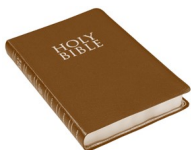
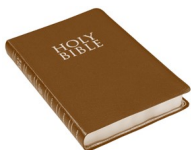


Profiting from the Word

Part One



A. W. Pink



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1. The Scriptures and Sin

There is grave reason to believe that much Bible reading and Bible study of the last few years has been of no spiritual profit to those who engaged in it. Yea, we go further; we greatly fear that in many instances it has proved a curse rather than a blessing. This is strong language, we are well aware, yet no stronger than the case calls for. Divine gifts may be misused, and Divine mercies abused. That this has been so in the present instance is evident by the fruits produced. Even the natural man may (and often does) take up the study of the Scriptures with the same enthusiasm and pleasure as he might of the sciences. Where this is the case, his store of knowledge is increased, and so also is his pride. Like a chemist engaged in making interesting experiments, the intellectual searcher of the Word is quite elated when he makes some discovery in it; but the joy of the latter is no more spiritual than would be that of the former. Again, just as the successes of the chemist generally increase his sense of self-importance and cause him to look with disdain upon others more ignorant than himself, so alas, is it often the case with those who have investigated Bible numerics, typology, prophecy and other such subjects.

The Word of God may be taken up from various motives. Some read it to satisfy their literary pride. In certain circles it has become both the respectable and popular thing to obtain a general acquaintance with the contents of the Bible simply because it is regarded as an educational defect to be ignorant of

them. Some read it to satisfy their sense of curiosity, as they might any other book of note. Others read it to satisfy their sectarian pride. They consider it a duty to be well versed in the particular tenets of their own denomination and so search eagerly for proof-texts in support of “*our* doctrines.” Yet others read it for the purpose of being able to argue successfully with those who differ from them. But in all this there is no thought of God, no yearning for spiritual edification, and therefore no real benefit to the soul.

Of what, then, does a true profiting from the Word consist? Does not 2 Timothy 3:16, 17 furnish a clear answer to our question? There we read, “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works.” Observe what is here omitted: the Holy Scriptures are given us not for intellectual gratification and carnal speculation, but to furnish unto “all good works,” and that by teaching, reproving, correcting us. Let us endeavour to amplify this by the help of other passages.

1. An individual is spiritually profited when the Word *convicts him of sin*. This is its first office: to reveal our depravity, to expose our vileness, to make known our wickedness. A man’s moral life may be irreproachable, his dealings with his fellows faultless; but when the Holy Spirit applies the Word to his heart and conscience, opening his sin-blinded eyes to see his relation and attitude to God, he cries, “Woe is me, for I am undone.” It is in this way that each truly saved soul is brought to realize his need of Christ. “They that are whole need not a physician, but they that are sick” (Luke 5:31). Yet it is not until the Spirit applies the Word in Divine power that any individual is made to feel that he is sick, sick unto death.

Such conviction that brings home to the heart the awful ravages which sin has wrought in the human constitution is not

to be restricted to the initial experience which immediately precedes conversion. Each time that God blesses His Word to my heart, I am made to feel how far, far short I come of the standard which He has set before me, namely, “Be ye holy in *all* manner of conversation” (1 Pet. 1:15). Here, then, is the first test to apply: as I read of the sad failures of different ones in Scripture, does it make me realize how sadly like unto them I am? As I read of the blessed and perfect life of Christ, does it make me recognize how terribly unlike Him I am?

2. An individual is spiritually profited when the Word makes him *sorrow over sin*. Of the stony-ground hearer it is said that he “heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it; yet hath he not root in himself” (Matt. 13:20, 21); but of those who were convicted under the preaching of Peter it is recorded that they were pricked in their heart (Acts 2:37). The same contrast exists today. Many will listen to a flowery sermon, or an address on “dispensational truth” that displays oratorical powers or exhibits the intellectual skill of the speaker, but which, usually, contains no searching application to the conscience. It is received with approbation, but no one is humbled before God or brought into a closer walk with Him through it. But let a faithful servant of the Lord (who by grace is not seeking to acquire a reputation for his “brilliance”) bring the teaching of Scripture to bear upon character and conduct, exposing the sad failures of even the best of God’s people, and, though the crowd will despise the messenger, the truly regenerate will be thankful for the message which causes them to mourn before God and cry, “Oh, wretched man that I am.” So it is in the private reading of the Word. It is when the Holy Spirit applies it in such a way that I am made to see and feel my inward corruption’s that I am really blessed.

What a word is that in Jeremiah 31:19: “After that I was instructed, I smote upon my thigh: I was ashamed, yea, even confounded.” Do you, my reader, know anything of such an experience? Does your study of the Word produce a broken heart and lead to a humbling of yourself before God? Does it

convict you of your sins in such a way that you are brought to daily repentance before Him? The paschal lamb had to be eaten with “bitter herbs” (Ex. 12:8); so as we really feed on the Word, the Holy Spirit makes it “bitter” to us before it becomes sweet to our taste. Note the order in Revelation 10:9, “And I went unto the angel, and said unto him, Give me the little book. And he said unto me, Take it, and eat it up; and it shall make thy belly bitter, but it shall be in thy mouth sweet as honey.” This is ever the experimental order: there must be mourning before comfort (Matt. 5:4); humbling before exalting (1 Pet. 5:6).

3. An individual is spiritually profited when the Word leads to *confession of sin*. The Scriptures are profitable for “reproof” (2 Tim. 3:16), and an honest soul will acknowledge its faults. Of the carnal it is said, “For every one that loveth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved” (John 3:20). “God be merciful to me a sinner” is the cry of a renewed heart, and every time we are quickened by the Word (Psa. 119) there is a fresh revealing to us and a fresh owning by us of our transgressions before God. “He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy” (Prov. 28:13). There can be no spiritual prosperity or fruitfulness (Psa. 1:3) while we conceal within our breasts our guilty secrets; only as they are freely owned before God, and that in detail, shall we enjoy His mercy.

