

[This lecture was gratefully received from Michael Madden, an elder of the Presbyterian Church of Queensland, Australia, who has an interest in 19th century church history.]

This lecture is taken from a rare first edition classic of theology, William Cunningham's "Theological Lectures on subjects connected with Natural Theology, Evidences of Christianity, The Canon and Inspiration of Scripture."

London: James Nisbet & Co., 1878.

Lecture 1.

Introductory.

You have arrived at an important era in your history, an occasion when you are specially called upon to search and try your ways, to realise your responsibility to God, your entire dependence upon the Author of every good and perfect gift, to look steadily and deliberately both behind you and before you, and to adopt resolutions suited to your present circumstances, and fitted to bear extensively and permanently upon your future studies and labours. Your studies have hitherto been directed principally to the improvement of your intellectual powers, and the acquisition of secular knowledge. They are now to be directed to the acquisition of the knowledge of God and of his revealed will. Hitherto, probably, your leading and immediate motives in the prosecution of your studies have been the mere pleasure of intellectual exertion and of the acquisition of knowledge, or, perhaps, the desire of distinction, or a wish to make a creditable preparation for what you had chosen as your future profession in life. Now it may be expected that you have taken a closer and fuller view of the office of the Christian ministry to which you have professedly devoted yourselves, and of the purposes it was designed to serve, and that you feel that it is with God you have to do in this matter, that it is with him you are to Hold communion, and to him you are to have respect in all your studies and preparations connected with entering upon his more immediate service. You have ere this time, I trust, been led to some serious reflection upon the end for which you were created, and the objects to which your powers and faculties ought to be devoted. You have been already giving some measure of serious and humble attention to the study of the word of God, and have been enabled to discern and apprehend the views unfolded there of your relation to God as his creatures, his subjects, and the transgressors of his law, and of the scheme of mercy which God devised and executed by sending his Son into the world to suffer and die for us. Through the knowledge and belief of these truths, you have been led, I trust, to flee for refuge to the hope set before you, to embrace Christ as all your salvation and all your desire. Under the influence of these views, and un-

der the guidance of the Holy Ghost, you have not only received Christ as the Way, the Truth, and the Life, for your own personal salvation, but you have resolved to devote your lives to the service of God in the gospel of his Son, to the great object of making God and Christ and salvation known to your fellow-men. Animated by this desire, and determined by God's grace to carry this resolution into effect, you have come to this place in order that you may acquire the necessary knowledge, and make other necessary preparations for entering upon this important work. This is the position you now occupy; these, I trust, are the motives by which you are animated, and the objects on which your desires are set; and if so, it may be reasonably expected that you will engage in the studies that now lie before you with an activity and a zeal, a seriousness and sense of responsibility, and at the same time with a cheerfulness and alacrity, which you have never known before. The studies in which you have hitherto been engaged have, indeed, been appointed and arranged with a view to your preparation for the study of theology, and the work of the ministry, the church having wisely determined that, in the actual circumstances in which we are placed, the general and ordinary rule should be, that men be not admitted to the ministry without some acquaintance with all those departments of knowledge to which your attention has been hitherto directed. It is right and proper that men should come to the work of the ministry with their intellectual powers brought to maturity, and fully and carefully cultivated; and the studies in which you have been engaged are admirably adapted to promote this object. There are some branches of literature and science an acquaintance with which affords facilities for attaining a knowledge of theology, and which are therefore sometimes called the propaedeutica of theological science. To these your attention has been directed, and you are all, I trust, possessed of a creditable acquaintance with them. The two great objects of education are the cultivation and improvement of the mental powers, and the positive acquisition of useful knowledge. These two things are in themselves distinct from each other; and it is easy to conceive that they might in fact be in some measure separated—i.e. that there might be certain exercises fitted to promote mental improvement without conveying much useful information; and, on the other hand, that much useful information might be communicated which was not fitted proportionately and by comparison to expand and strengthen the mental powers. But though these two things may be to some extent separated, they may be, and commonly are, united; and the great problem to be solved in an investigation of the principles of education is just how this union may be most completely effected—in other words, how education may be so conducted as to secure most fully by one and the same process the most thorough improvement of the mental faculties, and the communication of the largest amount of useful knowledge. The studies in which you have been hitherto engaged have been arranged with a view to both these objects, and it is expected that you are now prepared to enter upon the study of theology with your mental powers matured and invigorated by culture and exercise, and in the possession of a large amount of useful knowledge—of knowledge that may be useful to you generally as members of society who have chosen what is commonly called a learned profession, and that may be useful to you more particularly in the prosecution of your professional studies. There is perhaps no study

which at a certain period of life is more useful in calling into exercise and improving the mental powers than the study of languages, especially of those languages which are full and copious, and have been carried to a high pitch of cultivation. And in the attention which you have given to the classical languages of Greece and Rome, you are expected to have reaped this advantage, and at the same time to have also derived from the study and the researches to which it necessarily led these two important additional benefits—first, that your taste has been improved and refined by familiarity with the most splendid productions of genius, and with the most perfect models of composition; and second, that you have acquired a large Portion of information with respect to the history, geography, and chronology, the manners and customs, the laws and institutions of the nations of antiquity, and are fully aware of the low state of religion and morality which characterised even those nations which had made the greatest progress in literature, science, and the arts, but which had not been favoured with a supernatural and written revelation of God’s will.

