

Of the Holy Scriptures

As what I shall say hereafter concerning God, his essence, perfections, persons, works, and worship, and everything relative to him, will be taken out of the sacred scriptures, and proved by them; it will be necessary, before I proceed any further, to secure the ground I go upon; and establish the divine authority of them; and show that they are a perfect, plain, and sure rule to go by; and are the standard of faith and practice; and to be read constantly, studied diligently, and consulted with on all occasions.

By the Scriptures, I understand the books of the Old and of the New Testament. The books of the Old Testament, are the five books of Moses; Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, sometimes called the Pentateuch; the historical books, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, the two books of Samuel, the two of Kings, the two of Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther; the poetical books, Job, the Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Solomon's Song; the prophetic books, the larger Prophets, Isaiah, Jeremiah, with the Lamentations, Ezekiel, and Daniel; the lesser Prophets, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. The books of the New Testament the four Evangelists, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, and the Acts of the Apostles; the fourteen Epistles of the Apostle Paul; one of James; two of Peter; three of John; one of Jude, and the Revelation. These books are commonly called Canonical Scripture, because they have been always received by the church into the canon, or rule of faith. The books of the Old Testament, by the Jewish church; with which entirely agree Josephus's account of them, and the catalogue of them brought from the East by Melito; and the books of both Testaments agree with the account which Origen gives of them in his time, and which have always been acknowledged by the Christian church; and which testimony of both churches, respecting them, deserves our regard, and tends to corroborate their divine authority. Now these are the books which the apostle calls, all Scripture, or the whole of Scripture, said by him to be given by inspiration of God: which include not only the books of the Old Testament, which had been long in being in his time; but the books of the New Testament, which were all of them then written, excepting the book of the Revelation; since these words of his stand in an epistle supposed to be the last that was written by him; and however what is said by him is true of what might be written afterwards, for the uses he mentions, as well as before.

From these must be excluded, as un-canonical, the books that bear the name of Apocrypha; which are sometimes bound up with the Bible, to the great scandal and disgrace of it; for though there may be some things in them worthy to be read, as human writings; there is such a mixture of falsehood and impiety, that they cannot by any means be allowed to be placed upon an equality with the sacred scriptures. Likewise all such spurious books falsely ascribed to the apostles, or to some of the first Christians; as, The Gospel of the Infancy of Jesus; The Constitutions of the Apostles; Hermes's Pastor, &c., which carry in them manifest marks of imposture. To which may be added, all human and unwritten traditions, pleaded for by the papists; and all dreams and visions, and pretended revelations and prophecies, delivered out in later ages, by en-

thusiastic persons. Blessed be God, we have a more sure word of prophecy to attend unto; concerning which, I shall,

I. Observe the divine authority of the Scriptures, or show, that they are from God, or inspired by him; they lay in a claim to a divine original; and the claim is just, as will be seen. They are called the law, or doctrine of the Lord; the testimony of the Lord; the statutes of the Lord; the commandment of the Lord; the fear of the Lord; and the judgments of the Lord; by the Psalmist David, Psalm ix.7–9. And the prophets frequently introduce their prophecies and discourses, by saying, *The word of the Lord came* to them; and with a, *Thus saith the Lord*, Isa. i. 10; Jer ii. 1, 2. And our Lord expressly calls the scripture the word of God, John x. 35; as it is also called, Heb. Iv. 12. And which God, “at sundry times, and in divers manners, spake by the prophets;” and by his Son, and his apostles, in later times, chap. i. 1, 2: and is represented as the oracles of God, and may be safely consulted and depended on; and according to which men are to speak, Rom. iii. 2, 1 Pet. i. 11. But before I proceed any further, in the proof of the divinity of the sacred Scriptures, I shall premise the following things.

I. That when we say that the Scriptures are the word of God, or that this word is of God; we do not mean that it was spoken with an articulate voice by him; or written immediately by the finger of God: the law of the Decalogue, or the Ten Commands, indeed, were articulately spoken by him, and the writing of them was the writing of God, Exod. xx. 1, and xxxi. 18, and xxxii. 15; in which he might set an example to his servants, in after times, to write what might be suggested to them by him; that it might remain to be read: it is enough, that they were bid to write what he delivered to them, as Moses and others were ordered to do, Deut. xxxi. 19, Jer. xxx. 2, Hab. ii. 2, Rev. i. 11, 19; and what was ordered by the Lord to be written, it is the same as if it was written by himself; and especially since the penmen wrote as they were directed, dictated and inspired by him, and “spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost;” for they did not speak and write of their own head, and out of their own brains, nor according to their will, and when and what they pleased; but according to the will of God, and what he suggested to them, and when he inspired them, 2 Pet. i. 21.

II. Not all that is contained in the Scriptures is of God. Some are the words of others; yea, some are the speeches of Satan, and very bad ones too; as when he suggested that Job was not a sincere worshipper of God; and requested he might have leave to do an injury both to his property and to his person, Job, i. 9–11, and ii. 4–6. So when he tempted our Lord, and moved him to cast himself down from the pinnacle of the temple, and destroy himself; and not succeeding in that, urged him to fall down and worship him, Matt. iv. 5, 9. But now the penmen of these books, in which these speeches are, were moved and directed by the Lord to commit them to writing; so that though they themselves are not the word of God; yet that they are written, and are on record, is of God; and which was directed to, and done, to show the malice, pride, blasphemy, and impiety, of that wicked spirit. There are also speeches of bad men, as of Cain, Pharaoh, and others, ordered to be written, to discover the more the corruption of human nature; and even of good men, as of Moses, David, Jonah, and particularly the friends of Job, and their long discourses, in which they said not that which was right of God, as Job did; and he himself did not say in every speech of his what was right of God, though he said more, and what was righter than they did; and yet these speeches are on record, by divine order, to prove matters of fact, to show the weaknesses and frailties of the best of men. Some of the writers of thee Scriptures, as Moses, and the historical ones, being eye and ear witnesses of many things they wrote, could have wrote them of their own knowledge, and out of their own memories, and others they might take out of diaries, annals and journals, of their own and former times; yet in all they wrote they were under the im-

pulse and direction of God, what to leave, and what to take and insert into their writings, and transmit to posterity. So that all they wrote may be truly said to be by divine authority. In the writings and discourses of the apostle Paul, are several quotations out of heathen authors; one out of Aratus, when he was discoursing before the wise men at Athens; *as certain*, says he, *of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring*, Acts xvii. 28. Another out of Menander; *Evil communications corrupt good manners*, 1 Cor. xv. 33. And another out of Epimenides, a poet of Crete, a testimony of his against the Cretians, who said they were always liars, evil beasts, slow bellies; which were produced *ad hominem*, for greater conviction, and which he was directed to quote and write in his epistles and discourses, for that reason. So that though the words are not of God, yet that they were quoted and written, was of God.