There is no real peace for the conscience and no rest for the heart while we bury the burden of unconfessed sin. Relief comes when it is fully unbosomed to God. Mark well the experience of David, “When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long. For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me: my moisture is turned into the drought of summer” (Psa. 33:3,4). Is this figurative but forcible language unintelligible unto you? Or does your own spiritual history explain it? There is many a verse of Scripture which no commentary save that of personal experience can satisfactorily

interpret. Blessed indeed is the immediate sequel here: “I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin” (Psa. 32:5).

4. An individual is spiritually profited when the Word produces in him *a deeper hatred of sin*. “Ye that love the Lord, hate evil” (Psa. 97: 10). “We cannot love God without hating that which He hates. We are not only to avoid evil, and refuse to continue in it, but we must be up in arms against it, and bear towards it a hearty indignation” (C. H. Spurgeon). One of the surest tests to apply to the professed conversion is the heart’s attitude towards sin. Where the principle of holiness has been planted, there will necessarily be a loathing of all that is unholy. If our hatred of evil be genuine, we are thankful when the Word reproveth even the evil which we suspected not.

This was the experience of David: “Through thy precepts I get understanding: therefore I hate every false way” (Psa. 119:128). Observe well, it is not merely “I abstain from,” but “I hate;” not only “some” or “many,” but “*every false way*,” and not only “every evil,” but “*every false way*.” “Therefore I esteem all thy precepts concerning all things to be right, and I hate every false way” (Psa. 119:128). But it is the very opposite with the wicked: “Seeing thou hatest instruction, and castest my words behind thee” (Psa. 50:17). In Proverbs 8:13, we read, “The fear of the Lord is to hate evil,” and this godly fear comes through reading the Word: see Deuteronomy 17:18, 19. Rightly has it been said, “Till sin be hated, it cannot be mortified; you will never cry against it, as the Jews did against Christ, Crucify it, Crucify it, till sin be really abhorred as He was” (Edward Reyner, 1635).

5. An individual is spiritually profited when the Word causes *a forsaking of sin*. “Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity” (2 Tim. 2: 19). The more the Word is read with the definite object of discovering what is pleasing and what is displeasing to the Lord, the more will His will

become known; and if our hearts are right with Him the more will our ways be conformed thereto. There will be a “walking in the truth” (3 John 4). At the close of 2 Corinthians 6 some precious promises are given to those who separate themselves from unbelievers. Observe, there, the application which the Holy Spirit makes of them. He does not say, “Having therefore these promises, be comforted and become complacent thereby,” but “Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit” (2 Cor. 7:1).

“Now ye are *clean* through the word which I have spoken unto you” (John 15:3). Here is another important rule by which we should frequently test ourselves: Is the reading and studying of God’s Word producing a purging of my ways? Of old the question was asked, “Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way?” and the Divine answer is “by taking heed thereto according to thy word.” Yes, not simply by reading, believing, or memorizing it, but by the personal application of the Word to our “way.” It is by taking heed to such exhortations as “*Flee* fornication” (1 Cor. 6:18), “*Flee* from idolatry” (1 Cor. 10:14). “*Flee* these things”—a covetous love for money (1 Tim. 6:11), “*Flee* also youthful lusts” (2 Tim. 2:22), that the Christian is brought into practical separation from evil; for sin has not only to be confessed but “forsaken” (Prov. 28: 13).

6. An individual is spiritually profited when the Word *fortifies against sin*. The Holy Scriptures are given to us not only for the purpose of revealing our innate sinfulness, and the many, many ways in which we “come short of the glory of God” (Rom 3:23), but also to teach us how to obtain deliverance from sin, how to be kept from displeasing God. “Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I *might not sin* against thee” (Psa. 119:11). This is what each of us is required to do: “Receive, I pray thee, the law from his mouth, and lay up his words in thine heart” (Job 22:22). It is particularly the commandments, the warnings, the exhortations, we need to

make our own and to treasure; to memorize them, meditate upon them, pray over them, and put them into practice. The only effective way of keeping a plot of ground from being overgrown by weeds is to sow good seed therein: “Overcome evil with good” (Rom 12:21). So the more Christ’s Word dwells in us “richly” (Col. 3: 16), the less room will there be for the exercise of sin in our hearts and lives.

It is not sufficient merely to assent to the veracity of the Scriptures, they require to be received into the affections. It is unspeakably solemn to note that the Holy Spirit specifies as the ground of apostasy, “because the *love of the truth they received not*” (2 Thess. 2:10, Greek). “If it lie only in the tongue or in the mind, only to make it a matter of talk and speculation, it will soon be gone. The seed which lies on the surface, the fowls in the air will pick up. Therefore hide it deeply; let it get from the ear into the mind, from the mind into the heart; let it soak in further and further. It is only when it hath a prevailing sovereignty in the heart that we receive it in the love of it—when it is dearer than our dearest lust, then it will stick to us” (Thomas Manton).

Nothing else will preserve from the infections of this world, deliver from the temptations of Satan, and be so effective a preservative against sin, as the Word of God received into the affections, “The law of his God is in his heart; none of his steps shall slide” (Psa. 37:31). As long as the truth is active within us, stirring the conscience, and is really loved by us, we shall be kept from falling. When Joseph was tempted by Potiphar’s wife, he said, “How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?” (Gen. 39:9). The Word was in his heart, and therefore had prevailing power over his lusts. The ineffable holiness, the mighty power of God, who is able both to save and to destroy. None of us knows when he may be tempted: therefore it is necessary to be prepared against it. “Who among you will give ear . . . and hear *for the time to come?*” (Isa. 42:23). Yes, we are to anticipate the future and be fortified

against it, by storing up the Word in our hearts for coming emergencies.

