

§ xxiii. If in any age since the apostles' days God has decided to show his power by weak instruments for battering down the carnal and heathenish wisdom, and restoring the ancient simplicity of the Truth, this is that age. In our day God has raised up witnesses for himself, as he raised fishermen in the old days; many, indeed most of them, are laborers and workers with their hands. Though altogether without that worldly learning, they have struck at the very root and ground of Babylon by the power and Spirit of God. In the strength and might of this power they have gathered thousands into the same power and life by reaching their consciences, people who have been far more knowledgable than these witnesses in external things, yet have not been able to resist the power that proceeded from them. Of this I myself am a true witness, and can declare it from solid experience. My heart has often been greatly broken and tendered by the virtuous Life that proceeded from the powerful ministry of those illiterate men. By merely seeing their face, as well as by their words, I have often felt the evil part in me chained down and the good part touched and raised up. What shall I say to you who are lovers of learning and admirers of knowledge? Was I not also a lover and admirer of learning, and sought it according to my age and capacity? But it pleased God in his unutterable love to withstand my empty endeavors while I was only eighteen years of age, and he made me consider seriously (which I wish may happen to others also) that “without holiness and regeneration, no one can see God”¹

¹ See Hebrews 12:14

and that “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and to depart from iniquity is good understanding.”² And how much “knowledge puffs up”³ and leads away from the inward quietness, stillness, and humility of mind where the Lord appears and his heavenly wisdom is revealed. If you consider these things, then you will say with me that all this learning, wisdom, and knowledge gathered in this fallen nature, is only dross and dung in comparison with the cross of Christ. It completely lacks that Power, Life and Virtue which I perceived that these excellent witnesses of God are filled with, though they are despised because they are illiterate. I and many others have found among them the heavenly food that gives contentment, and therefore may my soul seek this kind of learning, and wait for it forever.

Sources: Robert Barclay, *Apology for the True Christian Divinity*, Proposition X § xxiii (Glenside PA: Quaker Heritage Press, 2002) pp. 267-268 and Roberti Barclaii, *Teologiae verè Christianae apologia*, facsimile (Amsterdam: Jacob Claus, 1676) pp. 202-203.

² Job 28:28 RB

³ 1 Corinthians 8:1