III. Let it be observed, that not the matter of the Scriptures only, but the very words in which they are written, are of God. Some who are not for organical inspiration, as they call it, think that the sacred writers were only furnished of God with matter, and had general ideas of things given them, and were left to clothe them with their own words, and to use their own style, which they suppose accounts for the difference of style to be observed in them: but if this was the case, as it sometimes is with men, that they have clear and satisfactory ideas of things in their own minds, and yet are at a loss for proper words to express and convey the sense of them to others; so it might be with the sacred writers, if words were not suggested to them, as well as matter; and then we should be left at an uncertainty about the real sense of the Holy Spirit, if not led into a wrong one; it seems, therefore, most agreeable that words also, as well as matter, were given by divine inspiration; and as for difference of style, as it was easy with God to direct to the use of proper words, so he could accommodate himself to the style such persons were wont to use, and which was natural to them, and agreeable to their genius and circumstances; and this may be confirmed from the testimonies of the writers themselves: says David, one of the writers of the Old Testament, *The Spirit of the Lord spake by me, and his word was in my tongue*, 2 Sam. xxiii. 2. And the apostle Paul speaks of himself, and other inspired apostles of the New Testament, *Which things*, says he, *we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth*, 1 Cor. ii. 13; and it is the writing, or the word of God as written, that is, *by inspiration of God*, 2 Tim. iii. 16. But then,

IV. This is to be understood of the Scriptures, as in the original languages in which they were written, and not of translations, unless it could be thought, that the translators of the Bible into the several languages of the nations into which it has been translated, were under the divine inspiration also in translating, and were directed of God to the use of words they have rendered the original by; but this is not reasonable to suppose. The books of the Old Testament were written chiefly in the Hebrew language, unless some few passages of Jeremiah, Daniel, Ezra, and Esther, in the Chaldee language, and the New Testament in Greek; in which languages they can only be reckoned canonical and authentic; for this is like the charters and diplomas of princes, the wills or testaments of men, or any deeds made by them; only the original exemplar is authentic, and not translations, and transcriptions, and copies of them, though ever so perfect; and to the Bible, in its original languages, is every translation to be brought, and by it to be examined, tried and judged, and to be corrected and amended, and if this was not the case, we should have no certain and infallible rule to go by, for it must be either all the translations together, or some one of them; not all of them, because they agree not in all things; not one; for then the contest would be between one nation and another which it should be, whether English, Dutch, French, &c., and could one be agreed upon, it could not be read and understood by all; so the papists they plead for their Vulgate Latin version, which has been decreed authentic by the council of Trent, though

it abounds with innumerable errors and mistakes; nay, so far do they carry this affair, that they even assert that the Scriptures, in their originals, ought to submit to, and be corrected by their version, which is absurd and ridiculous. Let not now any be uneasy in their minds about translations on this account, because they are not upon an equality with the original text, and especially about our own; for as it has been the will of God, and appears absolutely necessary that so it should be, that the Bible should be translated into different languages, that all may read it, and some particularly may receive benefit by it; he has taken care, in his providence, to raise up men capable of such a performance, in various nations, and particularly in ours; for whenever a set of men have been engaged in this work, as were in our nation, men well skilled in the languages, and partakers of the grace of God, of sound principles, and of integrity and faithfulness, having the fear of God before their eyes; they have never failed of producing a translation worthy of acceptance, and in which, though they have mistook some words and phrases, and erred in some lesser and lighter matters, yet not so as to affect any momentous article of faith or practice, and therefore such translations as ours may be regarded as the rule of faith. And if any scruple should remain on the minds of any on this account, it will be sufficient to remove it, when it is observed, that the Scriptures, in our English translation, have been blessed of God, either by reading them in it, or by explaining them according to it, for the conversion, comfort, and edification of thousands and thousands. And the same may be said of all others, so far as they agree with the original, that they are the rule of faith and practice, and alike useful.

Here I cannot but observe the amazing ignorance and stupidity of some persons, who take it into their heads to decry learning and learned men; for what would they have done for a Bible, had it not been for them as instruments? and if they had it, so as to have been capable of reading it, God must have wrought a miracle for them; and continued that miracle in every nation, in every age, and to every individual; I mean the gift of tongues, in a supernatural way, as was bestowed upon the apostles on the day of Pentecost; which there is no reason in the world ever to have expected. Bless God, therefore, and be thankful that God has, in his providence, raised up such men to translate the Bible into the mother tongue of every nation, and particularly into ours; and that he still continues to raise up such who are able to defend the translation made, against erroneous persons, and enemies of the truth; and to correct and amend it in lesser matters, in which it may have failed, and clear and illustrate it by their learned notes upon it. Having premised these things, I now proceed to prove the claim of the Scriptures to a divine authority, which may be evinced from the following things.

I. From the subject-matter of them.—1. In general there is nothing in them unworthy of God; nothing contrary to his truth and faithfulness, to his purity and holiness, to his wisdom and goodness, or to any of the perfections of his nature; there is no falsehood nor contradiction in them; they may with great propriety be called, as they are, The Scriptures of truth, and the word of truth, Dan. x. 21, Eph i. 13. There is nothing impious or impure, absurd or ridiculous in them; as in the Al-koran of Mahomet; which is stuffed with impurities and impieties, as well as with things foolish and absurd: or as in the Pagan treatises of their gods; which abound with tales of their murders, adulteries, and thefts; and the impure rites and ceremonies, and inhuman sacrifices used in the worship of them.—2. The things contained in the Scriptures are pure and holy: the Holy Spirit dictated them, holy men spoke and wrote them, and they are justly called holy Scriptures, Rom. i. 2, and plainly show they came from the holy God. The doctrines of them are holy; they are doctrines according to godliness, and tend to promote it; they teach and influence men to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly: they are indeed, by some ignorant persons, charged with licentiousness; but the charge, as it is false, it is easily

