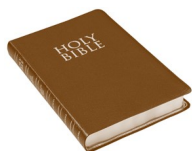
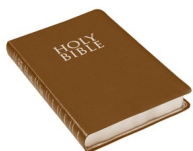


# Profiting from the Word

Part Three



A. W. Pink



# Profiting from the Word

## Part Three

- 7. The Scriptures and the World 1
- 8. The Scriptures and the Promises 8
- 9. The Scriptures and Joy 16
- 10. The Scriptures and Love 24

A. W. Pink

### 7. The Scriptures and the World

Not a little is written to the Christian in the New Testament about “the world” and his attitude towards it. Its real nature is plainly defined, and the believer is solemnly warned against it. God’s holy Word is a light from heaven, shining here “in a dark place” (2 Pet. 1:19). Its Divine rays exhibit things in their true colours, penetrating and exposing the false veneer and glamour by which many objects are cloaked. That world upon which so much labour is bestowed and money spent, and which is so highly extolled and admired by its blinded dupes, is declared to be “the enemy of God;” therefore are His children forbidden to be “conformed” to it and to have their affections set upon it.

The present phase of our subject is by no means the least important of those that we have set out to consider, and the serious reader will do well to seek Divine grace to measure himself or herself by it. One of the exhortations which God has addressed to His children runs, “As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may *grow* thereby” (1 Pet. 2:2), and it behoves each one of them honestly and diligently to examine himself so as to discover whether or not this be the case with him. Nor are we to be content with an increase of mere head-knowledge of Scripture: what we need to be most concerned about is our *practical* growth, our experimental conformity to the image of Christ. And one point at which we may test ourselves is, Does my reading and study of God’s Word make me less worldly?

1. We profit from the Word when our eyes are opened to *discern the true character of the world*. One of the poets wrote,

“God’s in His heaven—all’s right with the world.” From one standpoint that is blessedly true, but from another it is radically wrong, for “the whole world lieth in wickedness” (1 John 5:19). But it is only as the heart is supernaturally enlightened by the Holy Spirit that we are enabled to perceive that that which is highly esteemed among men is really “abomination in the sight of God” (Luke 16:15). It is much to be thankful for when the soul is able to see that the “world” is a gigantic fraud, a hollow bauble, a vile thing, which must one day be burned up.

Before we go further, let us define that “world” which the Christian is forbidden to love. There are few words found upon the pages of Holy Writ used with a greater variety of meanings than this one. Yet careful attention to the context will usually determine its scope. The “world” is a system or order of things, complete in itself. No foreign element is suffered to intrude, or if it does it is speedily accommodated or assimilated to itself. The “world” is fallen human nature acting itself out in the human family, fashioning the framework of human society in accord with its own tendencies. It is the organized kingdom of the “carnal mind” which is “enmity against God” and which is “not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be” (Rom. 8:7). Wherever the “carnal mind” is, there is “the world;” so that worldliness is the world without God.

2. We profit from the Word when we learn that the world is *an enemy to be resisted and overcome*. The Christian is bidden to “fight the good fight of faith” (1 Tim. 6:12), which implies that there are foes to be met and vanquished. As there is the Holy Trinity—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—so also is there an evil trinity—the flesh, the world, and the Devil. The child of God is called to engage in a mortal combat with them; “mortal,” we say, for either they will destroy him or he will get the victory over them. Settle it, then, in your mind, my reader, that the world is a deadly enemy, and if you do not vanquish it in your heart then you are no child of God, for it is written “Whatsoever is born of God *overcometh* the world” (1 John 5:4).

Out of many, the following reasons may be given as to why the world *must* be “overcome.” First, all its alluring objects tend to

divert the attention and alienate the affections of the soul from God. Necessarily so, for it is the tendency of things seen to turn the heart away from things unseen. Second, the spirit of the world is diametrically opposed to the Spirit of Christ; therefore did the apostle write, "Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is of God" (1 Cor. 2:12). The Son of God came into the world, but "the world knew him not" (John 1:10); therefore did its "princes" and rulers crucify Him (1 Cor. 2:8). Third, its concerns and cares are hostile to a devout and heavenly life. Christians, like the rest of mankind, are required by God to labour six days in the week; but while so employed they need to be constantly on their guard, lest covetous *interests* govern them rather than the performance of *duty*.

"This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith" (1 John 5:4). Naught but a God-given faith *can* overcome the world. But as the heart is occupied with invisible yet eternal realities, it is delivered from the corrupting influence of worldly objects. The eyes of faith discern the things of sense in their real colours, and see that they are empty and vain, and not worthy to be compared with the great and glorious objects of eternity. A felt sense of the perfections and presence of God makes the world appear less than nothing. When the Christian views the Divine Redeemer dying for his sins, living to intercede for his perseverance, reigning and overruling things for his final salvation, he exclaims, "There is none upon earth that I desire beside thee."

And how is it with *you* as you read these lines? You may cordially assent to what has just been said in the last paragraph, but how is it with you *actually*? Do the things which are so highly valued by the unregenerate charm and enthrall you? Take away from the worldling those things in which he delights, and he is wretched: is this so with you? Or, are your *present* joy and satisfaction found in objects which can never be taken from you? Treat not these questions lightly, we beseech you, but ponder them seriously in the presence of God. The *honest* answer to them will be an index to the real state of your soul, and will indicate whether or not you are deceived in supposing yourself to be "a new

creature in Christ Jesus.”

3. We profit from the Word when we learn that Christ *died to deliver us from “this present evil world”* (Gal. 1:4). The Son of God came here, not only to “fulfil” the requirements of the law (Matt. 5:17), to “destroy the works of the devil” (1 John 3:8), to deliver us “from the wrath to come” (1 Thess. 1:10), to save us from our sins (Matt. 1:21), but also to free us from the bondage of this world, to deliver the soul from its enthralling influence. This was foreshadowed of old in God’s dealings with Israel. They were slaves in Egypt, and “Egypt” is a figure of the world. They were in cruel bondage, spending their time in making bricks for Pharaoh. They were unable to free themselves. But Jehovah, by His mighty power, emancipated them, and brought them forth out of the “iron furnace.” Thus does Christ with His own. He breaks the power of the world over their hearts. He makes them independent of it, that they neither court its favours nor fear its frowns.

Christ gave Himself a sacrifice for the sins of His people that, in consequence thereof, they might be delivered from the damning power and governing influence of all that is evil in this present world: from Satan, who is its prince; from the lusts which predominate in it; from the vain conversation of the men who belong to it. And the Holy Spirit indwelling the saints co-operates with Christ in this blessed work. He turns their thoughts and affections away from earthly things to heavenly. By the working of His power, He frees them from the demoralizing influence which surrounds them, and conforms them to the heavenly standard. And as the Christian grows in grace he recognizes this, and acts accordingly. He seeks yet fuller deliverance from this “present evil world,” and begs God to free him from it completely. That which once charmed him now nauseates. He longs for the time when he shall be taken out of this scene where his blessed Lord is so grievously dishonoured.