You have been engaged also in the study of mathematics, a science of pure demonstration, calling into exercise, and, of course, improving other faculties than those developed in the study of languages, opening up to you new and interesting views of the nature of truth and evidence, of the grounds and certainty of human knowledge, accustoming you to a careful investigation of every successive step in your processes of thought and reasoning, and by the positive information which it communicates, paving the way for a fuller knowledge of the works of creation. Your attention has been directed to the material universe, the work of God’s hands, and you have found a profitable exercise for your faculties, and gained much useful information in examining the actual phenomena of nature, in arranging and classifying them, and in investigating the laws by which they are governed. You have thus seen how the heavens declare God’s glory, and how the firmament sheweth forth his handiwork; how all his works, great and small, praise him, and to some extent manifest His power, and wisdom, and goodness.

But perhaps the most interesting and important department of all the studies in which you have hitherto been engaged, is that which concerns not the classic writers of antiquity, not the abstract relations of form and numbers, not the material and irrational creation, but man himself, made originally in the image of God, still capable of being restored to that image, and of worshipping, serving, and enjoying God, invested with dominion over the works of creation, and destined not to perish or to be burned up, but to exist for ever. You have been studying man, especially in that respect in which he is distinguished from the lower animals, the possession of a rational and immortal soul. You have been inquiring into his intellectual and moral nature, his powers and capacities, his susceptibilities of emotion, the appetites, desires, and passions by which he is influenced. And your inquiries into the actual constitution of man’s intellectual and moral nature have been, or should have been, applied to two great practical subjects, viz., investigating and ascertaining truth, and discovering and establishing duty. In the investigation of man’s intellectual nature, you have been called upon to consider, What is

truth? How may it be ascertained? How may man's faculties be most successfully employed in the investigation of it, and best prepared for this work? What are the grounds of the certainty of our knowledge? and what are the different sources from which truth, or clear and certain knowledge, may be derived? And in the examination of man's moral nature, you have been led to consider by what law men ought to form their character and regulate their conduct. What is the relation in which they stand to the great Ruler and Lawgiver of the world, who has formed their mental constitution both in its intellectual and moral departments. What provision has he made in our constitution for guiding us to the knowledge and practice of duty and the attainment of happiness? and what may be learned from the exercise of our faculties upon the works of creation and providence, and the constitution of our own nature, as to the character and moral government of God, the relation in which we stand to him, the service we ought to render to him, the rule by which our conduct ought to be regulated, and the whole course we ought to pursue, that we may attain to the enjoyment of his favour, and the fullest and most permanent happiness of which we are capable?

To the study of all these various subjects your time and attention have been hitherto devoted. By the study of them I trust your intellectual powers have been expanded and invigorated, and much useful and important knowledge has been acquired. Whatever measure of intellectual strength or skill you may have attained, whatever portion of useful knowledge you may possess, you are now called upon to bring to bear upon the study of Christian theology, or of the word of God, the supernatural revelation which he has given us concerning Himself, and concerning our duty and destiny. To God indeed the grand object of knowledge, the great source of obligation, the bestower of all happiness, the author of every good and perfect gift, your attention already has been or should have been directed in the study of his works, and especially in the study of man, the noblest of his works. God's works should be all studied with a reference to him who created and sustains them. The things that are made should be ever contemplated as having been made and regulated for the purpose of making known the invisible things of God, even his eternal power and Godhead; and moral philosophy, when taught as it should be, unfolds all that can be known of God, and of man's relation to him, from the light of nature and the works of creation and providence, and especially from man's mental constitution, in order to settle aright the nature, ground, and requirements of duty, in so far as these can be known and ascertained without an immediate and supernatural revelation. But you are now to enter upon the study of the truth concerning God, and duty, and happiness, as unfolded to us in the written revelation which God inspired by his Spirit, and has put into our hands. If God has indeed, in addition to the light of nature and the ordinary exercise of their faculties upon the objects around them, given to men a supernatural revelation of his will, professing to communicate to them fuller and clearer views of the most important of all subjects than they could have acquired in any other way, then their first duty is to examine this revelation, and to learn from it what it was fitted and intended to teach, to bring all their powers and faculties, and all the information they may have acquired, to bear, if needful, upon the investigation of its meaning,