removed, by observing the nature of the doctrines, and the effects of them; the precepts the Scriptures enjoin, and the worship they require, are strictly holy; the law part of them is holy, just, and good, Rom. vii. 12. It is holy in its own nature, and requires nothing but what is for the good of men, what is but a reasonable service to God, and what is just between man and man; it forbids whatever is evil, strikes at all sorts of sins, and sets them in a just light, exposes and condemns them. And hence it is that there is in natural men, whose carnal minds are enmity to God, such a backwardness, yea, an aversion to reading the Scriptures; because the doctrines and precepts of them are so pure and holy; they choose to read an idle romance, an impure novel, or any profane writings and histories, rather than the Bible; and from whence may be drawn no inconsiderable argument in favour of their being of God. The style of the Scriptures is pure and holy, chaste and clean, free from all levity and obscenity, and from every thing that might be offensive to the ear of the chaste and pious. And there are remarkable instances in the marginal readings of some passages in the Hebrew text, to prevent this; and care should be taken in all translations, to make use of language neat and clean; and keep up, as much as may be, to the original purity of the Scriptures.—3. There are some things recorded in the Scriptures, which could never have been known but by revelation from God himself; as particularly, with respect to the creation of the world, and the original of mankind; that the world was made out of nothing; when made, how, and in what form and order, and how long it was in making; who were the first parents of mankind, when, how, and of what made; hence, without this revelation, men have run into strange, absurd, and extravagant notions about these things. Yea, the Scriptures inform us what was done in eternity, which none but God himself could reveal, and make known to men; as the choice of men in Christ to everlasting salvation, which was from the beginning; not of their being, nor of their conversion, nor of time; but before time or they or the earth were, even “before the foundation of the world,” Eph. i. 4. And also the council held between the divine persons, concerning the salvation of man; for as there was a consultation held about making him; so about saving him; which may be called the council of peace, Zech. vi. 13. When “God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself,” and the scheme of peace and reconciliation, and plan of salvation, were formed and agreed upon; so the covenant of grace made with Christ from eternity, on the behalf of the chosen ones; whose “goings forth in it were of old, from everlasting;” covenanting with his Father for them, and agreeing to be their Surety and Saviour; to become incarnate, and obey and suffer for them, and so work out the salvation of them; representing their persons and taking the charge and care of them, and of all blessings of grace given, and of all promises made to them, in him, before the world began; in which covenant he was set up as Mediator, “from everlasting, or ever the earth was,” Prov. viii. 22, 23, Mic. v. 2, 2 Tim. i. 9, Eph. i. 3, 4. All which could never have been known unless God himself had revealed them.—4. There are some things recorded in the Scriptures as future, which God only could foreknow would be, and foretell with certainty that they should be; and which have accordingly come to pass, and proves the revelation to be of God. Some of them relate to particular persons, and contingent events; as Josiah, who was prophesied of by name, as to be born to the house of David, three or four hundred years before his birth, and what he should do; “offer up the idolatrous priests on Jeroboam’s altar, and burn men’s bones on it;” all which exactly came to pass, see 1 Kings xiii. 2, compared with 2 Kings xxiii. 17–20. Cyrus, king of Persia, also was prophesied of by name, more than two hundred years before his birth, and what he should do; what conquests he should make, what immense riches he should possess; and that he should let the captive Jews go free, without price or reward, and give orders for the rebuilding their temple; all which was punctually fulfilled, Isa. xliv. 28, and xlv. 1–3, 13, see Ezra i. 1–4; others relate to kingdoms and states, and what should

befall them; as the Egyptians, Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Assyrians, Babylonians, and others; of whose destruction Isaiah and Jeremiah prophesied, and who now are no more, have not so much as a name on earth: and particularly many things are foretold concerning the Jews; as their descent into Egypt, abode and bondage there, and coming from thence with great riches; which was made known to their great ancestor Abraham, before they were, Gen. xv. 14, see Exod. xii. 35–41, their captivity in Babylon, and return from thence after seventy years, Jer. xxix. 10, 11, see Dan. ix. 2, and all their miseries and afflictions in their last destruction, and present state, are prophetically described in Deut. xxviii. and their exact case, for about seventeen hundred years, is expressed in a few words; as well as their future conversion is prophesied of, Hos. iii. 4, 5. But especially the prophecies concerning Christ, are worthy of notice; his incarnation and birth of a virgin; the place where he should be born; of what nation, tribe, and family; his sufferings and death; his burial, resurrection, ascension to heaven, and session at the right hand of God; all which are plainly pointed out in prophecy; and which, with many other things relating to him, have had their exact accomplishment in him. To which might be added, predictions of the calling of the Gentiles, by many of the prophets; and the abolition of paganism in the Roman empire; the rise, power, and ruin of antichrist; which are particularly spoken of in the book of the Revelation; great part of which prophetic book has been already fulfilled.—5. There are some things in the Scriptures, which, though not contrary to reason, yet are above the capacity of men ever to have made a discovery of, as the Trinity of persons in the Godhead; whose distinct mode of subsisting is mysterious to us; the eternal, generation of the Son of God, which is ineffable by us; his incarnation and birth of a virgin, under the power of the Holy Ghost, which is wonderful and amazing; the union of the human nature to his divine person; which is, “without controversy, the great mystery of godliness:” the regeneration of men by the Spirit of God, and the manner of his operation on the souls of men; which, on hearing of, made a master of Israel say, “How can these things be?” and the resurrection of the same body at the last day, reckoned by the Gentiles incredible; and which things, though revealed, are not to be accounted for upon the principles of nature and reason.—6. The things contained in the Scriptures, whether doctrines or facts, are harmonious; the doctrines, though delivered at sundry times, and in divers manners, are all of a piece, no yea and nay, no discord and disagreement among them; the two Testaments “are like two young roes that are twins;” to which some think they are compared in Cant. iv. 5, and vii. 3, and to the Cherubim over the mercy-seat, which were of one beaten piece, were exactly alike, and looked to one another, and both to the mercy-seat; a type of Christ, who is the foundation of the apostles and prophets, in which they unite, and both agree to lay; the apostle Paul said none other things than what Moses and the prophets did say should be. And as to historical facts, what seeming contradictions may be observed in any of them, are easily reconciled, with a little care, diligence, and study; and some of these arise from the carelessness of transcribers putting one word or letter for another; and even these instances are but few, and not very material; and which never affect any article of faith or practice: such care has Divine Providence taken of these peculiar and important writings, which, with the harmony of them, show them to be of God.

II. The style and manner in which the Scriptures are written, is a further evidence of their divine original; the majesty in which they appear, the authoritative manner in which they are delivered; not asking, but demanding, attention and assent unto them; and which commands reverence and acceptance of them; the figures used to engage hereunto are inimitable by creatures; and such as would be daring and presumptuous for any but God to use, with whom is terrible majesty; such as, *Hear, O heavens*, and *I will speak*, Deut. xxxii. 1, Isa. i. 2, the sublimity of the

style is such as exceeds all other writings: Longinus, a heathen orator, who wrote upon the *Sublime*, admired some passages in the writings of Moses, particularly Gen. i. 3. That early composition, the book of Job, abounds with such strong and lofty expressions as are not to be found in human writings, especially the speeches Jehovah himself delivered out of the whirlwind, chap. xxxviii, xxxix, xl, and xli, the book of Psalms is full of bright figures and inimitable language, particularly see Psalm xviii. 7–15, and xxix. 3–10, and cxiii. 3–8, and cxxxix. 7–12. The prophecies of Isaiah are fraught with a rich treasure of divine elocution, which surpasses all that is to be met with in the writings of men; and it is remarkable that in some of the inspired writers, who have been bred up in a rustic manner, are found some of the most grand images, and lively picturesque, and highest flights of language, as in Amos the herdman, chap. iv. 13, and ix. 2, 6.