4. We profit from the Word *when our hearts are weaned from it*. “Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world” (1 John 2:15). “What the stumbling-block is to the traveller in the way, the weight to the runner, the lime twigs to the bird in its flight, so is the love of the world to a Christian in his course—

either wholly diverting him from, greatly enticing him in, or forcibly turning him out of it” (Nathaniel Hardy, 1660). The truth is that until the heart is purged from this corruption the ear will be deaf to Divine instruction. Not until we are lifted above the things of time and sense can we be subdued unto obedience to God. Heavenly truth glides off a carnal mind as water from a spherical body.

The world has turned its back upon Christ, and though His name is professed in many places, yet will it have nothing to do with Him. All the desires and designs of worldlings are for the gratification of self. Let their aims and pursuits be as varied as they may, self being supreme, everything is subordinated to the pleasing of *self*. Now Christians are in the world, and cannot get out of it; they have to live their Lord’s appointed time in it. While here they have to earn their living, support their families, and attend to their worldly business. But they are forbidden to *love* the world, as though it could make them happy. Their “treasure” and “portion” are to be found elsewhere.

The world appeals to every instinct of fallen man. It contains a thousand objects to charm him: they attract his attention, the attention creates a desire for and love of them, and insensibly yet surely they make deeper and deeper impressions on his heart. It has the same fatal influence on *all* classes. But attractive and appealing as its varied objects may be, all the pursuits and pleasures of the world are designed and adapted to promote the happiness of *this life only* therefore, “What shall it profit a man if he should gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?” The Christian is taught by the Spirit, and through His presenting of Christ to the soul his thoughts are diverted from the world. Just as a little child will readily drop a dirty object when something more pleasing is offered to it, so the heart which is in communion with God will say, “I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord... and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ” (Phil. 3:8).

5. We profit from the Word *when we walk in separation from the world*. “Know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever will be a friend of the world is the enemy of

God” (James 4:4). Such a verse as this ought to search every one of us through and through, and make us tremble. How can I fraternize with or seek my pleasure in that which condemned the Son of God? If I do, that at once identifies me with His enemies. Oh, my reader, make no mistake upon this point. It is written, “If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him” (1 John 2:15).

Of old it was said of the people of God that they “shall dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned among the nations” (Num. 23:9). Surely the disparity of character and conduct, the desires and pursuits, which distinguish the regenerate from the unregenerate *must* separate the one from the other. We who profess to have our citizenship in another world, to be guided by another Spirit, to be directed by another rule, and to be journeying to another country, cannot go arm in arm with those who *despise* all such things! Then let everything in and about us exhibit the character of Christian *pilgrims*. May we indeed be “men wondered at” (Zech. 3:8) because “*not conformed to this world*” (Rom. 12:2).

6. We profit from the Word *when we evoke the hatred of the world*. What pains are taken in the world to save appearances and keep up a seemly and good state! Its conventionalities and civilities, its courtesies and charities, are so many contrivances to give an air of respectability to it. So too its churches and cathedrals, its priests and prelates, are needed to gloss over the corruption which seethes beneath the surface. And to make good weight “Christianity” is added, and the holy name of Christ is taken upon the lips by thousands who have never taken *His* “yoke” upon them. Of them God says, “This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me” (Matt. 15:8).

And what is to be the attitude of all real Christians toward such? The answer of Scripture is plain: “From such turn away” (2 Tim. 3:5), “Come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord” (2 Cor. 6:17). And what will follow when this Divine command is obeyed? Why, then we shall prove the truth of those words of Christ: “If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen

you out of the world, therefore the world *hateth* you” (John 15:19). Which “world” is specifically in view here? Let the previous verse answer: “If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you.”

What “world” hated Christ and hounded Him to death? The *religious* world, those who pretended to be most zealous for God’s glory. So it is now. Let the Christian turn his back upon a Christ—dishonouring Christendom, and his fiercest foes and most relentless and unscrupulous enemies will be those who claim to be Christians themselves! But “Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you ... for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad” (Matt. 5:11,12). Ah, my brother, it is a healthy sign, a sure mark that you are profiting from the Word, when the religious world hates you. But if, on the other hand, you still have a “good standing” in the “churches” or “assemblies” there is grave reason to fear that you love the praise of men more than that of God!

7. We profit from the Word *when we are elevated above the world*. First, above its *customs and fashions*. The worldling is a slave to the prevailing habits and styles of the day. Not so the one who is walking with God: his chief concern is to be “conformed to the image of his Son.” Second, above its *cares and sorrows*: of old it was said of the saints that they took joyfully the spoiling of their goods, knowing that they had “in heaven a better and an enduring substance” (Heb. 10:34). Third, above its *temptations*: what attraction has the glare and glitter of the world for those who are “delighting themselves in the Lord?” None whatever! Fourth, above its *opinions and approvals*. Have you learned to be independent of and defy the world? If your whole heart is set upon pleasing God, you will be quite unconcerned about the frowns of the godless.

Now, my reader, do you really wish to measure yourself by the contents of this chapter? Then seek honest answers to the following questions. First, what are the objects before your mind in times of recreation? What do your thoughts most run upon? Second, what are the objects of your choice? When you have to decide how to spend an evening or the Sabbath afternoon, what do you select? Third, which occasions you the most sorrow, the loss



of earthly things, or lack of communion with God? Which causes greater grief (or chagrin), the spoiling of your plans, or the coldness of your heart to Christ? Fourth, what is your favourite topic of conversation? Do you hanker after the news of the day, or to meet with those who talk of the “altogether lovely” One? Fifth, do your “good intentions” materialize, or are they nothing but empty dreams? Are you spending more or less time than formerly on your knees? Tis the Word sweeter to your taste, or has your soul lost its relish for it?

## 8. The Scriptures and the Promises

The Divine promises make known the good pleasure of God’s will to His people, to bestow upon them the riches of His grace. They are the outward testimonies of His heart, who from all eternity loves them and foreappointed all things for them and concerning them. In the person and work of His Son, God has made an all-sufficient provision for their complete salvation, both for time and for eternity. To the intent that they might have a true, clear and spiritual knowledge of the same, it has pleased the Lord to set it before them in the exceeding great and precious promises which are scattered up and down in the Scriptures as so many stars in the glorious firmament of grace; by which they may be assured of the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning them, and take sanctuary in Him accordingly, and through this medium have real communion with Him in His grace and mercy at all times, no matter what their case or circumstances may be.

The Divine promises are so many declarations to bestow some good or remove some ill. As such they are a most blessed making known and manifesting of God’s love to His people. There are three steps in connection with God’s love: first, His inward purpose to exercise it; the last, the real execution of that purpose; but in between there is the gracious *making known* of that purpose to the beneficiaries not only show His love fully to them in due time, but in the interim He will have us *informed* of His benevolent designs, that we may sweetly rest in His love, and stretch ourselves comfortably upon His sure promises. There we are able to say, “How precious also are thy thoughts unto me, O

God! how great is the sum of them” (Psa. 139:17).

