

Since, then, all scripture is profitable, till you have acquired a capacity of elucidation, you cannot be sufficiently instructed unto the kingdom of God, nor thoroughly furnished unto all good works. In the process of religious instruction, to rectify mistakes and obviate objections are frequently the first parts of a teacher's task; and he only who is mighty in the scriptures will mightily convince. To an extensive and accurate knowledge of the plain statements of revelation, therefore, you must add an acquaintance with those parts which are not so easily understood; and, in order to assist you in your researches I shall now state to you what appear to me to be the best means for attaining this end.

Divine authority induces me principally to recommend to you a frequent and attentive perusal of the scriptures themselves. He who knows the best means of religious improvement, has said, *Search the Scriptures*; and whoever obeys this direction obtains an enlargement of knowledge. You will thus familiarize yourselves with the Word of God; and its statements will, in an imperceptible manner, so identify themselves with your mental operations, that a richness of scriptural sentiment and expression will insensibly pervade your public instructions; and I would here observe, that, in religious disquisition, as scriptural sentiment, ought to be the only guide, so there is no species of style better adapted to the human capacity, more pleasing to a mind desirous of religious improvement, or more likely to produce useful effects, than that which accords with the simple diction and arrangement of the scriptures.

It may be also farther remarked, that, till you can trace your information to the word of God, you have no right to be recognized as Christian teachers. By conversation, and the perusal of books, you may obtain very accurate and extensive views of divine truth; but, if you have not brought all your knowledge to the law and testimony, compared and judged for yourselves, you have advanced no farther in religion than the tradition of the elders.

In perusing the scriptures, it will be necessary for you to guard against those incorrect views of their meaning, which the consideration of insulated phrases and sentences is apt to produce. It is a rule of criticism, applicable to every species of writing, that, in all cases of ambiguity or apparent contradiction the general spirit and scope is the standard of explanation: and, in ascertaining the meaning of scripture, attention to this principle will preserve you from many mistakes. He who compares spiritual things with spiritual frequently obtains unexpected results. He perceives a relation of parts which