III. Another argument for the divine authority of the Scriptures may be taken from the penmen and writers of them.—1. Many of these were men of no education, in a low station of life, and were taken from the flock, or from the herd, or from their nets, or other mean employments; and what they wrote, both as to matter and manner, were above and beyond their ordinary capacities, and therefore must be of God; what they wrote could not be of themselves; but they “spake and wrote as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.”—2. They lived in different times and places, and were of different interests and capacities, and in different conditions and circumstances; and yet they were all of the same sentiment, they speak and write the same things, deliver out the same truths and doctrines, and enjoin the same moral duties of religion, and the same positive precepts, according to the different dispensations under which they were; and this shows that they were dictated, and influenced in all, by the same Spirit of God.—3. They were holy and good men, partakers of the grace of God; and therefore could never give into an imposture, nor deliver out a known lie, nor obtrude a falsehood upon the world.—4. They appear to be plain, honest, and faithful men; they conceal not their own failings and infirmities; so Moses published his own weaknesses and inadvertencies, and spared not the blemishes of his family; not of his more remote ancestor Levi, in the case of the Shechemites; nor of his immediate parents, their illegal marriage; nor of his favourite people the Israelites, their rebellion and obstinacy, and idolatry: and the same may be observed of other inspired writers.—5. They were disinterested men; they sought not popular applause, nor worldly wealth, nor to aggrandize themselves and their families. Moses, when it was offered to him, by the Lord, to make of him a great nation, and cut off the people of Israel for their sins, refused it more than once; preferring the public good of that people to his own advantage; and though he was king in Jeshurun, he was not careful to have any of his posterity to succeed him in his office; and though the priesthood was conferred on Aaron his brother, and his sons, yet no other provision was made for his own family, than to attend the lower services of the tabernacle in common with the rest of his tribe: and of this disposition were the apostles of Christ, who left all, and followed him; and sought not the wealth of men, nor honour from them; but, on the contrary, exposed themselves to reproach, poverty, vexation, and trouble; yea, to persecution, and death itself; which they would never have done, had they not been fully satisfied of their mission of God, and of their message from him; and therefore could not be deterred from speaking and writing in his name, by the terrors and menaces of men, and by all the afflictions, bonds, and persecution, and death in every shape, which awaited them. In short, the writers of the Scriptures, seem to be men that neither could be imposed upon themselves, nor sought to impose on others; nor would it have been easy, had they been bad men, to have succeeded, had they attempted it.

IV. Another argument may be drawn from the many wonderful effects the sacred writings, attended with a divine power and influence, have had upon the hearts and lives of men.

Many have been converted from error, superstition, and idolatry, and from a vicious course of life, to embrace and profess the truth, and to live a holy life and conversation, upon reading the Scriptures, or hearing them explained; and even some of great natural parts and learning, who could not easily be prevailed upon to relinquish former tenets and practices, had they not had full and clear conviction of them. This “Word of God has been quick and powerful, sharper than a two-edged sword;” it has pierced and penetrated into the recesses of the heart, and laid open the secrets of it; it has been the means of enlightening the mind, quickening the soul, regenerating and sanctifying the heart, and of producing faith, and every other grace in it, and of strengthening, comforting, and reviving the spirits of the people of God when in distress, by afflictions, or Satan’s temptations; so that every good man has a testimony within himself of its divine authority. see 1 John v. 9, 10.

V. The testimony bore to the Scriptures by miracles, abundantly confirm the genuineness of them, and that they are of God; such as were done by Moses, and the prophets of the Old Testament, and by the apostles of the New; even such as are above and contrary to the laws of nature, and are beyond the power of a creature to perform, and which only omnipotence itself could work: now these God would never do to establish the character of impostors, or to confirm a lie; which yet he has done to witness the truth of divine revelation; see Mark xvi. 20, Heb. ii. 3, 4.

VI. The hatred and opposition of men, and the enmity of devils, to them, afford no inconsiderable argument in favour of the divinity of them; for were they of men, they would not have such a disgust at them, and disapprobation of them, and make such opposition to them: by these are to be known the Spirit of truth, and the spirit of error; what is of the world, and merely human, is approved by the men of the world; but what is of God is rejected, 1 John iv. 5, 6; and if these writings were of Satan, and the work of forgery, imposture, and deceit, that wicked spirit would never have shown such despite unto them, nor have taken such pains to tempt men, and prevail upon them not to read them; and to persuade others to use their utmost efforts to corrupt or destroy them, and root them out of the world.

VII. The awful judgment of God on such who have despised them, and have endeavoured to destroy them, are no mean evidence that they are of God; who hereby has shown his resentment of such conduct and behaviour; which might be illustrated by the instances of Antiochus Epiphanes, king of Syria, who cut to pieces the copies of the book of the law wherever he found them, and burnt them, and put to death all with whom they were, 1 Maccab. i. 59, 60; this man died of a violent disorder in his bowels, his body was covered with worms, his flesh flaked off, and was attended with an intolerable stench, 2 Maccab. ix. 5–9; and of Dioclesian, the Roman emperor, who by an edict, ordered all the sacred books to be burnt, that, if possible, he might root Christianity out of the world; and once fancied that he had done it; but when he found he had not accomplished his design, through madness and despair, in the height of his imperial glory, abdicated the empire, and retired to a private life, and at last poisoned himself; the one showed a despite to the books of the Old Testament, the other more especially to the books of the New Testament; and both were highly resented by the divine Being, who hereby showed himself the author of both. Many more instances might be produced, but these may suffice.

VIII. The antiquity and continuance of these writings may be improved into an argument in favour of them: Tertullian says, “That which is most ancient is most true.” Men from the beginning had knowledge of God, and of the way of salvation, and in what manner God was to be worshipped; which could not be without a revelation; though for some time it was not delivered in writing. The antediluvian patriarchs had it, and so the post-diluvian ones, to the times of Moses; whose writings are the first, and are more ancient than any profane writings, by many hun-

dreds of years; the most early of that sort extant are the poems of Homer and Hesiod, who flourished about the times of Isaiah; and the divine writings have been preserved notwithstanding the malice of men and devils, some of them some thousands of years, when other writings are lost and perished.

To which may be added, that the Scriptures receive no small evidence of the authority of them, from the testimonies of many heathen writers agreeing with them, with respect to the chronology, geography, and history of them; as concerning the creation of the world, Noah's flood, the tower of Babel, the confusion of languages, the peopling the earth by the sons of Noah, the burning of Sodom and Gomorrah; with many other things respecting the people of Israel, their origin, laws, &c.¹ I go on to consider,

II. The perfection of the Scriptures. When we assert the perfection of them, we do not mean that they contain a perfect account of all that God has done from the beginning of time, in the dispensations of his providence in the world, and in the distributions of his grace to the sons of men; though they relate much of the state and condition of the church of God in all ages, and as it will be to the end of time. Nor that they contain all the discourses, exhortations, admonitions, cautions, and counsels of the prophets, delivered to the people of Israel, in the several ages of time: nor all the sermons of the apostles, which they preached to the Jews, and among the Gentiles: nor are all that were said and done by our Lord Jesus Christ recorded in them: there were many signs done by him which are not written, which if they should be written, as the evangelist observes, *even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written*, John xx. 30, and xxi. 25. But then they relate all things necessary to salvation, every thing that ought to be believed and done; and are a complete, perfect standard of faith and practice: which may be proved,

I. From the Author of them, who is God; they are the word of God, and are "given by inspiration of God;" as is asserted in them, and has been clearly shown. Now since God is the author of them, who is a perfect Being, in whom is no darkness at all; not of ignorance, error, and imperfection; they coming from him, must be free from everything of that kind; He is a rock, and his work is perfect; as his works of creation, providence, and redemption; so this work of the Scriptures.

