

ON INTERPRETATION.

Many friends of the Bible, instead of regarding it as containing a system of truth, look upon it as a compilation of facts, commandments and promises, that are not susceptible of arrangement. Such persons are weak and vacillating, and often at the mercy of the bold unbeliever, who finds in his "God of Nature" the embodiment of law and order. He sees order in Geology, Astronomy and other sciences, but only confusion in the Bible, and he rightly reasons that God's works should be harmonious. He knows the principles of those sciences, and can read the book of nature, we will suppose (though but few are free from the domination of leaders who give us ideas second hand), but he knows little, if anything, of the plan of the Bible, and therefore cannot read it. One man has as much right to reject Astronomy because he cannot understand it, as another man has to reject the Bible for the same reason.

What is confusion when not understood, becomes when explained beautiful and harmonious.

Because, while learning, men differ and quarrel over their opinions does not militate against the truth of any system. If men were more fully controlled by the Spirit of Christ, they could differ in opinion without quarreling.

Until absolute knowledge is gained, each ray of light will at least modify former ideas.

To understand any science or book it should be read according to its own principles of interpretation. "No prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation." 2 Pet. 1:21. Moved by one Spirit it should be taken as a whole, and not disconnectedly. If we would compare scripture with scripture, we would learn that –

"God is his own interpreter,
And He will make it plain."

We affirm that a piece-meal interpretation is the cause of confusion in the Christian world, and gives rise to the profane proverb that "the Bible is just like an old fiddle on which any tune may be played." Very few pretend to use much of the Bible; only a few practical precepts, and enough to prove the particular creed, are valued by the many. They virtually blame the Lord for giving a large book when a small one would have been all-sufficient.

The practice of many in teaching is no more consistent than was that of the old Negro who made Paul vindicate him in theft: "Let him that stole, steal." The words, "no more," did not suit his purpose. The writer remembers hearing a minister (shall I say, of Christ) preach a sermon against the doctrine of justification by faith from the words: "To him that worketh is the reward." Rom. 4:4. The perversion will be apparent to all that will read the context.

We do not accuse men generally of dishonesty; we are glad to believe that all parties have some truth, and that they defend their errors with sincerity. None of us are perfect in knowledge, and doubtless all have in the past sincerely believed to be truth, and earnestly defended what is now regarded as error. This should make us feel kindly toward all who differ with us, and who cannot yet see all we can see.

The sects are too much like men backing **[R24 : page 6]** into a corner, and defending themselves with a text.

A text is of no value as proof of a doctrine unless its place in the plan of the ages be understood. The Calvinist, Arminian or Universalist may readily find a text that will seem to sustain his theory;

and the Infidel will say the three texts contradict each other. Each disputant will pass lightly over or ignore the proof-texts of the others, and so sustain their own theory at all hazard.

If the Bible is true there must be a theory which will make use of all these texts, and belittle none of them. There is a theory which claims to do this, and the foundation of that theory is a plan of the ages. Would that all lovers of truth understood that theory, and the plan on which it is based. In the search for truth it becomes necessary to discriminate between Bible language and "home made scripture" or pulpit phraseology. The Bible does not claim to be so plain that everybody can understand it. "But if God intended the word for man's use, why has He not made it plain?" I ask, why are the gold, the coal and the iron hidden deep in the earth? Why are all things of value made difficult of attainment? There is a question of character involved in it. Desire, will, energy, determination and faithfulness will be rewarded.

Some truths lie on the surface and are easily understood, being adapted to the conditions of childhood physically and spiritually. These properly used are as "milk for babes," and give strength for work, growth and further search. But to become as men in the knowledge of God, we must cry after it, seek it as silver, and search for it as for hid treasures. (Prov. 2:1-5.) As the word is arranged as food for the individual as babe, young man and aged, so is it of the race in its different stages of development. It will assist us if we remember that the Bible was not written for one man, nor for one age, but for all men and all ages, adapted to the circumstances as "meat in due season." Thus the "word is a lamp to our feet," giving light for present need; and "The path of the just is as a shining light that shineth more and more unto the perfect day." Prov. 4:18. Many do not understand how the Bible could be so written as to remain dark for a time, and then gradually unfold its truth as a burning lamp; but the fact of its being so is to all that understand it an unanswerable argument in

favor of its inspiration by the foreseeing spirit of God. In Dan. 12 is given an example clear and simple.

The truths concerning the "time of the end" are said to be "shut up and sealed" until that time. Then "knowledge shall be increased," and "the wise shall understand." The Papal dominion over both Church and State crippled every energy and prevented Bible searching. The overthrow of that dominion in 1798 by the French Revolution marked the beginning of the "time of the end" (Dan. 11:35), and opened the way for a multitude of improvements and the "increase of knowledge." Of course those who have the spirit of truth love it, and search for it, will learn when others will fail, but the wisest and best of Christians could not gain accurate knowledge on this subject until the seal of that book was broken at the time appointed of the Father.

We are not more intelligent or pious than our fathers, even if it be true as we claim that we have advanced truths. Let all bear in mind that "to whom much is given much is required." If we are advanced in truth we should also be advanced in holiness, and obedience to God's will is an important aid in knowing the truth. John 7:17.

He that values reputation more than truth, how can he believe?
John 5:44. J. H. P.