7. An individual is spiritually profited when the Word causes him to *practice the opposite of sin*. “Sin is the transgression of the law” (1 John 3:4). God says “Thou shalt,” sin says “I will not;” God says “Thou shalt not,” sin says “I will.” Thus, sin is rebellion against God, the determination to have my own way (Isa. 53:6). Therefore sin is a species of anarchy in the spiritual realm, and may be likened unto the waving of the red flag in the face of God. Now the opposite of sinning against God is submission to Him, as the opposite of lawlessness is subjection to the law. Thus, to practice the opposition of sin is to walk in the path of obedience. This is another chief reason why the Scriptures were given: to *make known* the path which is pleasing to God for us. They are profitable not only for reproof and correction, but also for “instruction in righteousness.”

Here, then, is another important rule by which we should frequently test ourselves. Are my thoughts being formed, my heart controlled, and my ways and works regulated by God’s Word? This is what the Lord requires: “Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves” (James 1:22). This is how gratitude to and affection for Christ are to be expressed: “If ye love me, *keep* my commandments” (John 14:15). For this, Divine assistance is needed. David prayed, “Make me to go in the path of thy commandments” (Psa. 119:35). “We need not only light to know our way, but a heart to walk in it. Direction is necessary because of the blindness of our minds; and the effectual impulsions of grace are necessary because of the weakness of our hearts. It will not answer our duty to have a naked notion of truths, unless we embrace and pursue them” (Manton). Note it is “the *path* of thy commandments:” not a self-chosen course, but a definitely marked one; not a public “road,” but a private “path.”

Let both writer and reader honestly and diligently measure himself, as in the presence of God, by the seven things here

enumerated. Has your study of the Bible made you more humble, or more proud—proud of the knowledge you have acquired? Has it raised you in the esteem of your fellow men, or has it led you to take a lower place before God? Has it produced in you a deeper abhorrence and loathing of self, or has it made you more complacent? Has it caused those you mingle with, or perhaps teach, to *say*, I wish I had your *knowledge* of the Bible; or does it cause you to *pray*, Lord give me the faith, the grace, the *holiness* Thou hast granted my friend, or teacher? ‘Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them; that thy profiting *may appear* unto all’ (1 Tim. 6:15).

2. The Scriptures and God

The Holy Scriptures are wholly supernatural. They are a Divine revelation. “All scripture is given by inspiration of God” (2 Tim. 3:16). It is not merely that God elevated men’s minds, but that He directed their thoughts. It is not simply that He communicated concepts to them, but that He dictated the very words they used. “The prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit” (2 Pet. 1:21). Any human “theory” which denies their *verbal* inspiration is a device of Satan’s, an attack upon God’s truth. The Divine image is stamped upon every page. Writings so holy, so heavenly, so awe-producing, could not have been created by man.

The Scriptures make known a *supernatural* God. That may be a very trite remark, yet today it needs making. The “god” which is believed in by many professing Christians is becoming more and more paganised. The prominent place which “sport” now has in the nation’s life, the excessive love of pleasure, the abolition of home-life, the brazen immodesty of women, are so many symptoms of the same disease which brought about the downfall and death of the empires of Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome. And the twentieth-century idea of God which is entertained by the majority of people in lands nominally

“Christian” is rapidly approximating to the character ascribed to the gods of the ancients. In sharp contrast therewith, the God of Holy Writ is clothed with such perfections and vested with such attributes that no mere human intellect could possibly have invented them.

God can only be known by means of a *supernatural revelation* of Himself. Apart from the Scriptures, even a theoretical acquaintance with Him is impossible. It still holds true that “the world by wisdom knew not God” (1 Cor. 1:21). Where the Scriptures are ignored, God is “the unknown God” (Acts 17:23). But something more than the Scriptures is required before the soul can know God, know him in a real, personal, vital way. This seems to be recognized by few today. The prevailing practice assumes that a knowledge of God can be obtained through studying the Word, in the same way as a knowledge of chemistry may be secured by mastering its textbooks. An intellectual knowledge of God maybe; not so a spiritual one. A supernatural God can only be known supernaturally (i.e. known in a manner above that which mere nature can acquire), by a supernatural revelation of Himself to the heart. “God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Cor. 4:6). The one who has been favoured with this supernatural experience has learned that only “in thy light shall we see light” (Psa. 36:9).

God can only be known through a *supernatural faculty*. Christ made this clear when He said, “Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3). The unregenerate have no spiritual knowledge of God. “The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are *spiritually* discerned” (1 Cor. 2:14). Water, of itself, never rises above its own level. So the natural man is incapable of perceiving that which transcends mere nature. “This is life

eternal, that they might know thee the only true God” (John 17:3). Eternal life must be imparted before the “true God” can be known. Plainly is this affirmed in 1 John 5:20, “We know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know Him that is true.” Yes, an “understanding,” a spiritual understanding, by new creation, must be given *before* God can be known in a spiritual way.

A supernatural knowledge of God produces a *supernatural experience*, and this is something to which multitudes of church members are total strangers. Most of the “religion” of the day is but a touching up of “old Adam.” it is merely a garnishing of sepulchres full of corruption. It is an outward “form.” Even where there is a sound creed, only too often it is a dead orthodoxy. Nor should this be wondered at. It has ever been thus. It was so when Christ was here upon earth. The Jews were very orthodox. At that time they were free from idolatry. The temple stood at Jerusalem, the Law was expounded, Jehovah was worshipped. And yet Christ said to them, “He that sent me is true, whom ye know not.” (John 7:28). “Ye neither know me, nor my Father: if ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also” (John 8:19). “It is my Father that honoureth me; of whom ye say, that he is your God. Yet ye have not known him” (John 8:54,55). And mark it well, this is said to a people who had the Scriptures, searched them diligently, and venerated them as God’s Word! They were well acquainted with God theoretically, but a spiritual knowledge of Him they had not.

