



Studying *the* Scriptures

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The Use of Scripture Study

The following is a compilation and revision of three separate addresses which were delivered for midweek Bible studies at Bells Yew Green Chapel. It is my desire that every one would seriously consider the matter of the reading of the Scriptures, and so we shall consider the studying of the Word of God, taking as a basis a number of passages, demonstrating the Scripture's own instructions concerning the matter.

The consideration is primarily of the studying of the Scriptures in our private devotions, but indeed many of the things that shall be considered will also be applicable to our devotions when we gather together, perhaps as households, or perhaps as fellowships of the Lord's people on the Lord's Day and in the midweek meetings.

It is my firm belief that the Scriptures must not just be left on the shelf unread, but the reading of them must be done regularly, and must affect our day-to-day lives. The addresses have the following titles:

Reading the Scriptures – Acts 8:26-35
Applying the Scriptures – 2 Samuel 12:7
Doing the Scriptures – Matthew 7:24

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1ST ADDRESS

Reading the Scriptures

Acts 8:26-35

The first matter for consideration is the Reading of the Scriptures. Upon this matter, we shall take for our primary text Acts 8:26-35, which contains the account of the evangelist Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch. This portion is are very profitable upon this particular matter.

The Scriptures are Profitable

We know from the Scriptures that they are indeed profitable. 2 Timothy 3:16 reads: 'All scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.' We cannot fathom the benefits which may be obtained from the study of the Scriptures.

Saved by the Grace of God Alone

The hearing of the gospel, accompanied with the conviction of the gospel message, and that which necessarily follows, in repentance, faith, and obedience, is all that is required to save a soul. There is nothing more needed: a man does not need to be learned in the Scriptures; he does not need to understand many things in the Scriptures. He only needs to understand Christ crucified - Christ slain for sinners.

The Christian's Duty to Seek Wisdom from the Bible

But for those of us who are saved, it is our duty, out of love for God, to study the Word of God that we may know how we ought to live as the servants of God. This is why Bible study is essential for the Christian. It is something that the Christian cannot do without. A Christian who is not regularly participating in Bible study privately and publicly is most probably walking away from God; they have most probably fallen away from the truth, if they ever believed. Our love for God must result in love for his Word; this is the Word of God. He has given it to us, in his wisdom, that we might learn about himself, and how we may serve him in this life.

There are four things I would like to take from this passage of the Word of God, concerning the Reading of the Scriptures.

The first is this:

1. We must make sure to have TIME to read the Scriptures

We see that this Ethiopian eunuch has time to read the Word of God. He demonstrates to us some principles with regards to our time. We all know that it is often difficult to find time to read the Word, and are very prone to neglect it, so this is an important matter here.

Who was the Ethiopian eunuch?

We read here a very short description of this man. We read all that we know of him in verse 27: he was 'a man of Ethiopia, an eunuch of great authority under Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who had the charge of all her treasure'. This was a great man in Ethiopia; no doubt he had many great responsibilities, and no doubt he was a very busy man. Therefore, we have here a man who did not have much time on his hands, because he was a man of position, and with high position must come great responsibility.

But does he use all of this business as a sufficient excuse to stop him from reading the Scriptures? No, he does not. He is a great man, and he has many things to be taking care of; but still he will read the Scriptures. That is not enough to stop him. If a man could ever have an excuse for not reading the Scriptures, I think this man would have to have one, but he does not use it, and neither should we, if we think we have an excuse why we cannot read the Scriptures. Do not try to excuse yourself from this holy duty: read the Scriptures.

Is there a good excuse for not reading the Word?

Do you complain that you have no time? Are you more busy than the eunuch? Perhaps you remember what we read of Daniel in the Old Testament. You read of that man, another most busy man, occupied

with many of the affairs of state. He does not read the Scriptures specifically, but we read of him there that he prayed three times a day. We know that it is recorded that he did so even when it was illegal to do so. We may be tired, we may be busy, we may have this or that thing that must be done, this or that deadline to meet, this or that particular problem which has to be solved – yes, we have all these things which try to stop us, but still do not let them get between you and God; that is the danger which you face in permitting these things come between you and the reading of God's Word.

The necessity of prayer and Bible reading

These two things - prayer and the reading of the Word of God - are vital. They are the Christian's life and breath; they are his food and his drink. The one is God speaking to him, and the other is him speaking to God. God communicates to us by his Word, and we communicate with God by prayer. Therefore it is necessary, whatever our physical state is, to read the Scriptures and pray. If we are tired, we must remember that this is the refreshing of the soul. Time spent reading the Word of God is refreshing the soul, and must not every Christian confess that the soul is far more important than the body? This is time well spent - it is time most profitably spent. We cannot be right in our bodies if our souls are not right with God.

We all fall short, no doubt. We all have temptation to leave off from Bible reading and Bible study. It is easy to say that we are too tired to read the Scriptures one evening, but then having done it once, we open wide the floodgates, and hold open the city gates to the enemy. If we do this, we may well find that we do it more and more often, even if we are most well-intentioned. We end up missing our reading because of tiredness, and this, and that, and the other things which must prevent us. But it is our essential duty. It is falling short on our part if we do not read the Scriptures. It is our duty to read the Scriptures, and indeed it is good if we read them every single day. It is good if we indulge in these things every day. You must do these things or else you will fall away as a Christian. You are fairly guaranteed to fall away if you do not read the Word of God.

How is your time spent?