In 2 Peter 1:4, the Divine promises are spoken of as “exceeding great and precious.” As Spurgeon pointed out, “greatness and preciousness seldom go together, but in this instance they are united in an exceeding degree.” When Jehovah is pleased to open His mouth and reveal His heart He does so in a manner worthy of Himself, in words of superlative power and richness. To quote again the beloved London pastor: “They come from a great God, they come to great sinners, they work for us great results, and deal with great matters.” While the natural intellect is capable of perceiving much of their greatness, only the renewed heart can taste their ineffable preciousness, and say with David, “How sweet are thy words unto my taste! yea, sweeter then honey to my mouth” (Psa. 119:103).

1. We profit from the Word *when we perceive to whom the promises belong*. They are available Only to those who are in Christ. “For all the promises of God in him [the Lord Jesus] are yea, and in him Amen” (2 Cor. 1:20). There can be no intercourse between the thrice holy God and sinful creatures except through a Mediator who has satisfied Him on their behalf. Therefore must that Mediator receive from God all good for His people, and they must have it at second hand through Him. A sinner might just as well petition a tree as call upon God for mercy while he despises and rejects Christ.

Both the promises and the things promised are made over to the Lord Jesus and conveyed unto the saints from Him. “This is *the* [chief and grandest] promise that he hath promised us, even eternal life” (1 John 2:25), and as the same epistle tells us, “This life is in his Son” (5:11). This being so, what good can they who are not yet in Christ have by the promises? None at all. A man out of Christ is out of the favour of God, yea, he is under His wrath; the Divine threatenings and not the promises are *his* portion. Solemn, solemn consideration is it that those who are “without Christ” are “aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and *strangers* from the covenants of promise, having *no* hope, and without God in the world” (Eph. 2:12). Only “the children of God” are “the children of the promise” (Rom. 9:8). Make sure, my

reader, that you are one of them.

How terrible, then, is the blindness and how great is the sin of those preachers who indiscriminately apply the Divine promises to the saved and unsaved alike! They are not only taking “the children’s bread” and casting it to the “dogs,” but they are “handling the word of God deceitfully” (2 Cor. 4:2), and beguiling immortal souls. And they who listen to and heed them are little less guilty, for God holds all responsible to search the Scriptures for themselves, and test whatever they read or hear by that unerring standard. If they are too lazy to do so, and prefer blindly to follow their blind guides, then their blood is on their own heads. Truth has to be “bought” (Prov. 23:23), and those who are unwilling to pay the price must go without it.

2. We profit from the Word when we *labour to make the promises of God our own*. To do this we must first take the trouble to become really acquainted with them. It is surprising how many promises there are in Scripture which the saints know nothing about, the more so seeing that *they* are the peculiar treasure of believers, the substance of faith’s heritage lying in them. True, Christians are already the recipients of wondrous blessings, yet the capital of their wealth, the bulk of their estate, is only prospective. They have already received an “earnest,” but the better part of what Christ has purchased for them lies yet in the promise of God. How diligent, then, should they be in studying His testamentary will, familiarizing themselves with the good things which the Spirit “hath revealed” (1 Cor. 2:10), and seeking to take an inventory of their spiritual treasures!

Not only must I search the Scriptures to find out what has been made over to me by the everlasting covenant, but I need also to meditate upon the promises, to turn them over and over in my mind, and cry unto the Lord for spiritual understanding of them. The bee would not extract honey from the flowers as long as he only gazed upon them. Nor will the Christian derive any real comfort and strength from the Divine promises until his faith lays hold of and penetrates to the heart of them. God has given no assurance that the dilatory shall be fed, but He has declared, “the soul of the diligent shall be made fat” (Prov. 13:4). Therefore did

Christ say, “*Labour* not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life” (John 6:27). It is only as the promises are stored up in our minds that the Spirit brings them to remembrance at those seasons of fainting when we most need them.

3. We profit from the Word when we *recognize the blessed scope of God’s promises*. “A sort of affectation prevents some Christians from seeking religion, as if its sphere lay among the commonplaces of daily life. It is to them transcendental and dreamy; rather a creation of pious fiction than a matter of fact. They believe in God, after a fashion, for things spiritual, and for the life which is to be; but they totally forget that true godliness hath the promise of the life which now is, as well as that which is to come. To them it would seem almost profanation to pray about the small matters of which daily life is made up. Perhaps they will be startled if I venture to suggest that this should make them question the reality of their faith. If it cannot bring them help in the little troubles of life, will it support them in the greater trials of death?” (C. H. Spurgeon).

“Godliness is profitable unto all things, having *promise* of the life that *now* is, and of that which is to come” (1 Tim. 4:8). Reader, do you really believe this, that the promises of God cover *every* aspect and particular of your daily life? Or have the “Dispensationalists” deluded you into supposing that the Old Testament belongs only to fleshly Jews, and that “*our promises*” respect spiritual and not material blessings? How many a Christian has derived comfort from “I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee” (Heb. 13:5); well, that is a quotation from Joshua 1:5! So, too, 2 Corinthians 7:1 speaks of “*having these promises*,” yet one of them, referred to in 6:18, is taken from the book of Leviticus!

Perhaps someone asks, “But where am I to draw the line? Which of the Old Testament promises rightfully belong to me?” We answer that Psalm 84:11 declares, “The Lord will give grace and glory: *no* good thing will He withhold from them that walk uprightly.” If you are really walking “*uprightly*” you are entitled to appropriate that blessed promise and count upon the Lord giving you whatever “*good thing*” is truly required by you. “My

God shall supply all your need” (Phil. 4:19). If then there is a promise anywhere in His Word which just fits your present case and situation, make it your own as suited to your need. Steadfastly resist every attempt of Satan to rob you of any portion of your Father’s Word.

4. We profit from the Word when *we make a proper discrimination between the promises of God*. Many of the Lord’s people are frequently guilty of spiritual theft, by which we mean that they appropriate to themselves something to which they are not entitled, but which belongs to another. “Certain covenant engagements, made with the Lord Jesus Christ, as to His elect and redeemed ones, are altogether without condition so far as we are concerned; but many other wealthy words of the Lord contain stipulations which must be carefully regarded, or we shall not obtain the blessing. One part of my reader’s diligent search must be directed toward this most important point. God will keep His promise to thee; only see thou to it that the way in which He conditions His engagement is carefully observed by thee. Only when we fulfil the requirements of a conditional promise can we expect that promise to be fulfilled to us” (C. H. Spurgeon).

Many of the Divine promises are addressed to particular characters, or, more correctly speaking, to particular graces. For example, in Psalm 25:9, the Lord declares that He will “guide in judgment” the *meek*; but if I am out of communion with Him, if I am following a course of self-will, if my heart is haughty, then I am not justified in taking to myself the comfort of this verse. Again, in John 15:7, the Lord tells us, “If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.” But if I am not in experimental communion with Him, if His commands are not regulating my conduct, then my prayers will remain unanswered. While God’s promises proceed from pure grace, yet it ever needs to be remembered that grace reigns “through righteousness” (Rom. 5:21) and never sets aside human responsibility. If I ignore the laws of health I must not be surprised that sickness prevents me enjoying many of God’s temporal mercies: in like manner, if I neglect His precepts I have myself to blame if I fail to receive the fulfilment of many of His promises.