II. From the name they go by, a Testament. We commonly divide the Scriptures into the Books of the Old Testament, and the Books of the New Testament; and that there was a first and a second Testament, an old and a new one, is plainly intimated, Heb. ix. 15. Now a man's testament, or will, contains the whole of his will and pleasure, concerning the disposition of his estate to whomsoever he pleases, or it is not properly his will and testament; a man's testament, if it be confirmed, as the apostle observes, *no man disannulleth or addeth thereto*, Gal. iii. 15. Such the Scriptures are; they contain the whole will of God, about the disposition of the blessings of grace, and of the heavenly inheritance, to those who are appointed by him heirs; and being ratified and confirmed by the blood of Christ, are so sure and firm as not to be disannulled, and so perfect that nothing can be added thereunto.

III. From the epithet of perfect being expressly given unto them; *The law of the Lord is perfect*, Psalm xix. 7, which is to be understood, not of the Decalogue, or Ten Commands, but of the doctrine of the Lord, as the phrase signifies; even what was delivered in the sacred writings extant in the times of David; and if it was perfect then as to the substance of it, then much more must it appear so by the accession of the prophets, and the books of the New Testament since, in which there are plainer and clearer discoveries of the mind and will of God.

¹See Gale's Court of the Gentiles.

IV. From the essential parts of them, the Law and Gospel; to which two heads the substance of them may be reduced. The Law is a perfect rule of duty; it contains what is the *good, acceptable, and perfect will of God* Rom. xii. 2. What he would have done, or not done; the whole duty of man, both towards God and man; all is comprehended in these two commands, *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, &c. and thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself* Matt. xxii. 37–40. The Gospel is the perfect law, or doctrine of liberty, the apostle James speaks of, chap. i. 25, which proclaims the glorious liberty of the children of God by Christ; and it is perfect, it treats of perfect things; of perfect justification by Christ; of full pardon of sin through his blood, and complete salvation in him; and contains a perfect plan of truth; every truth, “as it is in Jesus;” all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge: It is the whole, or all the counsel of God, concerning the spiritual and eternal salvation of men, Acts xx. 27.

V. From the integral parts of them; the Scriptures, containing all the books that were written by divine inspiration. The books of the Old Testament were complete and perfect in the times of Christ; not one was wanting, nor any mutilated and corrupted. The Jews, he says, have Moses and the prophets; and he himself, beginning at Moses, and all the prophets, *expounded in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself*, Luke xvi. 24, and xxiv. 27. So that they had not only the five books of Moses, but all the prophets, and all the Scriptures of the Old Testament: nay, he affirms, that *till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled*, Matt. v. 18. The Jews had the oracles of God committed to their care, Rom. iii. 2, and they have been faithful keepers of them; even some of them to superstition and scrupulous nicety, numbering not only the books and sections, but also the verses, and even the words and letters: and there never was, nor now is, any reason to be given why they had corrupted, or would corrupt, any part of the Old Testament; on the coming of Christ it was not their interest to do it; and even before that it was translated into the Greek tongue, by which they would have been detected; and after the coming of Christ they could not do it if they would, copies of it being in the hands of Christians; who were able to correct what they should corrupt, had they done it: and whatever attempts may have been made by any under the Christian name, to corrupt some copies of either Testament, they may be, and have been detected; or whatever mistakes may be made, through the carelessness of transcribers of copies, they are to be corrected by other copies, which God, in his providence, has preserved; and, as it seems, for such purposes: so that we have a perfect canon, or rule of faith and practice. It is objected to the perfection of the books of the Old Testament, that the books of Nathan, Gad, and Iddo, the prophets mentioned therein, are lost; but then it should be proved that these were inspired writings, and, indeed, that they are lost; they may be the same, as some think, with the books of Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles. And it is also objected to those of the New Testament, that there was an epistle from Laodicea, Col. iv. 16, and another to the Corinthians, distinct from those we have 1 Cor. v. 9, neither of them now extant: as to the first, that is not an epistle to Laodicea, but from it; and may refer to one of the epistles, we have, written by the apostle Paul, when at that place: and as to that to the Corinthians, it does not appear to be another and distinct, but the same he was then writing: but admitting, for argument sake, though it is not to be granted, that some book or part of the inspired writings is lost; let it be proved, if it can, that any essential article of faith is lost with it; or that there is any such article of faith wanting in the books we have: if this cannot be proved, then, notwithstanding the pretended defect, we have still a perfect rule of faith; which is what is contended for.

VI. This may be further evinced from the charge that is given, “not to add unto, nor diminish from, any part of the sacred writings, law or gospel:” this is strictly enjoined the Israelites to observe, with respect to the law, and the commandments of it, given them by Moses Deut. iv. 2,

and xii. 32. And with respect to the gospel, the apostle Paul says, *Though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you, than that which we have preached unto you—and ye have received, let him be accursed*, Gal. i. 8, 9). And the wise man, or Agur, says of the Scriptures in his time, Every word of God is pure—add thou not unto his words. And the apostle and evangelist John, closes the canon of the Scripture with these remarkable words, *If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book; and if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, &c.* Rev. xxii. 18, 19. Now if there is nothing superfluous in the Scriptures, to be taken from them; and nothing defective in them, which requires any addition to them: then they must be perfect.

VII. This may be argued from the sufficiency of them to answer the ends and purposes for which they are written. As, *for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, and for instruction in righteousness*, 2 Tim. iii. 16; they are sufficiently profitable and useful for doctrine; there is no spiritual truth, nor evangelical doctrine, but what they contain; they are called the Scriptures of truth; not only because they come from the God of truth, and whatsoever is in them is truth; but they contain all truth; which the Spirit of God, the dictator of them, guides into, and that by means of them; see Dan. x. 21; John xvi. 13; every doctrine is to be confirmed and established by them; our Lord proved the things concerning himself, his person, office, sufferings, and death, by them, Luke xxiv. 25–27; the apostle Paul reasoned out of the Scriptures, in confirmation and defence of the doctrines he taught; opening and alleging, that is, from the Scriptures, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus is Christ whom he preached; and, indeed, he said none other things than what Moses and the prophets did say should be, and which he was able to prove from thence, Acts xvii. 2, 3, and xxvi. 22, 23. Every doctrine proposed by men, to the assent of others, is not immediately to be credited; but to be tried and proved, and judged of by the holy Scriptures, which are to be searched, as they were by the Bereans, to see whether those things be so or no; and being found agreeable to them, they are to be believed, and held fast; *for to the law and to the testimony; if men speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them*, Isa. viii. 20); see 1 John iv. 1; 1 Thess. v. 21, Acts xvii. 11; and these are serviceable for reproof, for the detection, confutation, and conviction of error: thus Christ confuted the error of the Sadducees by the Scriptures, Matt. xxii. 29, 30, and the apostles, with these, warred a good warfare; these were their spiritual weapons, the word of God is the sword of the Spirit they used in fighting the good fight of faith against false teachers; by sound doctrine, fetched from thence, they were able to convince and stop the mouths of gainsayers: there never was an error, or heresy, broached in the world yet, but what has been confuted by the Scriptures; and it is not possible that anyone can arise in opposition to “the faith once delivered,” but what may receive its refutation from them. They are also of use for correction of every sin, internal or external; of heart, lip, and life, secret or open; sins of omission or commission; all are forbidden, reprov'd, and condemned by the law of God; which says, *Thou shalt not covet, nor do this, and that, and the other iniquity*, Rom. vii. 7, and xiii. 9. And the gospel agrees with the law herein; and what is contrary to the law, is to sound doctrine; the gospel of the grace of God, teaches to “deny ungodliness and worldly lusts,” 1 Tim. i. 9–11, Tit. ii. 11, 12. There is not a sin that can be named, but what the Scriptures inveigh against, forbid and correct. And another end answered by them is, that they are for instruction in righteousness, in every moral duty of religion, and in every positive precept of God, according to the different dispensations; they instruct in everything of a moral or positive nature, and direct to observe all that is

