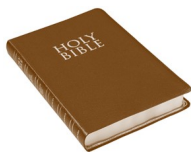


Profiting from the Word

Part Two



A. W. Pink



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4. The Scriptures and Prayer

A prayerless Christian is a contradiction in terms. Just as a still-born child is a dead one, so a professing believer who does not pray is devoid of spiritual life. Prayer is the breath of the new nature in the saint, as the Word of God is its food. When the Lord would assure the Damascus disciple that Saul of Tarsus had been truly converted, He told him, “Behold, he prayeth” (Acts 9:11). On many occasions had that self-righteous Pharisee bowed his knees before God and gone through his “devotions,” but this was the first time he had ever really *prayed*. This important distinction needs emphasizing in this day of powerless forms (2 Tim. 3:5). They who content themselves with formal addresses to God know Him not; for “the spirit of grace *and* supplications” (Zech. 12:10) are never separated. God has no dumb children in His regenerated family: “Shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto Him?” (Luke 18:7). Yes, “cry” unto Him, not merely “say” their prayers.

But will the reader be surprised when the writer declares it is his deepening conviction that, probably, the Lord’s own people sin more in their efforts to pray than in connection with any other thing they engage in? What hypocrisy there is, where there should be reality! What presumptuous demandings, where there should be submissiveness! What formality, where there should be brokenness of heart! How little we really *feel* the sins we confess, and what little *sense* of deep need for the mercies we seek! And even where God grants a measure of deliverance

from these awful sins, how much coldness of heart, how much unbelief, how much self-will and self-pleasing have we to bewail! Those who have no conscience upon these things are strangers to the spirit of holiness.

Now the Word of God should be our directory in prayer. Alas, how often we have made our own fleshly inclinations the rule of our asking. The Holy Scriptures have been given to us “that the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works” (2 Tim. 3:17). Since we are required to “pray in the Spirit” (Jude 20), it follows that our prayers ought to be according to the Scriptures, seeing that He is their Author throughout. It equally follows that according to the measure in which the Word of Christ dwells in us “richly” (Col. 3:16) or sparsely, the more or the less will our petitions be in harmony with the mind of the Spirit, for “out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh” (Matt. 12:34). In proportion as we hide the Word in our hearts, and it cleanses, moulds and regulates our inner man, will our prayers be acceptable in God’s sight. Then shall we be able to say, as David did in another connection, “Of thine own have we given thee” (1 Chron. 29:14).

Thus the purity and power of our prayer-life are another index by which we may determine the extent to which we are profiting from our reading and searching of the Scriptures. If our Bible study is not, under the blessing of the Spirit, convicting us of the sin of prayerlessness, revealing to us the place which prayer ought to have in our daily lives, and is actually bringing us to spend more time in the secret place of the Most High; unless it is teaching us how to pray more acceptably to God, how to appropriate His promises and plead them before Him, how to appropriate His precepts and turn them into petitions, then not only has the time we spend over the Word been to little or no soul enrichment, but the very knowledge that we have acquired of its letter will only add to our condemnation in the day to come. “Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves” (James 1:22) applies to its prayer-admonitions

as to everything else in it. Let us now point out seven criteria.

1. We are profited from the Scriptures when we are brought to realize *the deep importance of prayer*. It is really to be feared that many present-day readers (and even students) of the Bible have no deep convictions that a definite prayer-life is absolutely essential to a daily walking and communing with God, as it is for deliverance from the power of indwelling sin, the seductions of the world, and the assaults of Satan. If such a conviction really gripped their hearts, would they not spend far more time on their faces before God? It is worse than idle to reply, "A multitude of duties which have to be performed crowd out prayer, though much against my wishes." But the fact remains that each of us takes time for anything we deem to be imperative. Who ever lived a busier life than our Saviour? Yet who found more time for prayer? If we truly yearn to be suppliants and intercessors before God and use all the available time we now have, He will so order things for us that we shall have more time.

The lack of positive conviction of the deep importance of prayer is plainly evidenced in the corporate life of professing Christians. God has plainly said, "My house shall be called the house of prayer" (Matt. 21:13). Note, not "the house of preaching and singing," but of *prayer*. Yet, in the great majority of even so-called orthodox churches, the ministry of prayer has become a negligible quantity. There are still evangelistic campaigns, and Bible-teaching conferences, but how rarely one hears of two weeks set apart for special prayer! And how much good do these "Bible conferences" accomplish if the prayer-life of the churches is not strengthened? But when the Spirit of God applies in power to our hearts such words as, "Watch ye and pray, lest ye enter into temptation" (Mark 14:38), "In every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God" (Phil. 4:6), "Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving" (Col. 4:2), then are we being profited from the Scriptures.

2. We are profited from the Scriptures when we are made to

feel that *we know not how to pray*. “We know not what we should pray for as we ought” (Rom. 8:26). How very few professing Christians really believe this! The idea most generally entertained is that people know well enough what they should pray for, only they are careless and wicked, and so fail to pray for what they are fully assured is their duty. But such a conception is at direct variance with this inspired declaration in Romans 8:26. It is to be observed that that flesh-humbling affirmation is made not simply of men in general, but of the saints of God in particular, among which the apostle did not hesitate to include himself: “We know not what we should pray for as we ought.” If this be the condition of the regenerate, how much more so of the unregenerate! Yet it is one thing to read and mentally assent to what this verse says, but it is quite another to have an experimental realization of it, for the heart to be made to feel that what God requires from us He must *Himself* work in and through us.

