

have sinned and come short of the glory of God," "the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked," "thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart," "thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself," "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth might not perish but have everlasting life," "except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of heaven,"—these, and such truths as these, the knowledge of which is necessary for man's salvation, are so clearly revealed that the weakest capacity may comprehend them.

But it has been urged as an objection to the possibility of attaining a "full assurance of understanding" of the mysteries of the Scriptures, that they contain truths beyond the comprehension of man. They (it has been said) make known to us the being and perfection of God—they tell us respecting his eternity—his immensity—his omniscience—his omnipotence—that he is a pure spirit, and yet the author of material creatures. Now, "who by searching can find out God, who can find out the Almighty to perfection?" Or what do we know of his providence? Is it not as incomprehensible as his nature? What do we know of the trim of persons in the unity of the God-head? What do we know of the mystery of God incarnate? What do we know, even, of the soul of man—of its origin—of its present state and future destiny? How can we comprehend all that is said respecting God's sovereignty and man's free agency?

In reply to objections to the possibility of attaining a full assurance of understanding, drawn from these and such truths as these, we say:—It would be vain to allege that the Scriptures do not contain many difficulties: they contain many truths which have a height and a depth, a length and a breadth, which passeth understanding. Nor would they have been a revelation from God to man had they not contained these very truths: such mysteries were to be expected in such a communication from God to man—and they do exist. But to those who are disposed to perplex themselves by these and such difficulties as these, we say—there is a difference between a clearly revealed truth, and all the grounds or reasons of that truth. A doctrine may be clearly made known, and recorded as a part of the testimony of God, but all the reasons, the why and the wherefore it is so, is hid with God. There are myriads of facts, payable to the understanding of a child, but who can explain how or why they exist as they do? Our duty is to know the truth revealed, whether comprised in a narrative of facts—whether it is doctrine, precept or promise; and no one ever yet searched the Scriptures with a desire to know the mind of the Spirit in the word, but was led into all truth.

But a "full assurance of understanding" is attainable, because—

2. It has been attained by the Saints of God in ages that are past; and it is but asserting a truism to say, that what has been done may be done. How many of the people of God can say with the Psalmist—"thou through thy commandments hast made me wiser than mine enemies, for they are ever with me;" "I have more understanding than all my teachers, for thy testimonies are my meditation. I understand more than the ancients, because I keep thy precepts." Ps 119, 98-100. It can be said of the people of God in all ages, that their knowledge is better than the knowledge of Egypt—"They have been made wiser than Ethan the Ezrahite, and Heman and Calcol and Darda, the sons of Mahol," because they have known the Scriptures; these are written in a language with which they are all familiar, for God in the Scriptures speaks to man's heart and head—to man's desires and aversions—hopes and fears. Man is addressed as a sinner, and every motive that can be brought to bear on him as such, is used to terrify or allure. Man is addressed as reconciled to God by the death of his Son, and then the hopes which cheer the just, the consolations which fill their souls with joy and peace, are set before them. They drink of these streams of living waters and are refreshed and invigorated. Many have known this. Say what was the knowledge possessed by the wisest sages of Greece or Rome respecting the world or its Creator—respecting man's relations, nature, duties or destiny, compared with that which the humblest follower of the Redeemer possesses, and which he has derived from the word of God? He knows many truths respecting the Divine character and providence, which the researches of the learned and the works of creation tend to illustrate and confirm; and he knows truths respecting the Divine character and government which no researches, however diligently prosecuted, could ever reveal, viz.:—How God can be just, and yet the justifier

of the ungodly. And by the light which the word imparts, he understands events in Providence that seem obscure and perplexing to others, who do not take the Scriptures as a light to their feet and a lamp to their path.

But how are we to attain full assurance of understanding?

1. The Scriptures should be daily read.

A man in health, and who wishes to enjoy this blessing, must not only pray for, but partake of, his "daily bread." This is essential to his existence and happiness. The very vegetables need daily, food, light and air; so the children of God who live by faith in the word of God, need daily the sincere milk of the word, that they may grow thereby. As often then as the morning or evening comes, so often should we be found reading the stated portion of Scripture in connection with the worship of God. By doing so, we may expect to gain that knowledge of the truth which is essential to our edification and comfort. When we do so we are but complying with the express command of the Saviour, "Search the scriptures." Is it not in a great measure to the daily perusal of the Scriptures that we are to ascribe the great dignity which exists in the spirituality and intelligence of men placed in the same state of society? Our Lord made it his daily duty and delight to read the word; he regards its truths as essential to his growth in knowledge and grace as his daily food is to his existence and enjoyment here; and because he diligently pursues such a course, he is mighty in the Scriptures—prepared to give an answer to every man that asketh a reason of the hope that is in him, with meekness and fear. He is thus built up and strengthened in his most holy faith. False Christs and false prophets may rise and draw away many after them, but their doctrines and devices neither endanger his stability nor shake his faith. Another has followed a different course: the Scriptures are not read, or read occasionally and carelessly, and his knowledge, as might be expected, is confined to a few general principles; and even with respect to these he has no well-grounded persuasion. He knows little of God's character, purposes or providence, to him the scheme of salvation is a complete mystery—hence he is ignorant and sensual, not having the spirit, and becomes an easy prey to any deceiver. How requisite, then, is the daily study of the Scriptures. Hear God's command to the Israelites—"These words which I command thee this day shall be in thine heart, and thou shalt teach them diligently to thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down and when thou risest up; and thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes."

2. The particular topic treated in each portion of Scripture should be ascertained and kept in view in our readings. If we read with attention we will observe that each of the prophets, evangelists and apostles, who wrote as they were moved by the Holy Spirit, had some special object in view in the communications which they were honoured to make to mankind. For example, the object of the Apostle John in writing the gospel which bears his name, was "that ye might know that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing, ye might have life through his name"—and he keeps this end in view from the first to the last verse of his Gospel. The object of the Apostle Paul, in his epistle to the Romans, was the exhibition and illustration of God's method of justifying sinful man; and all other topics introduced in that epistle, are to be viewed as confirmatory of this great subject. This being known (and it can be known only by a careful perusal of the various portions of the word of God), we will possess the means of understanding the expressions and phrases which appear at first sight obscure. If we keep this in view, we will read the word with advantage. While we read with the conviction that it is given by inspiration, we will read with the knowledge that God adapts his communications to the circumstances and needs of his people.

3. We should read with a sincere desire to receive instruction, and to acquiesce in the will of God.

There is not a truth in God's word which has not been the subject of debate and contention, and men have tried to establish their peculiar dogmas by the testimony of the spirit, instead of coming to the word with minds prepared to receive and obey the truth. False views of the truth have sprung from pride and prejudice, the offspring of an unsanctified heart, not from any obscurity in the statements of the word. Some men come to the Scriptures, not that they may be instructed, but that they may be confirmed in their previously adopted opinions. They have received