How much time do you spend on other things? How much time do you spend on doing other things of lesser importance when you could be reading the Word of God? This is a challenge, and it must be seriously considered. We can all be found guilty of finding time to do the things that we want to do, but not finding time to do the things that we need or ought to do. We may easily find time to follow pursuits and hobbies sometimes, but not have time to sit down and to read the Scriptures. It is a grave danger for us that we will do this, and we are all guilty of it to some extent.

The danger of replacing the Scriptures

Even if it is a perfectly good thing perhaps, that you are reading; for instance I might say some commentary, some book on the Scriptures or something such as a book of Spurgeon's sermons or the like; is that good enough? Can we replace the Bible with that? No. We must read the Scriptures themselves for ourselves and we cannot replace them with anything. And if we cannot replace the Scriptures with such books, which we might consider to be very worthy and profitable books, how can we then presume to replace the Scriptures with other things which are even less important and less worthy of reading than those?

So we see firstly that this man, although he is a busy man, still has time. It is necessary to read the Scriptures every day. It is good also if you can read enough so that you can get through the whole of the Scriptures, every chapter, and every verse, every year, to make sure that you have a familiarity with it. It requires the reading of roughly four chapters every day; daunting perhaps, but more than possible.

Make sure that you make time to read the Book of books. This busy man has time, and you also can have time, but it will require effort and will-power from you. Pray to God that he would help you, and give you such a love for him and for his Word that you cannot resist its drawing.

We proceed to consider secondly, that:

2. We must have an INTEREST in reading the Scriptures

We may note that Ethiopian eunuch has an interest in the Word of God. This man is not a Jew; he is a man of Ethiopia, and yet here he is, reading Isaiah the prophet. He is reading from that very well-known chapter of Isaiah – Isaiah 53. This is one of the chapters that speaks and prophesies about the Lord our Saviour, and his crucifixion. Isaiah prophesied that this would take place many, many years before the event, by the divine inspiration of God.

A desire to obtain understanding

This great man of Ethiopia has a great interest in the Scriptures. He has a great interest in the Word, and he wants to know. He is not just reading this intellectually; he wants to know what he is reading. And so, when God has sent the evangelist Philip to him by the spirit and he asks the eunuch this question – ‘Understandest thou what thou readest?’, the eunuch replies, saying ‘How can I, except some man should guide me? And he desired Philip that he would come up and sit with him’. He wanted Philip to come up into the chariot, and explain it to him. He wanted to know; he was humble and acknowledged that he did not know, but he still had this desire within him when he was reading, to know.

And so we, when we come to the Scriptures, should come with an interest, and with a desire. We should want to learn from it when we come to it every day. When we come to open its pages, how do we open them? How do we approach the Word of God anywhere? Do we open it thinking that we had better do our daily reading, in a legalistic manner, or is it more of a sentiment of desiring to know what we can learn today from our daily reading, and what God would communicate to us by his Word? This last should be our attitude. We should be reading with great interest. How can I see this? What good can I derive from this portion? Every time you open your Bible to read it, look to benefit from it; look to gain something from it. Do not look to

open it as some other book, where you read a chapter, and then put it down and go away unchanged. Look to be convicted by it; look to be changed by it; look to learn from it.

The benefits of having the text before you

There is more benefit to be obtained by actually reading the Scriptures for yourself and indeed, if you are in a position to do so, to read the Scriptures aloud, than from listening to it, for instance. If you just listen to something, oh how easy it is to let things slip! How easy it is to switch off for a moment, and then you lose concentration, and you miss a bit! You may even do this while listening to the sermons on the Lord's Day and for the midweek Bible study.

Especially when there is a Scripture reading, being read in the service, as we do read at least one portion in every service, open your Bible up; then you can hear it being read, and you can read it with your eyes. It will help to focus your concentration, and you will get more from it. Likewise, when there is the preaching of the Word, which is also a central part of our services, have the text open before you, and if the preacher references certain texts, it is good to turn to them if you are able. It keeps you concentrating once more.

Using Bible references for study

Sometimes if you are reading in your personal devotions it may be helpful for you to look up the references, if you have a reference Bible. I would strongly recommend that you seek to obtain one if you have not one. The references are not inspired, but they are very useful. We should be keen readers and students of the Scriptures, and therefore we should be careful to make sure that we maximize every opportunity that we have to learn from it and to get some profit.

Reading the Scriptures aloud

The eunuch was reading aloud to himself in that chariot, and we know this because we read that Philip heard him reading from Isaiah. 'Philip

ran thither to him and heard him read the prophet Esaias'. There is no shame in reading the Scriptures aloud. It makes you think about what you are reading more, because you are having to pronounce the words; and therefore you have to actually think about them.

When you are listening, it is easy for things to pass you over: when you are reading, you can skim read, as some do, and thus you can miss bits out; but if you are reading it out loud there is greater benefit to be obtained from that.

So then this man evidently has an interest in the Word of God, and we should also as well.

We come to consider, thirdly:

3. We must seek to have a REVERENCE for the Scriptures

We may see now how that this eunuch has a reverence for the Scriptures. This is partly evident from his interest. These things tie very much together. He is a clever man, no doubt he is a high man, but still he reverences this Book. He is a great man in worldly terms, but this does not reduce respect for the prophet and for the Scriptures.