***“I often say my prayers, But do I ever pray?
And do the wishes of my heart Go with the words I say?
I may as well kneel down
And worship gods of stone,
As offer to the living God
A prayer of words alone”***

It is many years since the writer was taught these lines by his mother—now “present with the Lord”—but their searching message still comes home with force to him. The Christian can no more *pray* without the direct enabling of the Holy Spirit than he can create a world. This must be so, for real prayer is a felt need awakened within us by the Spirit, so that we ask God, in the name of Christ, for that which is in accord with His holy will. “If we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us” (1 John 5:14). But to ask something which is not according to God’s will is not praying, but presuming. True, God’s revealed will is made known in His Word, yet not in such a way as a cookery book contains recipes and directions for preparing

various dishes. The Scriptures frequently enumerate principles which call for continuous exercise of heart and Divine help to show us their application to different cases and circumstances. Thus we are being profited from the Scriptures when we are taught our deep need of crying “Lord, teach us to pray” (Luke 11:1), and are actually constrained to beg Him for the spirit of prayer.

3. We are profited from the Scriptures when we are made conscious *of our need of the Spirit’s help*. First, that He may make known to us our real wants. Take, for example, our temporal needs. How often we are in some external strait; things from without press hard upon us, and we long to be delivered from these trials and difficulties. Surely *here* we “know” of ourselves *what* to pray for. No, indeed; far from it! The truth is that, despite our natural desire for relief, so ignorant are we, so dull is our discernment, that (even where there is an exercised conscience) we know not what submission unto His pleasure God may require, or how He may sanctify these afflictions to our inward good. Therefore, God calls the petitions of most who seek for relief from external trials “howlings,” and not a crying unto Him with the heart (see Hos. 7:14). “For who knoweth what is good for man in this life?” (Eccles. 6:12). Ah, heavenly wisdom is needed to teach us our temporal “needs” so as to make them a matter of prayer according to the mind of God.

Perhaps a few words need to be added to what has just been said. Temporal things *may* be scripturally prayed for (Matt. 6:11, etc.), but with this threefold limitation. First, *incidentally* and not primarily, for they are not the things which Christians are principally concerned in (Matt. 6:33). It is heavenly and eternal things (Col. 3:1) which are to be sought first and foremost, as being of far greater importance and value than temporal things. Second, *subordinately*, as a means to an end. In seeking material things from God it should not be in order that we may be gratified, but as an aid to our pleasing Him better. Third, *submissively*, not dictatorially, for that would be the sin of presumption. Moreover, we know not whether any temporal

mercy would really contribute to our highest good (Psa. 106:18), and therefore we must leave it with God to decide.

We have inward wants as well as outward. Some of these may be discerned in the light of conscience, such as the guilt and defilement of sin, of sins against light and nature and the plain letter of the law. Nevertheless, the knowledge which we have of ourselves by means of the conscience is so dark and confused that, apart from the Spirit, we are in no way able to discover the true fountain of cleansing. The things about which believers do and ought to treat primarily with God in their supplications are the inward frames and spiritual dispositions of their souls. Thus, David was not satisfied with confessing all known transgressions and his original sin (Psa. 51:1-5), nor yet with an acknowledgment that none could understand his errors, whence he desired to be cleansed from “secret faults” (Psa. 19:12); but he also begged God to undertake the inward searching of his heart to find out what was amiss in him (Psa. 139:23, 24), knowing that God principally requires “truth in the inward parts” (Psa. 51:6). Thus, in view of I Corinthians 2:10-12, we should definitely seek the Spirit’s aid that we may pray acceptably to God.

4. We are profited from the Scriptures when the Spirit teaches us *the right end in praying*. God has appointed the ordinance of prayer with at least a threefold design. First, that the great triune God might be honoured, for prayer is an act of worship, a paying homage; to the Father as the Giver, in the Son’s name, by whom alone we may approach Him, by the moving and directing power of the Holy Spirit. Second, to humble our hearts, for prayer is ordained to bring us into the place of dependence, to develop within us a sense of our helplessness, by owning that without the Lord we can do nothing, and that we are beggars upon His charity for everything we are and have. But how feebly is this realized (if at all) by any of us until the Spirit takes us in hand, removes pride from us, and gives God His true place in our hearts and thoughts. Third, as a means or way of obtaining for ourselves the good things for which we ask.

It is greatly to be feared that one of the principal reasons why so many of our prayers remain unanswered is because we have a wrong, an unworthy end in view. Our Saviour said, "Ask, and it shall be given you" (Matt. 7:7): but James affirms of some, "Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts" (James 4:3). To pray for anything, and not expressly unto the end which God has designed, is to "ask amiss," and therefore to no purpose. Whatever confidence we may have in our own wisdom and integrity, if we are left to ourselves our aims will never be suited to the will of God. Unless the Spirit restrains the flesh within us, our own natural and distempered affections intermix themselves in our supplications, and thus are rendered vain. "Whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Cor. 10:31), (yet none but the Spirit can enable us to subordinate all our desires unto God's glory.

5. We are profited from the Scriptures when we are taught *how to plead God's promises*. Prayer must be in faith (Rom. 10:14), or God will not hear it. Now faith has respect to God's promises (Heb. 4:1; Rom. 4:21); if, therefore, we do not understand what God stands pledged to give, we cannot pray at all. The promises of God contain the matter of prayer and define the measure of it. What God has promised, all that He has promised, and nothing else, we are to pray for. "Secret things belong unto the Lord our God" (Deut. 29:29), but the declaration of His will and the revelation of His grace belong unto us, and are our rule. There is nothing that we really stand in need of but God has promised to supply it, yet in such a way and under such limitations as will make it good and useful to us. So too there is nothing God has promised but we stand in need of it, or are some way or other concerned in it as members of the mystical body of Christ. Hence, the better we are acquainted with the Divine promises, and the more we are enabled to understand the goodness, grace and mercy prepared and proposed in them, the better equipped are we for acceptable prayer.

