

The Scriptures and Christ

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The order we follow in this series is that of experience. It is not until man is made thoroughly displeased with himself that he begins to aspire after God. The fallen creature, deluded by Satan, is self-satisfied till his sin blinded eyes are opened to get a sight of himself. The Holy Spirit first works in us a sense of our ignorance, vanity, property, and depravity, before He brings us to perceive and acknowledge that in God alone are to be found true wisdom, real blessedness, perfect goodness and unspotted righteousness. We must be made conscious of our imperfections ere we can really appreciate the Divine perfections. As the perfections of God are contemplated, man becomes still more aware of the infinite distance that separates him from the Most High. As he learns something of God's pressing claims upon him, and his own utter inability to meet them, he is prepared to hear and welcome the good news that Another has fully met those claims for all who are led to believe in Him.

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

Now the measure in which we profit from our reading and study of the Scriptures may be ascertained by the extent to which Christ is becoming more real and more precious unto our hearts. To “grow in grace” is defined as “in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” (II Peter 3:18); the second clause there is not something in addition to the first, but is an explanation of it. To “know” Christ (Phil. 3:10) was the supreme longing and aim of the apostle Paul, longing and an aim to which he subordinated all other interest. But make it well, the “knowledge” which is spoken of in these verses, is not intellectual but spiritual, not theoretical but experimental, not general but personal. It is a supernatural knowledge, which is imparted to the regenerate heart by the operations of the Holy Spirit, as He interprets and applies to us the Scriptures concerning Him. Now the knowledge of Christ which the blessed Spirit imparts to the believer through the Scriptures profits him in different ways, according to his varying frames, circumstances and needs. Concerning the bread which God gave to the children of Israel during their wilderness wanderings, it is recorded that “some gathered more, some less” (Exodus 16:17). The same is true in our apprehension of Him of whom the manna was a type. There is that in the wondrous person of Christ which is exactly suited to our every condition, every circumstance, every need, both for time and eternity; but we are slow in realizing it, and slower still to act upon it. There is an inexhaustible fullness in Christ (John 1:16) which is available for us to draw from, and the Principle regulating the extent to which we become “strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus” (II Tim. 2:1) is, “according unto your faith be it unto you” (Matt. 9:29).

REVEALING HIS NEED

1. An individual is profited from the Scriptures when they reveal to him his need of Christ. Man in his natural estate deems himself self-sufficient. True, he has a dim perception that all is not quite right between himself and God. Yet he has no difficulty in persuading himself that he is able to do that which will propitiate Him. That lies at the foundation of all man's “religion,” begun by Cain, in

whose “way” (Jude 11) the multitudes still walk. Tell the devout religionist that “they that are in the flesh cannot please God” (Romans 8:8). And he is at once offended. Press upon him the fact that “all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags” (Isaiah 64:6), and his hypocritical urbanity at once gives place to anger. So it was when Christ was on earth. The most religious people of all, the Jews had no sense that they were “lost” and in dire need of an almighty Saviour.

“They that are whole need not a physician, but they that are sick” (Matt. 9:12). It is the peculiar office of the Holy Spirit, by His application of the Scriptures, to convict sinners of their desperate condition, to bring them to see that their state is such that “from the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness” in them, but, “wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores” (Isaiah 11:6). As the Spirit convicts us of our sins - our ingratitude to God, our murmuring against Him, our wanderings from Him - as He presses upon us the claims of God - His right to our love, obedience and adoration, and all our sad failures to render Him His due - then are we made to recognize that Christ is our only hope, and that, except we flee to Him for refuge the righteous wrath of God will most certainly fall upon us.

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

THE SCRIPTURES MAKE CHRIST REAL

2. An individual is profited from the Scriptures when they make Christ more real to him. The great mass of the Israelitish nation saw nothing more than the outward shell in the rites and ceremonies which God instructed, but a regenerated remnant were privileged to behold Christ Himself. “Abraham rejoiced to see My day” said Christ (John 8:56). Moses esteemed “the reproach of Christ” greater riches than the treasure of Egypt (Heb. 11:26). So it is in Christendom. To the multitudes Christ is but a name, or at most a historical character. They have no personal dealings with Him, enjoy no spiritual communion with Him. Should they hear one speak in rapture of His excellency they regard him as an enthusiast or a fanatic. To them Christ is unreal, vague, intangible. But with the real Christian it is far otherwise The language of his heart is,

“I have heard the voice of Jesus,

Tell me not of aught beside

I have seen the face of Jesus,

All my soul is satisfied.”