and the right use and application of its discoveries. And this is in substance the work to which you are now called. It is not indeed supposed that you are at present entirely ignorant of the word of God, and of the views which are there unfolded concerning God and duty, salvation and eternity. On the contrary, it is assumed that you have given some attention to the study of God's word, and that you have already been taught by the Spirit through the word the leading principles of God's oracles and been taught them so as to have been led by the knowledge and belief of them to choose God as your portion, to embrace Christ as your Saviour, and to devote yourselves to his service—and if so, your eyes have been opened, you have been turned from darkness to light, and are now advancing on your way to Zion with your faces turned thitherwards.

But it is assumed, also, that you have not hitherto given a great deal of attention to the careful and exact study of the word of God in the original languages, that you have not yet thought or read a great deal about the principles that ought to guide you in the study and interpretation of the sacred Scriptures, that you have not yet spent much time in comparing the different statements of God's word with each other, and trying to form clear and correct conceptions of the general truths which, as a whole, it teaches upon all the various and infinitely important subjects with respect to which it gives us information. It is assumed that while you have not yet had time to give much attention to such exercises as these, in which the study of Christian theology essentially consists, neither have you had much opportunity of making use, for the attainment of the ends to be effected by these exercises, of the assistance to be derived in this work from a knowledge of the labours of those who have brought the largest measure of natural talents, acquired learning, and spiritual discernment, to bear upon the investigation of the character, meaning, and contents of the sacred Scriptures. And if these assumptions are correct, then it follows that you do not yet possess that full, clear, and thorough knowledge of the doctrines of Christian theology and of the grounds on which they rest, that is needful, in order to explain the word of God to others, or to assist them in the explanation and application of it, and are not fully qualified to defend even what you have rightly learned against the assaults of adversaries; and that, on both these grounds, you are not yet fully prepared for entering upon the office of teachers of religion or of ministers of the gospel. You may be, I trust you are, Christians, believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, but you are not theologians. You may have been made wise unto your own salvation, but you have yet a great deal to learn, both from the agency of the Holy Spirit through the written word, and also from the writings of men, before you become qualified to be ministers of the New Testament.

A distinction has been often made between religion and theology, which has a real foundation in fact and experience. Both words are indeed used in two senses, somewhat different, though closely related to each other. Both are employed subjectively and objectively—subjectively as descriptive of qualities or properties of a man, or as the old theological writers are accustomed to say, “*habitus homini haerentes*,” by the possession of which a man becomes respectively a religious

man and a theologian; and objectively as descriptive of a system of opinions and sentiments irrespective of those who hold them. In the latter sense we speak of the Christian religion and of Christian theology, and when thus used there is scarcely any difference in meaning between them; they both mean that system of truths derived from the word of God which constitutes Christianity. It is when they are used subjectively that the difference between them appears, and it is a difference only in degree. Religion, as descriptive of that in a man which entitles him to be called religious, is a real knowledge of the true God, leading him to worship and to serve him; and it is usually regarded as conveying the idea that the man of whom it is predicated has so much knowledge of God, and knowledge of such a practical and effective kind, as to produce such a character and conduct as affords materials for cherishing a confident hope of his ultimate happiness.

A religious man, therefore, is practically just a true Christian, one who has acquired so much knowledge of God and of the way of salvation, and of the path of duty, from the Christian revelation, and who is so using and applying this knowledge, as that there is good ground to believe that he is advancing in the way that leadeth to glory, honour, and immortality, and that he will ultimately secure eternal life. Theology, used subjectively, as descriptive of that in a man which entitles him to be called a theologian, means a full and comprehensive and well-digested knowledge of God, and of everything needful to be known, in order to worshiping and serving him aright, such as may not only avail for the regulation of his own conduct, and the securing of his own personal happiness, but may qualify him for becoming a teacher or instructor of others. And in accordance with this view of its meaning, it is well known that when we apply the term theologian to one who is not in the office of the ministry, not using it merely as a common designation of a particular profession, we intend to convey the idea that he is possessed of a much fuller and more thorough acquaintance with religious subjects than is usually exhibited by those who have not studied religion professionally; such an acquaintance with these subjects as that he would be fairly entitled to speak or write about them for the instruction or information of others. Theology then used subjectively, and distinguished from religion, is descriptive of a full, comprehensive, well-digested knowledge of God and of divine things, such as may qualify for the instruction of our fellowmen. The words theology and theologian were used by the ancient classical writers. They applied the word theologian both to the poets who had given the fullest accounts of their gods, and to the philosophers who had most fully prosecuted their inquiries into the nature of God and of man's relation to him. The words theology and theologian do not occur in Scripture, though there are phrases which are virtually synonymous with them, and which naturally led to the formation and use of such words. The word theologos occurs in the inscription of the Apocalypse, which is called the Revelation of John the Divine, but from the way in which this word was commonly used about the time when this inscription was probably attached to it—for the time is not certainly known—the word was in all likelihood intended to be descriptive of the fact that John had written much about the divinity of the Saviour. In the third and fourth centuries a theologian usually meant one who distinguished himself by his