Let none suppose that by His promises God has obligated Himself to ignore the requirements of His holiness: He never exercises any one of His perfections at the expense of another. And let none imagine that God would be magnifying the sacrificial work of Christ were He to bestow its fruits upon impenitent and careless souls. There is a *balance* of truth to be preserved here; alas, that it is now so frequently lost, and that under the pretence of exalting Divine grace men are really “turning it into lasciviousness.” How often one hears quoted, “Call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee” (Psa. 50:15). But that verse begins with “And,” and the preceding clause is “*Pay thy vows* unto the most High!” Again, how frequently is “I will guide thee with mine eye” (Psa. 32:8) seized by people who pay no attention to the context! But *that* is God’s promise to one who has confessed his “transgression” unto the Lord (verse 5). If, then, I have unconfessed sin on my conscience, and have leaned on an arm of flesh or sought help from my fellows, instead of waiting only on God (Psa. 62:5), then I have no right to count upon the Lord’s guiding me with His eye—which necessarily presupposes that I am walking in close communion with Him, for I cannot see the eye of another while at a distance from him.

5. We profit from the Word when *we are enabled to make God’s promises our support and stay*. This is one reason why God has given them to us; not only to manifest His love by making known His benevolent designs, but also to comfort our hearts and develop our faith. Had God so pleased He could have bestowed His blessings without giving us notice of His purpose. The Lord might have given us all the mercies we need without pledging Himself to do so. But in that case we could not have been believers; faith without a promise would be a foot without ground to stand upon. Our tender Father planned that we should enjoy His gifts twice over: first by faith, and then by fruition. By this means He wisely weans our hearts away from things seen and perishing and draws them onward and upward to those things which are spiritual and eternal.

If there were no promises there would not only be no faith, but no hope either. For what is hope but the *expectation* of the things

which God has declared He will give us? Faith looks to the Word promising, hope looks to the performance thereof. Thus it was with Abraham; “Who against hope believed in hope. . .and being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah’s womb; he staggered not. . .through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God” (Rom. 4:18, 20). Thus it was with Moses: “Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward” (Heb. 11:26). Thus it was with Paul; “I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me” (Acts 27:25). Is it so with you, dear reader? Are the promises of Him who cannot lie the resting-place of your poor heart?

6. We profit from the Word when *we patiently await the fulfilment of God’s promises*. God promised Abraham a son, but he waited many years for the performance of it. Simeon had a promise that he should not see death till he had seen the Lord’s Christ (Luke 2:26), yet it was not made good till he had one foot in the grave. There is often a long and hard winter between the sowing-time of prayer and the reaping of the answer. The Lord Jesus Himself has not yet received a full answer to the prayer He made in John chapter Seventeen, nineteen hundred years ago. Many of the best of God’s promises to His people will not receive their richest accomplishment until they are in glory. He who has all eternity at His disposal needs not to hurry. God often makes us tarry so that patience may have “her perfect work,” yet let us not distrust Him. “For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come” (Hab. 2:3).

“These all died in faith, not having received the [fulfilment of the] promises but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them” (Heb. 11:13). Here is comprehended the whole work of faith: knowledge, trust, loving adherence. The “afar off” refers to the things promised; those they “saw” with the mind, discerning the substance behind the shadow, discovering in them the wisdom and goodness of God. They were “persuaded:” they doubted not, but were assured of their participation in them

and knew they would not disappoint them. “Embraced them” expresses their delight and veneration, the heart cleaving to them with love and cordially welcoming and entertaining them. The promises were the comfort and the stay of their souls in all their wanderings, temptations and sufferings.

Various ends are accomplished by God in delaying His execution of the promises. Not only is faith put to the proof, so that its genuineness may the more clearly appear; not only is patience developed, and hope given opportunity for exercise; but submission to the Divine will is fostered. “The weaning process is not accomplished: we are still hankering after the comforts which the Lord intends us for ever to outgrow. Abraham made a great feast when his son Isaac was weaned; and, peradventure, our heavenly Father will do the same with us. Lie down, proud heart. Quit thine idols; forsake thy fond doings; and the promised peace will come unto thee” (C. H. Spurgeon).

7. We profit from the Word when *we make a right use of the promises*. First, in our dealings with God Himself. When we approach unto His throne, it should be to plead one of His promises. They are to form not only the foundation for our faith to rest upon, but also the substance of our requests. We must ask according to God’s will if we are to be heard, and His will is revealed in those good things which He has declared He will bestow upon us. Thus we are to lay hold of His pledged assurances, spread them before Him, and say, “Do as thou hast said” (2 Samuel 7:25). Observe how Jacob pleaded the promise in Genesis 32:12; Moses in Exodus 32:13; David in Psalm 119:58; Solomon in 1 Kings 8:25; and do thou, my Christian reader, likewise.

Second, in the life we live in the world. In Hebrews 11:13, we not only read of the patriarchs discerning, trusting, and embracing the Divine promises, but we are also informed of the *effects* which they produced upon them: “and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims in the earth,” which means they made a public avowal of their faith. They acknowledged (and by their conduct demonstrated) that their interests were not in the things of this world; they had a satisfying portion in the promises they had



appropriated. Their hearts were set upon things above; for where a man's heart is, there will his treasure be also.

“Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God” (2 Cor. 7:1); that is the effect they should produce in us, and *will* if faith really lays hold of them. “Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: *that* by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust” (2 Pet. 1:4). Now the Gospel and the precious promises, being graciously bestowed and powerfully applied, have an influence on purity of heart and behaviour, and teach men to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly. Such are the powerful effects of gospel promises under the Divine influence as to make men inwardly partakers of the Divine nature and outwardly to abstain from and avoid the prevailing corruptions and vices of the times.

## 9. The Scriptures and Joy

The ungodly are ever seeking after joy, but they do not find it: they busy and weary themselves in the pursuit of it, yet all in vain. Their hearts being turned from the Lord, they look downward for joy, where it is not; rejecting the substance, they diligently run after the shadow, only to be mocked by it. It is the sovereign decree of heaven that nothing can make sinners truly happy but God in Christ; but this they will not believe, and therefore they go from creature to creature, from one broken cistern to another, inquiring where the best joy is to be found. Each worldly thing which attracts them says, It is found in me; but soon it disappoints. Nevertheless, they go on seeking it afresh today in the very thing which deceived them yesterday. If after many trials they discover the emptiness of one creature comfort, then they turn to another, only to verify our Lord's word, “Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again” (John 4:13).