commanded of God and Christ; and now writings by which all such ends are answered, must needs be perfect and complete.

The Scriptures are sufficient to make *a man of God perfect, and thoroughly furnish him unto all good works*, 2 Tim. iii. 17. Not a private good man only, but one in a public character and office; a prophet, a preacher, and minister of the word; in which sense the phrase is used, both in the Old and New Testament, 1 Sam. ix. 6, 7, 1 Tim. vi. 11. An acquaintance with these fits him for the work of the ministry, and furnishes him with sound doctrine, to deliver out to the edification of others; by means of these he becomes “a scribe well instructed in the kingdom of God; and to be able to bring out of his treasure things new and old:” and if they are able to make such a man perfect, they must be perfect themselves.

Another use of the Scriptures, and an end to be, and which is, answered by them, is not only the learning and instruction of private men, as well as those of a public character; but to make them patient under afflictions, and comfort them in them, and give hope of deliverance out of them, as well as of eternal salvation hereafter; for the apostle says, *Whatsoever things were written aforetime, were written for our learning; that we, through patience and comfort of the Scriptures, might have hope*, Rom. xv. 4. Nor is there any afflictive circumstance a good man can come into, but there is a promise in the word of God suitable to him in it; and which may be a means of enlivening, cheering, and comforting him, Psal. cxix. 49, 50; yea, the Scriptures are written to promote and increase the spiritual joy of God’s people, and that that joy might be full, and therefore must be full and perfect themselves, 1 John i. 3, 4.

VIII. The Scriptures are able to make a man *wise unto salvation*, 2 Tim. iii. 15. One part of them being the gospel of salvation; which points out to men the way of salvation; gives an account of Christ, the author of it, and of the salvation itself wrought out by him; and describes the persons that have an interest in it, and shall enjoy it; and who, through the grace of God, are made wise enough to see their need of it, seek after it, and embrace it; for it is not barely by reading the word they become so wise; but through the Spirit of wisdom and revelation opening their eyes to see what is contained in it, and applying it to them; whereby the gospel becomes “the power of God unto salvation,” to them. In short, the Scriptures contain all things in them necessary to be believed, unto salvation; and, indeed, they are written for this end, that men *might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing, they might have life through his name*, John xx. 31; and hereby, under a divine influence and blessing, they come to have the knowledge of God and Christ, and of God in Christ; which is the beginning, earnest, and pledge of eternal life, John xvii. 3. I proceed,

III. To prove the perspicuity of the Scriptures; for since they are a rule of faith and practice, they should be clear and plain, as they are: not that they are all equally clear and plain; some parts of them, and some things in them, are dark and obscure; but then by comparing spiritual things with spiritual, or those more dark passages with those that are clearer, they may be plainly understood. Moreover, the light of the Scriptures has been a growing one; it was but dim under the dispensation of the law of Moses; it became more clear through the writings of the prophets; but most clear under the gospel dispensation; where, “as in a glass, we behold, with open face, the glory of the Lord;” and of divine things: though in the gospel dispensation, and in such clear writings and epistles as those of the apostle Paul, who used great plainness of speech, there are some things *hard to be understood*, see 2 Cor. iii. 12–18, 2 Pet. iii. 16. And this is so ordered on purpose to remove all contempt and loathing of the Scriptures, and to humble the arrogance and pride of men, to engage reverence of them, and to excite attention to them, and to put men on searching them with close study, application, and prayer. Nor is every doctrine of the Scriptures

expressed in so many words; as the doctrine of the Trinity of Persons in the Godhead; the eternal generation of the Son of God, his incarnation and satisfaction, &c. but then the things themselves signified by them, are clear and plain; and there are terms and phrases answerable to them; or they are to be deduced from thence by just and necessary consequences. Nor are the Scriptures clear and plain to everyone that reads them; they are a sealed book, which neither learned nor unlearned men can understand and interpret without the Spirit of God, the dictator of them; the natural man, by the mere light of nature, and dint of reason, though he may understand the grammatical sense of words, yet he does not understand the meaning of them, at least in a spiritual way, with application to himself; and so far as he has any notion of them, he has a disgust and contempt of them, for the most part; yet they are so fully expressed and clearly revealed, that if the gospel is hid to any, it is to those that perish, who are left to the native darkness of their minds, and to be “blinded by the god of this world,” that the glorious light of the gospel might not shine into them, see Isa. xxxix. 11, 12, 1 Cor. ii. 14, 2 Cor. iv. 3, 4. But then the Scriptures are plain to them that have a spiritual understanding; who are spiritual men, and judge all things; “to whom it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom.” What are more clear and plain than the precepts of the law, commanding one thing to be done, and forbidding the doing of another? in what plain language are they expressed, Thou shalt have no other gods before me, &c. Thou shalt not kill, &c.? And how clearly is asserted the great and fundamental doctrine of the gospel, “That salvation is alone by Jesus Christ, through the free grace of God; and not of the works of men?” and so every thing necessary of belief unto salvation. In short, they are like a full and deep river, in which the lamb may walk, and the elephant swim, in different places.

