

THE CHRISTIAN ADVOCATE.

AUGUST, 1824.

Religious Communications.

LECTURES ON THE SHORTER CATECHISM OF THE WESTMINSTER ASSEMBLY OF DIVINES—ADDRESSED TO YOUTH.

LECTURE IX.

Without any recapitulation of what was said in the last lecture, on the Trinity of persons in the Unity of the Godhead, I proceed immediately to show—

II. That there are a number of passages of scripture which plainly represent, sometimes a plurality, and sometimes a Trinity of persons, in the one, only, living and true God.

Here, as in the former lecture, I can by no means introduce all the passages that bear on the point in discussion, but only select a few, out of a considerable number. And I shall begin with remarking—notwithstanding the sneers with which I know the remark has been treated—that one of the names of the true God, אֱלֹהִים (ALEIM, or ELOHIM) which is very frequently used in the Old Testament, is in the plural number. Some of the best and most erudite biblical and oriental scholars, have been clearly of the opinion, that the frequent use of this term, to denote the true God, does intimate, and was intended to intimate, that there is a plurality in the Godhead.* It is, no doubt, true,

that this word is occasionally used to denote inferior beings, and even

Aleim, have lately affected to look down on the opinions of their opponents as the tenets only of ignorance or weakness. Yet Bishop HORSLEY, whose erudition and intellectual vigour he who questions will only implicate his own, is among those who maintain that a plurality in the Godhead is clearly intimated in this word. In "A Critical Disquisition on the Etymology and Import of the Divine Names, *Eloah*, *Elohim*, *El*, *Jehovah*, and *Jah*," he says, "that whatever may be the etymology of these two words (*Eloah* and *Elohim*—written without points *Alue* and *Aleim*) and whatever the true interpretation of either, it cannot be, without some reason,—it cannot be, as some have pretended from the mere caprice of language,—that the plural word is much oftener used in the scriptures as a name of God, than the singular. That the plural word is used with the design of intimating a plurality in the Godhead, in some respect or other, it is strange that any one should doubt, who has observed that it is used in places, in which, if there be in truth no plurality in the Godhead, the inspired writers must have been determined, by the principles of their religion, studiously to avoid the use of a plural; especially as they had singulars at command. The plural is used in that very precept, which prohibits the worship of any God but one. 'I *Jehovah* am thy *Gods*, that brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.' 'Be not unto thee, other *Gods* beside me;' and in every subsequent part of the decalogue, where God is mentioned, the plural word is introduced. In the second commandment, 'For I *Jehovah* am thy *Gods*.' In the third, 'Take not the name of *Jehovah* thy *Gods* in vain.' In the fourth, 'the Sabbath of *Jehovah* thy *Gods*.' In the fifth, 'The land which *Jehovah* thy *Gods* is giving thee.' Whoever will

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* Those who deny that any plurality of persons is intimated in the Hebrew word
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attributed, under the divine blessing, to accurate catechetical instruction. Lecturing on the Heidelberg Catechism is still practised in many of the Dutch congregations in this country; and in a few of those of our denomination, the Westminster Catechisms have been publicly expounded; and wherever this has been done, I believe its beneficial influence has always been visible. But the practice, although recommended by some of the judicatures of our church, has, from one cause or another, never been general nor extensive. Adopt it, however, for yourself; assured that it will prove highly advantageous, both to you and to the dear people committed to your care. The preparation of catechetical lectures will render you more accurate in the knowledge of every part of systematick theology, and more familiar with the nature and connexion of the truths and doctrines which constitute the orthodox faith—"the faith once delivered to the saints"—than you can easily become in any other way. We always obtain a more full and correct understand-

ing of a subject, when we study and write upon it with a view to communicate our thoughts to others, than when we only endeavour to acquire knowledge for ourselves. On your people it will be likely to have the same effect as I have already remarked that it had in Scotland and Holland. Nor, if rightly conducted, will you find that this kind of publick address will be less interesting to persons of all descriptions—I think it may be rendered more interesting, than that of the ordinary description. It will also contribute to form that variety, which has been noticed as so desirable and useful.—While your sermons are making up a system in disjointed parts, here will be a system going forward in regular progression. I do not urge that you should enter on this course of lectures within the first year of your settlement. But I do earnestly advise that you begin it early in your ministry, and continue it, with some intervals of omission, to the end of your ministerial life.