As it was in the Jewish world, so it is in Christendom. Multitudes who “believe” in the Holy Trinity are completely devoid of a supernatural or spiritual knowledge of God. How are we so sure of this? In this way: the character of the fruit reveals the character of the tree that bears it; the nature of the waters makes known the nature of the fountain from which they flow. A supernatural knowledge of God produces a supernatural experience, and a supernatural experience results in *supernatural fruit*. That is to say, God actually dwelling in the

heart revolutionizes, transforms the life. There is that brought forth which mere nature cannot produce, yea, that which is directly contrary thereto. And this is noticeably absent from the lives of perhaps ninety-five out of every hundred now professing to be God's children. There is nothing in the life of the average professing Christian except what can be accounted for on natural grounds. But in the genuine child of God it is far otherwise. He is, in truth, a miracle of grace; he is a "new creature in Christ Jesus" (2 Cor. 5: 17). His experience, his life, is supernatural.

The supernatural experience of the Christian is seen in his *attitude toward God*. Having within him the life of God, having been made a "partaker of the Divine nature" (2 Pet. 1:4), he necessarily loves God, loves the things of God, loves what God loves; and, contrariwise, he hates what God hates. This supernatural experience is wrought in him by the Spirit of God, and that by means of the Word of God. The Spirit never works apart from the Word. By that Word He quickens. By that Word He produces conviction of sin. By that Word He sanctifies. By that Word He gives assurance. By that Word He makes the saint to grow. Thus each one of us may ascertain the extent to which we are profiting from our reading and studying of the Scriptures by the *effects* which they are, through the Spirit's application of them, producing in us. Let us enter now into details. He who is truly and spiritually profiting from the Scriptures has:

1. A *clearer recognition of God's claims*. The great controversy between the Creator and the creature has been whether He or they should be God, whether His wisdom or theirs should be the guiding principle of their actions, whether His will or theirs should be supreme. That which brought about the fall of Lucifer was his resentment at being in subjection to his Maker:

"Thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God . . . I will be like the most High" (Isa. 14:13, 14). The lie of the serpent which lured

our first parents to their destruction was, “Ye shall be as gods” (Gen. 3:5). And ever since then the heart-sentiment of the natural man has been, “Depart from us; for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways. What is the Almighty, that we should serve him?” (Job 21:14,15). “Our lips are our own; who is Lord over us?” (Psa. 12:4). “We are lords; we will come no more unto thee” (Jer. 2:31).

Sin has alienated man from God (Eph. 4: 18). His heart is averse to Him, his will is opposed to His, his mind is at enmity against Him. Contrariwise, *salvation* means being restored to God: “For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God” (1 Pet. 3:18).

Legally that has already been done; experimentally it is in the process of accomplishment. Salvation means being reconciled to God; and that involves and includes sin’s dominion over us being broken, enmity within us being slain, the heart being won to God. This is what true conversion is; it is a tearing down of every idol, a renouncing of the empty vanities of a cheating world, and taking God for our portion, our ruler, our all in all. Of the Corinthians we read that they “first gave their own selves unto the Lord” (2 Cor. 8:5). The desire and determination of those truly converted is that they “should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again” (2 Cor. 5:15).

God’s claims are now recognized, His rightful dominion over us is acknowledged, He is owned as God. The converted yield themselves “unto God, as those that are alive from the dead,” and their members as “instruments of righteousness unto God” (Rom. 6:13). This is the demand which He makes upon us: to be our *God*, to be served as such by us; for us to be and do, absolutely and without reserve, whatsoever He demands, surrendering ourselves fully to Him (see Luke 14:26,27,33). It belongs to God as God to legislate, prescribe, determine for us; it belongs to us as a bounded duty to be ruled, governed, disposed of by Him at His pleasure.

To own God as our God is to give Him the throne of our hearts. It is to say in the language of Isaiah 26:13, “O Lord our God, other lords beside thee have had dominion over us: but by thee *only* will we make mention of thy name.” It is to declare with the Psalmist, not hypocritically, but sincerely, “O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee” (Psa. 63:1). Now it is in proportion as this becomes our actual experience that we profit from the Scriptures. It is in them, and in them alone, that the claims of God are revealed and enforced, and just so far as we are obtaining clearer and fuller views of God’s rights, and are *yielding ourselves* thereto, are we really being blessed.

2. A *greater fear of God’s majesty*. “Let all the earth fear the Lord; let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him” (Psa. 33:8). God is so high above us that the thought of His majesty should make us tremble. His power is so great that the realization of it ought to terrify us. He is so ineffably holy, and His abhorrence of sin is so infinite, that the very thought of wrongdoing ought to fill us with horror. “God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be had in reverence of all them that are about him” (Psa. 89:7).

“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom” (Prov. 9:10), and “wisdom” is a right use of “knowledge.” Just so far as God is *truly* known will He be duly feared. Of the wicked it is written, “There is *no* fear of God before their eyes” (Rom. 3:18). They have no realization of His majesty, no concern for His authority, no respect for His commandments, no alarm that He shall judge them. But concerning His covenant people God has promised, “I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me” (Jer. 32:40). Therefore do they tremble at His Word (Isa. 66:5), and walk softly before Him.