exertions in illustrating and defending the personality and divinity of the Logos, a limitation in the use of the word which has long since passed away. Its meaning is now settled as descriptive of a full, thorough, and well-digested knowledge of God, and of all that God has made known to us.

We do not usually apply the word religion to a man, or speak of him as religious, except when we mean to convey the idea that, so far as we can judge, the knowledge he has acquired concerning God, is really applied in the way of leading him to worship God and to serve him. But the spectacle has been so often presented of men who had acquired a large measure of information upon subjects connected with God and religion, and who even held the office of public religious instructors, but who gave no evidence that they were really living under the practical influence of the doctrines which they preached, discussed, or defended, that we do not so generally associate with the common use of the words theology and theologians, any reference to the personal character of the individual, and do not hesitate to speak of men as great theologians even when there may be abundant ground to fear that they have never made any such use of their studies in theology, or of their examination of the word of God, as to have become themselves wise unto salvation. It is indeed true that men who are still walking in darkness, led captive by Satan at his will, may devote much time to the examination of the Scriptures and to the reading of theological works, and thus in a certain sense acquire much knowledge, so as to be qualified to speak and write learnedly upon theological subjects, and even to throw some light upon the exact interpretation of some Scriptural statements. But men who have never really submitted their understandings and their hearts to the influence and authority of the Bible as a divine revelation, and who have never really seen God as he has made himself known in his word, cannot with propriety be said to know God or Christian theology, and are not properly entitled to the name of theologians. It is eternal life to know God and Jesus Christ whom he hath sent, and therefore men who are putting away from them the eternal life which is offered them, cannot be properly said to know God or the Saviour. The apostle lays down a principle upon this subject which is of universal application, and ought never to be overlooked or forgotten, when he says, 2 Cor. ii. 14, "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him, neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." We know that even the spiritual man—the man who has been born again of the word of God, through the belief of the truth, receiveth the things of the Spirit of God only as they are set forth in the word; and clearly as they are set forth there, no one can receive them so as fully to know and comprehend them, except through the agency of the Holy Ghost. Hence it follows that the apostle's declaration that the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, and that he cannot know them, implies that no man in his natural state, without the renovation of his nature and the indwelling of the Spirit, really knows or comprehends, in any proper sense, the leading and most important declarations of the sacred Scriptures. If it be the clear doctrine of Scripture, that a man still unconverted cannot know the things of the Spirit, however fully and plainly they are stated in the word of God, then by whatever name the information he may have

acquired concerning scriptural and theological subjects may be designated, he ought not to be called a theologian.

And all who have resolved to devote themselves to theological study are called upon to give their most serious attention to this most momentous question, whether they have been brought into that condition in which alone they can acquire any real knowledge of the things of the Spirit as revealed in the sacred Scriptures; whether the grand obstacle which the natural darkness of their understandings and the natural ungodliness of their hearts interpose in the way of their making any real progress in theology, or in the knowledge of God and of divine things, has yet been taken out of the way. This is the first and fundamental qualification for the profitable study of theology, and the want of it nothing else whatever can supply. In accordance with these views, so plainly based upon Scripture, some distinguished writers have introduced into their definitions of theology and of a theologian, the idea that a theologian, one really deserving of the name, must be a converted man, and that theology, or a real knowledge of God and of divine things, can be predicated only of a man whose nature has been renewed, and whose understanding has been enlightened by the Spirit of God. Among the definitions which have been given of these words, I have not met with any one that seems to me, upon the whole, preferable to that given by Buddeus, a celebrated divine of the Lutheran Church, all whose works are most valuable, as he was eminently distinguished by a remarkable combination of piety and moderation, judgment and erudition. He defines or describes them in this way :—“*Qui inter Christianos non tantum vera fide imbuti sunt, sed etiam numinis munere eam prae reliquis adepti sunt facultatem ut sactae doctrinae, qua Christiana religio constat, capita rite proponere, explicare, et contra dissentientium insultus defendere, aliosque adeo ad veram fidem perducere, aut in ea confirmare, possint, voce recepta theologi vocari solent.*” And theology itself—that, the possession of which makes a man a theologian—he defines to be “*Scientia rerum divinarum homini peccatori ad salutem consequendam cognitu necessariarum, prout ex scriptura sacra nobis constant, cum facultate eas iterum altos docendi, confirmandi atque defendendi conjuncta;*” and this knowledge of divine things he says, must be true, certain, and efficacious; and after fully explaining these definitions or descriptions, he concludes again, “*Ex dictis consequitur eum qui jure et merite theologus dici potest non alium esse quam hominem vera fide praeditum seu regenitum.*” [Instit. Theol. Dog. Lib., I. c. I., sect. 32-49, pp. 51, 53, 55, and 66.]