Affectionately, adieu,

Miscellaneous.

Within a short time past one of the descendants of the late Rev. Dr. WITHERSPOON, has very obligingly put at our disposal a large part of his private papers, and some of the most important letters which he received, during the whole period which elapsed from the time of his leaving Scotland till his death. Several of these letters ought, in our judgment, to be made publick. Their publication, we are confident, will gratify the friends of religion and learning; and do honour, alike, to those who wrote and to him who received them.

We shall insert in our number for the present month, extracts from

two of the letters of the late distinguished Dr. DAVID RAMSAY, of Charleston, South Carolina; in which he refers to the sickness and death of his second wife, who was Dr. Witherspoon's youngest child. It was our lot to be present when the first of these letters was received and read, by the venerable man to whom it was addressed—It was on Christmas day, 1784—*fugit irreparabile tempus!*—He had made an appointment to preach, and had come for that purpose from Tusculum, his country residence about a mile from Princeton. A rumour was afloat that Mrs. Ramsay was dead; but it was not be-

lieved. The first letter, however, which we now give, was then in the post-office. The Doctor called at the office, took the letter, came immediately to the house of his son-in-law, the Rev. Dr. Smith, and opened and read it, in the midst of an agitated circle. He read it to himself—As he read, the tears rolled down his manly cheeks, but he uttered not a word, till he had read it through. He then wiped away his tears, made a few remarks with composure, mounted his horse, and returned immediately to Tusculum. The day which followed, in place of being one of festivity, became one of deep gloom and mourning, both in the college and the town. Mrs. Ramsay was a most accomplished and amiable woman, the delight of her associates, and the pride of the village. She possessed, in no inconsiderable degree, the wit and the sagacity of her father. But like him, too, she possessed prudence, good nature and piety; and her mental endowments were always employed to give pleasure, and not pain, to her acquaintance.—She died on the fifth day after she became a mother, and within a year after her marriage. A funeral sermon was preached by the Rev. Dr. Smith, on the occasion of her death, in the church at Princeton, on the first or second Sabbath after the afflictive intelligence of her dissolution reached that place. Dr. Witherspoon, shortly after, commenced a series of discourses, on “the doctrine and duty of submission to the will of God.” The discourses were sixteen in number, delivered on as many successive sabbaths; and all founded on Luke xxii. 42—“Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless, not my will but thine be done.” The nature of genuine Christian submission was accurately discriminated and clearly illustrated in these discourses; the various bearings of the duty were pointed out, and the whole

was accompanied with much practical application. It is not recollected that the speaker alluded to his own particular interest in the subject, more than once. It was then however done with great effect; and doubtless the circumstances in which he spoke, helped to give impression to all that he said. Yet the discourses were in themselves uncommonly excellent. Each was a whole by itself, and all together formed a kind of system. The present writer heard them all, regretted sincerely when the course was finished, and after the lapse of near forty years, retains a distinct recollection of their general scope and tendency. He considered them then, and still considers them, as the best *series* of sermons ever heard by him; and since the Doctor’s death, he has assiduously sought for the manuscripts which contained them; but not a trace of them has been discovered. They had certainly been precomposed with great care; although the Dr. never, on any occasion, showed a paper in the pulpit. He once told the writer, that when he had recently written a sermon, he would engage, after reading it over three times, to deliver what he had written, to an *of* and a *the*.

It was thought proper to omit, in the following letter, the part at the beginning, which related wholly to the train of symptoms and circumstances which terminated in death. The remainder of the letter is given entire: and surely it presents such a view of the supporting influence of true religion, in the most solemn crisis of human existence, as cannot fail to be edifying to every serious reader. Who but must wish for such a support! Who will not resolve to seek it!

The second letter, though short, contains reflections which many beside the writer ought to have made: and which it is hoped some may be led to make with effect, by reading

what is here submitted to their inspection and recommended to their candid consideration.

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LETTER I.

To Dr. Witherspoon from Dr. Ramsay, on the Death of his Wife.

Charleston, Dec. 17, 1784.