Going now to the other extreme: there are some Christians who suppose it to be sinful to rejoice. No doubt many of our readers will be surprised to hear this but let them be thankful they have

been brought up in sunnier surroundings, and bear with us while we labour with those less favoured. Some have been taught—largely by implication and example, rather than by plain inculcation—that it is their duty to be gloomy. They imagine that feelings of joy are produced by the Devil appearing as an angel of light. They conclude that it is well-nigh a species of wickedness to be happy in such a world of sin as we are in. They think it presumptuous to rejoice in the knowledge of sins forgiven, and if they see young Christians so doing they tell them it will not be long before they are floundering in the Slough of Despond. To all such we tenderly urge the prayerful pondering of the remainder of this chapter.

“Rejoice evermore” (1 Thess. 5:16). It surely cannot be unsafe to do what God has commanded us. The Lord has placed no embargo on rejoicing. No, it is Satan who strives to make us hang up our harps. There is no precept in Scripture bidding us “Grieve in the Lord alway: and again I say, Grieve;” but there is an exhortation which bids us, “Rejoice in the Lord, O ye righteous: for praise is comely for the upright” (Psa. 33:1). Reader, if you are a real Christian (and it is high time you tested yourself by Scripture and made sure of this point), then Christ is yours, all that is in Him is yours. He bids you “Eat, O friends; drink, yea, drink *abundantly*, O beloved” (Song of Sol. 5:1): the only sin you may commit against His banquet of love is to stint yourself. “Let your soul delight itself *in fatness*”(Isa. 55:2) is spoken not to those already in heaven but to saints still on earth. This leads us to say that:

1. We profit from the Word when we perceive that joy *is a duty*. “Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice” (Phil. 4:4). The Holy Spirit here speaks of rejoicing as a personal, present and permanent duty for the people of God to carry out. The Lord has not left it to our option whether we should be glad or sad, but has made happiness an obligation. Not to rejoice is a sin of omission. Next time you meet with a radiant Christian, do not chide him, ye dwellers in Doubting Castle, but chide yourselves; instead of being ready to call into question the Divine spring of his mirth, judge yourself for your doleful state.

It is not a carnal joy which we are here urging, by which we mean a joy which comes from carnal sources. It is useless to seek joy in earthly riches, for frequently they take to themselves wings and fly away. Some seek their joy in the family circle, but that remains entire for only a few years at most. No, if we are to “rejoice evermore” it must be in an object that lasts for evermore. Nor is it a fanatical joy we have reference to. There are some with an excitable nature who are happy only when they are half out of their minds; but terrible is the reaction. No, it is an intelligent, steady, heart delight in God Himself. Every attribute of God, when contemplated by faith, will make the heart sing. Every doctrine of the Gospel, when truly apprehended, will call forth gladness and praise.

Joy is a matter of Christian duty. Perhaps the reader is ready to exclaim, My emotions of joy and sorrow are not under my control; I cannot help being glad or sad as circumstances dictate. But we repeat, “Rejoice in the Lord” is a Divine command, and to a large extent obedience to it lies in one’s own power. I am responsible to control my emotions. True I cannot help being sorrowful in the presence of sorrowful thoughts, but I can refuse to let my mind dwell upon them. I can pour out my heart for relief unto the Lord, and cast my burden upon Him. I can seek grace to meditate upon His goodness, His promises, the glorious future awaiting me. I have to decide whether I will go and stand in the light or hide among the shadows. Not to rejoice in the Lord is more than a misfortune, it is a fault which needs to be confessed and forsaken.

2. We profit from the Word when *we learn the secret of true joy*. That secret is revealed in 1 John 1:3, 4: “Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full.” When we consider the littleness of our fellowship with God, the shallowness of it, it is not to be wondered at that so many Christians are comparatively joyless. We sometimes sing, “Oh happy day that fixed my choice on Thee, my Saviour and my God! Well may this glowing heart rejoice and tell its raptures all abroad.” Yes, but if that happiness is to be maintained there must be a continued steadfast occupation of the heart and mind with Christ. It is only where there is much

faith and consequent love that there is much joy.

“*Rejoice in the Lord always.*” There is no other object in which we can rejoice “always.” Everything else varies and is inconstant. What pleases us today may pall on us tomorrow. But the Lord is always the same, to be enjoyed in seasons of adversity as much as in seasons of prosperity. As an aid to this, the very next verse says, “Let your *moderation* be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand” (Phil. 4:5). Be temperate in connection with all external things; do not be taken with them when they seem most pleasing, nor troubled when displeasing. Be not exalted when the world smiles upon you, nor dejected when it scowls. Maintain a stoical indifference to outward comforts: why be so occupied with them when *the Lord Himself* “is at hand?” If persecution be violent, if temporal losses be heavy, the Lord is “a very *present help* in trouble” (Psa. 46:1)—ready to support and succour those who cast themselves upon Him. He will care for you, so “be anxious for nothing” (Phil. 4:6). Worldlings are haunted with carking cares, but the Christian should not be.

“These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full” (John 15:11). As these precious words of Christ are pondered by the mind and treasured in the heart, they cannot but produce joy. A rejoicing heart comes from an increasing knowledge of and love for the truth as it is in Jesus. “Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart” (Jer. 15:16). Yes, it is by feeding and feasting upon the words of the Lord that the soul is made fat, and we are made to sing and make melody in our hearts unto Him.

“Then will I go unto the altar of God, unto God my exceeding joy” (Psa. 43:4). As Spurgeon well said, “With what exultation should believers draw near unto Christ, who is the antitype of the altar! Clearer light should give greater intensity of desire. It was not the altar as such that the Psalmist cared for, for he was no believer in the heathenism of ritualism: his soul desired spiritual fellowship, fellowship with God Himself in very deed. What are all the rites of worship unless the Lord be in them; what, indeed, but empty shells and dry husks? Note the holy rapture with which

David regards his Lord! He is not his joy alone, but his *exceeding* joy; not the fountain of joy, the giver of joy, or the maintainer of joy, but *that joy itself*. The margin hath it, “The gladness of my joy;” i.e. the soul, the essence, the very bowels of my joy.”

“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). That is something of which the worldling knows nothing; alas, that it is an experience to which so many professing Christians are strangers! It is in God that the fount of spiritual and everlasting joy originates; from Him it all flows forth. This was acknowledged of old by the Church when she said, “All my springs are in thee” (Psa. 87:7). Happy the soul who has been truly taught this secret!

3. We profit from the Word when we are taught *the great value of joy*. Joy is to the soul what wings are to the bird, enabling us to soar above the things of earth. This is brought out plainly in Nehemiah 8:10: “The joy of the Lord is *your strength*.” The days of Nehemiah marked a turning-point in the history of Israel. A remnant had been freed from Babylon and returned to Palestine. The Law, long ignored by the captives, was now to be established again as the rule of the newly-formed commonwealth. There had come a remembrance of the many sins of the past, and tears not unnaturally mingled with the thankfulness that they were again a nation, having a Divine worship and a Divine Law in their midst. Their leader, knowing full well that if the spirit of the people began to flag they could not face and conquer the difficulties of their position, said to them: “This day is holy unto the Lord: (this feast we are keeping is a day of devout worship; therefore, mourn not), neither be ye sorry, for the joy of the Lord is your strength.”

