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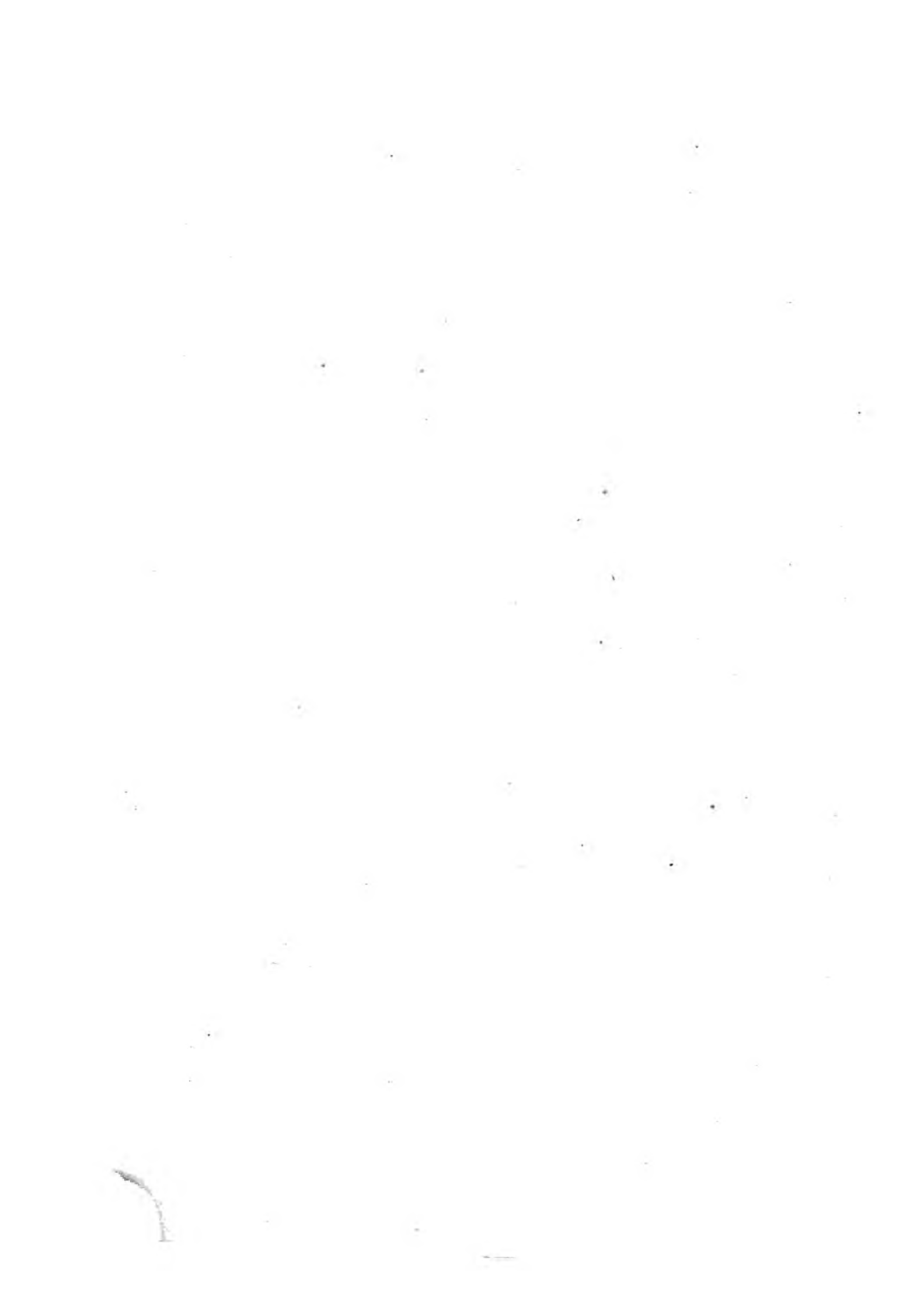
Dr *WILLIAMS*'s  
SECOND SERMON

AT

Mr. *BOYLE*'s Lecture,

1 6 9 6.

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*Scripture the Rule of Faith.*

A

S E R M O N

Preached at

*St. Martins in the Fields, Febr. 3. 169<sup>s</sup>.*

B E I N G T H E

Second of the L E C T U R E

For this Present Y E A R,

Founded by the Honourable

*ROBERT BOYLE, Esquire.*

By *JOHN WILLIAMS, D. D.*

Chaplain in Ordinary to His Majesty.