Greater knowledge of God inspires reverence

We ought to have a greater reverence for this Book. If we had a greater interest in this book, and if we took more time to read it, then we would have a greater reverence for it. We would consider it to be something much higher than what we consider it to be at present, because we would have a greater reverence for the God who inspired it. I am afraid sometimes it is so easy to consider it just as another book. Perhaps it will sit on the bookshelf alongside all of the other books, and there is no difference. But there is a great difference: this is God-breathed; God inspired this Word. It is the perfect absolute truth; it is infallible, and there is not a flaw to be found within the pages of the Scriptures.

A defence of the Authorized Version

Yes, there may be some faults in translation, but the majority of it is the Word of God. We cannot say that the Authorized (King James) Version is the absolute, perfect Word of God. It is but a translation of men, but still it is the most faithful translation in the English language, and is the most faithful to the most reliable manuscripts. The reliable manuscripts in Hebrew and Greek are the Word of God, for they are how it was written at the first, by divine inspiration. Scholars of Greek and Hebrew can easily say that the Authorized Version stays the closest to the original texts; other English translations fail to translate word for word, though claiming to do so. They also use or consider corrupted texts, and therefore often miss out whole passages, and change words, besides inputting their own interpretation on certain passages; you will find much loss of reverence towards God in almost all other translations.

How precious is the Bible to you?

People of some religions are very careful about the treatment of their holy books. They are very reverent of them. I do not wish to be legalistic here, but I do desire that every Christian would treat our Holy Bible with more respect and more reverence, that we should not treat these books carelessly. There are many people in this world right now who would long to have the Scriptures in their hands; they would long to have this precious book in their grasp.

But how do we treat them when they are so common? Perhaps we each have maybe two or three or four Bibles each, and perhaps more. How easy it is in such a case to treat them lightly, and not to really think too much that this is a precious Book. We ought to frequently remind ourselves that this is a Book which is to be precious to us.

Pray before reading

Also, when we come to read it, we should treat it with reverence. It is

maybe helpful for you to pray before you read it. To pray that the Lord would open your eyes, that he would give you a reverence and a seriousness when you come to read it, in your heart, that your eyes might be opened to see wondrous things out of the law of God.

Finally, we come to think, fourthly, that:

4. We should have PERSISTENCE in reading the Scriptures

The eunuch has great persistence in the reading of the Word. He is reading Isaiah the prophet, but he does not understand it. So what does he do? He still reads it, even though he cannot understand it.

Dealing with difficult portions

We may be able to see the application of this portion which is before him now, in the light of Christ. We may be able to see, in a manner of speaking, very broadly how Philip might have opened his mouth and begun at that Scripture and preached unto him Jesus.

We may understand this portion, which the eunuch then did not understand, but oh how many passages of Scripture are there, how many portions, passages, chapters, even books, that we struggle to comprehend? How many times, when you are reading, do you think to yourself that you really do not understand what is meant in this place. Pray that the Lord would give you wisdom, but still read them; do not skip over them. Do not miss those books out in your reading, but rather make sure that you have the whole counsel of God included in your Bible reading, and not just a part of it.

Acquaint yourself with the whole counsel of God

This whole book which we have before us is inspired, being the Word of God. Do not do it an injustice by missing out some books, and by spending more time in familiar ones than in in ones which are harder. Seek to have a balanced diet of the Scriptures, and thus seek to obtain a balanced view of it, and even those portions that you do

not understand at present. Perhaps if you have them in your mind, and thereby you are familiar with them, then as time goes by, and as you become more acquainted, something may stand out. Perhaps another portion you are reading somewhere else may suddenly hang together, and you may suddenly see what before was veiled to you.

The helps of the preached Word

Perhaps sometimes it may be that the Lord will send a Philip to you, even during a sermon, and someone will explain it to you. Or it may be that your Pastor can shed light on a difficult text, or the reading of a commentary may help; but despite all of these, read the Bible for yourself regularly.

A knowledge of the historical order of the Old Testament

It is good, of course, to have a general outline of the Scriptures, and we can only obtain this if we look at the Word of God. Obviously, the books are not in chronological order; but if we read it through time and time again, and we are familiar with it, we will begin to see the pattern of history. We can begin to see the historic progression through the books, and we can see lines and repetitions. This is the church history which is vital - this is the church history which we really need to know, because it is necessary, being a valuable part of the inspired Book.

Let us seek to be faithful to our God, and show our love for him and for his Word: let us read the Scriptures; let us make sure that we have time for them; make sure that we are interested, when we come to read them; make sure that we are reverent in considering the Word of God; and let us be persistent in reading it, and reading it, and reading it, and continuing to read again, even when there are those things that we do not understand.

2ND ADDRESS

Applying the Scriptures

2 Samuel 12:7

The second matter for consideration is concerning the Application of the Scriptures. This book is not just simply meant to be read as another book. It is a book which is to be considered. It is a book which is to be meditated upon; it is a book which is to be applied to the soul of man. It is because of this that this book can profit us if we apply it to our souls.

The importance of a right understanding of doctrine

We often speak about doctrine. Doctrine is most important to the Christian; it is not just words and creeds, and all such things like that; it is not just dry and really unhelpful - just something for divines to discuss and to debate over. Doctrine is not these things. Doctrine is practical. Yes, it may be that doctrine can be preached entirely theoretically, and it can just all be head knowledge, and no help to you tomorrow morning with all of the problems that you will face.

Doctrine determining practice

But doctrine is given to us in order that we may determine our practice. Our doctrine is to determine what we do; we do not consider what we do to determine our doctrine; but so often we can muddle these two, and we can say that since we do such and such a thing, this means that we must believe this doctrine or this creed. If we do this, we do not see how that the doctrines stem from the Word of God, and therefore the practice stems from them. We do certain things because that is what it commands in the Scriptures. Sometimes we just do things out of custom.