The perspicuity of the Scriptures may be urged,—1. From the author of them, God, as has been proved, who is the Father of lights; and therefore what comes from him must be light and clear, in whom is no darkness at all.—2. From the several parts of them, and what they are compared unto. The law, or legal part of them, is represented by things which are light, and give it; *The commandment is a lamp, and the law is light*, Prov. vi. 23. The commandments of the law, as before observed, are clearly expressed; and are a plain direction to men what to do, or shun; the same David says of the word of the Lord in general and more explicitly, *Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path*, Psalm cxix. 105, directing how to walk and act. The evangelical part of the Scriptures, or the gospel, is compared to a glass, in which may be clearly beheld, the glory of the Lord; of his person, offices, grace, and righteousness; and every one of the glorious truths and doctrines of it, 2 Cor. iii. 18. Hence the ministers of the word are called the light of the world; because by opening and explaining the Scriptures, they are instruments of enlightening men into the will of God, and the mysteries of his grace, Matt. v. 14.—3. From other testimonies of Scripture, particularly from Deut. xxx. 11–14. *For this commandment, which I command thee this day, is not hidden from thee; neither is it far off—it is not in heaven—neither is it beyond the sea—but the word is very nigh unto thee; in thy mouth, and in thy heart, that thou mayest do it.* And if it is not hidden, nor at a distance and inaccessible, then it must be open, and the knowledge of it to be come at; and this is to be understood, not only of the law of Moses, but more especially of the gospel, the word of faith, preached by the apostles, as the apostle Paul interprets it, Rom. x. 6–8. And the whole of Scripture is the sure word of prophecy, whereunto men do well to take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place: and so the means of dispelling the darkness of ignorance, error, and unbelief; and of giving light all around, both with respect to doctrine and duty, see 2 Pet. i. 19.—4. From exhortations to all sorts of people to read them, and who are commended for so doing. Not only the kings of Israel were to read the law of the Lord, but all that people in general; and there was a certain time of the year for them to assemble to-

gether to hear it read, men, women, children, and strangers; but if it was not plain and clear, and easy to be understood, it would have been to no purpose for them to attend it, Deut. xvii. 19, and xxxi. 11–13. Our Lord advises to “search the Scriptures;” which supposes them legible and intelligible, John v. 39; and the Bereans are commended as more noble than those of Thessalonica, because they searched the Scriptures daily, and compared what they heard with them; that they might know whether they were right or no, Acts xvii. 11; see Rev. i. 3.—5. From all sorts of persons being capable of reading them, and hearing them read, so as to understand them. Thus in the times of Nehemiah and Ezra, persons of every sex and age, who were at years of maturity, and had the exercise of their rational faculties, had the law read unto them, Neh. viii. 3; and Timothy, from a child, knew the holy Scriptures, 2 Tim. iii. 15; believers, and regenerate persons of every rank and degree, have knowledge of them, whether fathers, young men, or little children, 1 John ii. 12–14. Nor is the public preaching of the word, and the necessity of it, to be objected to all this; since that is, as for conversion, so for greater edification and comfort, and for establishment in the truth, even though it is known; and besides, serves to lead into a larger knowledge of it, and is the ordinary means of guiding into it, and of arriving to a more perfect acquaintance with it, 1 Cor. xiv. 3. 2 Pet. i. 12. Acts viii. 30, 31. Eph. iv. 11–13. So that it may be concluded, upon the whole, that the Scriptures are

A sure, certain, and infallible rule to go by, with respect to things both to be believed and done: a rule they are, Gal. vi. 16. And since they are of Divine authority, and are perfect and plain, they are a sure rule, and to be depended on; *The testimony of the Lord is sure*, Psalm xix. 7, and a more sure word of prophecy than all others whatever, 2 Pet. i. 19; these are the witness of God, and therefore greater than man’s; and to be believed before any human testimony, 1 John v. 9, yea, must be reckoned infallible, since they are the Scriptures of truth, and not only contain what is truth, and nothing but truth in them: but have a true, even a Divine testimony borne unto them, and come from the God of truth, who cannot lie, Dan. x. 21, Tit i. 2. They are the judge of all religious controversies, to which all are to be brought, and by them determined; according to these spiritual men, who have their senses exercised, to discern between good and evil, try and judge all things. The Scripture is the best interpreter of Scripture, or the Spirit of God therein; nor are the church or its pastors, nor councils and popes, the infallible interpreters thereof; there is a private interpretation of Scripture, which every Christian may make, according to his ability and light; and there is a public one, by the preacher of the word; but both are subject to, and to be determined by the Scripture itself, which is the only certain and infallible rule of faith and practice. And,

IV. There seems to be a real necessity of such a rule in the present state of things; and, indeed, a Divine revelation was necessary to Adam, in a state of innocence; how, otherwise, should he have known anything of the manner of his creation; of the state and condition in which he was created, after the image and in the likeness of God; the extent of his power and authority over the creation; by what means his animal life was to be supported; in what manner God was to be served and worshipped by him, especially the parts of positive and instituted worship, both as to matter, time, and place; and particularly the will of God, as to abstinence from eating of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil? And if our first parents stood in need of a divine revelation, as a rule and guide to them in their state of integrity; then much more we in our present state of ignorance and depravity. And after the fall, it was owing to divine revelation, that man had any knowledge of the way of his salvation, by the woman’s seed; and of the appointment, nature, import, use, and end of sacrifices; and though this revelation was for a time unwritten, and was handed down by tradition to the patriarchs before the flood, and for some time after,

whilst the lives of men were of a long continuance, and it required but few hands to transmit it from one to another; but when men's lives were shortened, and it was the pleasure of God to make further and clearer discoveries of his mind and will, and to frame new laws and rules of worship, in different dispensations; it seemed proper and necessary to commit them to writing, both that they might remain, and that they might be referred to in case of any doubt or difficulty about them; and particularly that the ends before mentioned might be answered by them, which it was intended should be; namely, the learning and instruction of men in matters of faith and practice, their peace, comfort, and edification, Rom. xv. 4, 2 Tim. iii. 15–17; and the rather since nothing else was, and nothing less than the Scriptures are, a sufficient rule and guide in matters of religion; even not the light of nature and reason, so much talked of, and so highly exalted; and since it has been set up as such against divine revelation, it may be proper to show the insufficiency of it. Now the light of nature or reason, is not to be taken in an abstract sense, or considered only in theory, what it has been, may be, or should be, but not subsisting in men or books; as such it can be no rule or guide at all to have recourse unto; and besides, reason in such sense is not opposed to revelation; there is nothing in revelation contrary to reason, though there are things above it, and of which it is not a competent judge, and therefore can be no guide in such matters; but it must be considered as it is in fact, and as it subsists, either in single individuals, or in whole bodies of men, and these unacquainted with, and unassisted by divine revelation; and then its sufficiency, or rather insufficiency, will soon appear. If it is considered as in individuals, it may easily be observed it is not alike in all, but differs according to the circumstances of men, climate, constitution, education, &c. some have a greater share of it than others; and what is agreeable to the reason of one man, is not so to another; and therefore unless it was alike and equal in all, it can be no sure rule or guide to go by: let one of the most exalted genius be pitched upon, one of the wisest and sagest philosophers of the Gentiles, that has studied nature most, and arrived to the highest pitch of reason and good sense; for instance, let Socrates be the man, who is sometimes magnified as divine, and in whom the light of nature and reason may be thought to be sublimated and raised to its highest pitch, in the Gentile world, without the help of revelation; and yet, as it was in him, it must be a very deficient rule of faith and practice; for though he asserted the unity of the Divine Being, and is said to die a martyr for it; yet he was not clear of the heathenish notions of inferior deities, and of worship to be given them; for one of the last things spoken by him was, to desire his friends to fulfil a vow of his, to offer a cock to Æsculapius, the god of health; and he is most grievously belied, if he was not guilty of the love of boys in an unnatural way; and besides, he himself bewails the weakness and darkness of human reason, and confessed the want of a guide. If the light of nature and reason be considered in large bodies of men, in whole nations, it will appear not to be the same in all. Some under the guidance of it have worshipped one sort of deities, and some others; have gone into different modes of worship, and devised different rites and ceremonies, and followed different customs and usages, and even differed in things of a moral nature; and as their forefathers, guided by this light, introduced and established the said things; they, with all their observations, reflections, and reasonings on them, or increase of light, supposing they had any, were never able, by the light of nature and reason in them, to prevail over, and demolish such idolatry, and such profane and wicked practices that obtained among them; and the insufficiency thereof, as a rule and guide in religion, will further appear by considering the following particulars.