L O N D O N :

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J O H N V. 39.

*Search the Scriptures, for in them ye think ye have Eternal Life, and they are they which testify of me.*



**A**FTER that our Saviour had Cured the Impotent Man at the Pool *Bethesda*, *Ver. 9.* the Jews sought to Slay him, because he had Healed him on the Sabbath-day, *Ver. 16.* And so much the more were they bent upon this, as in Vindication of himself he had said also that God was his [*ἰδίου*] own proper Father, making himself equal with God, *V. 18.*

Our Saviour therefore, in the following part of this Chapter, largely insists upon the Explication and Proof of what he had Asserted, and Appeals to a Threesfold Testimony for his Justification, *Viz.* (1.) That of *John Baptist*, who bore Witness of him, and to whom for a season they gave Credit, *Ver. 32, 33, 34, 35.*

A 3.

(1.) His

(2.) His own Works, *Ver. 36.* they, saith he, bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent me.

(3.) The Scriptures, *Ver. 46.* Had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me: for he wrote of me. And in the Text; *Search the Scriptures, for in them ye think, &c.*

The Words may be either an Appeal to the Jews, and so are to be read by way of Affirmation and Concession, *ye do search the Scriptures*, as it is in the Margin: Or they may be read Imperatively and by way of Exhortation, as it is in our Version, *Search ye the Scriptures.*

If we admit the former, then they are a Re-proof to the Jews, that professed to be very Conversant in those Sacred Books, so that not a Word, Syllable or Tittle should escape their notice (as it's said in After-times of the *Masorites*), and yet so little heeded what was the main Subject of them, that they observed not how the Characters belonging to the *Messias* pointed plainly to him.

[*Basil. 2.*  
*Bapt. c.*  
*4. Athan.*  
*Tom.*  
*2. p.*  
*295.*  
*Par.*  
*1627.*]

But I conceive the Words are to be understood as an Exhortation, as the way of our Saviour's arguing doth shew, which is from point to point, from *John Baptist*, to his own Works; and from his Works to the Scriptures: And so *St. Basil* and *St. Athanasius* understand them.

And

And if the Words contain a Duty, then they are an Appeal of our Saviour to the highest Authority, that is, Divine Revelation, and what even the *Jews* themselves admitted for such. So that should they reject the Testimony of *John Baptist*, whom they did at one time believe to be a Prophet: Or should they be so perverse (as they sometime were) as to impute our Saviour's Miraculous Works to *Beelzebub*; yet the Scriptures was a proof not to be gain'd. For they themselves thought and judged (as the Word *δοκίματε* signifies) that *Eternal Life* was therein Revealed, and by the direction whereof it was to be obtained; and yet even those did testify of him. Having brought the Controversy thus far, it would in reason be at an end: Thither therefore he remits them, to their Authority he Appeals, these he requires them to Search; and if they Searched, and Searched sincerely and impartially, they would find Him (whom they now traduced, and whose Life they sought) to be the *Messias* there described. So he concludes his Discourse, *There is one that accuseth you, even Moses, in whom ye trust. For had ye believed Moses and his Writings, ye would have believed me: for he wrote of me, Ver. 45, 46. Or as it is in the Text; They testify of me.*

From



From the Words I Observe ;

1. That notwithstanding there is a Revelation from God, and owned to come from him ; yet there may be Disputes about Points contained in that Revelation. It was so here, the *Jews* as well as our Saviour believed the Old Testament to be a Divine Revelation, and to contain all things necessary to Everlasting Life ; and yet there was a Dispute about an Article of no less Importance than whether our Saviour was the *Messias* therein Prophefied of, and whom they hoped for Salvation by.

2. There is a Direction what to do in this Case, and that is to Repair to the Rule ; *Search the Scriptures*, impartially Examine them, and compare what is therein Revealed with what our Saviour affirmed concerning himself.

3. There is the final Decision of the Case, and that is by the Scriptures. You grant, saith he, they contain all things necessary to *Eternal Life*, and they are they which testify of me. Thereby he is willing to abide, and thereby they ought to be concluded.

4. Here is a further Direction how to Search, implied in the Verses following, *Ver. 41, &c.* and that is with Humility and Diligence ; with  
Impar-

Impartiality and Sincerity , without Prejudice and Prepossessions.