Perhaps you have gone to church and followed certain customs for so many years, and perhaps all of the people you respect do these things, and therefore we do these things. In such a case, there is nothing more to this than tradition. But the application of the Scriptures is the practice which proceeds from the doctrine which is given to us therein.

There are a few points which I would like to draw out from a few different texts, but eventually focussing on 2 Samuel 12:7.

Let us consider, firstly, that:

1. We must submit to Scriptural interpretation

The Christian, when he comes to apply the Word of God to himself, must submit to the Scriptural laws of interpretation. This applies in all other things: if, for instance, one is making an argument for a debate, or whether one is determining how he should be living; the same principle should be applied. In this case, we must always remember that important portion in the last few verses of 2 Peter 1: 'Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.' It is an important passage to direct us in determining how we ought to interpret, and how we ought to find, the applications from the Word of God; and thus how we should be living.

Applications according to our ideas

We cannot just make applications which suit our mindset. We cannot make applications which suit what we like to do, or what we think is right: no, that is not how we should be applying the Word of God. Man can make anything out of that; he can make the Scriptures to justify so many things that he does which are evidently wrong and most wicked; just by taking a verse out of context. There is a great danger to beware of in taking a verse, separating it, and isolating it from the rest of this holy book, and then making out of it a man's own application. I repeat, there is a great danger in this matter, and a great cause for so many to justify wrong actions. But there is no justification before God. We ought to seek to know what the mind of Christ is, and therefore the principles promoted by the whole of the Bible. These principles flow from one end of the book to the other, though there may not be explicit texts that we can cite.

Concerning obscure ideas and teachings

Do not consider obscure teachings too much; there are many that you can find if you begin to search; there are all sorts of novel ideas out there, and it is very easy for us to go chasing about after this novel idea, and that novel idea. All sorts of different people come up with all sorts of different ideas, about sometimes even the most seemingly obvious passages. They come up with the most peculiar interpretations of these, and necessarily they are followed by the most peculiar applications as well.

Often, I think, they are looking for more from very familiar texts, and are looking for novel and gripping ways to obtain people's attention on such well-known portions. We have to be careful with these things, that the applications that we make have the consensus of the whole of the Scriptures behind them. This is essential. We cannot even run by the opinions of men who are well educated; or men who are learned, even in the Scriptures; because men are fallible. This book is not, but all men are fallible. We may say that even if all men should be liars, still God must be true.

Thus, never mind so much what the men say; indeed they may be very helpful in commentaries, and books on different subjects (I do not deny they may be of immense help, and are most useful), but this, the Bible, is the ultimate source of our help. These people who write on the Scriptures should only be taking their lessons from the Word of God, and as soon as they cease to do so then it becomes their opinion, and it is really of no value.

The value of a book must be judged by its faithfulness to the Word of God. Those who write are not authoritative as their writing is not inspired, and it is not the Word of God. It is only this book that is pure, tried and tested. It is the only truth. It has been preserved throughout the generations for our benefit.

So that is the first matter: we must make sure that we are making scriptural applications, when we do seek to make applications.

Let us pass on, secondly, to consider that:

2. There must be a working of the Holy Spirit in application

There must be the work of the Holy Spirit involved in the matter of applying the Scriptures. We read of this in John 14:26: 'But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.' These are the words of Christ to his disciples, which we may apply to ourselves today.

The general working of the Holy Spirit

Christ ascended up into heaven; he departed from this world - and yet for those who trusted in him, he left the Comforter, that is the Holy Spirit, to indwell the heart of everyone who believes upon him.

The Holy Spirit does not provide extra revelation, as many suppose. There are many that get into a great tangle, and have almost mystical opinions about the Spirit. Some think it to be this sort of mysterious thing, which sometimes they use to justify the most peculiar applications from the good Book.

But the Holy Spirit of God is not so. The matter is quite plain and straightforward in this case: the Spirit does not add anything to the Word of God. The Spirit does not do anything to change the Word of God, but he simply expounds it. The Holy Spirit is given to expound and to apply the Word to our hearts; and that is what is inferred here: 'he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance.' He will not inform you of anything new or novel; he will not instruct you of anything which is contrary to this Word, but rather he will be, as it were, make the truth evident to our minds, and apply it to our hearts and convict us to change. That is the role of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit's work in conversion

The Spirit works first in a man's heart, to bring him to salvation. The Spirit works in the heart of an unregenerate man, to apply the gospel to that heart. He works to change that heart, to melt it, and to cause it to have great love for God, which it could not otherwise have on its own.

The Holy Spirit's work in sanctification

In like manner the Spirit continues to work in in a regenerate person, that is, one who is saved, to apply the Word to the heart. After salvation we are to grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour, and the Holy Spirit is part of this working, to perform certain functions in that growth. He must work in us to teach, to guide, to rebuke, and to exhort, from this Book, the Word of God.

Praying for the working of the Holy Spirit

It is good then to be in prayer - to be earnest in prayer especially when we are coming to the Word of God, that the Spirit would open our eyes. Our desire should be that we might see wondrous things from the Word. The Spirit of God must show us certain things, and we should desire that we might see things that we are doing which are against the commands of God, and to see many other things; perhaps encouragements, perhaps rebukes, perhaps exhortation. We should desire the Spirit to show us these things that we may truly have the Spirit working holiness in us by this means.