“The fear of the Lord is to hate evil” (Prov. 8: 13). And again, “By the fear of the Lord men depart from evil” (Prov. 16: 6). The man who lives in the fear of God is conscious that “the eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good” (Prov. 15:3), therefore is he conscientious about his

private conduct as well as his public. The one who is deterred from committing certain sins because the eyes of men are upon him, and who hesitates not to commit them when alone, is destitute of the fear of God. So too the man who moderates his language when Christians are about him, but does not so at other times, is devoid of God's fear. He has no awe-inspiring consciousness that God sees and hears him at *all* times. The truly regenerate soul is *afraid* of disobeying and defying God. Nor does he want to. No, his real and deepest desire is to *please Him* in all things, at all times, and in all places. His earnest prayer is "Unite my heart to fear thy name" (Psa. 86:11).

Now even the saint has to be *taught* the fear of God (Psa. 34:11). And here, as ever, it is through the Scriptures that this teaching is given us (Prov. 2:5). It is through them we learn that God's eye is ever upon us, marking our actions, weighing our motives. As the Holy Spirit applies the Scriptures to our hearts, we give increasing heed to that command, "Be thou in the fear of the Lord all the day long" (Prov. 23:17). Thus, just so far as we are awed by God's awful majesty, are made conscious that "Thou God seest me" (Gen. 16:13), and work out our salvation with "fear and trembling" (Phil. 2:12), are we truly profited from our reading and study of the Bible.

3. *A deeper reverence for God's commandments.* Sin entered this world by Adam's breaking of God's law, and all his fallen children are begotten in his depraved likeness (Gen. 5:3). "Sin is the transgression of the law" (1 John 3:4). Sin is a species of high treason, spiritual anarchy. It is the repudiation of God's dominion, the setting aside of His authority, rebellion against His will. Sin is having our own way. Now salvation is deliverance from sin, from its guilt, from its power as well as its penalty. The same Spirit who convicts of the need of God's grace also convicts of the need of God's government to rule us. God's promise to His covenant people is, "I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God" (Heb. 8:10).

A spirit of obedience is communicated to every regenerated soul. Said Christ, "If a man love me, he will keep my words" (John 14:23). There is the test: "Hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments" (1 John 2:3). None of us keeps them perfectly, yet every real Christian both desires and strives to do so. He says with Paul, "I delight in the law of God after the inward man" (Rom. 7:22). He says with the Psalmist, "I have *chosen* the way of truth," "Thy testimonies have I *taken* as an heritage for ever" (Psa. 119:30,111). And teaching which lowers God's authority, which ignores His commands, which affirms that the Christian is, in *no* sense, under the Law, is of the Devil, no matter how oily-mouthed his human instrument may be. Christ has redeemed His people from the curse of the Law and not from the command of it; He has saved them from the wrath of God, but not from His government. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart" never has been and never will be repealed.

1 Corinthians 9:21, expressly affirms that we are "under the law to Christ." "He that saith he abideth in him ought himself so to walk, even as he walked" (1 John 2:6). And *how* did Christ "walk?" In perfect obedience to God; in complete subjection to His law, honouring and obeying it in thought and word and deed. He came not to destroy the Law, but to fulfil it (Matt. 5:17). And our love for Him is expressed, not in pleasing emotions or beautiful words, but in keeping His commandments (John 14:15), and the commandments of Christ are the commandments of God (cf. Ex. 20:6). The earnest prayer of the real Christian is, "*Make me to go* in the path of thy commandments; for therein do I delight" (Psa. 119:35). Just so far as our reading and study of Scripture is, by the Spirit's application, begetting within us a greater love and a deeper respect for and a more punctual keeping of God's commandments, are we really profiting thereby.

4. A *firmer trust in God's sufficiency*. Whatsoever or whomsoever a man most trusts in is his "god." Some trust in

health, others in wealth; some in self, others in their friends. That which characterizes all the unregenerate is that they lean upon an arm of flesh. But the election of grace have their hearts drawn from all creature supports, to rest upon the living God. God's people are the children of faith. The language of their hearts is, "O my God, I trust in thee: let me not be ashamed" (Psa. 25:2). and again, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him" (Job 13: 15). They rely upon God to provide, protect and bless them. They look to an unseen resource, count upon an invisible God, lean upon a hidden Arm.

True, there are time when their faith wavers, but though they fall they are not utterly cast down. Though it be not their uniform experience, yet Psalm 56:11 expresses the general state of their souls: "In God have I put my trust: I will not be afraid what man can do unto me." Their earnest prayer is, "Lord, increase our faith." "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Rom. 10:17). Thus, as the Scriptures are pondered, their promises received in the mind, faith is strengthened, confidence in God increased, assurance deepened. By this we may discover whether or not we are profiting from our study of the Bible.

5. *A fuller delight in God's perfections.* That in which a man most delights is his "god." The poor worldling seeks satisfaction in his pursuits, pleasures and possessions. Ignoring the Substance, he vainly pursues the shadows. But the Christian delights in the wondrous perfections of God. Really to own God as *our* God is not only to submit to His sceptre, but is to love Him more than the world, to value Him above everything and everyone else. It is to have with the Psalmist an experiential realization that "*all* my springs are in thee" (Psa. 87:7). The redeemed have not only received a joy from God such as this poor world cannot impart, but they "rejoice in God" (Rom. 5:11); and of this the poor worldling knows nothing. The language of such is "the Lord is *my portion*" (Lam. 3:24).

Spiritual exercises are irksome to the flesh. But the real

Christian says, “It is good for me to draw near to God” (Psa. 73:28). The carnal man has many cravings and ambitions; the regenerate soul declares, “*One* thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord” (Psa. 27:4). And why? Because the true sentiment of his heart is, “Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee” (Psa. 73:25). Ah, my reader, if your heart has not been drawn out to love and *delight* in God, then it is still dead toward Him.