The Words, we see, contain a plain Resolution of a Case of great Importance, and that is, what is to be done in Matters of Doubt or Controversy, and how persons should proceed to obtain due satisfaction.

And here the first thing to be agreed upon, is, By what shall we be tried, what is the Rule which is to determine us, and which we must abide by ?

The next thing is, Who shall be the Judge ?

The Third is, What are the Qualifications of such as are to judge ?

To the First, our Saviour Answers, We must go to the *Scriptures* ; for if it be a matter of Consequence, and concerns *Eternal Life*, there to be sure it is contained , and there it is to be found.

As to the Second, He saith, the persons concerned are to *Search* ; those that doubt, question or deny, are carefully to examine.

As to the Third, He saith, they must lay aside all other Interests , and *Search* with all Humility, as those that love God, and *seek after the honour that cometh from him only*, Ver. 44:

So that by this resolution of the Case we

B

have

have gained two or three considerable points, towards the resolving all Doubts, and ending all Controversies in the Christian Church: And they are,

1. That the Scriptures are the only Rule, by which we are to judge and determine concerning points of Faith, and necessary to Salvation.

2. That it appertains to all persons to have recourse to, and to judge by this Rule concerning matters of that nature, and which are of that Importance.

3. A Direction how to Search, and that is with Modesty and Humility, with Sincerity and Impartiality.

1<sup>st</sup>. The Scriptures are the only Rule by which we are to judge and determine concerning Articles of Faith, and matters necessary to Salvation.

'Tis on all hands granted, that there must be some Authority which Faith is to be resolv'd into: For Faith is no other than an assent to some Proposition or Propositions upon Authority: And according as the Authority is, such is our Faith, Humane or Divine.

So that Divine Faith must have Divine Authority, and Divine Authority is no other than  
Divine

Divine Revelation, delivered at *sundry times and in divers manners*, Written or Unwritten.

And where there is no verbal Revelation by Persons Divinely Inspired, the Written Word is the only Authority that Faith can be resolved into; which our Saviour here appeals to, and propounds as a means sufficient, and in their Circumstances, as the only means for ending the Dispute.

The Question here in Debate was (as I observed before), Whether Jesus was the Messias prophesied of in the Old Testament? This the *Jews* denied, and our Saviour affirms, appealing for proof of it to *John Baptist*, to his own Works, and to the Scriptures, and there he leaves it. For this was the old and true way of deciding matters of that nature; *To the Law and to the Testimony; if they speak not according to this word, there is no light in them.*

Isai. 8.  
20.

Indeed in After-ages a party of the *Jews* rose up, that taught for *Doctrines the Commandments of men*; that did exalt their Traditions to an equal Authority with the Divine Law, and made it equally a fault to transgress them; as our Saviour charges it upon them (of which more anon); But our Saviour shews the invalidity of this, and directs them to the Fountain of all

Mat. 15.  
2, 3, 9.  
Mar. 7.  
8, &c.

Revealed Truth, the Holy Scriptures then extant, as a Rule sufficient to guide them, and of Authority sufficient to determine them.

And this was the course he at other times took: As doth the Young Ruler put a serious Case to him; *Good Master, What shall I do that I may inherit Eternal Life?* Our Saviour Answers, *Thou knowest the Commandments.*

Mark  
10. 17.

Do the Sadduces, that denied a Future State and a Resurrection to it, contend with our Saviour about it? He argues with them from the Scriptures, *Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures. ---As touching the Resurrection of the Dead, have ye not read, &c.*

Mat. 22.  
29, 31.

Would he instruct the Disciples in the great Articles of Faith? He doth it from those Sacred Oracles: *Ought not Christ to have suffer'd? &c. And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, he expounded unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.*

Luk. 24.  
26.

In like manner did the Apostles proceed to convince the Jews of their Incredulity: So St. Paul reasoned with them out of the Scriptures, opening and alledging, *That Christ must needs have suffered and risen again, and that this Jesus is the Christ.*

Act. 17.  
2, 3.

Act. 18.  
28.

So Apollos shewed by the Scriptures, *That this Jesus was the Christ.*

To this they always remitted them, as to a Rule certain and sufficient, and without which nothing was to be received as an Article of Faith.