I. That there is a God may be known by the light of nature; but who and what he is, men, destitute of a divine revelation, have been at a loss about. Multitudes have gone into polytheism, and have embraced for gods almost every thing in and under the heavens; not only the sun,

moon, and stars, and mortal men, they have deified; but various sorts of beasts, fishes, fowl, creeping things, and even forms of such that never existed: and some that have received the notion of a supreme Being, yet have also acknowledged a numerous train of inferior deities, and have worshipped the creature besides the Creator; whose folly is represented in a true and full light by the apostle, Rom. i. 19–25; and though the unity of the Divine Being, is the voice of reason as well as of revelation; yet by the former, without the latter, we could have had no certain notion, if any at all, of three divine Persons subsisting in the unity of the divine essence; and especially of the several parts they have taken in the economy of man's salvation; for as for what Plato and others have been supposed to say concerning a Trinity, it is very lame and imperfect, and what was borrowed from eastern tradition.

II. Though the light of nature may teach men that God, their Creator and Benefactor, is to be worshipped by them; and may direct them to some parts of worship, as to pray unto him for what they want, and praise him for what they have received; yet a perfect plan of worship, acceptable to God, could never have been formed according to that; and especially that part of it could not have been known which depends upon the arbitrary will of God, and consists of positive precepts and institutions; hence the Gentiles, left to that, and without a divine revelation, have introduced modes of worship the most absurd and ridiculous, as well as cruel and bloody, even human sacrifices, and the slaughter of their own children, as well as the most shocking scenes of debauchery and uncleanness.

III. By the light of nature men may know that they are not in the same condition and circumstances they originally were; for when they consider things, they cannot imagine that they were made by a holy Being subject to such irregular passions and unruly lusts which now prevail in them; but in what state they were made, and how they fell from that estate, and came into the present depraved one, they know not; and still less how to get out of it, and to be cured of their irregularities. But divine revelation informs us how man was made upright, and like unto God; and by what means he fell from his uprightness into the sinful state he is in; and how he may be recovered from it, and brought out of it by the regenerating and sanctifying grace of the Spirit of God, and not otherwise.

IV. Though, as the apostle says, the Gentiles without the law, *do by nature the things contained in the law; and are a law to themselves, which show the work of the law written on their hearts; their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts the meanwhile accusing, or else excusing one another*, Rom. ii. 14, 15, and so have some notion of the difference between moral good and evil; yet this is not so clear and extensive, but that some of the greatest moralists among them gave into the most notorious vices, and allowed of them, and recommended them. Chrysippus² allowed of incest; Plato³ commended community of wives; Socrates a plurality of wives, and which he enforced by his own example;⁴ Cicero⁵ pleaded for fornication; the Stoics, a grave set of moralists, for the use of obscene words,⁶ and recommended self-murder as becoming a wise man,⁷ and as his duty to commit in some cases. So dim was this light of nature in things of a moral kind.

²Laertius in Vita ejus.

³Vide Grotium in Eph. v. 6.

⁴Laertius in Vita ejus.

⁵Orat. 34, pro Caelio.

⁶Vide Ciceron. Ep. l. 9, ep. 22.

⁷Vide Lips. Manuduct. Stoic. Philosoph. Dissert. 22, p. 365.

V. Though in many cases reason taught them that certain vices were disagreeable to God, and resented by him, and he was displeased with them, and would punish for them; and they were very desirous of appeasing him; but then how to reconcile him to them, and recommend themselves to his favour, they were quite ignorant, and therefore took the most shocking and detestable methods for it, as human sacrifices, and particularly burning their innocent infants. But revelation shows us the more excellent way.

VI. Men may, by the light of nature, have some notion of sin as an offence to God, and of their need of forgiveness from him; and from a general notion of his mercy, and of some instances of kindness to them, may entertain some faint hope of the pardon of it; but then they cannot be certain of it from thence, or that even God will pardon sin at all, the sins of any man; and still less how this can be done consistent with his holiness and justice; but through divine revelation we come at a clear and certain knowledge of this doctrine, and of its consistence with the divine perfections.

VII. The light of nature leaves men entirely without the knowledge of the way of salvation by the Son of God. And even without revelation, angels of themselves would not be able to know the way of saving sinful men, or how sinful men can be justified before God; wherefore, in order to know this, they “desire to look into it,” 1 Pet. i. 12. Some have thought that Socrates had some notion of it; who is made to say,⁸ “It is necessary to wait till some one teaches how to behave towards God and men:” but then this respects only a man’s outward conduct, and not his salvation: nor does the philosopher seem to have any clear notion of the instructor, and of the means he should use to instruct, and still less of the certainty of his coming; and besides, the relater of this, Plato, might receive this as a tradition in the East, whither it is well known he travelled for knowledge. But the divine revelation gives an account of this glorious Person, not merely as an Instructor of men in the way of their duty, but as a Saviour of them from their sins; and in what way he has wrought out our salvation, by his sacrifice, blood, and righteousness.

VIII. The light of nature is far from giving any clear and certain account of the immortality of the soul, the resurrection of the body, and a future state of happiness and misery. As for the immortality of the soul, the heathens rather wished it to be true, than were fully satisfied of it: they that were for it made use of but mean arguments to prove it, and they themselves believed it only *fide dimidiata*, as Minutius Felix⁹ expresses it, and with a divided faith; they did, as it were, but half believe it; and as for the resurrection of the body, that was denied, as Tertullian says,¹⁰ by every sect of the philosophers: and in what a low manner do they represent the happiness of the future state, by walking in pleasant fields, by sitting under fragrant bowers and cooling shades, and by shelter from inclement weather; by viewing flowing fountains and purling streams; by carnal mirth, feasting, music, and dancing: and the misery of it, by being bound neck and heels together, or in chains, or fastened to rocks, and whipped by furies with a scourge of serpents, or doomed to some laborious service. But not the least hint is given of the presence of God with the one, nor of his absence from the other, nor of any sensation of his love or wrath. Let us therefore bless God that we have a better rule and guide to go by; “a more sure word of prophecy to take heed unto:” let us have constant recourse unto it, as the standard of faith and practice, and try every doctrine and practice by it, and believe and act as that directs us, and fetch every thing from it that may be for our good and the glory of God.

⁸Plato in Alcibiad. 2, p. 459.

⁹Octav. P. 37.

¹⁰De Præscript. Hæret. C. 7, p. 232.