Yet such a blissful sight is not the consistent and unvarying experience of the saints. Just as clouds come in between the sun and the earth, so failures in our walk interrupt our communion with Christ and serve to hide from us the light of His countenance. “He that hath My commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth Me: and he that loveth Me shall be loved of My Father, and I will love him, and will manifest Myself to him” (John 14:21). Yes, it is the one who by grace is treading the path of obedience to whom the Lord Jesus grants manifestations for Himself. And the more frequent and prolonged these manifestations are, the more real He becomes to the soul, until we

are able to say with Job, "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth Thee" (42:5). Thus the more Christ is becoming a living reality to me, the more I am profiting from the Word.

CHRIST'S PERFECTIONS

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

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

CHRIST BECOMES MORE PRECIOUS

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

The more we are engaged with Christ's perfections, the more we love and adore Him. It is lack of experimental acquaintance with Him that makes our hearts so cold towards Him. But where real and daily fellowship is cultivated the Christian will be able to say with the Psalmist, "Whom have I in heaven but Thee? And there is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee" (Psalm 73:25). This it is which is the very essence and distinguishing nature of true Christianity. Legalistic zealots may be busily engaged in tithing mint and annise and cummin, they may encompass sea and land to make one proselyte, and yet have no love for God in Christ. It is the heart that God looks at: "My son,

give me thine heart” (Prov. 23:26) is His demand. The more precious Christ is to us, the more delight does He have in us.

INCREASING CONFIDENCE IN CHRIST

5. An individual who is profited from the Scriptures has an increasing confidence in Christ. There is “little faith” (Matt. 14:31) and “great faith” (Matt. 8:10). There is the “full assurance of faith” (Heb. 10:22), and trusting in the Lord “with all the heart” (Prov. 3:5). Just as there is growing “from strength to strength” (Psalm 84:7), so we read of “from faith to faith” (Romans 1:17). The stronger and steadier our faith, the more the Lord Jesus is honored. Even a cursory reading of the four Gospels reveals the fact that nothing pleased the Saviour more than the firm reliance which was placed in Him by the few who really counted upon Him. He Himself lived and walked by faith, and the more we do so the more are the members being conformed to their Head. Above everything else there is one thing to be aimed at and diligently sought by earnest prayer: that our faith may be increased. Of the Thessalonian saints Paul was able to say, “Your faith groweth exceedingly” (II Thess. 1:3).

Now Christ cannot be trusted at all unless He be known, and the better He is known the more He will be trusted: “And they that know Thy name will put their trust in Thee” (Psalm 9:10). As Christ becomes more real to the heart, as we are increasingly occupied with His manifold perfections and He becomes more precious to us, confidence in Him is deepened until it becomes as natural to trust Him as it is to breathe. The Christian life is a walk of faith (II Cor. 5:7), and that very expression denotes a continual progress, an increasing deliverance from doubts and fears, a fuller assurance that all He has promised He will perform. Abraham is the father of all them that believe, and thus the record of his life furnishes an illustration of what a deepening confidence in the Lord signifies. First, at His bare word he turned his back upon all that was dear to the flesh. Second, he went forth in simple dependence on Him and dwelt as a stranger and sojourner in the land of promise, though he never owned a single acre of it. Third, when the promise was made of a seed in his old age, he considered not the obstacles in the way of its fulfilment, but was strong in faith, giving glory to God. Finally, when called upon to offer up Isaac, through whom the promises were to be realized, he accounted that God was able to “raise him up, even from the dead” (Heb. 11:19).

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

A DESIRE TO PLEASE CHRIST

6. An individual is profited from the Scriptures when they beget in him a deepening desire to please Christ. “Ye are not your own. For ye are bought with a price” (I Cor. 6:19,20) is the first great fact that Christians need to apprehend. Henceforth they are not to “live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them, and rose again” (II Cor. 5:15). Love delights to please its object, and the more our affections are drawn out to Christ the more shall we desire to honour Him by a

life of obedience to His known will. "If a man love Me, he will keep My words" (John 14:23). It is not in happy emotions or in verbal professions of devotion, but in the actual assumption of His yoke and the practical submitting to His precepts, that Christ is most honoured.

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

RETURN OF CHRIST

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

At the return of Christ we shall be done with sin for ever. The elect are predestined to be conformed to the image of God's Son, and that Divine purpose will be realized only when Christ receives His people unto Himself. "We shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is" (I John 3:2). Never again will our communion with Him be broken, never again shall we groan and moan over our inward corruptions; never again shall we be harassed with unbelief. He will present His Church to Himself "a glorious church, not having spot, wrinkle, or any such thing" (Eph. 5:27). For that hour we eagerly wait. For our redeemer we lovingly look. The more we yearn for the coming One, the more we are trimming our lamps in earnest expectation of His coming, the more do we give evidence that we are profiting from our knowledge of the Word.

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