To a Rule certain, called therefore by St. Peter 2. 1, 19. *A more sure word of Prophecy,* and which he prefers before a Voice from Heaven.

And a Rule sufficient, that is (as St. Paul saith) *able to make wise unto Salvation,* and thoroughly to furnish even the Man of God, the Teacher, unto all good works. 2 Tim. 3. 15, 16.

And when these things were spoken at that time more immediately of the Jewish Canon of the Old Testament, they may equally as well be applied to the New; which is not only as much the Scripture (as St. Peter calls it, 2 Pet. 3. 19. as I have before proved) but also by the addition of it, renders the Old much more intelligible and complete. Serm. 6.

Now there can be no imaginable reason assigned why the Scripture which was then sufficient in all points necessary to Salvation, and for resolving of Faith, should now be insufficient after the Revelation made by Christ: That is, that we should be more at a loss with the more clear, full, and perfect Revelation, than they were under

under the less perfect ; that what in the *last days* God Deliver'd and Reveal'd by his Son, should be less sufficient to direct us, than what he Spoke at *sundry times and in divers manners in times past* to the Jews by the Prophets.

And especially considering, that there was a time when their Circumstances were much the same with ours, which was in the long interval of 400 or 450 Years between the finishing of the *Jewish Canon* in the Prophecy of *Malachi*, (with whom Revelation ceased) and the appearance of *John Baptist*. In which time they were left, as we are, wholly to the Written Word of God for their Direction, and the Sole Authority they were to rely upon.

Since then in the Christian Church there is no more need of any *Traditionary or Unwritten Word*, than the *Jews* had at that time at least, under the Law ; and no more proof to be made of it now than there was then ; it follows, that the Scripture is the only Rule, in exclusion to all others ; and what is not contained therein by positive Proof, nor by evident Consequence to be deduced from it, can no more be of Divine Authority and Obligation to Christians, than *Unwritten Traditions* were then to the *Jews*.

This

This is the true Resolution of Faith ; and if our Saviour in a point of such Importance, as his being the Messiah, put the Case upon this issue, we have good reason to think that it is still the true Method of reasoning among Christians, and of resolving any Point of Faith and Doctrine necessary to Salvation.

And therefore supposing we would find out the truth of any Doctrine thus Necessary and Fundamental, we must come hither for direction and resolution ; and if it has no Foundation in Scripture, we are to reject it. For it is a Rule in the Law, *Quod Instrumentum non dicit, nec nos dicere debemus* ; or as it is usually said, Where that has not a Tongue to Speak, we are not to have an Ear to Hear. 'Tis then a *Doctrine of Men*, and may be a *Tradition of the Elders*, but is no Fundamental Article of the Christian Faith.

But grant this ; yet it has been before yielded, that Doubts and Disputes may arise in the Church about the sense of this Written Rule ; and therefore who shall be the Arbiter to Judge and Determine ; or how shall the Doubter be resolved ; or how shall he be sure of the Sense and Meaning of that which is Disputed ?



Our Saviour here directs what is to be done ; *Search the Scriptures* , examine and prove all by this Rule. He doth not direct them to any speaking Infallible Guide , nor to any Church, nor Persons into whom their Faith is to be resolv'd, but puts them themselves upon the trial of it. Whence it follows,

2. That every Man is to judge for himself.

Certainly if ever there were a necessity of an Infallible Judge to Determine points of Controversy to Mens hands , it had been in the long Interval before spoken of, between the Cessation of Prophecy, and the Appearance of our Saviour ; when there were divers Sects risen up among the *Jews* , continually contending one with another, and oftentimes about matters of very great Importance.

Of which I shall give a few Instances :

(1.) There was at that time a notable Controversy about the Church, which was the true. This was the Case between the *Jews* and *Samaritans* ; as 'tis stated by the Woman of *Samaria*, Joh. 4. 20. *Our Fathers*, saith she to our Saviour, *Worshipped in this Mountain Gerizim, and ye say that Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship : That is, ye say, Yours is the true Church, and we say*

say ours is that true Church : And each of these were so violently addicted to their own way, that *the Jews would have no dealing with the Samaritans*, nor so much as *ask drink of them in their necessity*, *V. 9.*

And on the other side, the *Samaritans* would not so much as receive the *Jews* into their Houses, *Luk. 9. 53.*

Nay so high did the Contest grow between them, that it engaged them in the fiercest Quarrels, even to Assaults and Assassinations, wherever they were, out of *Canaan* as well as in it; as their *Historian Reports*.