Let us now come to consider, thirdly, that:

3. There must be real and actual application to the heart

We come now to consider something about David in 2 Samuel 12:7. We shall note some practical things about the real and actual application of the Scriptures to the heart, bearing in mind the things already considered.

The background to 2 Samuel 12:7

I shall just briefly outline the background to this text. David has committed a great sin with Bathsheba. Bathsheba was the wife of Uriah the Hittite. David lusted after Bathsheba, and he made a plot to get Uriah killed. He sent a message to Joab, who was out fighting; Uriah was with him. David commanded Joab to put Uriah into the forefront of the battle, that is, into the hottest part of it, where he was most likely to be slain. And he was slain, and then David took Bathsheba to be his wife. This was a great sin against God.

God sends Nathan the prophet

But then Nathan the prophet comes to him; we do not know how long afterwards this was: it might have been some time. The Lord sends Nathan to David, and he speaks to him this parable that is found in the first few verses of this chapter. And David is naturally quite angry with the man who has done this wickedness in this parable. We read in verse 5 that his anger was greatly kindled against the man, and he says to Nathan: 'As the Lord liveth, the man that hath done this thing shall surely die; and he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity.'

Nathan addresses David's sin

But then we read some crushing words from Nathan. He replies to David, and he says to him quite plainly, 'Thou art the man.' Thus far he has spoken to him in a parable, but David has not seen the application. His conscience has perhaps been silenced for so long, that it does not trouble him here. But Nathan then takes it straight to him, and does not spare him in the slightest. He says 'Thou art the man, you have done this, you are the one who is guilty of this great wickedness.' We see here the picture of the Word of God being applied to the soul of a man.

There are two things we shall note from this briefly:

Firstly, we may think that:

a) This is a personal application

'Thou art the man'. 'Thou', it is you that has done this thing. How hard-hitting this message is for David, and it is for none other. This parable is for David; all of this is for David. It is for nobody else. This has not been delivered for Bathsheba; it has not been delivered for one of the people in the court; it is not for one of the people who lives under David's command. This is for David, and it strikes right home to the core, as it were. 'Thou art the man'. This is you.

Thinking of applications for others distracting

When we are reading the Scriptures, when we are listening to sermons, and you are listening to messages, when you are reading books, and all these things - is it not so easy to start thinking how much good a certain message, a certain book, or something of the sort, would be for someone else. Do we not all do these things? Sometimes, we begin to think this way, and we begin to think about other people to our own detriment - what about you? The Lord has brought you to this place, to hear this message - what about you? With regards to other people - if the Lord willed it to be so, he could have brought it into his power to make that person to be present for that meeting; but he has brought you! Why are you not listening for yourself?

Listen firstly for yourself

We should be listening earnestly and intently, seeking first and foremost applications of these things to our own souls. It is our duty to make sure that we take every opportunity to make certain that we are right with God; that we are not hiding some secret sin which we can hide away. We can take every effort as David did to conceal the wickedness, and perhaps we are like this. But still, if the Word of God comes to us, let us not try to shift the blame onto somebody else. Let us not try and apply it to somebody else, because you are the one

here. You are listening to the message, so apply it to yourself. Take these things and consider them in your own heart. Am I guilty of this? Am I doing such things? That is how we will benefit from it the most. We must be careful of these things.

Sending verses of Scripture to others for encouragement

Of course, I do not say that it is wrong to send, perhaps, a portion of Scripture, a verse or two, that comes particularly to our attention, to somebody who is struggling. To send a verse or two of encouragement from the Word of God to somebody who is in distress at a particular time is nothing wrong. But it is when we begin to think of other people, and we begin to apply the Word to other people before ourselves, then that is the danger. It is a great encouragement to receive texts or messages from people, where they have included a verse of Scripture and it has warmed our hearts, and it has encouraged us - it is a good thing. But we need to make sure that we are obeying God ourselves first, especially when we are listening to messages. So that primarily, we make sure of ourselves first.

So we see that these words are personally applied to David. When we hear the word preached, it is for you to listen to it diligently, to listen to it carefully, and seek to apply it to your own heart.

Secondly, we may think that:

b) This is a very painful application

We may note that it is a very painful application. How painful is it? You cannot tell. We know from David's outburst in Psalm 51, that he was indeed a miserable man. He was without the joy of the Lord, and so he was quite wretched.

The joy of salvation removed by sin

He speaks in that psalm, and he petitions God in this way: 'Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation'. Perhaps he did have a little joy from

his sin for a time, but it was the joy of this world. It was a very carnal joy, it was a fading joy, it was a passing joy. It was nothing deep and lasting - that is the joy of the salvation of God.

We have considered already the reading of the scriptures, and noted how that sometimes it is hard to read the Scriptures. Well, how much harder is it to have the Scriptures applied to our own hearts when we read them? It is hard perhaps to see an application, but it is also hard sometimes to take the application to our hearts, and to apply it to ourselves.

Hiding favourite sins

Sometimes there are things, such as darling sins, which we hold in our bosoms, and which we try to shield, trying to hide them away. We try not to let anybody know about these. But we cannot hide them from Christ.

If anybody makes a compelling argument against such a sin, you perhaps hear a sermon, and it mentions the subject, but you still want to hide it away, then how hard it is to come out into the open, and to see what you are doing, that it is entirely wrong. How painful when you see that you cannot justify it, and you cannot defend it any longer, for it is entirely wrong. How hard it is to stop, and to cast that away!

