

that; so I believe it was with Apollos, that when he came to be taught farther in the knowledge of Christ, he then became more and more suitable to the rudeness and simplicity of preaching the gospel, as well as Paul; for never afterwards do we read that he was commended by the term eloquent, for such manner of excellency was proper to the law, and not to the gospel in any degree.

But secondly, taking it for granted that he persisted in his eloquence, yet it appears that it was such as he had obtained by being mighty in the scriptures. And this also farther justifies a former answer, that the scripture alone is sufficient to furnish us with expression. So then the point remains true for all this, that men destitute of the Spirit, having human learning, and add to that all knowledge, yet they do but pervert the scriptures to their own destruction. This may teach,

1. All men, that are without God's Spirit, how wise and learned soever they otherwise seem to be, to beware of meddling with the scriptures; as I said before, it is the worst work that possibly they can undertake: for in so doing they meddle with that in which they have no skill, and so wound themselves; for it is a sharp two-edged sword," Heb. iv. 12; and they, having no skill to handle it, it will dangerously wound them to their own destruction. But seeing the truth is so, that they have neither ears to hear, nor heart to understand it, I will now pass on, and

2. In the next place take notice, that persons.

destitute of God's Spirit, whatever they be beside, they are both unlearned and unstable men, according to the mind of God. So the unbeliever is called by Paul an unlearned man, 1 Cor. xiv. 24; and so much, in effect, James tells us of a faithless man's inconstancy, that he is tossed to and fro like a wave of the sea, and is unstable in all his ways, James i. 6—8. For indeed, wanting the Spirit to establish him, he is driven hither and thither by every blast and breath of man's wisdom. And so much experience, without any more scriptures, daily proves upon every change of orders and ordinances in religion. How confident have many wise, worldly learned men been of their stability, in not being brought to yield to this or that? Whereas, when the raging wave of the sea hath roared but a little, how have these men fallen from their supposed stability and stedfastness? Instances I need not name; every one's small experience can bring forth enough: but by all this we are given to see the scriptures fulfilled before our eyes, for our confirmation, and their just conviction.

3. Now, in the next place, I will manifest in some few particulars, how these learned, or rather unlearned men, do pervert the scriptures, making their interpretations as carnal as themselves. For whereas the scriptures speak of learning, thereby commending unto us the learning of the Spirit of truth, as before we have seen from this text, and many more places; these persons presently apply them to human learning, and such texts are by

them wrested and perverted. And here many instances might be alleged: first, concerning the church; whereas the scriptures do authorize Christians to gather themselves together in Christ's name, and have the promise of God's presence in so doing, "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of you," Matt. xviii. 20. This they presently deny to be the meaning of the passage; and say, it is meant of two or three coming together to perform prayers, or such like, which is contrary to the scope of the text; whereas it treats of such as are in church-fellowship, since to them is given the power of binding and loosing, with the promise of Christ's presence and approbation. Besides, where in all the scriptures is Christ Jesus said to be in the midst of any but his own assemblies? And further, the scriptures speak of the church, temple, and house, of God, applying these expressions to believers, and such as are builded upon Christ by faith, Lev. xvi. 11, 12; 2 Cor. vii. 16; Psal. cxxxii. 13, 14; Rev. xiii. 1; and ii. 1; 2 Cor. vi. 16; Heb. iii. 6; 1 Pet. ii. 5. These they wrest and pervert, by applying these titles to their houses of lime and stone; calling them churches of God, and temples for him to dwell in; though the scriptures be plain to the contrary; as Stephen declared to the council long ago, and that from the testimony of the prophet long before, Acts vii. 47—50; Isai. lxvi. 1. And so our Saviour himself to the woman of Samaria, denying for the time to come, any such

places as the Jews and Samaritans doted on, John iv. 20—24; but tells her and us, that spiritual service in any place should please him, though it will not give carnal men content. Likewise, are not the scriptures brought frequently by these learned men to prove the nation and people are the church of God? and for vindicating national observances, &c. as from their high-priests consecrated and set apart for the service of their church; and so under him the rest of their holy priests, with their holy garments, and tithes, and such like with their maintenance? endeavouring thereby, both from the law and prophets, to justify their names, orders, and administrations. Whereas, if it were spiritually discerned, and the scriptures not wrested and perverted, it will be found true, as Peter saith, that not every nation, nor any nation in particular, but in every nation, them that fear the Lord, and none other, are accepted of him, Acts x. 34, 35. Hence Christ Jesus himself hath told us, that the beast should have power over every kindred, nation, and tongue, and that the nations and cities should fall; whereas Mount Sion, the city of God, shall never be moved, as saith the prophet, and also the apostle.

By this then it appears, that all such scriptures alleged for the maintenance of a national church are perverted, seeing, that long since, the Lord hath rejected it; now on the other hand accounting a company of saints, in fellowship with him

self, to be mount Sion that shall never be moved; for these he hath made kings and priests to God.

