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Heaven Taken by Storm

Showing the Holy Violence
A Christian is to Put Forth in the
Pursuit After Glory

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APPENDIX 2

How We May Read the Scriptures With Most Spiritual Profit

"And it shall be with him, and he shall read therein all the days of his life: that he may learn to fear the LORD his God, to keep all the words of this law and these statutes, to do them."

— Deuteronomy 17:19

What Cicero said of Aristotle's politics may not unfitly be said of this book of Deuteronomy: It is full of golden eloquence. In this chapter, God instructs the Jews about setting a king over them, and there are two things specified: his *election* and his *religion*.

1. His election: "Thou shalt in any wise set him king over thee, whom the LORD thy God shall choose" (verse 15). There is good reason that God should have the choice of their king, since by Him kings reign (Prov. 8:15).

2. His religion: "When he sitteth upon the throne of his kingdom, he shall write him a copy of this law in a book out of that which is before the priests" (verse 18). Here was a good beginning of a king's reign; the first thing he did after he sat upon the throne was to copy the Word of God in a book. And in the text we read, "It shall be with him, and he shall read therein all the days of his life: that he may learn to fear the LORD his God, to keep all the words of this law and these statutes, to do them."

"It shall be with him." The Book of the law shall be his *Vade Mecum*, that is, daily companion. Charles the Great used to set his crown upon the Bible. Indeed the Bible is the best support of government. "And he shall read therein." It is not

below the majesty of a prince to peruse the oracles of heaven; in them are comprised sacred sayings. "I will speak of excellent things" (Prov. 8:6). In the Septuagint it is "grave things"; in the Hebrew, "princely things," such as are fit for a God to speak and a king to read. Nor must the king only read the Book of the law at his first installment into his kingdom, but he "shall read therein all the days of his life." He must not leave off reading till he has left off reigning. And the reasons that he must be conversant in the law of God are in the subsequent words: 1) "That he may learn to fear the LORD his God." Reading of the Word is the best means to usher in the fear of the Lord. 2) "That he may keep all the words of this law, to do them." 3) "That he may prolong his days in his kingdom."

I shall now confine myself to these words, "He shall read therein all the days of his life," that is, in the Book of the law.

The Holy Scripture is, as Augustine said, a golden epistle sent to us from God. This is to be read diligently; ignorance of Scripture is the mother of error, not of devotion. "Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures" (Matt. 22:29). We are commanded to "search the Scriptures" (John 5:39). The Greek word signifies to search as for a vein of silver. How diligently does a child read over his father's will and testament and a citizen peruse his charter! With the same diligence we should read God's Word, which is our Magna Charta for heaven. It is a mercy that the Bible is not prohibited. Trajan the emperor forbade the Jews to read in the Book of the law.

Let us inquire at this sacred oracle. Apollos was "mighty in the Scriptures" (Acts 18:24). Melancthon, when he was young, sucked the sincere milk of the Word. Alphonsus, King of Aragon, read the Bible fourteen times. That Roman lady, Cecilia, had by much reading of the Word made her heart the "Library of Christ," as Jerome relates. Were the Scriptures confined to the original tongues, many would plead excuse for not reading; but when the sword of the Spirit is unsheathed, and the Word is made plain to us by being translated, what should hinder us from a diligent search into these holy mysteries?

Adam was forbidden upon pain of death to taste of the tree of knowledge. "In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" (Gen. 2:17). But there is no danger of touching this tree of Holy Scripture; if we do *not* eat of *this* tree of knowledge

we shall surely die. What will become of them who are strangers to the Scriptures? "I have written to him the great things of My law, but they were counted as a strange thing" (Hos. 8:12). Many lay aside the Scriptures as rusty armor (Jer. 8:9). They are more well-read in romances than in Paul; they spend many hours between the comb and the mirror, but their eyes begin to be sore when they look at a Bible. The very Turks will rise up in judgment against these Christians. They reverence the books of Moses; and if they find but a leaf whereon anything of the Pentateuch is written, they take it up and kiss it. They who slight the Word written slight God Himself, whose stamp it bears. To slight the king's edict is an affront offered to the person of the king. They who reject and vilify the Scriptures are in a state of condemnation. "Whoso despiseth the Word shall be destroyed" (Prov. 13:13). Nor is it enough to read the Word of God, but it should be our care to get some spiritual emolument and profit by it, that our souls may be nourished in the words of faith (1 Tim. 4:6).

Why else was the Scripture written but that it might profit us? God did not give us His Word only as a landscape to look upon, but He delivered it as a father delivers a stock of money to his son to improve. It is sad not to profit by the Word — to be like a body in a consumption which does not thrive. Men would be loathe to trade and get no profit.

The grand question I am to speak to is this: *How may we read the Scriptures with most spiritual profit?* In answering this question, I shall lay down several rules or directions about the reading of Scripture.