*Joseph  
Antiq. l.  
12. c. 1.  
& 3.*

And though that *Samaritan Temple* was afterward utterly destroyed by *Hyrchanus* about 130 years before our Saviour; yet the Prejudices and Animosities continued, till both fell under the common and final Destruction by the *Romans*.

*L. 13. e.  
6. & 18.  
l. 20. c. 5*

(2.) Another point in Controversy was about a Future State, and the Resurrection to it. This was Disputed between the *Pharisees* and the *Sadducees*: For the *Sadducees* held that there was no Resurrection, nor Angel, nor separate Spirit, existing out of a Body (for that the *Jews* called a Spirit); but the *Pharisees* confessed both.

*Acts 23.  
8.  
Matt. 22:  
29.  
Luk. 24.  
37, 39.  
V. Light-  
foot Tal.*

(3.) Another material Controversy that then divided the Church, was, What was the Rule of

*Exercit.  
on Acts.*

Faith? For the *Sadducees* would admit the Law of *Moses* only to be of that Authority; and what was not therein contained, was among them accounted of no validity; and therefore they denied a Future State, because (as they pretended) there was no proof of it from that Law. But the *Pharisees*, whatever respect they might give to the Law above the other Books of Scripture, yet allowed both to be of the same Authority; and so what was contained in any of them, to be the Object of Faith.

Again; The *Sadducees* were for Scripture alone without any Traditions; but the *Pharisees* set their Traditions in the same Rank with the Scriptures, and would have both of the same Obligation (as has been aforesaid, p. 13) and if either was to give way to the other, the Scripture was rather to give way to Tradition, than Tradition to the Scripture. About which Matters there were often great Disputes and Differences between these Two powerful Factions, as the Historian relates; so that however they were concerned in the Government, yet the Flame broke out upon every occasion, and which St. Paul made his advantage of, who when he perceived that the one part of the Council were *Pharisees* and the other *Sadducees*, cried out, *I am*

*Joseph*  
*Antiq. l.*  
13. c. 18.

*Acts*  
23. 6.

*a Pha*

a Pharisee, and the Son of a Pharisee; of the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in question. By these means they filled the whole Nation with Bandyings and Feuds; the Great Men generally siding with the Sadducees, and the People with the Pharisees, as the same Author saith.

(4.) Another Point in Controversy among them was about the Messias. This was a Character much pretended to by several about the time of our Saviour; and was the Chief Subject in Dispute between Him and the Ruling-part of the Jews.

Points surely these were of great Importance; *Viz.* Which is the True Church? What is the Rule of Faith? Whether there be a Future Life? And whether Jesus be the Messias? And Points these were that the whole Nation of the Jews was divided about: So that in all Appearance there was scarcely ever a greater occasion for a Determining-power to put this Case to an Issue.

Now if there had been any such Infallible Authority, any such Concluding-Power Visible and Known; as it was then, if ever, necessary: so no doubt, there would have been Appeals to it in these Disputes among themselves, and with our Saviour. And in reason it may be

thought our Saviour would readily have Appeal'd to it; because the Judge being Infallible, could never have Determined and given it against Him.

But we read of no such Appeals in Scripture; but on the contrary, our Saviour puts them upon another way of Enquiry; not to Search after a Living and Infallible Judge, by whom they were to be finally concluded; but to Search the Scriptures, as the Infallible Rule by which they were to be Determined. And accordingly the Apostles advised their Auditors to the same Course; that they should thereby prove all things, and hold fast what upon trial they found to be good and true. That they should not believe every Spirit, every Pretender to Revelation and Infallibility, but should try the Spirits whether they were of God; and there was good reason it seems for it, because, saith the Apostle, many false Prophets are gone out into the World. 1 Joh. 4. 1. that pleaded Inspiration and a Divine Mission and Authority for what they Taught; as is manifest from the Epistles of the Apostles: And yet the Apostles (who themselves had the Spirit of Infallibility and Immediate Revelation) referr'd the Jews to the Written Word as the Rule, and to their own Reason and Conscience as the Judge.

