

THE SCRIPTURES AND GOD

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

The Scriptures make known a *supernatural* God. That may be a very trite remark, yet today it needs making. The "god" which is believed in by many professing Christians is becoming more and more paganized. The prominent place which "sport" now has in the nation's life, the excessive love of pleasure, the abolition of home-life, the brazen immodesty of women, are so many symptoms of the same disease which brought about the downfall and death of the empires of Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome. And the twentieth-century idea of God which is entertained by the majority of people in lands nominally "Christian" is rapidly approximating to the character ascribed to the gods of the ancients. In sharp contrast therewith, the God of Holy Writ is clothed with such perfections and vested with such attributes that no mere human intellect could possibly have invented them.

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

God can only be known through a *supernatural faculty*. Christ made this clear when He said, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3). The unregenerate have no spiritual knowledge of God. "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (I Cor. 2:14). Water, of itself, never rises above its own level. So the natural man is incapable of perceiving that which transcends mere nature. "This is life eternal, that they might know Thee the only true God" (John 17:3). Eternal life must be imparted before the "True God" can be known. Plainly is this affirmed in 1 John 5:20, "We know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know Him that is true." Yes, an "understanding," a spiritual understanding, by a new creation, must be given *before* God can be known in a spiritual way.

A supernatural knowledge of God produces a *supernatural experience*, and this is something to which the multitudes of church members are total strangers. Most "religion" of the day is but a touching up of "old Adam." It is merely a garnishing of sepulchres full of corruption. It is an outward "form." Even where there is a sound creed, only too often it is a dead orthodoxy. Nor

should this be wondered at. It has ever been thus. It was so when Christ was here upon earth. The Jews were very orthodox. At that time they were free from idolatry. The temple stood at Jerusalem, the Law was expounded, Jehovah was worshipped. And yet Christ said to them, "He that sent Me is true, whom ye know not" (John 7:28). "Ye neither know Me, nor My Father: if ye had known Me, ye should have known My Father also" (John 8:19). "It is My Father that honoureth Me; of whom ye say, that He is your God. Yet ye have not known Him" (John 8:54-55). And mark it well, this is said to a people who had the Scriptures, searched them diligently, and venerated them as God's Word! They were well acquainted with God theoretically, but a spiritual knowledge of Him they had not.

As it was in the Jewish world, so it is in Christendom. Multitudes who "believe" in the Holy Trinity are completely devoid of a supernatural or spiritual knowledge of God. How are we so sure of this? In this way: the character of the fruit reveals the character of the tree that bears it; the nature of the waters makes known the nature of the fountain from which they flow. A supernatural knowledge of God produces a supernatural experience, and a supernatural experience results in *supernatural fruit*. That is to say, God actually dwelling in the heart revolutionizes and transforms the life. There is that brought forth which mere nature cannot produce, yea, that which is directly contrary thereto. And this is noticeably absent from the lives of perhaps ninety-five out of every hundred now professing to be God's children. There is nothing in the life of the average professing Christian except what can be accounted for on natural grounds. But in the genuine child of God it is far otherwise. He is, in truth, a miracle of grace; he is a "new creature in Christ" (II Cor. 5:17). His experience, his life, is supernatural.

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

I. A CLEARER RECOGNITION OF GOD'S CLAIMS

The great controversy between the Creator and the creature has been whether He or they should be God, whether His wisdom or theirs should be the guiding principle of their actions, whether His will or theirs should be supreme. That which brought about the fall of Lucifer was his resentment at being in subjection to his Master; "Thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven. I will exalt My throne above the stars of God...I will be like the most High" (Isaiah 14:13-14). The lie of the serpent which lured our first parents to their destruction was, "Ye shall be as gods" (Gen. 3:5). And ever since then the heart-sentiment of the natural man has been, "Depart from us; for we desire not the knowledge of Thy ways. What is the Almighty, that we should serve Him?" (Job 21:14-15). "Our lips are our own, who is Lord over us?" (Psalm 12:4). "We are lords; we will come no more unto Thee" (Jer. 2:31).