I. If you would profit by reading, remove those things that will hinder your profiting. That the body may thrive, obstructions must be removed. There are three obstructions which must be removed if you would profit by Scripture. 1) Remove the love of every sin. Let a physician prescribe ever so good remedies; if the patient takes poison, it will hinder the virtue and operation of the physic. The Scripture prescribes excellent remedies, but sin lived in, poisons all. The body cannot thrive in a fever, nor can the soul under the feverish heat of lust. Plato calls the love of sin *magnus daemon*, a great devil. As the rose is destroyed by the canker which breeds in it, so are the souls of men destroyed by those sins in which they indulge.

2) Take heed of those thorns which will choke the Word read. These thorns our Savior expounds to be the cares of this world (Matt. 13:22). By "cares" is meant *covetousness*. A covetous man has such diversity of secular employment that he can scarce find time to read, and if he does, what improprieties does he commit in reading! While his eye is upon the Bible, his heart is upon the world; it is not the writings of the apostles he is so much taken up with, as the writing in his account books. Is this man apt to profit? You may as soon extract oil and syrup out of a flint, as he will receive any real benefit out of Scripture.

3) Take heed of jesting with Scripture; this is playing with fire. Some cannot be merry unless they make bold with God. When they are sad, they bring forth the Scripture as their harp to drive away the evil spirit — as that drunkard who having emptied his cups, called to his fellows, "Give us of your oil, for our lamps are gone out." In the fear of God beware of this. King Edward IV would not endure to have his crown jested with, but caused him to be executed who said *he would make his son heir to the crown*, meaning the sign of the crown on his tavern. Much less will God endure to have His Word jested with. Eusebius relates of one who took a piece of Scripture to jest with: God struck him with frenzy. The Lord may justly give over such persons to a *reprobate mind* (Rom. 1:28).

II. If you would profit, prepare your hearts before the reading of the Word; the heart is an instrument which needs to be put in tune. "Prepare your hearts unto the LORD" (1 Sam. 7:3). The heathen, as Plutarch notes, thought it indecent to be too hasty or rash in the service of their supposed deities. This preparation for reading consists in two things:

1) In summoning our thoughts together to attend to that solemn work we are going about. The thoughts are stragglers, therefore rally them together. 2) In purging out those unclean affections which do indispose us to reading. Before we come to the water of life, let us cast away the poison of impure affections. Many come rashly to the reading of the Word, and it is no wonder if they come without preparation that they go away without profit.

III. Read the Scriptures with reverence; think about every line you read; God is speaking to you. The ark wherein the

law was put, was overlaid with pure gold and was carried on bars, that the Levites might not touch it (Ex. 25). Why was this, but to breed in the people reverence to the law? When Ehud told Eglon he had a message to him from God, he arose from his throne (Judg. 3:20). The Word written is a message from Jehovah; with what veneration should we receive it!

IV. Read the books of Scripture in order. Though occurrences may sometimes divert our method, yet, for a *constant course*, it is best to observe an order in reading. Order is a help to memory. We do not begin to read a friend's letter in the middle.

V. Get a right understanding of Scripture. "Give me understanding, that I may learn Thy commandments" (Ps. 119:73). Though there are some knots in Scripture which are not easily untied, yet things essential to salvation the Holy Ghost has plainly pointed out to us. The knowledge of the sense of the Scriptures is the first step to profit. In the law, Aaron was first to light the lamps and then to burn the incense; the lamp of the understanding must be first lighted before the affections can be inflamed. Get what knowledge you can by comparing Scriptures, by conferring with others, by using the best commentaries. Without knowledge the Scripture is a *sealed book*; every line is too high for us; and if the Word shoot above our head, it can never hit our heart.

VI. Read the Word with seriousness. If one go over the Scripture cursorily, said Erasmus, there is little good to be obtained by it; but if he be serious in reading it, it is the savor of life; and well may we be serious if we consider the importance of those truths which are bound up in this sacred volume. "It is not a vain thing for you; because it is your life" (Deut. 32:47). If a letter were to be broken open and read wherein a man's whole estate were concerned, how serious would he be in reading it. In the Scripture our salvation is concerned; it treats of the love of Christ — a serious subject. Christ has loved mankind more than the angels that fell (Heb. 2:7). The loadstone, indifferent to gold and pearl, draws the iron to it; thus Christ passed by the angels, who were of more noble extraction, and drew mankind to Him. Christ loved us more than His own life; nay, though we had a hand in His death, yet that He should not leave us out of His will — this is a love that *passeth knowledge*. Who can read this without seriousness?

The Scripture speaks of the mystery of faith, the eternal

recompenses, and the paucity of them that shall be saved: "Few chosen" (Matt. 20:16). One said the names of all the good emperors of Rome might be engraved in a little ring; there are, comparatively speaking, but few names in the Book of Life. The Scripture speaks of striving for heaven as in an agony (Luke 13:24). It cautions us of falling short of the promised rest (Heb. 4:1). It describes the horrors of the infernal torments, the worm, and the fire (Mark 9:44). Who can read this and not be serious? Some have light, feathery spirits; they run over the most weighty truths in haste (like Israel who ate the Pass-over in haste), and they are not benefited by the Word. Read with a solemn, composed spirit. Seriousness is the Christian's ballast which keeps him from being overturned with vanity.