1 Thes.  
5. 21.

2 Cor.  
11. 13.  
Tit. 1.  
10.  
2 Ep.  
John  
7. ver.

If

If ever any might have required an implicit Faith, and an absolute and a blind Obedience to their judgment, it was Christ and his Apostles, and yet we find that they would have all Try and Examine, Weigh and Consider. It being an innate Privilege of Mankind not to be led blindfold; but to be governed by their Reason, a privilege that true Religion doth evermore preserve; and what every Man is obliged to defend, since every Man must *give an account of himself to God*: And therefore the *Bereans* are commended by St. Paul, as *Ευγερέσει* more generous and free-spirited, *Who Searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were true, which that Apostle Taught, and compared one with another, his Doctrine with that Holy Standard; and finding them to accord, they received the word with all readiness of mind.* So manifest is it, that in the Apostolical times every Man was to judge for himself, and to use the same reason in Religion, which he used in the Common Affairs of Life.

Rom. 14.  
12.

Acts 17.  
11, &c.

All that those Inspired Writers desired, was, That Men would *Search*, and search Impartially; and then they did not question but as they would be like the *Bereans* in Temper, so they would be alike prevailed with in the conclusion, and  
receive

receive the truth with the like promptitude and readiness of mind ; toward the finding out of which, Searching and Honesty go a great way.

And whereas it might have been thought, however, that the times would come when the Apostles should leave the World , and Immediate Inspiration should cease with them , and so Men would be left to their own Fallible judgment in the Interpretation of the Rule : Yet there is no other provision made by our Saviour and the Apostles for preventing any such Inconvenience ( though they foresaw and foretold there would be Deceivers and Impostors ) ; but all Future-Ages were left in the very same Circumstances with the *Jews* in that Period of 450 years before spoken of.

Mat. 24.  
24.  
2 Tim 4.  
3.  
2 Pet. 2.  
1.

The Divine Writers supposing that there was in the Scriptures such a plain and full Revelation of all things necessary to be known in order to Salvation, and there would be so much Reason and Sense in Mankind ( where so great an Interest as their Salvation was concerned ) that with Ordinary and Common Helps, such as Prayer and Consideration , and Advice and appointed Teachers are, that they would be able to find out the Truth , or as much of it as was necessary

necessary to their Salvation, if they came to it with sincere and well-disposed minds: And that God would never suffer such to want Ability, Opportunities and Means for it; or be wanting in mercy to them, in forgiving and passing by such defects as were unavoidable to them in their Circumstances. But that belongs to the next Head; and that is,

3. The Direction, what to do in this Case, which is to Search, that is, with Diligence and Impartiality.

Supposing this, that every Man is to judge for himself, then persons will judge differently, and there will be Eternal and Endless Disputes. To this our Saviour fits an Answer, not only in the Direction given in the Text, but also in the subsequent part of his Discourse, which amounts to thus much; that we are to Search with Diligence and Impartiality.

The former is implied in the Word *ἐπιζητεῖτε* Search, and which is very requisite in matters of such Importance as those were which our Saviour is here Discoursing upon, and that is no less than his being the Messias, the Son of God. A Subject that from the quality of it, and the various passages in Scripture relating to it, requir'd due Consideration. For though the Scriptures are



are so plain in most necessary points, that in the Prophet's Phrase, *the wayfaring men though fools shall not err therein*, and what are as soon understood as they are read : Yet there are even some of those that in the nature of the thing require a strict and careful attendance : Of which kind are such as contain the Characters of the Messiah ; and therefore ye not so open to a superficial Eye, but that they may be misunderstood ; and he that would then know and understand the force of the Argument referring to it, must *Search*. Our Saviour doth not therefore say only, That the Scriptures *Testify* of him, but requires them to *Search*, if they would be satisfied in it. For though proofs of this nature often are like Mines, that lie deep, yet upon Searching they are to be found : And if so, then our Ignorance is not to be imputed to their Obscurity, but to our own Negligence, that we take not that course which is proper thereunto, and may very justly be requir'd.

But there is a further Qualification requisite, and that is Sincerity and Impartiality.

Our Saviour here resolves the Infidelity of the *Jews* into Obstinacy and Insincerity. They had another Interest to mind, a Reputation to maintain, Ver. 40. *Ye will not come to me.* Ver. 42. *Ye*

Ye have not the love of God in you. Ver. 44. How can ye believe, which receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour which cometh from God only?

