

THE  
**CHRISTIAN SYSTEM,**  
IN REFERENCE TO THE  
**UNION OF CHRISTIANS,**  
AND A  
RESTORATION  
OF  
**PRIMITIVE CHRISTIANITY,**  
AS PLEAD IN THE  
**CURRENT REFORMATION**

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## CHAPTER II.

### THE BIBLE.

I. One God, one moral system, one Bible. If nature be a system, religion is no less so. God is "a God of order," and that is the same as to say he is a God of system. Nature and religion, the offspring of the same supreme intelligence, bear the image of one father; twin sisters of the same Divine parentage. There is an intellectual and a moral universe as clearly bounded as the system of material nature. Man belongs to the whole three. He is an animal, intellectual, and moral being. *Sense* is his guide in nature, *faith* in religion, *reason* in both. The Bible contemplates man primarily in his spiritual and eternal relations. It is the history of nature, so far only as is necessary to show man his origin and destiny; for it contemplates nature, the universe, only in relation to man's body, soul, and spirit.

II. The Bible is to the intellectual and moral world of man, what the sun is to the planets in our system;--the fountain and source of light and life, spiritual and eternal. There is not a spiritual idea in the whole human race, that is not drawn from the Bible. As soon will the philosopher find an independent sunbeam in nature, as the theologian a spiritual conception in man, independent of THE ONE BEST BOOK.

III. The Bible, or the Old and New Testaments, in Hebrew and Greek, contains a full and perfect revelation of God and his will, adapted to man as he now is. It speaks of man as he was, and also as he will hereafter be; but it dwells on man *as he is*, and *as he ought to be*, as its peculiar and appropriate theme. It is not, then, a treatise on man as he was, nor on man as he will be, but on man as he is, and as he ought to be; not as he is physically, astronomically, geologically, politically, or metaphysically; but as he is and ought to be *morally* and *religiously*.

IV. The words of the Bible contain all the ideas in it;--these words, then, rightly understood, and the ideas are clearly perceived. The words and sentences of the Bible are to be translated, interpreted, and understood according to [15] the same code of laws and principles of interpretation by which other ancient writings are translated and understood; for when God spoke to man in his own language, he spoke as one person converses with another, in fair, stipulated, and well established meaning of the terms. This is essential to its character as a revelation from God; otherwise it would be no revelation, but would always require a class of inspired men to unfold and reveal its true sense to mankind.

V. We have written frequently and largely upon the principles and rules of interpretation, as of essential importance and utility in this generation of remaining mysticising and allegorizing. From our former writings, we shall here only extract the naked rules of interpretation, deduced from extensive and well digested premises; fully sustained, too, by the leading translators and most distinguished critics and commentators of the last and present century.

VI. *Rule 1.* On opening any book in the sacred Scriptures, *consider first the historical circumstances of the book. These are the order, the title, the author, the date, the place, and the occasion of it.*

The *order* in historical compositions is of much importance; as, for instance,--whether the first, second, or third, of the five books of Moses, or any other series of narrative, or even epistolary communication.

The *title* is also of importance, as it sometimes expresses the *design* of the book. As *Exodus*--the departure of Israel from Egypt; *Acts of Apostles*, &c.

The peculiarities of the *author*--the age in which he lived--his style--mode of expression, illustrate his writings. The date, place, and occasion of it, are obviously necessary to a right application of any thing in the book.

*Rule 2.* In examining the contents of any book, as respects precepts, promises, exhortations, &c., *observe who it is that speaks, and under what dispensation he officiates.* Is he a Patriarch, a Jew, or a Christian? *Consider also the persons addressed; their prejudices, characters, and religious relations.* Are they Jews or Christians--believers or unbelievers--approved or disapproved? This rule is essential to the proper application of every command, promise, threatening, admonition, or exhortation, in Old Testament or New.

