of their mistake? The Spirit operates by means of the word; if a soul is to be saved, it must be done, not without and against, but with and by the word. That Divine Spirit who is the author of the Bible, is also the only interpreter who can open to us its true meaning, and save us