These and the like *Vicious Inclinations* hinder from *Searching*, or from finding the truth if they *Search*, or from receiving it though they find it. Persons thus disposed will then *handle the word of God deceitfully*, and like artificial Orators put what Colour they please upon it. They will pervert and *wrest*, distort and writhe the Text, till they force it to serve the Cause they espouse, and are resolved beforehand to maintain.

2 Cor. 2.  
17.  
4. 2.  
Eph. 4.  
14.  
2 Pet. 3.  
16.

And so it would be, if there were an Infallible Judge, and so it was when there were Inspired Persons in the Church, when our Saviour himself was in the Chair, and the Apostles were *helpers* of their Faith.

So that there is no Fence in the World against Perverseness and Obstinacy, against Pride and Self-conceit, against Interest and Self-seeking.

These things indeed will make the Scripture difficult, and Truth unintelligible, though ne'er so plain in it self, or never so evidently proved: When in the Phrase of Scripture, *Their heart's*

D

wax<sup>e</sup>d

Matth. 13. 15. *waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and they have closed their eyes, lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart.* For then it is with such as with a sickly Stomach, that will nauseate the most wholesome and delightful Diet: In which Case it is not the fault of the Diet, but of the Stomach, which wants an Appetite, or of the Palate that wants the savour, which is the occasion of the disorder; and for remedy of which, the Body is to be Cured, and the Stomach to be restored to its natural Tone and Temper; and then the same Diet will be nourishing and grateful as before.

So it is in the Case before us, where it is not the Understanding but the Will that is in the fault, or some pre-occupations and Sinister Inclinations, that do Cloud the mind and keep it from judging, or dispose it by such fatal Biasses to judge amiss.

Jam. 1. 21. *But now if the contrary Temper prevail, that Men lay aside all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, all Prejudices and Interests, and receive with meekness the ingrafted word: If they are candid and ingenuous, free and impartial, and come with an hearty desire to know the truth, and with a stedfast resolution to be guided by it (whether it be for or against their Worldly Interest), and to do*

do according to what they know, they shall not finally and fundamentally mistake ; according to our Saviour's resolution of this Case, *Joh. 7. 17.* *If any man will do his will, he shall know of the Doctrine, whether it be of God, or, saith he, whether I speak of my self.* So again, *If ye continue in my word, then are ye my Disciples indeed, and ye shall know the truth, John 8. 31, 32.* For God will not leave an honest mind without such means as shall be sufficient for the understanding of all things necessary to Sal- Acts 8.  
 vation. He that sent a *Philip* to an *Eunuch*, 26.  
 and an Angel to *Cornelius*, and called to a *Saul* 10. 5.  
 out of Heaven, will present such occasions, 9. 4.  
 give such assistance, or direct to such Instructors,  
 that shall, as *Aquila* to *Apollos*, expound unto them Act. 18.  
*the way of God more perfectly.* 26.

And if we put the Case, that a Person sincerely disposed to know and receive the Truth should fall into error ( for man is a fallible Creature ), yet the Error shall not be Damnable, but what may be as consistent with his being a Christian and Orthodox, as Infirmities are with a good Man, and Sincerity. For as in the present State, which is a State of Infirmary, there is no arriving to such an established temper of Virtue and Goodness, but that *Elijah*, and *Paul*, and *Barnabas*, and the best Jam.  
 of Men were *subject to like passions* with others: 5. 17.  
Acts 14.

So neither is it possible by the utmost Diligence, and the most laborious Searching, to find out the Truth, so as ne'er to mistake nor embrace Error for it (for that would as much be above the state of Nature thus to be infallible, as impeccable); nor is it necessary, when a person may be saved with all tolerable Errors, as with natural and unavoidable Infirmities. And this then neither the Providence of God, nor the Promise of our Saviour are concerned to prevent: For these are like Diseases that belong to the quality of the State we are in; and are no more to be prevented, than our Nature and our State are to be alter'd, and of imperfect to be made perfect.

But so far both the Promise, and the Providence of God, in confirmation of that promise, are concerned, that a person of a truly sincere mind, continuing such, shall no more fall into a damnable error without his own fault and choice, than be guilty of a Damnable Sin; for that would be to leave Him in a damnable condition, who upon the terms of the Gospel otherwise most certainly should be saved. For no Sin under that Dispensation damns, but what is wilful; according to that known Saying of St. *Austin*, *Nil ardet in Inferno nisi propria voluntas.*

Or

Or however, if he should fall into such an error, as is against a fundamental Article, and for the quality of it, is damnable: Yet it shall not be damnable to him. It is a Case special, and what, though it falls not within the ordinary Rules of the Gospel, shall however taste of the mercy of it.