The language of the saints is, “Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation” (Hab. 3:17,18). Ah, that is a supernatural experience indeed! Yes, the Christian can rejoice when all his worldly possessions are taken from him (see Heb. 10:34). When he lies in a dungeon with back bleeding, he can still sing praises to God (see Acts 16:25). Thus, to the extent that you are being weaned from the empty pleasures of this world, are learning that there is no blessing outside of God, are discovering that He is the source and sum of all excellency, and your heart is being drawn out to Him, your mind stayed on Him, your soul finding its joy and satisfaction in Him, are you really profiting from the Scriptures.

6. A *larger submission to God’s providences*. It is natural to murmur when things go wrong, it is supernatural to hold our peace (Lev. 10:3). It is natural to be disappointed when our plans miscarry, it is supernatural to bow to His appointments. It is natural to want our own way, it is supernatural to say, “Not my will, but thine be done.” It is natural to rebel when a loved one is taken from us by death, it is supernatural to say from the heart, “The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; *blessed be* the name of the Lord” (Job 1:21). As God is truly made our

portion, we learn to admire His wisdom, and to know that He does all things well. Thus the heart is kept in “perfect peace” as the mind is stayed on Him (Isaiah 26:3). Here, then, is another sure test: if your Bible study is teaching you that *God’s* way is best, if it is causing you to submit unrepiningly to all His dispensations, if you are enabled to give thanks for *all* things (Eph. 5:20), then are you profiting indeed.

7. *A more fervent praise for God’s goodness.* Praise is the outflow of a heart which finds its satisfaction in God. The language of such a one is, “I will bless the Lord at all times: his praise shall continually be in my mouth” (Psa. 34:1). What abundant cause have God’s people for praising Him! Loved with an everlasting love, made sons and heirs, all things working together for their good, their every need supplied, an eternity of bliss assured them, their harps of gladness ought never to be silent. Nor will they be while they enjoy fellowship with Him who is “altogether lovely.” The more we are increasing in the knowledge of God (Col. 1:10), the more shall we adore Him. But it is only as the Word dwells in us richly that we are filled with spiritual songs (Col. 3:16) and make melody in our hearts to the Lord. The more our souls are drawn out in true worship, the more we are found thanking and praising our great God, the clearer evidence we give that our study of His word is profiting us.

3. The Scriptures and Christ

The order we follow in this series is that of *experience*. It is not until man is made thoroughly displeased with himself that he begins to aspire after God. The fallen creature deluded by Satan, is self-satisfied till his sin-blinded eyes are opened to get a sight of himself. The Holy Spirit first works in us a sense of our ignorance, vanity, poverty and depravity, before He brings us to perceive and acknowledge that in God alone are to be found true wisdom, real blessedness, perfect goodness and unspotted righteousness. We must be made conscious of our

imperfections ere we can really appreciate the Divine perfections. As the perfections of God are contemplated, man becomes still more aware of the infinite distance that separates him from the most High. As he learns something of God's pressing claims upon him, and his own utter inability to meet them, he is prepared to hear and welcome the good news that Another has fully met those claims for all who are led to believe in Him.

“Search the Scriptures,” said the Lord Jesus, and then He added, “for. . .they are they which testify of me” (John 5:39). They testify of Him as the only Saviour for perishing sinners, as the only Mediator between God and men, as the only one through whom the Father can be approached. They testify to the wondrous perfections of His person, the varied glories of His offices, the sufficiency of His finished work. Apart from the Scriptures, He cannot be known. In them alone He is revealed. When the Holy Spirit takes of the things of Christ and shows them unto His people, in thus making them known to the soul He uses naught but what is written. While it is true that Christ is the key to the Scriptures, it is equally true that only in the Scriptures do we have an opening-up of the “mystery of Christ” (Eph. 3:4).

Now the measure in which we profit from our reading and study of the Scriptures may be ascertained by the extent to which *Christ* is becoming more real and more precious unto our hearts. To “grow in grace” is defined as “and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” (2 Pet. 3:18): the second clause there is not something in addition to the first, but is an explanation of it. To “know” Christ (Phil. 3:10) was the supreme longing and aim of the apostle Paul, a longing and an aim to which he subordinated all other interests. But mark it well, the “knowledge” which is spoken of in these verses is not intellectual but spiritual, not theoretical but experimental, not general but personal. It is a supernatural knowledge, which is imparted to the regenerate heart by the operations of the Holy

Spirit, as He interprets and applies to us the Scriptures concerning Him.

Now the knowledge of Christ which the blessed Spirit imparts to the believer through the Scriptures profits him in different ways, according to his varying frames, circumstances and needs. Concerning the bread which God gave to the children of Israel during their wilderness wanderings, it is recorded that “some gathered more, some less” (Exod. 16:17). The same is true in our apprehension of Him of whom the manna was a type. There is that in the wondrous person of Christ which is exactly suited to our every condition, every circumstance, every need, both for time and eternity; but we are slow to realize it, and slower still to act upon it. There is an inexhaustible fullness in Christ (John 1:16) which is available for us to draw from, and the principle regulating the extent to which we become “strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim. 2:1) is “According to your faith be it to you” (Matt. 9:29).

1. An individual is profited from the Scriptures when they reveal to him *his need of Christ*. Man in his natural estate deems himself self-sufficient. True, he has a dim perception that all is not quite right between himself and God, yet has he no difficulty in persuading himself that he is able to do that which will propitiate Him. That lies at the foundation of all man’s religion, begun by Cain, in whose “way” (Jude 11) the multitudes still walk. Tell the devout religionist that “they that are in the flesh cannot please God” (Rom. 8:8), and he is at once offended. Press upon him the fact that “all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags” (Isa. 64:4), and his hypocritical urbanity at once gives place to anger. So it was when Christ was on earth. The most religious people of all, the Jews, had no sense they were “lost” and in dire need of an almighty Saviour.