Such then is the work in which you are to be henceforth engaged. You are supposed to have been led already so far to know God and the views opened up in his word as to have resolved not only to take his word as a light to your feet and a lamp to your path, that you may be guided to heaven, but to devote yourselves to the promotion of the spiritual welfare and salvation your fellow-men, and with this view, to be intent now on gaining that full and intelligent knowledge of God’s revelation, which may fit you for becoming the instructors and guides of others. To ascertain the true origin, character, and authority of this revelation and to be so familiar with the grounds on which the views you hold upon these points rest, that

you may be able to defend it against adversaries, and press it upon men's notice and study; to investigate fully and carefully the meaning of the Bible, so as to be able to expound and enforce its contents, and bring them to bear most successfully upon men for their conversion and growth in knowledge and in grace, is henceforth to be your principal occupation. To ascertain and open up the mind of the Spirit in the word, and to apply it for the spiritual welfare of others, is to be the chief business of your future lives. As preliminary, however, to this work, it is necessary that you understand fully and intelligently, so as to be able to state and defend your opinion—first, what the Bible is; and second, how or in what way the mind of the Spirit is to be ascertained from it; and that then, with your understandings and hearts deeply impressed with right views upon these subjects, you devote yourselves to the study of the word itself, and bring all the powers of your minds, and all the knowledge and skill and experience you may have acquired, to bear, not merely upon the correct interpretation of its statements singly and separately, although that is the basis of all sound knowledge of Christian theology, but upon the formation of right conceptions of the whole mind of God as revealed, with respect to everything contained in the sacred volume, giving their due place and prominence to those subjects which are manifestly possessed of the greatest intrinsic importance. The study of the Scriptures is so ordinary and familiar an occupation, especially with many who have no pretensions to rank among the noble, the wise, and the mighty, that men are sometimes apt to associate it with ignorance, weakness, and obscurity, and to imagine that theology, when elevated to the rank of a science (and indeed to the place of the first and highest of the sciences, for so it has ever been regarded in all Christian countries), and when taught in academic halls, must be something totally different in kind, and must rest upon some other basis than the correct interpretation of Scripture, and to look upon the careful and exact investigation of the meaning of scriptural statements with something like contempt. Spiritual pride produces this feeling, as well as pride of reason and science. This notion, or anything approaching to it, is a dangerous delusion. The bringing out the true meaning of the statements of Scripture, and the deducing from a comparison of them the whole scheme of truth and duty which are taught us in the word, are the only means of attaining to a just and well-grounded knowledge of theology, and afford the fullest exercise for all the highest powers of the human mind, while they require the constant presence and guidance of the Holy Spirit. And of that whole process the correct interpretation of the statements of Scripture is the basis and foundation, the only certain ground on which a real knowledge of God and of divine things can rest. You have already in your previous studies examined the book of nature, the works of creation, that you might know the truth concerning God and your own duty. You are now called upon to examine his word, which he has magnified above all his works, and which at least as much needs and deserves a minute and careful investigation. You have, as it were, exhausted all other means of attaining to clear and certain knowledge of truth and duty and happiness, and nothing now remains but that you listen to the voice of God speaking in his word, and subordinate everything to the object of ascertaining and understanding fully what he has told you.