DEAR SIR—On the ninth instant, Mrs. Ramsay was safely delivered of a son.

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May heaven support you while I add, on the 14th day of this month, at five o'clock in the morning, she exchanged earth for heaven.

Poorly am I qualified to administer consolation to others, standing so much in need of it myself. But I can with truth and pleasure assure you, that such was the tenor of her life, with the triumphant manner of her death, that I have not a doubt remaining that my loss is her everlasting and inconceivable gain. So strongly am I persuaded of this, that if it were possible by any act of mine to restore her to life, I would not do it.

She conversed freely with the Rev. Mr. Hollingshead and myself, the day before her departure; repeated many of the promises of the gospel, with appropriation; sundry of Watts' psalms and hymns with a divine rapture. She spoke much, and often of free grace and a free salvation; and with confidence cast herself on her Redeemer. Though sensible of her approaching dissolution, she never once prayed for life, nor did she wish for death. Her whole desire was to be resigned and to submit to God's will, and to be prepared for every event.

She well understood and thoroughly believed the gospel scheme of redemption, through the propitiatory sacrifice of the Redeemer. Sensible of her unworthiness, on the score of personal merit, she renounced it in every view; but instead of being upset with this consideration, she clung the closer to

the Saviour of sinners. Her hopes having another foundation than her own goodness, were not darkened by an humble sense of her demerits; but the more she reflected on her want of perfection, her insufficiency for any good work, and the purity of the Divine nature, the more beauty she saw in the gospel plan of salvation, and the more was she disposed to put her trust in a Saviour who died for the unworthy. These considerations, instead of filling her with doubts and fears, invigorated the exercise of her faith:

About twelve hours before her departure, she joined with me in devoting our babe to God in baptism—This she did under the full conviction that she was soon to die. She added, for a reason, that she wished by that solemn act to give her dying testimony to the truth of religion. She told me that for months past she had a presentiment (her own word) that she would not survive labour. My profession leads me often to witness dying scenes, and I assure you I never saw any person discover less anxiety for life, less fear of death, or who seemed to die more in the true spirit of Christianity. I have seen her weak and delicate system more disconcerted by trifling alarms and fancied dangers, than by the full view of approaching dissolution.—She seemed neither to fear the pains nor the consequences of death; but submitted to it as a natural and necessary event, the times and circumstances of which were ordered by Infinite Wisdom.

She took every medicine prescribed (and she was attended by three Physicians beside myself) without reluctance, more from a sense of duty than an anxiety for life. On the day before her death, they all told her (and they were warranted to do so from her present circumstances) that she was much better, and hopes of her recovery might be indulged. Instead of being

elated or grasping at the prospect of life, she replied with the greatest composure, "You are all mistaken." She once expressed a tender concern for her mother in the following words. "How will my poor mother be distressed when she hears that her daughter is dead!" On all other occasions, her high and commanding sense of eternal things, seemed to obliterate her concern for her relations and all earthly matters.

She discovered no anxiety about her infant—asked me to transmit it to her friends at Princeton; and without any distressing emotion, she trusted *that*, with her other connexions, to a good God, who she doubted not would take care of them. Though her constitution was unusually timid, yet she died with all the fortitude that a practical regard to religion is calculated to inspire—God has given, and God has taken,—blessed be his name! He is the sovereign of the world, and has a right to do with his creatures what seemeth best to his infinite wisdom. This sovereignty is not the mere exercise of abstract power, but the government of perfect reason, of wisdom and goodness. He knows and has fixed the bounds of our habitations; and fixed them all in the wisest and best manner, though unknown to us. There were divine reasons why my much loved partner should die in the bloom of life, leaving a helpless infant in her stead. God has done it, and for that reason it is fit, and proper, just, wise and good, that it should be so. These are the doctrines of religion which I have always been taught to revere. Had I been sceptical about them, or about the Gospel plan of salvation through the imputed merits of a Saviour, recent experience would have convinced me of the reality. I have seen them inspire such fortitude in the breast of a delicate, weakly, timid female, as thoroughly disarmed death of all its terrors. I

have felt their consolatory influence in my own case, in supporting me under the most heavy afflictions that could possibly befall me.