“They that are whole need not a physician, but they that are sick” (Matt. 9:12). It is the peculiar office of the Holy Spirit, by His application of the Scriptures, to convict sinners of their

desperate condition, to bring them to see that their state is such that “from the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness” in them, but “wounds, and bruises, and putrefying sores” (Isa. 1:6). As the Spirit convicts us of our sins—our ingratitude to God, our murmuring against Him, our wanderings from Him—as He presses upon us the claims of God—His right to our love, obedience and adoration—and all our sad failures to render Him His due, then we are made to recognize that Christ is our only hope, and that, except we flee to Him for refuge, the righteous wrath of God will most certainly fall upon us.

Nor is this to be limited to the initial experience of conversion. The more the Spirit deepens His work of grace in the regenerated soul, the more that individual is made conscious of his pollution, his sinfulness and his vileness; and the more does he discover his need of and learn to value that precious, precious blood which cleanses from all sin. The Spirit is here to glorify Christ, and one chief way in which He does so is by opening wider and wider the eyes of those for whom He died, to see how suited Christ is for such wretched, foul, hell-deserving creatures. Yes, the more we are truly profiting from our reading of the Scriptures, the more do we feel our need of Him.

2. An individual is profited from the Scriptures when they *make Christ more real* to him. The great mass of the Israelitish nation saw nothing more than the outward shell in the rites and ceremonies which God gave them, but a regenerated remnant were privileged to behold Christ Himself. “Abraham rejoiced to see my day” said Christ (John 8:56). Moses esteemed “the reproach of Christ” greater riches than the treasures of Egypt (Heb. 11:16). So it is in Christendom. To the multitudes Christ is but a name, or at most a historical character. They have no personal dealings with Him, enjoy no spiritual communion with Him. Should they hear one speak in rapture of His excellency they regard him as an enthusiast or a fanatic. To them Christ is unreal, vague, intangible. But with the real Christian it is far otherwise. The language of his heart is,

*I have heard the voice of Jesus,
Tell me not of aught beside;
I have seen the face of Jesus,
And my soul is satisfied.*

Yet such a blissful sight is not the consistent and unvarying experience of the saints. Just as clouds come in between the sun and the earth, so failures in our walk interrupt our communion with Christ and serve to hide from us the light of His countenance. “He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will *manifest* myself to him” (John 14:21). Yes, it is the one who by grace is treading the path of obedience to whom the Lord Jesus grants manifestations of Himself. And the more frequent and prolonged these manifestations are, the more real He becomes to the soul, until we are able to say with Job, “I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear; *but now* mine eye seeth thee” (42:5). Thus the more Christ is becoming a living reality to me, the more I am profiting from the Word.

3. An individual is profited from the Scriptures when he becomes *more engrossed* with Christ’s *perfections*. It is a sense of need which first drives the soul to Christ, but it is the realization of His excellency which draws us to run after Him. The more real Christ becomes to us, the more are we attracted by His perfections. At the beginning He is viewed only as a Saviour, but as the Spirit continues to take of the things of Christ and show them unto us we discover that upon His head are “many crowns” (Rev. 19:12). Of old it was said, “His name shall be called Wonderful” (Isa. 9:6). His name signifies all that He is as made known in Scripture. “Wonderful” are His offices, in their number, variety, sufficiency. He is the Friend that sticks closer than a brother, to help in every time of need. He is the great High Priest, who is touched with the feeling of our infirmities. He is the Advocate with the Father, who pleads our cause when Satan accuses us.

Our great need is to be occupied with Christ, to sit at His feet as Mary did, and receive out of His fullness. Our chief delight should be to “*consider* the Apostle and High Priest of our profession” (Heb. 3:1): to contemplate the various relations which He sustains to us, to meditate upon the many promises He has given, to dwell upon His wondrous and changeless love for us. As we do this, we shall so delight ourselves in the Lord that the siren voices of this world will lose all their charm for us. Ah, my reader, do you know anything about this in your own actual experience? Is Christ the chief among ten thousand to your soul? Has He won your heart? Is it your chief joy to get alone and be occupied with Him? If not, your Bible reading and study has profited you little indeed.

4. An individual is profited from the Scriptures as *Christ becomes more precious* to him. Christ is precious in the esteem of all true believers (1 Pet. 2:7). They count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus their Lord (Phil. 3:8). His name to them is as ointment poured forth (Song of Sol. 1:3). As the glory of God that appeared in the wondrous beauty of the temple, and in the wisdom and splendour of Solomon, drew worshippers to him from the uttermost parts of the earth, so the unparalleled excellency of Christ which was prefigured thereby does more powerfully attract the hearts of His people. The Devil knows this full well, therefore is he ceaselessly engaged in blinding the minds of them that believe not, by placing between them and Christ the allures of this world. God permits him to assail the believer also, but it is written, “Resist the devil, and he will flee from you” (James 4:7). Resist him by definite and earnest prayer, entreating the Spirit to draw out your affections to Christ.

The more we are engaged with Christ’s perfections, the more we love and adore Him. It is lack of experimental acquaintance with Him that makes our hearts so cold towards Him. But where real and daily fellowship is cultivated the Christian will be able to say with the Psalmist, “Whom have I in heaven but thee? and

there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee” (Psa. 73:25). This it is which is the very essence and distinguishing nature of true Christianity. Legalistic zealots may be busily engaged in tithing mint and anise and cummin, they may encompass sea and land to make one proselyte, and yet have no love for God in Christ. It is the heart that God looks at: “My son, give me thine heart” (Prov. 23:26) is His demand. The more precious Christ is to us, the more delight does He have in us.