Some of God's promises are general rather than specific; some are conditional, others unconditional; some are fulfilled in this life, others in the world to come. Nor are we able of ourselves to discern which promise is most suited to our particular case and present emergency and need, or to appropriate by faith and rightly plead it before God. Wherefore we are expressly told, "For what man knoweth the things of a man save the spirit of man which is in him? Even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world but the Spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God" (1 Cor. 2: 11, 12). Should someone reply, If so much be required unto acceptable praying, if we cannot supplicate God aright without much less trouble than you indicate, few will continue long in this duty, then we answer that such an objector knows not what it is to pray, nor does he seem willing to learn.

6. We are profited from the Scriptures when we are brought to *complete submission unto God*. As stated above, one of the Divine designs in appointing prayer as an ordinance is that we might be humbled. This is outwardly denoted when we bow the knee before the Lord. Prayer is an acknowledgment of our helplessness, and a looking to Him from whom all our help comes. It is an owning of His sufficiency to supply our every need. It is a making known our requests (Phil. 4:6) unto God; but requests are very different from *demands*. "The throne of grace is not set up that we may come and there vent our passions before God" (Wm. Gurnall). We are to spread our case before God, but leave it to His superior wisdom to prescribe how it shall be dealt with. There must be no dictating, nor can we "claim" anything from God, for we are beggars dependent upon His mere mercy. In all our praying we must add, "Nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt."

But may not faith plead God's promises and expect an answer? Certainly; but it must be *God's* answer. Paul besought the Lord thrice to remove his thorn in the flesh; instead of doing so, the Lord gave him grace to endure it (2 Cor. 12). Many of

God's promises are promiscuous rather than personal. He has promised His Church pastors, teachers and evangelists, yet many a local company of His saints has languished long without them. Some of God's promises are indefinite and general rather than absolute and universal; as, for example Ephesians 6:2, 3. God has not bound Himself to give in kind or specie, to grant the particular thing we ask for, even though we ask in faith. Moreover, He reserves to *Himself* the right to determine the fit time and season for bestowing His mercies. "Seek ye the Lord, all ye meek of the earth . . . it may be ye shall be hid in the day of the Lord's anger" (Zeph. 2:3). Just because it "may be" God's will to grant a certain temporal mercy unto me, it is my duty to cast myself upon Him and plead for it, yet with entire submission to His good pleasure for the performance of it.

7. We are profited from the Scriptures when prayer becomes *a real and deep joy*. Merely to say our prayers each morning and evening is an irksome task, a duty to be performed which brings a sigh of relief when it is done. But really to come into the conscious presence of God, to behold the glorious light of His countenance, to commune with Him at the mercy seat, is a foretaste of the eternal bliss awaiting us in heaven. The one who is blessed with this experience says with the Psalmist, "It is good for me to draw near to God" (Psa. 73:28). Yes, good for the heart, for it is quietened; good for faith, for it is strengthened; good for the soul, for it is blessed. It is lack of this soul communion with God which is the root cause of our unanswered prayers: "Delight thyself also in the Lord; and he *shall* give thee the desires of thine heart" (Psa. 37:4).

What is it which, under the blessing of the Spirit, produces and promotes this joy in prayer? First, it is the heart's delight in God as the Object of prayer, and particularly the recognition and realization of God as *our Father*. Thus, when the disciples asked the Lord Jesus to teach them to pray, He said, "After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven." And again, "God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba [the Hebrew for "Father"], Father" (Gal. 4:6),

which includes a filial, holy delight in God, such as children have in their parents in their most affectionate addresses to them. So again, in Ephesians 2:18, we are told, for the strengthening of faith and the comfort of our hearts, “For through him [Christ] we both have access by one Spirit unto *the Father*.” What peace, what assurance, what freedom this gives to the soul: to know we are approaching our Father!

Second, joy in prayer is furthered by the heart’s apprehension and the soul’s sight of God as on the throne of *grace*—a sight or prospect, not by carnal imagination, but by spiritual illumination, for it is by faith that we “see him who is invisible” (Heb. 11:27); faith being the “evidence of things not seen” (Heb. 11:1), making its proper object evident and present unto them that believe. Such a sight of God upon such a “throne” cannot but thrill the soul. Therefore are we exhorted, “Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need” (Heb. 4:16).

Thirdly, and drawn from the last quoted scripture, freedom and delight in prayer are stimulated by the consciousness that God is, through Jesus Christ, willing and ready to dispense grace and mercy to suppliant sinners. There is no reluctance in Him which we have to overcome. He is more ready to give than we are to receive. So He is represented in Isaiah 30:18, “And therefore will the Lord wait, that He may be gracious unto you.” Yes, He waits to be sought unto; waits for faith to lay hold of His readiness to bless. His ear is ever open to the cries of the righteous. Then “let us draw near with a true heart in *full assurance of faith*” (Heb. 10:22); “in *every thing* by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God,” and we shall find that peace which passes all understanding guarding our hearts and minds through Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:6, 7).

5. The Scriptures and Good Works

The truth of God may well be likened to a narrow path skirted

on either side by a dangerous and destructive precipice: in other words, it lies between two gulfs of error. The aptness of this figure may be seen in our proneness to sway from one extreme to another. Only the Holy Spirit's enabling can cause us to preserve the balance, failure to do which inevitably leads to a fall into error, for error is not so much the denial of truth as the perversion of truth, the pitting of one part of it against another.

The history of theology forcibly and solemnly illustrates this fact. One generation of men have rightly and earnestly contended for that aspect of truth which was most needed in their day. The next generation, instead of walking therein and moving forward, warred for it intellectually as the distinguishing mark of their party, and usually, in their defence of what was assaulted, have refused to listen to the balancing truth which often their opponents were insisting upon; the result being that they lost their sense of perspective and emphasized what they believed *out of its scriptural proportions*. Consequently, in the next generation, the true servant of God is called on almost to ignore what was so valuable in their eyes, and to emphasize that which they had, if not altogether denied, almost completely lost sight of.