A full, correct, and intelligent acquaintance with the Scriptures is not by any means so easy or so ordinary an attainment as men are sometimes apt to suppose. It requires a larger measure of natural ability, a higher degree of acquired learning, and a greater amount of patient and laborious study than is commonly imagined. It is quite true that the great leading doctrines and duties of Christianity are very plainly set forth in Scripture, and that every thing needful to guide men to the saving knowledge of the truth and the enjoyment of eternal blessedness, may be certainly learned, under the guidance of God's Spirit, from almost any translation of the Scriptures, by men who have but a very small measure of intellectual culture and of acquired knowledge; and it is also true, that men who, from the teaching of the Spirit and of the word, have got a clear perception and a firm hold of the leading principles of God's oracles, are not likely to fall into any very dangerous errors in the interpretation of particular portions of Scripture. But though all this is true, and most important and encouraging truth it is, it has nothing to do with the question as to what kind and degree of knowledge of God's word may be attained, and ought to be aimed at, and what may be reasonably expected of those who aspire to be the public instructors of others. They ought not to be contented with knowing the word of God through the help of a translation, when they have opportunities of becoming acquainted with the original. They ought not to be satisfied with understanding the few fundamental principles of Scriptural truth, but are bound to acquire as thorough and accurate a knowledge as they can of the whole volume which God's Spirit inspired. They should not be contented, as men too often are, with a mere familiarity with the sense of the words, with some vague and indefinite inkling of the meaning of a scriptural statement, but are bound to employ all such means as may be necessary for understanding fully and establishing firmly the exact meaning of God's declarations, and to bring as much of meditation and reflection to bear upon them as may produce clear and definite conceptions of their import. It is of indispensable importance that ministers of the gospel have their hearts saturated with the general spirit and substance of God's word, with the leading views which are there unfolded, but it is necessary also that they have so full and accurate a knowledge of the exact meaning of the particular statements of Scripture, as to be able to open them up and expound them to others, to bring out clearly and intelligently the grounds in the correct interpretation of God's word on which their own convictions rest, and to defend them if needful against the assaults of adversaries. Ministers of the gospel ought not, in the execution of their function, which consists mainly in opening up and expounding the mind of the Spirit in the word, to be wholly dependent upon translators and commentators, but should be capable of understanding the original inspired writings; and though not all profound scholars and critics themselves, at least able to appreciate and to apply the erudite and critical labours of others. There is nothing which affords so abundant a supply of interesting, wholesome, and edifying matter for public instruction, as that knowledge which is the result of a thorough familiarity with God's word, of much meditation and reflection upon the statements of Scripture; and if men will attempt to expound and apply the word of God for the instruction of others, they are bound by the most solemn obligations to take all possible pains, and to use all practicable means, first for satisfying them-

selves, and then for convincing others, that what they are setting forth from the Scriptures is what God really teaches in that portion of his inspired word which they are considering. It is not enough that the matter set forth be the truth of God, it is also required, to use the language of our Directory for Public Worship, “that it be a truth contained in or grounded on that text, that the hearers may discern how God teacheth it from thence.” If it be the great duty of the ministers of the gospel to explain and open up the Word of God in its true meaning and real import for the salvation of men, then it is manifest that their theological education should be principally directed to these two objects—first, that they acquire that information, form these habits, and be impressed with these general views and principles, which may constrain them ever after to devote their principal attention to the study of God’s Word, and may afford them the best assistance in attaining most speedily and most certainly to a correct knowledge of the meaning of its statements; and second, that they become intelligently and accurately acquainted on scriptural grounds with those fundamental doctrines of revelation which ought to pervade all their efforts to instruct their fellow-men, as bearing most directly and immediately upon the salvation of sinners, and which, when distinctly perceived, and firmly held, and faithfully applied, will preserve them from radical or fundamental error in the interpretation of any portion of Scripture.

All the knowledge then you may have acquired, all the experience and skill you may have attained, are henceforth to be brought to bear more or less directly upon the study of the sacred Scriptures, and the great object of acquiring a real, thorough, and influential knowledge of God and of divine things from the revelation which he has given us. The subjects of study to which your attention has been hitherto directed need not, and should not, be altogether neglected, but they must be subordinated to the study of divine truth in God’s word. The books of the Old and New Testament are the only classics to which henceforth you are to apply the precept, “*Nocturna versate manu, versate diurna.*” The divine character and government you are henceforth to study, not in the dim light of nature, but in the bright effulgence of revelation. The character, duty, and destiny of man you are to investigate, not merely by looking within yourselves upon your hearts, and looking around you on the position in which you find yourselves placed, but by studying the information communicated to you on all these subjects by Him who made the heart and who knows it best, who alone is entitled to regulate our conduct, and who alone determines our destiny. And in investigating these infinitely important subjects, and in seeking to form clear, definite and impressive conceptions regarding them, such as may most powerfully influence yourselves and most fully qualify you for becoming the instructors of others, you may, even when most fully enjoying the guidance of God’s Spirit and the light of his word, and when most humbly and implicitly submitting to their teaching, find full scope for the exercise of the highest powers and the most exalted faculties which God has ever conferred upon any of the human race.

Christian theology, then, is the knowledge of God and of divine things, especially of Him who is the image of the invisible God, the Way, the Truth, and the Life, derived from the sacred Scriptures.