Seeking necessary things from Scripture

The Scriptures are not just given for our comfort, consolation, and encouragement, and these very positive things: if we come to the Scriptures with an attitude of coming to see what encouragement, and what comforts we can get from the Scriptures, then we will miss an much of the Scriptures out. We will not read many parts of it because they will not encourage us, they will not comfort us, and they will not give us nice, soft, gentle, pleasing words. They will be harsh as this portion sometimes. The Scriptures sometimes stand to us, and says 'Thou art the man'. It speaks sometimes like this: 'Now what is this thou art doing? If thou lovest thy God, cease from these things, repent

in dust and ashes, and plead for forgiveness'. The Scripture was given for our learning, and therefore we should seek to read all of it, and learn from all of it what we can.

The need for pain before profit

There is no profit, friends, if there is not some pain inflicted. When one is building muscles, one must have them to be aching and weary at times, before they can be built up in strength; and so it is with us in this case. We may be challenged, and refreshed by the Word, but we must seek to read all of it, even though it is painful, and apply all of it, and act upon all of it that we read.

Fourthly, and lastly upon the matter of applying the Scriptures, let us consider that:

4. Look for Christ on every page

If you are struggling to find an application from the Word of God, then firstly pray earnestly, and then look for Christ on every page. There are many passages which are hard to understand, there are many passages which seem to bear no relation to my life or your life, but I say to you: look for Christ.

Christ as our Beloved

Search for him, seek him, hunt for him if need be. Remember that bride in the Song of Solomon. She goes searching for her Beloved. If you claim to love Christ, and if Christ is as dear to you, in your bosom, as you claim him to be; then search for him, and do not give up until you find him. He is not just in the New Testament, for he is in the Old as well. Look for types, and shadows, and pictures of Christ, and his crucifixion. You will find them everywhere, but if you struggle to see anything relevant or encouraging from a passage, and if you strive to see any application from a passage; then look for Christ. Look for your Beloved in the pages of this Book, which it centres on Christ.

Christ crucified central

The apostle Paul wrote: 'We preach Christ crucified'. That is the central message of this Book, and it is found throughout. Sometimes it is, as it were, behind the veil of the tabernacle, and other times he is set forth in glorious display, as on the cross. We see him there, open and visible to all.

Friends, look for Christ throughout the Scriptures. And above all, pray that the Holy Spirit of God would apply the Word to your heart, that you may live in accordance with the Word, that you may please him who hath called you.

3RD ADDRESS

Doing the Scriptures

Matthew 7:24

Now we come to what we could call Doing the Scriptures. I mean by this, doing what the Scriptures teach to us, and what they command to us to do. We shall consider a few thoughts upon this matter. If we do not those things that we read, then they are not beneficial to us.

The difficulty of putting the Scriptures into practice

Reading the Scriptures is a hard thing to do; for as we have considered, it is hard to have a regular time to read the Scriptures. However, applying it is harder still, for it must touch the soul; it must touch the very depths of us, and therefore it may well be painful to us when it comes to convict us. But, actually doing it is surely the hardest of all. Indeed, there is a part of this involved in the reading of the Scriptures, for we must do it - and how slow we are to do it! We can see it even there; but when it comes to actually performing the Word of God, and actually doing these things which are necessary to be done; that is hard work. We must pray for grace, to be able to do these things, for it is not easy.

'Living for Christ'

What we are considering is what many Evangelical Christians often speak of as being 'living for Christ'. Now I for one do not believe that this phrase is scriptural, either in origin, or in doctrine; for I fear that there are things wrong with it. We have not time to go into any depth upon the matter here, but if you consider Galatians 2:20, which is, perhaps, quite a well-known text, we read: 'I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me. And the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.'

Living to Christ

The apostle says elsewhere 'To me, to live is Christ', but it is here we can see that actually we are to live to Christ. We are to live to Christ's glory, which is to live doing as Christ did as he walked upon the earth, and also how we are instructed to live according to the Word of God.

This is the matter which we come to consider here: the actual practice. Now obviously, we cannot go into detail over all of the different aspects of our lives, all of which must be affected by the Word of God, but I would like to consider a few general heads, upon this matter, which I trust the Lord will use to be helpful.

We come, then, firstly, to consider that:

1. We must beware of the danger of DECEPTION

Let us to consider the matter of deception. There is a considerable amount of deception which takes place, within the church of Christ. That is to say, within the membership of local fellowships, but which also takes place within the professing body of the church, which is much larger. There are many professing Christians who are not members of a local fellowship, but it is so commonly found beneath the surface, in those who profess the faith.

Professing worldly Christians

So many Christians seem to have the mark of God in their forehead, and the mark of the beast in their hand; if that were a possible thing - I speculate here somewhat. You may, perhaps, see what I mean: they appear to think the right way, and they appear to think all the right things - you could have a good conversation with them, perhaps, about all the finer details of the questions of doctrine, and all the finer details of the theoretical parts of Christianity - but if you take one look at their lives, then you see that they are worldly. They walk in the ways of the world, and so they speak the things of the world, they speak like the world does; there is no difference between them, professing Christians, and the atheists and the like, apart from some form of religion.

Thus, I trust you can see: they think the things of Christ, and they have, as it were, the mark of God in their foreheads, representing their minds; but they have also the mark of the beast in their hands, representing the things that they do. They are as wicked in their

deeds. They are corrupt, being just as the godless world, in natural morality.