It has been said that "Rays of light, whether they proceed from the sun, star, or candle, move in perfect straight lines; yet so inferior are our works to God's that the steadiest hand cannot draw a perfectly straight line; nor, with all his skill, has man ever been able to invent an instrument capable of doing a thing apparently so simple" (Thomas Guthrie, 1867). Be this so or not, certain it is that men, left to themselves, have ever found it impossible to keep the even line of truth between what appear to be conflicting doctrines: such as the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of man; election by grace and the universal proclamation of the Gospel; the justifying faith of Paul and the justifying works of James. Only too often, where the absolute sovereignty of God has been insisted upon, it has been to the ignoring of man's accountability; and where unconditional election has been held fast, the unfettered preaching of the

Gospel to the unsaved has been let slip. On the other hand, where human accountability has been upheld and an evangelical ministry been sustained, the sovereignty of God and the truth of election have generally been whittled down or completely ignored.

Many of our readers have witnessed examples which illustrate the truth of what has been said above, but few seem to realize that exactly the same difficulty is experienced when an attempt is made to show the precise relation between faith and good works. If, on the one hand, some have erred in attributing to good works a place which Scripture does not warrant, certain it is that, on the other hand, some have failed to give to good works the province which Scripture assigns them. If, on the one side, it be serious error to ascribe our justification before God to any performances of ours, on the other side they are equally guilty who deny that good works are *necessary* in order to our reaching heaven, and allow nothing more than that they are merely evidences or fruits of our justification. We are well aware that we are now (shall we say) treading on thin ice, and running a serious risk of ourselves being charged with heresy; nevertheless we deem it expedient to seek Divine aid in grappling with this difficulty, and then commit the issues thereof to God Himself.

In some quarters the claims of faith, though not wholly denied, have been disparaged because of a zeal to magnify good works. In other circles, reputed as orthodox (and they are what we now have chiefly in mind), only too rarely are good works assigned their proper place, and far too infrequently are professing Christians urged with apostolic earnestness to maintain them. No doubt this is due at times to a fear of undervaluing faith, and encouraging sinners in the fatal error of trusting to their own doings rather than to and in the righteousness of Christ. But no such apprehensions should hinder a preacher from declaring "all the counsel of God." If his theme be faith in Christ, as the Saviour of the lost, let him fully set forth that truth without any modification, giving to this grace

the place which the apostle gave it in his reply to the Philippian jailer (Acts 16:31). But if his subject be good works, let him be no less faithful in keeping back nothing which Scripture says thereon; let him not forget that Divine command, “Affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works” (Titus 3:8).

The last-quoted scripture is the most pertinent one for these days of looseness and laxity, of worthless profession, and empty boasting. This expression “good works” is found in the New Testament in the singular or plural number no less than thirty times; yet, from the rarity with which many preachers, who are esteemed sound in the faith, use, emphasize, and enlarge upon them, many of their hearers would conclude that those words occur but once or twice in all the Bible. Speaking to the Jews on another subject, the Lord said, “What. . . God hath joined together, let not man put asunder” (Mark 10:9). Now in Ephesians 2: 8-10, God has joined two most vital and blessed things together which ought never to be separated in our hearts and minds, yet they are most frequently parted in the modern pulpit. How many sermons are preached from the first two of these verses, which so clearly declare salvation to be by grace through faith and not of works. Yet how seldom are we reminded that the sentence which begins with grace and faith is only completed in verse 10, where we are told, “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.”

We began this series by pointing out that the Word of God may be taken up from various motives and read with different designs, but that 2 Timothy 3:16, 17, makes known for what these Scriptures are really “profitable,” namely for doctrine or teaching, for reproof, correction, instruction in righteousness, and all of these that “the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.” Having dwelt upon its teaching about God and Christ, its reproofs and corrections for sin, its instruction in connection with prayer, let us now consider how these furnish us unto “all good works.” Here is another vital

criterion by which an honest soul, with the help of the Holy Spirit, may ascertain whether or not his reading and study of the Word is really benefiting him.

1. We profit from the Word when we are thereby taught *the true place of good works*. “Many persons, in their eagerness to support orthodoxy as a system, speak of salvation by grace and faith in such a manner as to undervalue holiness and a life devoted to God. But there is no ground for this in the Holy Scriptures. The same Gospel that declares salvation to be freely by the grace of God through faith in the blood of Christ, and asserts, in the strongest terms, that sinners are justified by the righteousness of the Saviour imputed to them on their believing in Him, without any respect to works of law, also assures us, that without holiness no man shall see God; that believers are cleansed by the blood of atonement; that their hearts are purified by faith, which works by love, and overcomes the world; and that the grace that brings salvation to all men, teaches those who receive it, that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, they should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world. Any fear that the doctrine of grace will suffer from the most strenuous inculcation of good works on a scriptural foundation, betrays an inadequate and greatly defective acquaintance with Divine truth, and any tampering with the Scriptures in order to silence their testimony in favour of the fruits of righteousness, as *absolutely necessary* in the Christian, is a perversion and forgery with respect to the Word of God” (Alexander Carson).

But what force (ask some) has this ordination or command of God unto good works, when, notwithstanding it, though we fail to apply ourselves diligently unto obedience, we shall nevertheless be justified by the imputation of Christ’s righteousness, and so may be saved without them? Such a senseless objection proceeds from utter ignorance of the believer’s present state and relation to God. To suppose that the hearts of the regenerate are not as much and as effectually influenced with the authority and commands of God unto obedience as if they were given in order unto their justification

is to ignore what true faith is, and what are the arguments and motives whereby the minds of Christians are principally affected and constrained. Moreover, it is to lose sight of the inseparable connection which God has made between our justification and our sanctification: to suppose that one of these may exist without the other is to overthrow the whole Gospel. The apostle deals with this very objection in Romans 6:1-3.

