

His character as respects style and method—what his peculiar art of reasoning and modes of expression—what relation he bears to the persons addressed—whether personally acquainted with them, or by report—whether their father or brother in the faith—whether his letter is the first or second to them, or one of a series not extant—whether it was solicited on their part, an answer to one from them, or written of his own accord—whether he addresses them alone, or others in conjunction with them—and whether he writes in his own name, or associated with others—and what their character and standing.

In the next place, great attention must be paid to his *design* in writing to them at that time. It must be ascertained whether he writes with a reference to their whole circumstances, or to some one more urgent consideration—whether that consideration was one that respected themselves merely, or others equally with them—whether he aimed at the full accomplishment of his design in one letter, or in more—or whether he reserved some things to a special interview, or to some persons soon to visit them.

In the fifth place, the reader must recollect that no one sentence in the argumentative part of a letter is to be explained as a proposition, theorem, proverb, or maxim, detached from the drift and scope of the passage. Indeed, neither words or sentences in any argumentative composition, have any meaning but what the scope, connexion, and design of the writer give them. Inattention to this most obvious fact has beclouded the apostolic epistles, has introduced more errors into the views, and unmeaning ceremonies into the practice of professing Christians, than any other cause in the world. To this the cutting up the sacred text into morsels, called *verses*, has greatly contributed. Many passages, otherwise plain and forcible, have been weakened and obscured by this absurd interference.

The difficulties in the way of our understanding these epistles, may be easily gathered from the preceding items. We must place ourselves in Judea, in Rome, or in Corinth, and not in these places in the present day; but we must live in them nearly two thousand years before we lived at all. We must mingle with the Jews in their temple and synagogues. We must visit the temples and the altars of the Pagan Gentiles. We must converse with Epicurean and Stoic philosophers—with the Pharisees and Sadducees—with priests and people that died centuries before we were born. We must place before us manuscript copies of these epistles, written without a break, a chapter, or a verse. We must remember what the writers *spoke* to the people before they *wrote* to them. We must not only attend to what they said and wrote, but what they did. And we must always bear in mind the numerous and diversified enemies, in and out of authority, with whom they had to conflict. Now all these are apparently great difficulties, and, at first view, would seem to put the golden key of interpretation out of the reach of all.

They are not, however, insurmountable. In reading any epistle, on any subject, written by any person, we are accustomed to attend to all these things, in substance, if not in form. Indeed, these are but the dictates of common sense, regarded by every person in the common occur-