The need for change in the heart

It is so easy to be thinking the right things, and to know all the right things – indeed, to be able to speak the right things and to sound very convincing, and yet be unchanged in heart, and to be unchanged in practice. And practice is so important. We see the things that are written in Matthew 7:21: ‘Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven.’ Who will? ‘He that doeth the will of my Father, which is in heaven’; these are the only ones who will enter into heaven.

Good works a proof or evidence of faith

We are saved by grace through faith, and we are not saved by our works. But our good works are an outworking of the faith which is within us. They are, as it were, to some measure, proof of our faith. Good doctrine, and bad practice, so often go hand in hand in professing Christians. You may have an outward profession, but that does not guarantee inward security. You are guaranteed no eternal life, just because you say you were a Christian; nor just because your parents were Christians; nor just because you were brought up in a Christian home; nor just because you believe in some sort of Christianity. None of these will qualify you to automatically find your way into heaven. You cannot seek to get through the golden gates that way, friends: you must get to that place striving and labouring for the sake of Christ.

Apparent religion insufficient for salvation

We see also, in that portion, at the end of Matthew 7, about what Jesus Christ says concerning the building of the house on the rock. This is of course a part of his famous ‘Sermon on the Mount’. In the closing part of it, we read of that man who built a house upon the sand - to all intents and purposes it looked like he had built a house;

and so Christians today may profess to be Christians, for all anybody else knows, but they may yet have no foundation. You might meet somebody, for instance, and they will happily say that they are Christians; but then you get to know them a little more, and you see that their Christianity is without foundation.

They have built their Christianity upon sand, and so if they are not openly exposed in this life, then they will crumble when the great storm of God's wrath comes upon them. That profession will be nothing if it is not backed by saving faith in Christ, and the results of the same.

The purifying nature of tribulation

Tribulation may be viewed as something which will either drive a wedge between you and Christ - it will either cause you to fall away from the faith - or it will cause you to be drawn closer to Christ. You will either flee from him or you will fly to him. This is what tribulation does, and so for the true Christian, tribulation is a good thing, for it drives you closer to Christ. It does have benefit, though it may be hard, for it drives to Christ. It is, therefore, ultimately good for us; thus the apostle writes in Romans 8:28 that all things work together for good for them that love God. Even the worst things, if they drive us to Christ, are good for us, and they are beneficial for us.

However, I must sadly note that it is easy to deceive ourselves. It is easier still to deceive others in this manner. Many a man has been accepted into church membership, simply because of a good profession. The danger is that we talk the right things, but do not live them out every day. It is most dangerous if you deceive yourself. You may deceive others, perhaps, along the way.

Let us come, secondly, to consider that:

2. There is a great need for **PERSONAL CONVICTION**

The second thing I would like to speak about is personal conviction. Now conviction comes hand in hand, as it were, with application, which has already been considered.

Conviction vital, but not everything

Conviction is absolutely vital, but it is not the end of the road, as we might say. It is vital, it is often overlooked, but it is not everything. This man who is wise is convicted, undoubtedly, that he must build his house upon the rock, rather than upon the sand; and so he does so. He is convicted of the right thing, and he also goes and he does it.

Conviction without action useless

If you would permit me to speculate for just a moment: it could be that the man who built his house upon the sand also believed it would be better to build his house on the rock. But perhaps he considered that it would be harder work, as you would have to dig out the rock in order to lay the foundations in the rock, and so it would be much more labour than just building it on the sand. And he may have thought that it would be better to choose the easier option, and just build his house on the sand.

Perhaps he has some tinge of conscience pricking in the back of his mind, that, perhaps this was not the right thing, but he goes ahead with it, being easier. And you see what becomes of him. The house falls down, and of course it is a greater matter when we speak of the soul. For the soul falling down, as a house, is a far more solemn thing. A house can be built again; a soul may never be revived once it has finally fallen. Once the grave holds the body, and once the soul has departed from it, then there is nothing more but for that soul to stand before the judgment seat. There is no hope left for it. He was convicted, but he did not act upon it - there is a great danger here.

Conviction assisting practice as an incentive

Conviction assists the practice greatly. If you are convicted that something is right, then you have all the more incentive to do it. And this way, conviction comes, as it were, as a sort of a backup. It acts as an incentive, but is not everything, and most importantly, it is not the actual doing of it.

Scriptural examples of Pharaoh and Saul

Just consider the example of different men from the Scriptures on this matter. Consider Pharaoh: he heard the word of God from Moses; Moses spoke to him, and on some occasions, Pharaoh said that he would let the people go, but he never did so. Perhaps he was convicted that he should let them go, from time to time, but he never did anything about it.

Consider Saul: he comes to David, having been pursuing him, and he says that he has sinned. What does he go on to do? We read about him a little while after, pursuing David once more, evidencing that he had not really repented.

The danger of not responding to conviction

So then, conviction following good and sound application from the Scriptures it is an excellent thing; I do not wish to put it down in any manner; but it is not enough. With that conviction, there must be something more. You may attest for yourself that it is possible to read a book, to listen to a sermon, or to read the scriptures, and to be really convicted and challenged in your heart by what the preacher has spoken, or what this person has written; and you think to yourself, perhaps, as you are sitting there in chapel, that you will change such and such when you get home.

Maybe you have said to yourself that you will stop doing this and you will start doing this. But then, too many times for many of us, I fear, we return to our homes and then once you got back into the familiar

environment, you have just slipped back into the ordinary routine: and you have never done anything about it. Is not this familiar to you? Have you ever been convicted, truly, by the Word of God and then done nothing?