A full and adequate knowledge of these things, adequate, i.e. so far as God has revealed it and man is capable of receiving it, can reside only in a habile or capable subject, in one whose eyes have been opened, whose understanding has been enlightened, and whose nature has been renewed. It can come only from the operation of the Spirit of truth convincing men of the divine authority of the word, and enabling them to understand its meaning; and wherever and in so far as it has been conferred, it is to be employed for promoting God's glory and the eternal welfare of men, for advancing our own conformity to God's image and meetness for his presence, for diffusing scriptural views of God and Christ and the way of salvation in the world, and for leading men to embrace Christ, and to grow up in all things unto Him who is the head. It is to the attainment of this knowledge that your studies and prayers should now be directed. You seek it, because God has already in some measure opened your eyes and enabled you to discern something of its excellency, so that you desire to know more of it and to live more under its power. You seek it because you have been led to devote yourselves to the work of the ministry, and are conscious that you must have much more knowledge of God and his word and of the way of salvation, before you could venture to engage in the arduous and responsible work of instructing others in the mysteries of the kingdom. And you are resolved to seek it from God, because you know from his declaration and your past experience that you can obtain it nowhere else, and that he giveth liberally and upbraideth not; while at the same time you are determined to employ all the means, to improve all the opportunities, and to avail yourselves of all the assistance which there is any reason to expect that God will bless for attaining this end. These, I trust, are your views, your desires, and your purposes. If it be not so, there is but little reason to expect that you will make any real progress in the studies in which you are about to be engaged, or that without an entire change of heart and character you can become qualified for the work of the Christian ministry. But if you are influenced by these views and desires, and are enabled to carry out these purposes, then we can confidently hold out to you much pure satisfaction, much exalted enjoyment in the prosecution of your studies; and, if it please God to spare you, we can set before you a most encouraging prospect of abundant usefulness in the vineyard of the Lord. I would fain regard it as a presumption that you are in some measure influenced by such views and feelings as these, that you have resolved to cast in your lot with the Free Church of Scotland. ... We cannot hold out to you in the ministry of the Free Church the prospect of worldly honours and emoluments, of the favour or countenance of the wealthy and the powerful, or of the enjoyment of ease or idleness. With us you must be prepared to endure hardness, as good soldiers of Christ Jesus. But we can offer you a place in the ministry of a Church which, blessed be God, maintains the truth of God, and which therefore he may be reasonably expected to bless. We can hold out to you a wide field of usefulness, abundant opportunities of labouring in Christ's cause, in circumstances which afford an encouraging prospect of success. God has set before us an open door—no man can shut it; and, so far as we can

judge from the statements of God's word, the general principles of his moral government, and the indications of his providence, there is no reason to fear that he will speedily close it. When He who had struck Paul with blindness on his way to Damascus was directing Ananias to go and visit him, that he might receive his sight and be filled with the Holy Ghost, he assured him that Paul was "a chosen vessel to bear his name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel;" and then he added, "I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake" (Acts ix. 16); seemingly intending to represent both the sufferings themselves, and the previous intimation of them, as tokens of his favour and his kindness. And men who have any real love to the Saviour, and any honest zeal for his glory, will not shrink from his service because of the difficulties and hardships that may lie before them in the work to which they may be called.

I have said that I would fain regard it as a presumption that you have chosen the ministry from the right motives, and are resolved to prosecute your studies in a right spirit, that you have cast in your lot with the Free Church of Scotland; but I must warn you against imagining that this circumstance, or indeed anything that is external and applies to men in the mass, can afford any sufficient ground for establishing the soundness of your principles or the purity of your motives, the deceitfulness of sin, and the deceitfulness of men's hearts, are continually at work leading men to think more highly of themselves than they ought to think. Satan is continually exerting his utmost skill and activity to introduce into the ministry of the professing church men who will be in reality his servants and not the servants of Christ. He knows well that nothing tends so much to the advancement of his cause as an unconverted ministry. He will not fail to direct his efforts in this respect against the Free Church of Scotland, and we can scarcely cherish the hope that he will be altogether unsuccessful. There are some obvious advantages of which he will not fail to avail himself. There are some views and considerations which may induce men to join the Free Church of Scotland, of a more creditable and elevated kind than worldliness or selfishness in their proper forms, but which yet may be entirely separated from that fear of God which is the beginning of wisdom, from real godliness of heart and motive, from real love to the Saviour and regard to his honour. There cannot be a reasonable doubt that the principles for which the Free Church of Scotland has been called upon to testify and to suffer are in substance the same for which our forefathers laid down their lives, and are thus associated with circumstances and transactions which have always had a strong hold upon the hearts and feelings of Scottish Presbyterians, and which must appeal most powerfully to every patriotic and generous mind. Although, then, your preferring the Free Church may prove that you have triumphed over selfishness in some of its lower and grosser forms, and have subordinated them to some of the higher and nobler principles of our nature, it is still quite a possible thing that you may be deceiving yourselves as to your motives in entering upon the study of theology with a view to the office of the ministry, and in doing so in the circumstances in which you have placed yourselves. And I have adverted to this subject for the purpose of warning

you that you should not trust to mere presumptions and probabilities in judging of the state of your hearts, and the motives by which you are animated, but that, fully alive to the dangers of self-deceit, you search and try your ways, see that you have really devoted yourselves to Christ's service, and are now ready and willing to do whatever may be best fitted to prepare you for usefulness in his vineyard; to exert yourselves and to deny yourselves, that you may acquire all that knowledge, and form all those habits, which may prepare you for usefulness and respectability in the ministry; animated and encouraged amid all your studies and all your labours by a growing regard to the glory of God, by increasing love to the Lord Jesus Christ, and to the souls of perishing men.