I pray God to support you under this severe trial. You have every ground of comfort. Your daughter, though young, had finished the great business of life; has got through this world, with but a small portion of its many calamities; and has, I doubt not, entered on the reward, which is only obtained by many others after a long life of labour and sorrow. Her babe still lives, and bids fair for life. He is well furnished with an excellent white nurse, and shall, in the spring, if God spares his life, agreeably to his mother's request, be sent to you. The sympathizing tenderness of his mother's friends, leads them often to visit and inquire after his health. May heaven preserve his life, raise him to usefulness in his generation, and make him worthy of the parent, who in giving him life lost her own.

I feel most tenderly for the affectionate mother, and the other relations of my much loved partner. May God support you all; and may each one, by the triumphant exit of the dear deceased, be quickened in our Christian course; so that when we come to die, we may have the same consolations that buoyed her up above the fear of death, and made her triumph in approaching dissolution.

I am yours by every tender tie.

DAVID RAMSAY.

LETTER II.

From Doctor Ramsay.

Charleston, December 29, 1784.

DEAR SIR—My last, by captain Allebone, communicated the unwelcome intelligence of the decease of my dearest Fanny. The interesting subject still dwells upon my mind. Though no affliction could have been greater, I hope it has not been altogether useless. I feel that

I deserved the stroke, and even more, if any thing could have wounded me more sensibly. Wealth, independence, honour and distinctions, were all within my grasp. Worldly prosperity was flowing in upon me. Blessed with a partner whose good sense and sprightliness enlivened domestic society, and whose elegant taste qualified her for sharing with me the gifts of fortune with dignity and grace, I was tempted to feel myself happy, independent of religion. In a moment my towering schemes of sub-lunary bliss are tumbled to the dust. Thus do they deserve to suffer, who place their happiness in any thing distinct from the supreme good. May my affections be recalled, and fixed on their proper object—never to wander any more!

My dear little infant lives, and enjoys good health. But so uncertain are all human comforts, that I dare not allow myself to build any expectations, even on this promising source of enjoyment. It gives me pleasure to think, that in every event which may befall him, he was devoted to God in the solemn ordinance of baptism, by one of the last acts of his pious mother. "The promise is to you and to your seed after you." I cannot but hope, that one so solemnly devoted to God by an expiring parent, "who had remembered her Creator in the days of her youth," will be blessed of Heaven. Grant, merciful Father! that he may live—not to dishonour the God of his mother, but to promote the cause of religion, the glory of his Maker, and the happiness of his fellow creatures— * *

I am, &c.

DAVID RAMSAY.

FOR THE CHRISTIAN ADVOCATE.

GLEANINGS AND HINTS TOWARDS AN ARGUMENT FOR THE AUTHENTICITY OF JOHN V. 7.

"There are three that bear record in Vol. II.—*Ch. Adv.*

heaven—the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one."

"We are unspeakably ashamed that any modern divines should have fought, *pedibus et unguibus*, for the retention of a passage so indisputably spurious."

Eclectic Review.

I take this up *purely* as a subject of criticism. The decisions which may be made by the critic on this verse, will assuredly not affect an article of doctrine. The characters, and faith of the respectable critics who have arranged themselves against this verse, will clearly indicate this.

The most strenuous opposers of the authenticity of the verse are, generally speaking, as decided in their faith in the most holy Trinity, and in the divinity of our Lord, as those are who advocate its authenticity. "There are,"—says Griesbach, one of the ablest opponents of this verse,—“there are so many arguments for the true Deity of Christ, that I see not how it can be called in question.” See his Pref. vol. ii. First Crit. Edit. of the Greek Test.

And, indeed, such is the extent and force of the evidence of the Trinity, that were this verse relinquished and expunged, it would remain *unshaken* in all its beauty and vigour. For instance, nothing can be more clear than the scriptural evidence that there is one God. And nothing can be more clear than this, that the Father sent the Son; and that, therefore, the Father and the Son are distinct: that the Father and the Son sent the Holy Ghost: and that, therefore, the Father, and the Son, and Holy Ghost are distinct persons: that each of these distinct persons is *called* God: and being *called* God, in the language of inspiration, each of them is the *one* God.

That this is true of the Father, no one has yet expressed a doubt. He is true God: "*The only true*