2. We profit from the Word when we are thereby taught the *absolute necessity of good works*. If it be written that “without shedding of blood is no remission” (Heb. 9:22) and “without faith it is impossible to please him” (Heb. 11:6), the Scripture of Truth also declares, “Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord” (Heb. 12:14). The life lived by the saints in heaven is but the completion and consummation of that life which, after regeneration, they live here on earth. The difference between the two is not one of kind, but of degree. “The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day” (Prov. 4:18). If there has been no walking with God down here there will be no dwelling with God up there. If there has been no real communion with Him in time there will be none with Him in eternity. Death effects no vital change to the heart. True, at death the remainders of sin are for ever left behind by the saint, but no new nature is then imparted. If then he did not hate sin and love holiness before death, he certainly will not do so afterwards.

No one really desires to go to hell, though there are few indeed who are willing to forsake that broad road which inevitably leads there. All would like to go to heaven, but professing Christians are really willing and determined to walk that narrow way which alone leads thereto? It is at this point that we may discern the precise place which good works have in connection with salvation. They do not merit it, yet they are inseparable from it. They do not procure a title to heaven, yet they are among the means which God has appointed for His people’s getting there. In no sense are good works the procuring

cause of eternal life, but they are part of the means (as are the Spirit's work within us and repentance, faith and obedience by us) conducing to it. God has appointed the way wherein we must walk in order to our arriving at the inheritance purchased for us by Christ. A life of daily obedience to God is that which alone gives actual admission to the enjoyment of what Christ has purchased for His people—admission now by faith, admission at death or His return in full actuality.

3. We profit from the Word when we are taught thereby *the design of good works*. This is clearly made known in Matthew 5:16: "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." It is worthy of our notice that this is the first occurrence of the expression, and, as is generally the case, the initial mention of a thing in Scripture intimates its subsequent scope and usage. Here we learn that the disciples of Christ are to authenticate their Christian profession by the silent but vocal testimony of their lives (for "light" makes no noise in its "shining"), that men may see (not hear boastings about) their good works, and this that their Father in heaven may be glorified. Here, then, is their fundamental design: for the honour of God.

As the contents of Matthew 5:16 are so generally misunderstood and perverted we add a further thought thereon. Only too commonly the "good works" are confounded with the "light" itself, yet they are quite distinct, though inseparably connected. The "light" is our *testimony* for Christ but of what value is this unless the life itself exemplifies it? The "good works" are not for the directing of attention to ourselves, but to Him who has wrought them in us. They are to be of such a character and quality that even the ungodly will know they proceed from some higher source than fallen human nature. Supernatural fruit requires a supernatural root, and as this is recognized, the Husbandman is glorified thereby. Equally significant is the *last* reference to "good works" in Scripture: "Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your

good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation” (1 Pet. 2:12). Thus the first and final allusions emphasize their design: to glorify God because of His works through His people in this world.

4. We profit from the Word when we are taught thereby *the true nature of good works*. This is something concerning which the unregenerate are in entire ignorance. Judging merely from the external, estimating things only by human standards, they are quite incompetent to determine what works are good in God’s esteem and what are not. Supposing that what men regard as good works God will approve of too, they remain in the darkness of their sin-blinded understandings; nor can any convince them of their error, till the Holy Spirit quickens them into newness of life, bringing them out of darkness into God’s marvellous light. Then it will appear that only those are good works which are done in obedience to the will of God (Rom. 6:16), from a principle of love to Him (Heb. 10:24), in the name of Christ (Col. 3:17), and to the glory of God by Him (1 Cor. 10:31).

The true nature of “good works” Was perfectly exemplified by the Lord Jesus. All that He did was done in obedience to His Father. He “pleased not himself” (Rom. 15:3), but ever performed the bidding of the One who had sent Him (John 6:38). He could say, “I do always those things that please him” (John 8:29). There were no limits to Christ’s subjection to the Father’s will: He “became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross” (Phil. 2:8). So too all that He did proceeded from love to the Father and love to His neighbour. Love is the fulfilling of the Law; without love, compliance with the Law is naught but servile subjection, and that cannot be acceptable to Him who is Love. Proof that all Christ’s obedience flowed from love is found in His words, “I *delight* to do thy will, O my God” (Psa. 40:8). So also all that Christ did had in view the glory of the Father: “Father, glorify *thy* name” (John 12:28) revealed the object constantly before Him.

5. We profit from the Word when we are taught thereby *the*

true source of good works. Unregenerate men are capable of performing works which in a natural and civil sense, though not in the spiritual sense, are good. They may do those things which, externally, as to matter and substance of them, are good, such as reading the Bible, attending the ministry of the Word, giving alms to the poor; yet the mainspring of such actions, their lack of godly motive, renders them as filthy rags in the sight of the thrice holy One. The unregenerate have no power to perform works in a *spiritual* manner, and therefore it is written, “There is none that doeth good, no, not one” (Rom. 3:12). Nor are they able to: they are “not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be” (Rom. 8:7). Hence, even the ploughing of the wicked is sin (Prov. 21:4). Nor are believers able to think a good thought or perform a good work of themselves (2 Cor. 3:5): it is God who works in them “both to will and to do of his good pleasure” (Phil. 2:13).

When the Ethiopian can change his skin, and the leopard his spots, then may they also do good that are accustomed to do evil (Jer. 13:23). Men may as soon expect to gather grapes of thorns or figs of thistles, as good fruit to grow upon or good works to be performed by the unregenerate. We have first to be “created in Christ Jesus” (Eph. 2:10), have His Spirit put within us (Gal. 4:6), and His grace implanted in our hearts (Eph. 4: 7; 1 Cor. 15:10), before there is any capacity for good works. Even then we can do nothing apart from Christ (John 15:5). Often we have a will to do that which is good, yet how to perform it we know not (Rom. 7:18). This drives us to our knees, begging God to make us “perfect in every good work,” *working* in us “that which is well-pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ” (Heb. 13:21). Thus we are emptied of self-sufficiency, and brought to realize that all our springs are in God (Psa. 87:7); and thus we discover that we can do all things through Christ strengthening us (Phil. 4:13).