Confession of sin and mourning over the same have their place, and communion with God cannot be maintained without them. Nevertheless, when true repentance has been exercised, and things put right with God, we must forget “those things which are behind” and reach forth unto “those things which are

before” (Phil. 3:13). And we can only press forward with alacrity as our hearts are joyful. How heavy the steps of him who approaches the place where a loved one lies cold in death! How energetic his movements as he goes forth to meet his bride! Lamentation unfits for the battles of life. Where there is despair there is no longer power for obedience. If there be no joy, there can be no worship.

My dear readers, there are tasks needing to be performed, service to others requiring to be rendered, temptations to be overcome, battles to be fought; and we are only experimentally fitted for them as our hearts are rejoicing in the Lord. If our souls are resting in Christ, if our hearts are filled with a tranquil gladness, work will be easy, duties pleasant, sorrow bearable, endurance possible. Neither contrite remembrance of past failures nor vehement resolutions will carry us through. If the arm is to smite with vigour, it must smite at the bidding of a light heart. Of the Saviour Himself it is recorded, “Who for *the joy that was set before him* endured the cross, despising the shame” (Heb. 12:2).

4. We profit from the Word when we attend to *the root of joy*. The spring of joy is faith: “Now the God of hope fill you with all peace and joy in believing” (Rom. 15:13). There is a wondrous provision in the Gospel, both by what it takes from us and what it brings to us, to give a calm and settled glow to the Christian’s heart. It takes away the load of guilt by speaking peace to the stricken conscience. It removes the dread of God and the terror of death which weighs on the soul while it is under condemnation. It gives us God Himself as the portion of our hearts, as the object of our communion. The Gospel works joy, because the soul is at rest in God. But these blessings become our own only by personal appropriation. Faith must receive them, and when it does so the heart is filled with peace and joy. And the secret of *sustained* joy is to keep the channel open, to continue as we began. It is *unbelief* which clogs the channel. If there be but little heat around the bulb of the thermometer, no wonder that the mercury marks so low a degree. If there is a weak faith, joy cannot be strong. Daily do we need to pray for a *fresh* realization of the preciousness of the Gospel, a fresh appropriation of its blessed contents; and then

there will be a renewing of our joy.

5. We profit from the Word when *we are careful to maintain our joy*. “Joy in the Holy Spirit” is altogether different from a natural buoyancy of Spirit. It is the product of the Comforter dwelling in our hearts and bodies, revealing Christ to us, answering all our need for pardon and cleansing, and so Setting us at peace with God; and forming Christ in us, so that He reigns in our souls, subduing us to His control. There are no circumstances of trial and temptation in which we may refrain from it, for the command is, “Rejoice in the Lord *always*.” He who gave this command knows all about the dark side of our lives, the sins and sorrows which beset us, the “much tribulation” through which we must enter the kingdom of God. Natural hilarity leaves the woes of our earthly lot out of its reckoning. It soon relaxes in the presence of life’s hard-ships: it cannot survive the loss of friends or health. But the joy to which we are exhorted is not limited to any set of circumstances or type of temperament; nor does it fluctuate with our varying moods and fortunes.

Nature may assert itself in the subjects of it, as even Jesus wept at the grave of Lazarus. Nevertheless, they can exclaim with Paul, “As sorrowful, yet *always* rejoicing” (2 Cor. 6:10). The Christian may be loaded with heavy responsibilities, his life may have a series of reverses, his plans may be thwarted and his hopes blighted, the grave may close over the loved ones who gave his earthly life its cheer and sweetness, and yet, under all his disappointments and sorrows, his Lord still bids him “Rejoice.” Behold the apostles in Philippi’s prison, in the innermost dungeon, with feet fast in the stocks, and backs bleeding and smarting from the terrible scourging they had received. How were they occupied? In grumbling and growling? in asking what they had done to deserve such treatment? No! “At midnight Paul and Silas prayed and sang praises unto God” (Acts 16:25). There was no sin in their lives, they were walking obediently, and so the Holy Spirit was free to take of the things of Christ, and show them unto their hearts, so that they were filled to overflowing. If we are to maintain our joy, we must keep from grieving the Holy Spirit.

When Christ is supreme in the heart, joy fills it. When He is

Lord of every desire, the Source of every motive, the Subjugator of every lust, then will joy fill the heart and praise ascend from the lips. The possession of this involves taking up the cross every hour of the day; God has so ordered it that we cannot have the one without the other. Self-sacrifice, the cutting off of a right hand, the plucking out of a right eye, are the avenues through which the Spirit enters the soul, bringing with Him the joys of God's approving smile and the assurance of His love and abiding presence. Much also depends upon the spirit in which we enter the world each day. If we expect people to pet and pamper us, disappointment will make us fretful. If we desire our pride to be ministered to, we are dejected when it is not. The secret of happiness is forgetting self and seeking to minister to the happiness of others. "It is more blessed to give than to receive," so it is a happier thing to minister to others than to be ministered to.

6. We profit from the Word when *we are sedulous in avoiding the hindrances to joy*. Why is it that so many Christians have so little joy? Are they not all born children of the light and of the day? This term "light," which is so often used in Scripture to describe to us the nature of God, our relations to Him and our future destiny, is most suggestive of joy and gladness. What other thing in nature is as beneficent and beautiful as the light? "God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all" (1 John 1:5). It is only as we walk with God, in the light, that the heart can truly be joyous. It is the deliberate allowing of things which mar our fellowship with Him that chills and darkens our souls. It is the indulgence of the flesh, the fraternizing with the world, the entering of forbidden paths which blight our spiritual lives and make us cheerless.

David had to cry, "Restore unto me *the joy* of thy salvation" (Psa. 51:12). He had grown lax and self-indulgent. Temptation presented itself and he had no power to resist. He yielded, and one sin led to another. He was a backslider, out of touch with God. Unconfessed sin lay heavy on his conscience. Oh my brethren and sisters, if we are to be kept from such a fall, if we are not to lose our joy, then self must be denied, the affections and lusts of the flesh crucified. We must ever be on our watch against temptation. We must spend much time upon our knees. We must



drink frequently from the Fountain of living waters. We must be out-and-out for the Lord.

7. We profit from the Word when we *diligently preserve the balance between sorrow and joy*. If the Christian faith has a marked adaptation to produce joy, it has an almost equal design and tendency to produce sorrow—a sorrow that is solemn, manly, noble. “As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing” (2 Cor. 6:10) is the rule of the Christian’s life. If faith casts its light upon our condition, our nature, our sins, sadness must be one of the effects. There is nothing more contemptible in itself, and there is no surer mark of a superficial character and trivial round of occupation, than unshaded gladness, that rests on no deep foundations of quiet, patient grief—grief because I know what I am and what I ought to be; grief because I look out on the world and see hell’s fire burning at the back of mirth and laughter, and know *what* it is that men are hurrying to.