Sin has alienated man from God (Eph. 4:18). His heart is averse to Him, his will is opposed to His, his mind is at enmity against Him. Contrariwise, salvation means being restored to God: "For

Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God” (I Peter 3:18). Legally that has already been done; experimentally it is in process of accomplishment. Salvation means being reconciled to God; and that involves and includes sin’s dominion over us being broken, enmity within us being slain, and the heart being won to God. This is what true conversion is: it is a tearing down of every idol, a renouncing of the empty vanities of a cheating world, and taking God for our Portion, our Ruler, our All in all. Of the Corinthians we read that they “first gave their own selves unto the Lord” (II Cor. 8:5). The desire and determination of those truly converted is that they “should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them, and rose again” (II Cor. 5:15).

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

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

II. A GREATER FEAR OF GOD’S MAJESTY

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

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

“The fear of the Lord is to hate evil” (Prov. 8:13). And again, “By the fear of the Lord men depart from evil” (Prov. 16:6). The man who lives in the fear of God is conscious that “the eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good (Prov. 15:3); therefore is he conscientious about his private conduct as well as his public. The one who is deterred from committing certain sins because the eyes of men are upon him, and who hesitates not to commit them when alone, is destitute of the fear of God. So too the man who moderates his language when Christians are about him, but does not so at other times, is devoid of God’s fear. He has no awe-

inspiring consciousness that God sees and hears them at all times. The truly regenerate soul is afraid of disobeying and defying God. Nor does he want to. No, his real and deepest desire is to please Him in all things, at all times, and in all places. His earnest prayer is “unite my heart to fear Thy name” (Psalm 86:11).

Now even the saint has to be taught the fear of God (Psalm 34:11). And here, as ever, it is through the Scriptures that this teaching is given us (Prov. 2:1-5). It is through them we learn that God’s eye is ever upon us, marking our actions, weighing our motives. As the Holy Spirit applies the Scriptures to our hearts, we give increasing heed to that command, “be thou in the fear of the Lord all the day long” (Prov. 23:17). Thus, just so far as we are awed by God’s awful majesty, are made conscious that: “Thou God seest me” (Gen. 16:13), and work out our salvation with “fear and trembling” (Phil. 2:12), are we truly profited from our reading and study of the Bible.

III. A DEEPER REVERENCE OF GOD’S COMMANDMENTS

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

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

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

IV. A FIRMER TRUST IN GOD’S SUFFICIENCY

Whatsoever or whomsoever a man most trusts in is his “god.” Some trust in health, others in wealth; some in self, others in their friends. That which characterizes all the unregenerate is that they lean upon an arm of flesh. But the election of grace have their hearts drawn from all creature supports, to rest upon the living God. God’s people are the children of faith. The language of their hearts is, “O my God I trust in Thee: let me not be ashamed” (Psalm 25:2). And again, “Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him” (Job 13:15). They rely upon God to provide, protect and bless them. They look to an unseen Resource, count upon an invisible God, lean upon a hidden Arm.

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

V. A FULLER DELIGHT IN GOD’S PERFECTIONS

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

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

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

VI. A LARGER SUBMISSION TO GOD’S PROVIDENCES

It is natural to murmur when things go wrong, it is supernatural to hold our peace (Lev. 10:3). It is natural to be disappointed when our plans miscarry, it is supernatural to bow to His

appointments. It is natural to want our own way, it is supernatural to say, “not my will, but Thine be done.” It is natural to rebel when a loved one is taken from us by death, it is supernatural to say from the heart: “The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord” (Job 1:21). As God is truly made our Portion, we learn to admire His wisdom and to know He does all things well. Thus the heart is kept in “perfect peace” as the mind is stayed on Him (Isaiah 26:3). Here, then, is another sure test: if your Bible study is teaching you that God’s way is best, and causing you to submit unrepiningly to all His dispensations, if you are enabled to give thanks for all things (Eph. 5:20), then are you profiting indeed.

VII. MORE FERVENT PRAISE FOR GOD’S GOODNESS

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