Christian theology is, as we have explained to you, a knowledge of God and divine things as they are set before us in the sacred Scriptures. The principal exercise, therefore, by which this knowledge is to be acquired, so far as natural means or human agency is concerned, must be the investigation of the meaning of God's word, and the application of the ascertained meaning of its various statements to the formation of clear and distinct conceptions as to the mind and will of God with regard to all the different subjects which the statements of Scripture respect. This ought to be one of your principal exercises during the remainder of your lives, and the foundation of the knowledge and of the habits by which it may be successfully prosecuted should be laid during your attendance at this place. There are, however, some important topics which are in a certain sense preliminary to this. When the general nature and object of theology are explained and illustrated, the first questions that naturally occur are—What are these sacred Scriptures? Why ought they to be studied with such care and diligence? In what way and by what means may their meaning be most correctly and certainly ascertained?

The sacred Scripture contains a revelation from God; or, in other words, the Jewish and Christian religions are true; and not only so, but the Scriptures are themselves the word of God given by the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, and intended by him to be the exclusive rule of faith and practice. It is for these reasons that they ought to be studied, and that all appropriate means should be sedulously and unceasingly employed by which we may attain to a correct and certain knowledge of their meaning. It is with the investigation of these preliminary subjects that you are to be mainly occupied at this class during the first session of your theological studies—the evidences of Christianity, the canonicity and inspiration of the books of Scripture, their sufficiency, perfection and exclusive authority as the rule of faith and practice (a subject of more interest and importance in the present day than in some preceding generations, in consequence of the revival of Popish corruptions by many men who have not yet joined the Church of Rome); and the general principles of scriptural interpretation, the leading considerations that ought to be kept in view and acted upon in order that you may attain to a correct understanding of their meaning, and the best mode of applying them to the purpose they were intended to serve. I would not like to spend a whole session merely about the Scriptures without entering at all within them. I have it in contemplation to examine those portions of the sacred Scriptures which give us in-

formation concerning the Scriptures themselves, selecting these portions because the information they contain bears most directly upon the general subject of the course, but meaning to attempt to treat them so as to illustrate some of the principal rules according to which the general interpretation of Scripture ought to be conducted. In this way I hope to be able, in the course of the session, to bring before you, and to assist you in more fully understanding the import and the grounds of the truths we believe concerning the origin, the authority, the character and perfection, the objects and uses of the sacred Scriptures, and the way and manner in which they ought to be interpreted and applied, in order that having sound views upon all these points deeply impressed upon your minds, you may thus have a good foundation laid for all your future studies and labours in investigating, as fully as you can, the meaning of the word of God, and in seeking to have the fullest and most intelligent comprehension of all those leading truths with respect both to belief and to practice which, “according to the commandment of the everlasting God, have been made known unto all nations for the obedience of faith.”

If a high and solemn responsibility attaches to every one of you in beginning such a course of study as this, and preparing for such all occupation as the ministry of the gospel, how great must be the responsibility of those who are called to superintend your studies, and to assist you in the prosecution of them!

I trust I am not altogether insensible of the responsibility that attaches to me, and of my insufficiency for these things. But we all need to be more deeply humbled and more thoroughly abased, and to be stirred up to seek for ourselves, and for each other, that God would make his grace sufficient for us and perfect his strength in our weakness. It is my hope and expectation that the zeal and ardent with which you will engage in the prosecution of your studies, and the copious effusion, given in answer to our prayers, of the Spirit of him who alone teacheth savingly and to profit, will make you in a great measure independent of your instructor for your progress in the knowledge of divine things, but may at the same time make even the feeble and imperfect assistance which he may be able to render you not altogether unprofitable. I trust I can with some measure of sincerity adopt the language of the Apostle, and say, “For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and long-suffering with joyfulness” (Col. i. 9-11), and this result will most assuredly be realized if each one of you is prepared to adopt the language of the same Apostle on another occasion, and to say, “But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, and be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith: that I may know him, and the power of his resurrection,

and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death; if by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead” (Phil. iii. 7-11).