He who is anointed with the oil of gladness above His fellows (Psa. 45:7) was also “the man of *sorrows* and acquainted with *grief*” And both of these characters are (in measure) repeated in the operations of His Gospel upon every heart that really receives it. And if, on the one hand, by the fears it removes from us and the hopes it breathes into us, and the fellowship into which it introduces us, we are anointed with the oil of gladness; on the other hand, by the sense of our own vileness which it teaches us, by the conflict between the flesh and the Spirit, there is infused a sadness which finds expression in “O wretched man that I am!” (Rom. 7:24). These two are not contradictory but complementary. The Lamb must be eaten with “bitter herbs” (Exod. 12:8).

## 10. The Scriptures and Love

In earlier chapters we have sought to point out some of the ways by which we may ascertain whether or not our reading and searching of the Scriptures are really being blessed to our souls. Many are deceived on this matter, mistaking an eagerness to acquire knowledge for a spiritual love of the Truth (2 Thess. 2:10), and assuming that addition to their store of learning is the same

thing as growth in grace. A great deal depends upon the end or aim we have before us when turning to God's Word. If it be simply to familiarize ourselves with its contents and become better versed in its details, it is likely that the garden of our souls will remain barren; but if with the prayerful desire to be rebuked and corrected by the Word, to be searched by the Spirit, to conform our hearts to its holy requirements, then we may expect a Divine blessing.

In the preceding chapters we have endeavoured to single out the vital things by which we may discover what progress we are making in personal godliness. Various criteria have been given, which it becomes both writer and reader honestly to measure themselves by. We have pressed such tests as: Am I acquiring a greater hatred of sin, and a practical deliverance from its power and pollution? Am I obtaining a deeper acquaintance with God and His Christ? Is my prayer-life healthier? Are my good works more abundant? Is my obedience fuller and gladder? Am I more separated from the world in my affections and ways? Am I learning to make a right and profitable use of God's promises, and so delighting myself in Him that His joy is my daily strength? Unless I can truthfully say that these are (in some measure) my experience, then it is greatly to be feared that my study of the Scriptures is profiting me little or nothing.

It hardly seems fitting that these chapters should be concluded until one has been devoted to the consideration of Christian love. The extent to which this spiritual grace is, or is not, being cultivated and regulated affords another index to the measure in which my perusal of God's Word is helping me spiritually. No one can read the Scriptures with any measure of attention without discovering how much they have to say about love, and therefore it behooves each one of us prayerfully and carefully to ascertain whether or not his or her love be really a spiritual one, and whether it be in a healthy state and is being exercised aright.

The subject of Christian love is far too comprehensive to consider all its varied phases within the compass of a single chapter. Properly we should begin with contemplating the exercise of our love toward God and His Christ, but as this has been at least

touched upon in preceding chapters we shall now waive it. Much too, might be said about the natural love which we owe to our fellow-men, who belong to the same family as we do, but there is less need to write on that theme than on what is now before our mind. Here we propose to confine our attention to spiritual love to the brethren, the brethren of Christ.

1. We profit from the Word when *we perceive the great importance of Christian love*. Nowhere is this brought out more emphatically than in 1 Corinthians chapter 13. There the Holy Spirit tells us that though a professing Christian can speak fluently and eloquently upon Divine things, if has not love, he is like metal, which, though it makes a noise when struck, is lifeless. That though he can prophesy, understand all mysteries and knowledge, and has faith which brings miracles to pass, yet if he be lacking in love, he is spiritually a nonentity. Yea, that though he be so benevolent as to give all his worldly possessions to feed the poor, and yield his body to a martyr's death, yet if he have not love, it profits him nothing. How high a value is here placed upon love, and how essential for me to make sure I possess it!

Said our Lord, "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another" (John 13:35). By Christ's making it the badge of Christian discipleship, we see again the great importance of love. It is an essential test of the genuineness of our profession: we cannot love Christ unless we love His brethren, for they are all bound up in the same "bundle of life" (1 Samuel 25:29) with Him. Love to those whom He has redeemed is a sure evidence of spiritual and supernatural love to the Lord Jesus Himself. Where the Holy Spirit has wrought a supernatural birth, He will draw forth that nature into exercise, He will produce in the hearts and lives and conduct of the saints supernatural graces, one of which is loving all who are Christ's for Christ's sake.

2. We profit from the Word when *we learn to detect the sad perversions of Christian love*. As water will not rise above its own level, so the natural man is incapable of understanding, still less appreciating, that which is spiritual (1 Cor. 2:14). Therefore we should not be surprised when unregenerate professors mistake human sentimentality and carnal pleasantries for spiritual love.

But sad it is to see some of God's own people living on so low a plane that they confuse human amiability and affability with the queen of the Christian graces. While it is true that spiritual love is characterized by meekness and gentleness, yet is it something very different from and vastly superior to the courtesies and kindnesses of the flesh.

How many a doting father has withheld the rod from his children, under the mistaken notion that real affection for them and the chastising of them were incompatible! How many a foolish mother, who disdained all corporal punishment, has boasted that "love" rules in her home! One of the most trying experiences of the writer, in his extensive travels, has been to spend a season in homes where the children have been completely spoilt. It is a wicked perversion of the word "love" to apply it to moral laxity and parental looseness. But this same pernicious idea rules the minds of many people in other connections and relations. If a servant of God rebukes their fleshly and worldly ways, if he presses the uncompromising claims of God, he is at once charged with being "lacking in love." Oh, how terribly are multitudes deceived by Satan on this important subject!

3. We profit from the Word when we are taught the *true nature of Christian love*. Christian love is a spiritual grace abiding in the souls of the saints alongside faith and hope (1 Cor. 13:13). It is a holy disposition wrought in them when they are regenerated (1 John 5:1). It is nothing less than the love of God shed abroad in their hearts by the Holy Spirit (Rom. 5:5). It is a righteous principle which seeks the highest good of others. It is the very reverse of that principle of self-love and self-seeking which is in us by nature. It is not only an affectionate regard of all who bear the image of Christ, but also a powerful desire to promote their welfare. It is not a fickle sentiment which is easily offended, but an abiding dynamic which "many waters" of cold indifference or "floods" of disapproval can neither quench nor drown (Song of Sol. 8:7). Though coming far short in degree it is the same in essence as His of whom we read, "Having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end" (John 13:1).

There is no safer and surer way of obtaining a right conception

of the nature of Christian love than by making a thorough study of its perfect exemplification in and by the Lord Jesus. When we say a “thorough study,” we mean the taking of a comprehensive survey of *all* that is recorded of Him in the four Gospels, and not the limiting of ourselves to a few favourite passages or incidents. As this is done, we discover that His love was not only benevolent and magnanimous, thoughtful and gentle, unselfish and self-sacrificing, patient and unchanging, but that many other elements also entered into it. Love could deny an urgent request (John 11:6), rebuke His mother (John 2:4), use a whip (John 2: 15), severely upbraid His doubting disciples (Luke 24:25), and denounce hypocrites (Matt. 23:13-33). Love can be stern (Matt. 16:23), yea, angry (Mark 3:5). Spiritual love is a *holy* thing: it is faithful to God; it is uncompromising toward all that is evil.