So in like manner such men imitate the ministers of Christ, seeing, of old times, they were to be persons in outward honour and esteem by their names, priests; for their callings, above the rest of the people, a distinct body of themselves; by their apparel, different, in their administrations, from the rest of the people; and so for their maintenance, by tithes and offerings; all which had a respect to Christ, and were in him to have their end, as the apostle declares, being but wordly rudiments, Gal. iv. 9.

Such men, though they profess themselves ministers of the gospel of Jesus Christ, yet as children, under tutors and governors, they do observe these things, after the rudiments of the world; and so, contrary to the gospel, cannot abide to approve themselves to be ministers of Christ by such marks as his word holds forth, and as we have before given; but they must be men of honour, and such as be distinct from others in their apparel, maintenance, and such like. Dishonour, reproach, and nakedness, and living on mere alms, they cannot brook, 2 Cor. vi. 4—10; and are so far from working with their own hands to supply their necessities, as the apostle requires the ministers of the gospel should do, Acts xx. 33—35; that they wrest the scriptures, the law and the prophets; haling in, as it were, by the hair of the head, the

scriptures to speak for them, and their delicate living; faring, like Dives, deliciously every day; whereas, elders of Jesus Chsist should feed the flock of God, not taking care of it for filthy lucre's sake, but of a ready mind, 1 Pet. v. 1, 2.

But leaving these things, which are declared to be more suitable to Moses and the law, as tending to wrath and bondage, than to such as are ministers of Christ, and made partakers of the liberty of the servants of God, I will speak of some few things that make a difference between them and us. You know they usually object against us, because of our separation from their church, those words of Peter to our Saviour, "Whither shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life," John vi. 68. From whence it is concluded against us, that if the text be not perverted, we, in leaving them, do forsake Jesus Christ; wherein they take it for granted, that he is with them, and not with those that forsake them; whereas the text is clear to prove, that the words of etenal life are in him, as himself saith also, "The words that I speak are spirit and life," ver. 63; and again, "he that hath the Son hath life, he that hath not the Son, hath not life." But let not the text be wrested; yet what proof is here that antichrist hath the words of eternal life, and that there is no forsaking of him? and yet all that know wherein the difference lies, know that this is the controversy, and that these persons, thus forsaking him, go to Christ, and to the word of eternal life, seeing the Lord binds up

the testimony, and seals the law among his disciples, Isa. viii. 16; so that until it can be proved that these leave Christ, and forsake the words of eternal life, the text must be taken for none other but to be perverted, and a veil drawn over it to beguile the simple.

Upon this same head hangs another great exception against us; which is, where we had our conversation, if we have any, if not among them? and so taking it for granted that we had it among them, a great outcry is made against us, as if we had stolen their gods, and done them great wrong. And for this purpose, this, amongst other things is alleged, that that church which is able to beget children, is able to bring them up.

Now for answer hereunto, it is to be minded, that conversion doth properly belong to the word of the Lord, Psal. xix. 7; Rom. i. 16. This word by which we are all begotten, 1 Pet. i. 3, 23, is the proper portion of the church of God, as divers scriptures declare, Psal. cxlvii. 19, 20; Matt. xiii. 11; 1 Cor. iii. 22. Hence then it must needs follow, that whosoever are converted to the Lord, they, by virtue of their conversion, belong to Zion the true church; because, as it is before said, the word is hers, and therefore they are to cleave to her, and forsake those places where they were converted; and that for this reason, because the Lord himself is said to count, when he writes the people, that this or that man was born there, that is, in Sion, the church of God; and though the man

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salem, that is from above, is the mother of us all; and she is not one that gendereth to bondage, but to freedom, as saith the apostle, Gal. iv. 24—26; and therefore methinks it appears, that every one's conversion strongly binds him to flee to that church which consists of such as are faithful in Jesus Christ, as being the proper assembly to which they all belong. All such passages therefore as are brought to prove otherwise, are but wrested and perverted, though never so fair a gloss be set upon them; for God ever since the beginning, hath put enmity betwixt the seed of the woman, and the seed of the serpent: and accursed shall all they be that join those together, that God hath so far separated; therefore let none of God's servants stand with one foot on Mount Sion and another on Babylon, lest that which is halting be turned out of the way, Heb. xii. 13.

Another objection is brought against us, and in the defence of your ministry, after this manner:

That ministry which consists in doing the work for which it was appointed by Jesus Christ, mentioned in Eph. iv. viz. "the perfecting the saints, and edifying the body of Christ," is a true ministry; but yours, you say, doth that work.

Was it the work of the ministry of the apostles, &c. to read service for churching of women, marriage service, burial of the dead, and such like services as these? Did the apostles perfect the saints after this manner? For who knows not but that this is the substance of what your office of

ministry binds you unto? As for preaching, that may be dispensed withal, or a little now and then may serve the turn.