*Rule 3.* To understand the meaning of what is commanded, promised, taught, &c., *the same philological principles, deduced from the nature of language; or the same laws of [16] interpretation which are applied to the language of other books, are to be applied to the language of the Bible.*

*Rule 4.* *Common usage, which can only be ascertained by testimony, must always decide the meaning of any word which has but one signification;--but when words have according to testimony (i. e. the dictionary,) more meanings than one, whether literal or figurative, the scope, the context, or parallel passages must decide the meaning:* for if common usage, the design of the writer, the context, and parallel passage fail, there can be no certainty in the interpretation of language.

*Rule 5.* *In all tropical language, ascertain the point of resemblance, and judge of the nature of the trope, and its kind, from the point of resemblance.*

*Rule 6.* In the interpretation of symbols, types, allegories, and parables, this rule is supreme: *ascertain the point to be illustrated; for comparison is never to be extended beyond that point--to all the attributes, qualities, or circumstances of the symbol, type, allegory, or parable.*

*Rule 7.* For the salutary and sanctifying intelligence of the Oracles of God, the following rule is indispensable--

*We must come within the understanding distance.*

There is a distance which is properly called *the speaking distance*, or the *hearing distance*; beyond which the voice reaches not, and the ear hears not. To hear another, we must come within that circle which the voice audibly fills.

Now we may say with propriety say, that as it respects God, there is an understanding distance. All beyond that distance cannot understand God; all within it, can easily understand him in all matters of piety and morality. God, himself, is the centre of that circle, and humility is its circumference.

The wisdom of God is as evident in adapting the light of the Sun of Righteousness to our spiritual or moral vision, as in adjusting the light of day to our eyes. The light reaches us without an effort of our own; but we must open our eyes, and if our eyes be sound, we enjoy the natural light of heaven. There is a sound eye in reference to spiritual light, as well as in reference to material light. Now, while the philological principles and rules of interpretation enable many men to be skillful in biblical criticism, and in the interpretation of words and sentences; who neither perceive nor admire the *things* represented by those words; the sound eye contemplates the things themselves, and is ravished with the moral scenes which the Bible unfolds.

The moral *soundness* of vision consists in having the eyes of understanding fixed solely on God himself, his approbation and complacent affection for us. It is sometimes called a *single eye*, because it looks for one thing supremely. Every one, then, who opens the Book of God, with *one aim*, with one ardent desire--intent only to know the will of God; to such a person, the knowledge of God is easy: for the Bible is framed to illuminate such, and only such, with the salutary knowledge of things celestial and divine.

Humility of mind, or what is in effect the same, contempt for all earth-born pre-eminence, prepares the mind for the reception of this light; or, what is virtually the same, opens the ears to hear the voice of God. Amidst the din of all the arguments from the flesh, the world, and Satan, a person is so deaf that he cannot hear the still small voice of God's philanthropy. But receding from pride, covetousness, and false ambition; from the love of the world; and in coming within that circle, the circumference of which is unfeigned humility, and the centre of which is God himself--the voice of God is distinctly heard and clearly understood. All within this circle are taught by God; all without it are under the influence of the wicked one. 'God resisteth the proud, but he giveth grace to the humble.'

He, then, that would interpret the Oracles of God to the salvation of his soul, must approach this volume with the humility and docility of a child, and meditate upon it day and night. Like Mary, he must sit at the Master's feet, and listen to the words which fall from his lips. To such a one there is an assurance of understanding, a certainty of knowledge, to which the man of letters alone never attained, and which the mere critic never felt.

VII. The Bible is a book of facts, not of opinions, theories, abstract generalities, nor of verbal definitions. It is a book of awful facts, grand and sublime beyond description. These facts reveal God and man, and contain within them the reasons of all piety and righteousness; or what is commonly called religion and morality. The meaning of the Bible facts is the true biblical doctrine. History is therefore the plan pursued in both Testaments; for testimony has primarily to do with faith, and reasoning with the understanding. History has, we say, to do with facts--and religion springs from them. Hence, the history of the past, and [18] the anticipations of the future, or what are usually called history and prophecy, make up exactly four-fifths of all the volumes of inspiration.