

Since, then, the sacred volume is the basis of religion, a Christian teacher should possess an accurate knowledge of its various parts; and this you must expect only as the result of much careful research. In religion, and in natural things, the arrangements of the Deity are similar; the hand of the diligent alone is rewarded with abundance.

By this I do not mean to insinuate, that, in the scriptures important doctrines are obscurely taught. On the contrary, these are now explicitly stated; and each with a degree of evidence proportioned to its value. Still, however, to acquire the information necessary for a public instructor is not an easy task. Admitting the perspicuity of every part of scripture, much remains for diligent application and the exercise of judgement. To arrange and classify its numerous contents, to store them in the mind, to possess just views of them as one whole, and to have that knowledge of every part in its connexions and bearings which will enable you to form from it deductions applicable to the varied circumstances of the Christian life, must be the result of no small labour. But it may be also added, that the word of God is not without its obscurities. The Deity has adopted a mode of instruction, which, in its nature, accords with the grand ends of revelation. The Christian religion is designed, not merely to communicate knowledge, but to enlarge the mind's intellectual capacities; and the form in which God has revealed his will, excites those exertions of intellect which promotes its improvement.

A variety of causes have contributed to render many parts of scripture not easily understood. The general nature of languages produces occasional ambiguities of expression which cannot be avoided. Every nation, also, has its peculiar modes of expression, which accord neither with the usual meaning of the terms individually, nor with the general structure of language. Besides, in all languages, there are so many allusions to national and natural history, to local institutions and to national modes of thinking and acting, that, where these are unknown, the most explicit statements become involved in obscurity.

As a revelation from God, the scriptures also contain other causes of obscurity peculiar to themselves. The early instructions afforded to the church were not always of easy comprehension. Many of them were intentionally presented in prophetic hints, and under the guide of emblematical allusions and typical services; and, when you consider that the very persons whom the Deity employed to communicate the knowledge of his will, with much diligent inquiry into the meaning of their own statements made little proficiency, you cannot expect that you will comprehend them with ease.