4. We profit from the Word when *we discover that Christian love is a Divine communication*. “We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren” (1 John 3:14). “Love to the brethren is the fruit and effect of a new and supernatural birth, wrought in our souls by the Holy Spirit, as the blessed evidence of our having been chosen in Christ by the Divine Father, before the world was. To love Christ and His, and our brethren in Him, is congenial to that Divine nature He hath made us the partakers of by His Holy Spirit. . . . This love of the brethren must be a peculiar love, such as none but the regenerate are the subjects of, and which none but they can exercise, or the apostle would not have so particularly mentioned it; it is such that those who have it not are in a state of unregeneracy; so it follows, “he that loveth not his brother abideth in death”” (S. E. Pierce).

Love for the brethren is far, far more than finding agreeable the society of those whose temperaments are similar to or whose views accord with my own. It pertains not to mere nature, but is a spiritual and supernatural thing. It is the heart being drawn out to those in whom I perceive *something of Christ*. Thus it is very much more than a party spirit; it embraces all in whom I can see the image of God’s Son. It is, therefore, a loving them for Christ’s sake, for what I see of Christ in them. It is the Holy Spirit within attracting and alluring me with Christ indwelling my brethren and

sisters. Thus real Christian love is not only a Divine gift, but is altogether dependent upon God for its invigoration and exercise. We need to pray daily that the Holy Spirit will call forth into action and manifestation, toward both God and His people, that love which He has shed abroad in our hearts.

5. We profit from the Word when *we rightly exercise Christian love*. This is done, not by seeking to please our brethren and ingratiate ourselves in their esteem, but when we truly seek their highest good. “By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments” (1 John 5:2). What is the real test of my personal love to God Himself? It is my keeping of His commandments (see John 14:15,21,24; 15:10,14). The genuineness and strength of my love to God are not to be measured by my words, nor by the lustiness with which I sing His praises, but by my obedience to His Word. The same principle holds good in my relations with my brethren.

“By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep His commandments.” If I am glossing over the faults of my brethren and sisters, if I am walking with them in a course of self-will and self-pleasing, then I am *not* “loving” them. “Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart: thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbour, and not suffer sin upon him” (Lev. 19:17). Love is to be exercised in a Divine way, and never at the expense of my failing to love God; in fact, it is only when God has His proper place in my heart that spiritual love can be exercised by me toward my brethren. True spiritual love does not consist in gratifying them, but in pleasing God and helping them; and I can only *help* them in the path of God’s commandments.

Petting and pampering one another is not brotherly love; exhorting one another to press forward in the race that is set before us, and speaking words (enforced by the example of our daily walk) which will encourage them to “look off unto Jesus,” would be much more helpful. Brotherly love is a holy thing, and not a fleshly sentiment or a loose indifference as to the path we are treading. God’s “commandments” are expressions of His love, as well as of His authority, and to ignore them, even while seeking to be kindly affectioned one to another, is not “love” at all. The

*exercise of love is to be in strict conformity to the revealed will of God. We are to love “in the truth” (3 John 1).*

6. We profit from the Word when *we are taught the varied manifestations of Christian love*. To love our brethren and manifest the love in all kinds of ways is our bounden duty. But at no point can we do this more truly and effectually, and with less affectation and ostentation, than by having fellowship with them at the throne of grace. There are brethren and sisters in Christ in the four corners of the earth, about the details of whose trials and conflicts, temptations and sorrows, I know nothing; yet I can express my love for them, and pour out my heart before God on their behalf, by earnest supplication and intercession. In no other way can the Christian more manifest his affectionate regard toward his fellow-pilgrims than by using all his interests in the Lord Jesus in their behalf, in-treating His mercies and favours unto them.

“Whoso hath this world’s good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth” (1 John 3:17,18). Many of God’s people are very poor in this world’s goods. Sometimes they wonder why it is so; it is a great trial to them. One reason why the Lord permits this is that others of His Saints may have their compassion drawn out and minister to their temporal needs from the abundance with which God has furnished them. Real love is intensely practical: it considers no office too mean, no task too humbling, where the sufferings of a brother can be relieved. When the Lord of love was here upon earth, He had thought for the bodily hunger of the multitude and the comfort of His disciples’ feet!

But there are some of the Lord’s people so poor that they have very little indeed to share with others. What, then, may they do? Why, make the spiritual concerns of all the saints their own; interest themselves on their behalf at the throne of grace! We know by our own cases and circumstances what the feelings, sorrows, and complaints of other saints must be the subjects of. We know from sad experience how easy it is to give way to a

spirit of discontent and murmuring. But we also know how, when we have cried unto the Lord for His quieting hand to be laid upon us, and when He has brought some precious promise to our remembrance, what peace and comfort have come to our heart. Then let us beg Him to be equally gracious to all His distressed saints. Let us seek to make their burdens our own, and weep with them that weep, as well as rejoice with them that rejoice. Thus shall we express real love for their persons in Christ by intreating their Lord and our Lord to remember them with everlasting kindness.

*This* is how the Lord Jesus is now manifesting His love to His saints: “He ever liveth to make intercession for them” (Heb. 7:25). He makes their cause and care His own. He is intreating the Father on their behalf. None is forgotten by Him: every lone sheep is borne upon the heart of the Good Shepherd. Thus, by expressing our love to the brethren in daily prayers for the supply of their varied needs, we are brought into fellowship with our great High Priest. Not only so, but the saints will be endeared to us thereby: our very praying for them as the beloved of God will increase our love and esteem for them as such. We cannot carry them on our hearts before the throne of grace without cherishing in our own hearts a real affection for them. The best way of overcoming a bitter spirit to a brother who has offended is to be much in prayer for him.

7. We profit from the Word when *we are taught the proper cultivation of Christian love*. We suggest two or three rules for this. First, recognizing at the outset that just as there is much in you (in me) which will severely try the love of the brethren, so there will be not a little in them to test our love. “*Forbearing one another in love*” (Eph. 4:3) is a great admonition on this subject which each of us needs to lay to heart. It is surely striking to note that the very first quality of spiritual love named in, Corinthians 13 is that it “*suffereth long*” (verse 4).

Second, the best way to cultivate any virtue or grace is to *exercise* it. Talking and theorizing about it avails nothing unless it be carried into action. Many are the complaints heard today about the littleness of the love which is being manifested in many



places: that is all the more reason why I should seek to set a better example! Suffer not the coldness and unkindness of others to dampen your love, but “overcome evil with good” (Romans. 12:21). Prayerfully ponder 1 Corinthians 13 at least once a week.

Third, above all, see to it that your own heart basks in the light and warmth of God’s love. Like begets like. The more you are truly occupied with the unwearying, unfailling, unfathomable love of Christ to you, the more will your heart be drawn out in love to those who are His. A beautiful illustration of this is found in the fact that the particular apostle who wrote most upon brotherly love was he who leaned upon the Master’s bosom. The Lord grant all requisite grace to both reader and writer (than whom none more needs to heed them) to observe these rules, to the praise of the glory of His grace, and to the good of His beloved people.

The third of three booklets.