6. We profit from the Word when we are taught thereby *the great importance of good works.* Condensing as far as possible: “good works” are of great importance because by them God is

glorified (Matt. 5:16), by them the mouths of those who speak against us are closed (1 Pet. 2:12), by them we evidence the genuineness of our profession of faith (James 2:13-17). It is highly expedient that we “*adorn* the doctrine of God our Saviour in *all* things” (Titus 2:10). Nothing brings more honour to Christ than that those who bear His name are found *living* constantly (by His enablement) in a Christ-like way and spirit. It was not without reason that the same Spirit who caused the apostle to preface his statement concerning Christ’s coming into this world to save sinners with “This is a faithful saying,” etc., also moved him to write, “This is a *faithful saying*. . . that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works” (Titus 3:8). May we indeed be “zealous of good works” (Titus 2:14).

7. We profit from the Word when we are taught thereby *the true scope of good works*. This is so comprehensive as to include the discharge of our duties in every relationship in which God has placed us. It is interesting and instructive to note the first “good work” (as so described) in Holy Writ, namely, the anointing of the Saviour by Mary of Bethany (Matt. 26:10; Mark 14:6). Indifferent alike to the blame or praise of men, with eyes only for the “chiefest among ten thousand,” she lavished upon Him her precious ointment. Another woman, Dorcas (Acts 9:36), is also mentioned as “full of good works;” after worship comes service, glorifying God among men and benefiting others.

“That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work” (Col. 1:10). The bringing up (not “dragging” up!) of children, lodging (spiritual) strangers, washing the saints’ feet (ministering to their temporal comforts) and relieving the afflicted (1 Tim. 5:10) are spoken of as “good works.” Unless our reading and study of the Scriptures is making us better soldiers of Jesus Christ, better citizens of the country in which we sojourn, better members of our earthly homes (kinder, gentler, more unselfish), “thoroughly furnished unto all good works,” it is profiting us little or nothing.

6. The Scriptures and Obedience

All professing Christians are agreed, in theory at least, that it is the bounden duty of those who bear His name to honour and glorify Christ in this world. But as to *how* this is to be done, as to what He requires from us to this end, there is wide difference of opinion. Many suppose that honouring Christ simply means to join some “church,” take part in and support its various activities. Others think that honouring Christ means to speak of Him to others and be diligently engaged in “personal work.” Others seem to imagine that honouring Christ signifies little more than making liberal financial contributions to His cause. Few indeed realize that Christ is honoured only as we *live holily* unto Him, and that, by walking in subjection to His revealed will. Few indeed really believe that word, “Behold, to *obey* is better than sacrifice, and to *hearken* than the fat of rams” (1 Sam. 15:22).

We are not Christians at all unless we have fully surrendered to and “received Christ Jesus *the Lord*” (Col. 2:6). We would plead with you to ponder that statement diligently. Satan is deceiving many today by leading them to suppose that they are savingly trusting in “the finished work” of Christ while their hearts remain unchanged and self still rules their lives. Listen to God’s Word: “Salvation is far from the wicked; *for they seek not thy statutes*” (Psa. 119:155). Do you really *seek* His statutes? Do you diligently search His Word to discover what He has commanded? “He that saith, I know Him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him” (1 John 2:4). What could be plainer than that?

“And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and *do not* the things which I say?” (Luke 6:46). Obedience to the Lord in life, not merely glowing words from the lips, is what Christ requires. What a searching and solemn word is that in James 1:22: “Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves!” There are many “hearers” of the Word, regular hearers, reverent hearers, interested hearers; but alas, what they hear is not *incorporated* into the life: it does not regulate their way. And

God says that they who are not *doers* of the Word are deceiving their own selves!

Alas, how many such there are in Christendom today! They are not downright hypocrites, but deluded. They suppose that because they are so clear upon salvation by grace alone *they* are saved. They suppose that because they sit under the ministry of a man who has “made the Bible a new book” to them they have grown in grace. They suppose that because their store of biblical knowledge has increased they are more spiritual. They suppose that the mere listening to a servant of God or reading his writings is *feeding on* the Word. Not so! We “feed” on the Word only when we personally appropriate, masticate *and assimilate into our lives* what we hear or read. Where there is not an increasing conformity of heart and life to God’s Word, then increased knowledge will only bring increased condemnation. “And that servant, which knew his lord’s will, and prepared not himself, neither *did* according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes” (Luke 12:47).

“Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth” (2 Tim 3:7). This is one of the prominent characteristics of the “perilous times” in which we are now living. People hear one preacher after another, attend this conference and that conference, read book after book on biblical subjects, and yet never attain unto a vital and practical acquaintance with the truth, so as to have an impression of its power and efficacy on the soul. There is such a thing as spiritual *drowsy*, and multitudes are suffering from it. The more they hear, the more they want to hear: they drink in sermons and addresses with avidity, but their lives are unchanged. They are puffed up with their knowledge, not humbled into the dust before God. The faith of God’s elect is “the acknowledging [in the life] of the truth which is *after godliness*” (Titus 1:1), but to this the vast majority are total strangers.

God has given us His Word not only with the design of instructing us, but for the purpose of *directing* us: to make known what He requires us to *do*. The first thing we need is a

clear and distinct *knowledge* of our duty; and the first thing God demands of us is a conscientious *practice* of it, corresponding to our knowledge. “What doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?” (Micah 6:8). “Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man” (Eccles. 12:13). The Lord Jesus affirmed the same thing when He said, “Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you” (John 15:14).