I fear it is too easy for us to do this: to be really challenged by something - the Spirit of God speaking to us, and convicting us of certain things; and then us ignoring it, and going on as we were. It is indeed harder if we have to change. It is harder to break old habits, and to break off from certain not things. And on the other side, it is hard to set new habits. Do you not find this also? We need true repentance with the conviction.

We come further to consider, thirdly, that:

3. There is a great need for DEDICATION to Christ

Let us consider our dedication. If you love Christ, and if you love God, you should be willing to do the hardest things for Christ.

Motivation for serving Christ

Consider, if you must have some sort of motivation, what Christ went through for you. Consider what he suffered for your sake. Consider how unworthy you are to receive anything from him. Consider what Christ has done for you. Are you now going to throw this back in his face, as one might throw dirt at another? Is this what you should give to the one who gave himself for you? Just to our minds, that seems an alien thing to do; something horrible to somebody who has done so much for you. Christ died for you - will you repay him with this? We must be dedicated to our God, and we must be dedicated to serving Christ until we are called to be with him.

Being not forgetful hearers

The wise man, who is a man of God, a true man of God sees the need - he is convicted - and then he does it. James speaks of this: 'Be

ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass; for he beholdeth himself and goeth on his way and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was.' Therefore we must be as James 1:25 speaks - not being forgetful hearers, as he says. We must not be a forgetful hearers, but a doers of the word.

Blessing in doing the Scriptures

Then we read that such a man shall be blessed in his deed. Do we not all seek blessing from God? Let us seek to do his Word; then, when we sin, and when we are convicted, and we go our own ways - what are we doing?

The work of the Holy Spirit in conviction to act

The Spirit is working in us to convict us, to make us to think, to see, and to realize that this is wrong, or this is right, and we should be doing this. But if we then ignore it, this is grieving the Holy Spirit which was given to us, and we are commanded in Ephesians 4:30 that we should not grieve the spirit, speaking there of sin. And we have it again in 1 Thessalonians 5:19, where we are commanded 'Quench not the spirit'. This is very much of the same matter. We are not to be quenching the risings of the Spirit within us of conviction. They are like fires, and we are not to put them out, but we are to let them burn, and to strive to keep them burning, by the grace of God.

The unpardonable sin

Some believe, perhaps with very good reason, that constant repetition of this quenching, or putting down of these convictions, obviously over some period - many gracious souls have indeed concerned themselves for long times over their whether their salvation is real, fearing lest they have committed that unpardonable sin - is the unpardonable sin. What is that unpardonable sin? Grieving the Holy Spirit. Sin against the Holy Spirit. If we constantly are convicted, and

then constantly ignore it, then some hold that it is indeed the unpardonable sin.

The Spirit works to convict, and this demands action from us. We cannot let it go unnoticed; we cannot let it go on past. This is a life and death matter, and so we should act upon it, if it is truly from the Word of God. If it is true conviction by the Spirit, then we should be willing to do whatever it takes, for the sake of Christ, to continue, and to work the work of faith, and to fight the good fight, or to run the race, as the apostle speaks on various occasions.

In James, and in Ephesians, the context concerning the Spirit with regard to the actions is of committing sin, which is of course what we are convicted of - we are convicted of sin in our lives – but in 1 Thessalonians it is in that list of very brief exhortations for the believers.

Let us come, finally, and fourthly, to consider further:

4. The importance and need of PRAYER for godly living

Let us think some more, in closing, on the matter of prayer. The brief exhortation, just preceding that concerning the Spirit, in 1 Thessalonians 5:17 I think to be particularly notable: 'Pray without ceasing.'

Our inability to do right

We may well ask, as the apostle did: 'Who is sufficient for these things?' Who is sufficient to do the work of God? Who is sufficient to say, and to believe, and to act as if for us to live is Christ? We are not sufficient. We are far from it; just consider the number of times we sin against God every day.

Always be praying about the matter

Therefore, we must be oft in prayer, we must be oft coming before the throne of grace, to pray for strength to do these things: to put down the sin, to mortify it, to actually fight against it when we see it, and when we are convicted - not just to ignore it, and to forget about it, to be forgetful hearers - but to act on it, to perform it, to go forwards.

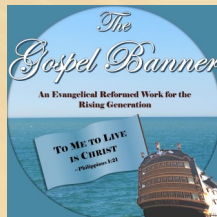
We are to go out of the chapel, or to go out of your closet after reading something, convicted, and to act on it. The Bible is not just to be *read* in private, and at the public assembly of the saints; but it is to be practiced all the time by those who believe, and by all those who profess Christ.

We must pray for strength to act upon conviction. It is hard to obey the Word. It is hard to live as Christians ought. But it is our life's work, and it is our life's duty to do these things. Therefore, we should be praying always. How many times do we find that in the Scriptures? How many times do we actually do it? Again, it is the doing of it that is at fault in us. Let us be often praying for these things, that the Lord would help us.

STUDYING THE SCRIPTURES

William Arrowsmith

The Bible must be often read, and often studied, so that we may learn what we can of God, and also of our duty towards him. This great book is given to us by God, that we may be thoroughly furnished to every good work. Perfection may not be obtained, but it must be striven for, and we may only obtain the perfect correction, reproof, and conviction from the Word of God itself. It must be more important to us that our daily food, that we may be healthy Christians.



A publication from 'The Gospel Banner'