The Apostle speaks of *Damnable Heresies*; and we have those Truths which we call Fundamental, and both are rightly so termed; because those Truths are so essential to the Christian Faith, that it cannot be the Christian Faith without them: And those Heresies are so destructive to the Christian Faith, that it cannot be the Christian Faith with them. 2 Pet. 2. 1.

But yet because it is an error of invincible Ignorance, and what proceeds from a mere defect in the Understanding, and not in the Will, we may charitably conceive, that it being not that sort of *Heresy*, which is a *Work of the Flesh*, God will not impute it to such to their Condemnation; and that their Piety towards God, and Charity towards Men, shall through Christ's Merits and Intercession do more to save them, than their involuntary mistakes, how great soever, shall do to damn them: Since God requires *according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not.* Gal. 5. 20.  
But 2 Cor. 8. 12.

2 Theff.  
2. 10.

But because for the most part the Error is rather in the Will than in the Understanding, or at least is then the more pernicious of the two : therefore as we should enquire after the truth, and be careful to receive it when it is proposed ; so it is as necessary that we should *receive the truth in the love of it*, and then it will have an influence upon us proportionable to the Consequence and Importance of it.

And as they are the best, most useful and necessary Principles that most of all tend to make Men Good and Religious ; so that is the best Testimony of our being in the right, and that our Principles are true, that we are thereby made more holy and pure, more just and charitable. I look upon this as an undoubted Evidence of the Truth of the Christian Revelation, that it most of all conduces to such an Excellent end ; and it will appear that he best understands it, that makes it the Rule of his Life as well as of his Faith ; which if he doth, as he cannot likely mistake in his enquiry after Truth, so it's certain in the Issue he shall not miscarry. For then he that comes thus prepared to *Search the Scriptures*, will both find what they *testify* unto, and obtain that *Eternal Life*, which is therein revealed and promised.

There

There it is then that the matters of greatest Consequence are to be found, and all Points relating to them are resolved, such as do most nearly concern our Eternal Happiness.

And if Scriptures do require our utmost Diligence and Care to find out their meaning, yet in the issue when found out, it will reward all our pains, though it be as great as the Affairs of this present Life are not managed nor accomplished without.

I do acknowledge the Church of *Rome* hath put this matter into a far more compendious course, if it were as true as it is short, by an Infallible Judge, who by an *Ipsè dixit*, without giving any reason, stamps upon all he saith, an uncontrollable Authority; but that must be, if a person is so near the Papal Chair, as to have the Infallible Ear to apply himself to, and immediately receives the dictates from the Infallible Oracle. For if he be remote from him, and receives all by Written Decrees, or the Oral Tradition of others, it issues then into a kind of Infallible Rule, and fails to be the Sentence of the Infallible Judge. For Words and Writings if they once fall into Fallible hands, according to them, cease to be Infallible, and are as much subject to difficulties, and about the sense of which have often hap-  
pen'd



pen'd as endless Contentions and Misunderstandings, as ever they can pretend have happened to an Infallible Rule. Therefore they are no safer, nor less subject to err by the having an Infallible Judge, than we by an Infallible Rule: Nay, so much the worse is it with them, as we cannot suppose that an Infallible Judge (if we go to their Fountain-head) can more clearly interpret the Divine Rule, than God himself could and did direct and dictate to those who wrote it. So that at last they are left with all their Pretences to Infallibility, in a condition worse than those that have an Infallible Rule for their Director; and that with their own Diligence and Searching, and the blessing of God concurring therewith, like *Apollos*, become *mighty in the Scriptures*, *Act. 18. 24.*: For to such is that spoken which never was said to any Infallible Judge, *If any man will do his will, he shall know of the Doctrine whether it be of God.*

F I N I S.

E R R A T A.

**S**erm. 1st. Page 21. Line 17. Read needs. p. 26. l. 4. r. Enthusiastical. p. 29. l. 8. r. of one among them. p. 31. Margin add V. Dr. Geddis, Of the Ecclesiastical State of *Ethiopia*. Appendix.

Serm. 2d. p. 6. l. 7. r. and things. p. 9. l. 18. r. 16.