

tion? I trust there is scarce any one among us who will object to a recommendation of this nature, whether we attend to the fallibility, the ignorance, the prejudice of men, or to the truth, wisdom, and perfection of the Author of our divine religion.

I will take the liberty to advance a general proposition, the evidence of which, I persuade myself, may be established by the most incontestible proofs. The proposition is, indeed, simple and plain: it is, "that those christian societies will ever be found to have formed their union upon principles the wisest and the best, which impose the fewest restraints upon the minds of their members, *making the scriptures alone*, and not human articles or confessions of belief, the *sole rule of faith and conduct.*"

It is much to be lamented that the venerable reformers, when they burst asunder the cords of popish tyranny, ever departed from the simplicity of this scripture plan; and, that instead of adhering to it, they thought theological systems the only means of preserving uniformity of opinion, or of evincing the purity of their faith. The experience of more than two centuries has proved how far they are capable of producing either effect. On the other hand, the consequences which such institutions have been productive of, have been more or less severely felt in every part of the Protestant world, from the Diet of Augsburg to the present time.

They have in former, as well as in later ages, caused a religion, designed to unite men as brethren in the sacred bonds of charity and benevolence, too often to disseminate amongst them *jealousies, animosities, and rancorous hatred.* Yet many pious and worthy christians are apt to suppose that such systems of faith are necessary for the maintenance of true religion, or, for preventing that disorder which arises from a diversity of opinions. But do such christians reflect sufficiently upon the example which our Lord himself and his Apostles have placed before us? Did they, for this or any other purpose, prescribe or recommend summaries of faith? On the contrary, did not our Saviour constantly enjoin upon his followers, to *search the scriptures themselves?* Do we not find that the Bereans were commended for their conduct in not receiving even the *doctrine of the inspired Apostles*, until they had first searched the scriptures to see whether these things were so or not? Doth not St. Paul expressly say, that "other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ?" Doth he not every where recommend to christians the duty of examining the grounds of their faith, "to prove all things, and to hold fast that which is good?" And St. John, doth he not exhort us to "believe not every spirit, but to try the spirits whether they be of God?" Now, if summaries of faith had been necessary for the prosperity of our religion, can we suppose that Christ and his Apostles would have neglected, not only to leave such as must have been most proper to maintain the true faith; but that, by their precepts as well as conduct, they would rather have taught us the duty of avoiding them? No, my brethren, we may be assured that Christ and his Apostles did not esteem any other summary necessary than the gospel itself; and that whatever is essential either as to faith or