5. An individual who is profited from the Scriptures has an *increasing confidence in Christ*. There is “little faith” (Matt. 14:3) and “great faith” (Matt. 8:10). There is the “full assurance of faith” (Heb. 10:22), and trusting in the Lord “with all the heart” (Prov. 3:5). Just as there is growing “from strength to strength” (Psa. 84:7), so we read of “from faith to faith” (Rom. 1:17). The stronger and steadier our faith, the more the Lord Jesus is honoured. Even a cursory reading of the four Gospels reveals the fact that nothing pleased the Saviour more than the firm reliance which was placed in Him by the few who really counted upon Him. He Himself lived and walked by faith, and the more we do so the more are the members being conformed to their Head. Above everything else there is one thing to be aimed at and diligently sought by earnest prayer: that our faith may be increased. Of the Thessalonian saints Paul was able to say, “Your faith groweth exceedingly” (2 Thess. 1:3).

Now Christ cannot be trusted at all unless He be known, and the better he is known the more will He be trusted: “And they that know thy name *will* put their trust in thee” (Psa. 9:10). As Christ becomes more real to the heart, as we are increasingly occupied with His manifold perfections and He becomes more precious to us, confidence in Him is deepened until it becomes as natural to trust Him as it is to breathe. The Christian life is a *walk* of faith (2 Cor. 5:7), and that very expression denotes a continual progress, an increasing deliverance from doubts and fears, a fuller assurance that all He has promised He will perform. Abraham is the father of all them that believe, and thus

the record of his life furnishes an illustration of what a deepening confidence in the Lord signifies. First, at His bare word he turned his back upon all that was dear to the flesh. Second, he went forth in simple dependence on Him and dwelt as a stranger and sojourner in the land of promise, though he never owned a single acre of it. Third, when the promise was made of a seed in his old age, he considered not the obstacles in the way of its fulfilment, but was strong in faith, giving glory to God. Finally, when called on to offer up Isaac, through whom the promises were to be realized, he accounted that God was able to “raise him up, even from the dead” (Heb. 11:19).

In the history of Abraham we are shown how grace is able to subdue an evil heart of unbelief, how the spirit may be victorious over the flesh, how the supernatural fruits of a God-given and God-sustained faith may be brought forth by a man of like passions with us. This is recorded for our encouragement, for us to pray that it may please the Lord to work in us what He wrought in and through the father of the faithful. Nothing more pleases, honours and glorifies Christ than the confiding trust, the expectant confidence and the childlike faith of those to whom He has given every cause to trust Him with all their hearts. And nothing more evidences that we are being profited from the Scriptures than an increasing faith in Christ.

6. An individual is profited from the Scriptures when they beget in him a *deepening desire to please Christ*. “Ye are not your own, for ye are bought with a price” (1 Cor. 6:19,20) is the first great fact that Christians need to apprehend. Henceforth they are not to “live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again” (2 Cor. 5:15). Love delights to please its object, and the more our affections are drawn out to Christ the more shall we desire to honour Him by a life of obedience to His known will. “If a man love me, he will keep my words” (John 14:23). It is not in happy emotions or in verbal professions of devotion, but in the actual assumption of His yoke and the practical submitting to His precepts, that Christ is

most honoured.

It is at this point particularly that the genuineness of our profession may be tested and proved. Have they a faith in Christ who make no effort to learn His will? What a contempt of the king if his subjects refuse to read his proclamations! Where there is faith in Christ there will be delight in His commandments, and a sorrowing when they are broken by us. When we displease Christ we should mourn over our failure. It is impossible seriously to believe that it was my sins which caused the Son of God to shed His precious blood without my hating them. If Christ groaned under sin, we shall groan too. And the more sincere those groanings be, the more earnestly shall we seek grace for deliverance from all that displeases, and strength to do all that which pleases our blessed Redeemer.

7. An individual is profited from the Scriptures when they cause him to *long for the return of Christ*. Love can be satisfied with nothing short of a sight of its object. True, even now we behold Christ by faith, yet it is “through a glass, darkly.” But at His coming we shall behold Him “face to face” (1 Cor. 13:12). Then will be fulfilled His own words, “Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am: that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world” (John 17:24). Only this will fully meet the longings of His heart, and only this will meet the longings of those redeemed by Him. Only then will He “see of the travail of His soul, and be satisfied” (Isa. 53:11); and “As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with Thy likeness” (Psa. 17:15).

At the return of Christ we shall be done with sin for ever. The elect are predestined to be conformed to the image of God’s Son, and that Divine purpose will be realized only when Christ receives His people unto Himself. “We shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is” (1 John 3: 2). Never again will our communion with Him be broken, never again shall we groan

and moan over our inward corruptions; never again shall we be harassed with unbelief. He will present His Church “to Himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing” (Eph. 5:27). For that hour we eagerly wait. For our Redeemer we lovingly look. The more we yearn for the coming One, the more we are trimming our lamps in earnest expectation of His coming, the more do we give evidence that we are profiting from our knowledge of the Word.

Let the reader and writer honestly search themselves as in the presence of God. Let us seek truthful answers to these questions. Have we a deeper sense of our need of Christ? Is He Himself becoming to us a brighter and living reality? Are we finding increasing delight in being occupied with His perfections? Is Christ Himself becoming daily more precious to us? Is our faith in Him growing so that we confidently trust Him for everything? Are we really seeking to please Him in all the details of our lives? Are we so yearning for Him that we would be filled with joy did we know for certain that He would come during the next twenty-four hours? May the Holy Spirit search our hearts with these pointed questions!

The first of three booklets.