1. A man profits from the Word as he discovers God’s *demands upon him*; His undeviating demands, for He changes not. It is a great and grievous mistake to suppose that in this present dispensation God has *lowered* His demands, for that would necessarily imply that His previous demand was a harsh and unrighteous one. Not so! “The law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good” (Rom. 7:12). The sum of God’s demands is, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might” (Deut. 6:5); and the Lord Jesus repeated it in Matthew 22:37. The apostle Paul enforced the same when he wrote, “If any man *love not* the Lord Jesus Christ let him be *Anathema*” (1 Cor. 16:22).

2. A man profits from the Word when he discovers *how entirely and how sinfully he has failed to meet God’s demands*. And let us point out for the benefit of any who may take issue with the last paragraph that no man can see what a sinner he is, how infinitely short he has fallen of measuring up to God’s standard, until he has a clear sight of the exalted demands of God upon him! Just in proportion as preachers *lower* God’s standard of what He requires from every human being, to that extent will their hearers obtain an inadequate and faulty conception of their sinfulness, and the less will they perceive their need of an almighty Saviour. But once a soul really perceives what are God’s demands upon him, and how completely and constantly he has failed to render Him His due, then does he recognize what a desperate situation he is in. The law must be preached before any are ready for the Gospel.

3. A man profits from the Word when he is taught therefrom that *God, in His infinite grace, has fully provided for His people's meeting His own demands.* At this point, too, much present-day preaching is seriously defective. There is being given forth what may loosely be termed a “half Gospel,” but which in reality is virtually a *denial* of the true Gospel. Christ is brought in, yet only as a sort of make-weight. That Christ has vicariously met every demand of God upon all who believe upon Him is blessedly true, yet it is only a part of the truth. The Lord Jesus has not only vicariously satisfied for His people the requirements of God's righteousness, but He has also secured that *they shall personally* satisfy them too. Christ has procured the Holy Spirit to make good in them what the Redeemer wrought for them.

The grand and glorious miracle of salvation is that the saved are *regenerated*. A transforming work is wrought within them. Their understandings are illuminated, their hearts are changed, their wills are renewed. They are made “new creatures in Christ Jesus” (2 Cor. 5:17). God refers to this miracle of grace thus: “I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts” (Heb. 8:10). The heart is now inclined to God's law: a disposition has been communicated to it which *answers* to its demands; there is a sincere desire to perform it. And thus the quickened soul is able to say, “When thou saidst, *Seek ye my face*; my heart said unto thee, thy face, Lord, *will I seek*” (Psa. 27:8).

Christ not only rendered a perfect obedience unto the Law for the justification of His believing people, but He also merited for them those supplies of His Spirit which were essential unto their sanctification, and which alone could transform carnal creatures and enable them to render acceptable obedience unto God. Though Christ died for the “ungodly” (Rom. 5:6), though He *finds* them ungodly (Rom. 4:5) when He justifies them, yet He does not *leave them* in that abominable state. On the contrary, He effectually teaches them by His Spirit to *deny* ungodliness and worldly lusts (Titus 2:12). Just as weight cannot be

separated from a stone, or heat from a fire, so cannot justification from sanctification.

When God really pardons a sinner in the court of his Conscience, under the sense of that amazing grace the heart is purified, the life is rectified, and the whole man is sanctified. Christ “gave himself for us, that he might redeem us *from* all iniquity, and *purify* unto himself a peculiar people [not “careless about” but], zealous of good works” (Titus 2:14). Just as a substance and its properties, causes and their necessary effects are inseparably connected, so are a saving faith *and* conscientious obedience unto God. Hence we read of “the obedience of faith” (Rom. 16:26).

Said the Lord Jesus, “He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me” (John 14:21). Not in the Old Testament, the Gospels or the Epistles does God own anyone as a lover of Him save the one who keeps His commandments. Love is something more than sentiment or emotion; it is a principle of action, and it expresses itself in something more than honeyed expressions, namely, by deeds which please the object loved. “For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments” (1 John 5:3). Oh, my reader, you are deceiving yourself if you think you love God and yet have no deep desire and make no real effort to walk obediently before Him.

But what is obedience to God? It is far more than a mechanical performance of certain duties. I may have been brought up by Christian parents, and under them acquired certain moral habits, and yet my abstaining from taking the Lord’s name in vain, and being guiltless of stealing, may be no obedience to the third and eighth commandments. Again, obedience to God is far more than conforming to the conduct of His people. I may board in a home where the Sabbath is strictly observed, and out of respect for them, or because I think it is a good and wise course to rest one day in seven, I may refrain from all unnecessary labour on that day, and yet not keep the fourth commandment at all! Obedience is not only subjection to

an external law, but it is the surrendering of my will to the authority of another. Thus, obedience to God is the heart's recognition of His lordship: of His right to command, and my duty to comply. It is the complete subjection of the soul to the blessed yoke of Christ.

That obedience which God requires can proceed only from a heart which *loves* Him. "Whatsoever ye do, do it *heartily*, as to the Lord" (Col. 3:23). That obedience which springs from a dread of punishment is servile. That obedience which is performed in order to procure favours from God is selfish and carnal. But spiritual and acceptable obedience is cheerfully given: it is the heart's free response to and gratitude for the unmerited regard and love of God for us.

4. We profit from the Word when we not only see it is our bounden duty to obey God, but *when there is wrought in us a love for His commandments*. The "blessed" man is the one whose "*delight* is in the law of the Lord" (Psa. 1:2). And again we read, "Blessed is the man that feareth the Lord, that delighteth greatly in his commandments" (Psa. 112:1). It affords a real test for our hearts to face honestly the questions, Do I really value His "commandments" as much as I do His *promises*? Ought I not to do so? Assuredly, for the one proceeds as truly from *His love* as does the other. The heart's compliance with the voice of Christ is the foundation for all practical holiness.