Besides it is manifest, by your readings, your offices are not the same there mentioned, or that Jesus Christ from on high gave gifts for the performance of; for you have others of which the scripture speaks not otherwise than by the names of blasphemy, Rev. xvii. 3. As for your power and work of the ministry, which you say is answerable to that of the apostles, by your gathering of the saints together, &c. taking it for granted that what you say of converting them be true, I ask from what do you convert them? If from the power of darkness, as you would seem to imply, into the kingdom of Christ, as did the apostles; then, by your own grant, in the power of darkness you found them, and the truth is, where you found them, there you leave them: for before this their conversion, you professed for them at their baptism, that they were regenerate and born anew; to whom pray do you convert them now; or have they conversion after regeneration? You also bid these persons, before you knew them, or their conversion, to take and eat in remembrance that Christ died for them, and so gave them the seals of life and salvation; and yet after all this, you being ministers to them, come to justify the truth of your ministry by your conversion of the people, when you have before declared them the subjects of that conversion that hath no need

of amendment; and even while they still abide in the same church, under the same ministry, and in the same worship that they were conversant in before. Whereas I have declared before, that when the apostles converted any, those converts left their former places, turning from “dumb idols to serve the living God.” Now it hath been long acknowledged and professed, ‘That the worship of your church, and the ministry of it, came out of the Pope’s shop, and must needs be reformed, or else the judgment of God cannot but light upon you;’ as hath been manifested in the first and second admonition to the parliament in the days of Queen Elizabeth; and all know, that it yet continues the same that it was then; and if it were so bad then, as it is reported a thousand ministers said it was, small cause have any to plead conversion there: it is to be feared they will continue in such abominations, until the plagues of God cannot be withheld from them: seeing the scriptures and Spirit of God declare, that the fear of the Lord teacheth men to refrain their feet from every evil way, and to cleanse themselves from all filthiness both of flesh and spirit; and to grow up unto perfect holiness in the fear of God; or the worship of God, as our Saviour interprets it; and to hate the very garment spotted by the flesh. Now these things well considered, it will appear, that the several scriptures that are continually brought for the maintenance of your ministry, are but so many flourishes by which the word of truth

is wrested and wringed like a nose of wax, contrary to their proper intent and scope, to serve your own turns; whoever they be of you, or others, that are the perverters of them, God knows, and one day will judge betwixt the righteous and the wicked, and give to every one according as his works shall be. In the mean while, to me it appears plain, that men, destitute of the Spirit of God, be they as learned as they may, in men's learning, yet they do pervert all scriptures to their own destruction; while the unlearned ones, simple men and women, having the Spirit of truth to guide them, shall rightly understand the mind of God, to their great comfort.

Again, seeing it is so, that men do thus, it should provoke all that are made able ministers of the New Testament, as saith the apostle, 2 Cor. iii. 6, to take his advice, saying, "If thou put the brethren in remembrance of these things, thou shalt be a good minister of Jesus Christ," 1 Tim. iv. 6. If thou put the brethren in remembrance of these things; What things? those things mentioned before; how that the Spirit hath foretold of doctrines of devils; and that men should speak lies through hypocrisy, &c. As Zachary also foretold that the father and mother of the prophet should say, That he told them lies in the name of the Lord, Zech. xiii. 3. Put the brethren in remembrance of these things; because they are subject to forget them, thou shouldst be their remembrancer; which, if thou dost, thou

shalt be a good minister of Jesus Christ; nourished up in the words of faith and good doctrine. Then mark; these things are neither errors, nor lies; nor he a false teacher that speaketh of them; but a good minister, that hath been nourished up in faith and sound doctrine, which was continually taught by Paul, and heard by Timothy. To this may be added what the apostle saith farther; declaring, that he that consenteth not to the wholesome doctrine that is according to godliness, is puffed up, and knows nothing; but dotes about words, and is such a one, as being so far corrupted by the flesh, that he is to be separated from you, 1 Tim. vi. 3, 4. Therefore God's good ministers should be careful of these things, knowing of whom they shall receive their reward; and what shall also be their portion from the men of the world; in that which is death in the world, Rev. xi. 7, but life with the Lord, Rev. xiv. 13. Be faithful therefore unto death, and you shall have a crown of life, Rev. ii. 10, declaring the power of the Spirit of the Lord in you.

Now, in the last place, I will conclude with the exhortation of the apostle in the words following; "Ye, therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before," What things? Among others these, that worldly learned men are in God's account unlearned men, because destitute of his Spirit; "beware, therefore, and take heed lest ye also," as well as others, you being subject to it, "be plucked away, before you are aware, into

the error of the wicked;" to think that God's mysteries can be attained by man's learning, "and so fall from your own steadfastness" which is through faith? for by faith ye stand, and by the Spirit ye are also established; and for a preservation against this error, and as opposite to it, growing and increasing in the grace of God, and the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, which is that that will preserve you from all evil. Now to him be glory, not to us, nor to man, but to our Lord Jesus Christ, both now and for evermore. Amen.

ISAIAH xliv. 25.

"The Lord frustrateth the tokens of the liars, and maketh diviners mad; turneth wise men backward, and maketh their knowledge foolishness."

THE END.