Here again we would earnestly and lovingly beg the reader to attend closely to this detail. Any man who supposes that he is saved and yet has no genuine love for God's commandment is deceiving himself. Said the Psalmist, "O how love I thy law!" (Psa. 119:97). And again, "Therefore I love thy commandments above gold; yea, above fine gold" (Psa. 119:127). Should someone object that *that* was under the Old Testament, we ask, Do you intimate that the Holy Spirit produces a lesser change in the hearts of those whom He now regenerates than He did of old? But a New Testament saint also placed on record, "I *delight* in the law of God after the inward

man” (Rom. 7:22). And, my reader, unless *your* heart *delights* in the “law of God” there is something radically wrong with you; yea, it is greatly to be feared that you are spiritually dead.

5. A man profits from the Word when his heart and will are yielded to *all* God’s commandments. Partial obedience is no obedience at all. A holy mind declines whatsoever God forbids, and chooses to practice all He requires, without any exception. If our minds submit not unto God in all His commandments, we submit not to *His* authority in anything He enjoins. If we do not approve of our duty in its *full* extent, we are greatly mistaken if we imagine that we have any *liking* unto *any* part of it. A person who has no principle of holiness in him may yet be disinclined to many vices and be pleased to practice many virtues, as he perceives the former are unfit actions and the latter are, in themselves, comely actions, but his disapprobation of vice and approbation of virtue do not arise from any disposition to *submit to the will of God*.

True spiritual obedience is *impartial*. A renewed heart does not pick and choose from God’s commandments: the man who does so is not performing *God’s* will, but his own. Make no mistake upon this point; if we do not sincerely desire to please God in *all* things, then we do not truly wish to do so in anything. Self must be denied; not merely some of the things which may be craved, but self itself! A wilful allowance of *any* known sin breaks the whole law (James 2:10, 11). “Then shall I not be ashamed, when I have respect unto all thy commandments” (Psa. 119:6). Said the Lord Jesus, “Ye are my friends, if ye do *whatsoever* I command you” (John 15:14): if I am not His friend, then I must be His *enemy*, for there is no other alternative—see Luke 19:27.

6. We profit from the Word when the soul is moved to *pray earnestly for enabling grace*. In regeneration the Holy Spirit communicates a nature which is fitted for obedience according to the Word. The heart has been won by God. There is now a deep and sincere desire to please Him. But the new nature possesses no inherent power, and the old nature or “flesh”

strives against it, and the Devil opposes. Thus, the Christian exclaims, "To will is present with me; but how to *perform* that which is good I find not" (Rom. 7:18). This does not mean that he is the slave of sin, as he was before conversion; but it means that he finds not how *fully* to realize his spiritual aspirations. Therefore does he pray, "*Make me to go* in the path of Thy commandments; for therein do I delight" (Psa. 119:35). And again, "Order my steps in Thy word, and let not any iniquity have dominion over me" (Psa. 119:133).

Here we would reply to a question which the above statements have probably raised in many minds: Are you affirming that God requires *perfect* obedience from us in this life? We answer, Yes! God will not set any lower standard before us than that (see 1 Pet. 1:15). Then does the real Christian measure up to that standard? Yes and no! Yes, *in his heart*, and it is at *the heart* that God looks (I Sam. 16:7). In his heart every regenerated person has a real love for God's commandments, and genuinely *desires* to keep all of them completely. It is in *this* sense, and this alone, that the Christian is experimentally "perfect." The word "perfect," both in the Old Testament (Job 1:1, and Ps. 37:37) and in the New Testament (Phil. 3:15), means "upright," "sincere," in contrast with "hypocritical."

"Lord, thou hast heard the desire of the humble" (Psa. 10:17). The "desires" of the saint are the language of his soul, and the promise is, "He will fulfil the desire of them that fear him" (Psa. 145:19). The Christian's desire is to obey God in all things, to be completely conformed to the image of Christ. But this will only be realized in the resurrection. Meanwhile, God for Christ's sake graciously accepts the will for the deed (1 Pet. 2:5). He knows our hearts and see in His child a genuine love for and a sincere desire *to keep* all His commandments, and He accepts the fervent longing and cordial endeavour in lieu of an exact performance (2 Cor. 8:12). But let none who are living in wilful disobedience draw false peace and pervert to their own destruction what has just been said for the comfort of those who *are* heartily desirous of seeking to please God in all the details of their lives.

If any ask, How am I to know that my “desires” are really those of a regenerate soul? we answer, Saving grace is the communication to the heart of an habitual *disposition unto* holy acts. The “desires” of the reader are to be tested thus: Are they constant and continuous, or only by fits and starts? Are they earnest and serious, so that you really “hunger and thirst after righteousness” (Matt. 5:6) and pant “after God” (Psa. 42:1)? Are they operative and efficacious? Many desire to escape from hell, yet their desires are not sufficiently strong to bring them to hate and turn from that which must inevitably bring them to hell, namely, wilful sinning against God. Many desire to go to heaven, but not so that they enter upon and follow that “narrow way” which alone leads there. True spiritual desires use the means of grace and spare no pains to realize them, and continue prayerfully pressing forward unto the mark set before them.

7. We profit from the Word when we are, even now, *enjoying the reward of obedience*. “Godliness is profitable unto all things” (1 Tim. 4:8). By obedience we purify our souls (1 Pet. 1:21). By obedience we obtain the ear of God (1 John 3:22), just as disobedience is a barrier to our prayers (Isa. 59:2; Jer. 5:25). By obedience we obtain precious and intimate manifestations of Christ unto the soul (John 14:21). As we tread the path of wisdom (complete subjection to God) we discover that “her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace” (Prov. 3:17). “His commandments are *not* grievous” (1 John 5:3), and “in keeping of them there is great reward” (Psa. 19:11).

The second of three booklets.