VII. Labor to remember what you read. Satan would steal the Word out of your mind; not that he intends to make use of it himself, but lest we should make use of it. The memory should be like the chest in the ark, where the ark was put. "I remembered Thy judgments of old" (Ps. 119:52). Jerome speaks of that religious lady, Paula, that she knew most of the Scriptures by heart; we are bid to have the Word dwell in us (Col. 3:16). The Word is a jewel; it adorns the hidden man, and shall we not remember it? If the Word stays not in the memory, it cannot profit. Some can better remember a piece of news than a line of Scripture; their memories are like those ponds where the frogs live, but the fish die.

VIII. Meditate upon what you read. "I will meditate in Thy precepts" (Ps. 119:15). The Hebrew word to meditate, signifies to be *intense* in the mind. In meditation there must be a fixing of the thoughts upon the object. "Mary pondered those things" (Luke 2:19). Meditation is the concoction of Scripture; reading brings a truth into our head, meditation brings it into our heart; reading and meditation, like Castor and Pollux, must appear together. Meditation without reading is erroneous; reading without meditation is barren. The bee sucks the flower and then works it into the hive, and so turns it into honey; by reading we suck the flower of the Word, by meditation we work it into the hive of our mind, and so it turns to profit. Meditation is the bellows of the affection. "While I was musing the fire burned" (Ps. 39:3). The reason we come away so cold from reading the Word is because we do not warm ourselves at the fire of meditation.

IX. Come to the reading of Scripture with *humble hearts*; acknowledge how unworthy you are that God should reveal Himself in His Word to you. God's secrets are with the humble. Pride is an enemy to profiting. It has been said that the ground on which the peacock sits is barren; that heart where pride sits is *really barren*. An arrogant person disdains the counsels of the Word, and hates the reproofs. Is he likely to profit? "God...giveth grace to the humble" (Jas. 4:6). The most eminent saints have been of low stature in their own eyes; like the sun at the zenith, they showed least when they were at the highest. David had "more understanding than all my teachers" (Ps. 119:99), but how humble he was: "I am a worm, and no man" (Ps. 22:6).

X. Give credence to the Word written; believe it to be of God; see the name of God in every line. The Romans, that they might gain credit to their laws, reported that they were inspired by the gods at Rome. Believe the Scriptures to be divinely inspired. "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God" (2 Tim. 3:16). Who but God could reveal the great doctrines of the Trinity, the atonement of Jesus Christ for sinners, the resurrection? Whence should the Scriptures come, if not from God? 1) Sinners could not be the authors of Scripture. Would they indite such holy lines or inveigh so fiercely against the sins which they love? 2) Saints could not be the authors of Scripture. How could it stand with their sanctity to counterfeit God's Name, and put "thus saith the LORD," to a book of their own devising? 3) Angels could not be the authors of Scripture. What angel in heaven dares personate God, and say, "I am the LORD"? Believe the pedigree of Scripture to be sacred and to come from the Father of light. The antiquity of Scripture speaks its divinity. No human history extant reaches further than Noah's flood; but the Scripture treats of things before time. Besides, the majesty, profundity, purity and harmony of Scripture show it could be breathed from none but God Himself.

Add to this the *efficacy* the written Word has upon men's consciences. By reading Scripture they have been turned into other men, as may be instanced in Augustine, Junius, and others. If you should set a seal upon a piece of marble, and it should leave a print behind, you would say there was a strange

virtue in that seal; so also, when the written Word leaves a heavenly print of grace upon the heart, it argues it to be of divine authority. If you would profit by the Word, you must believe it to be of God. Some skeptics question the verity of Scripture; they have the articles of religion in their creed, but not in their belief. Unbelief enervates the virtue of the Word and makes it abortive. Who will obey truths he does not believe? "The Word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith" (Heb. 4:2).

XI. Highly prize the Scriptures. "The law of Thy mouth is better unto me than thousands of gold and silver" (Ps. 119:72). Can he make a proficiency in any art who doth slight and depreciate it? Prize this book of God above all other books. Gregory calls the Bible the heart and soul of God. The rabbis say that there is a mountain of sense upon every point and tittle of Scripture. "The law of the LORD is perfect" (Ps. 19:7). The Scripture is the library of the Holy Ghost; it is a code of divine knowledge, an exact model and platform of religion. The Scripture contains in it the *Credenda*, the things which we are to believe, and the *Agenda*, the things which we are to practice; it is able to make us wise unto salvation (2 Tim. 3:15). The Scripture is the standard of truth, the judge of controversy; it is the pole star to direct us to heaven. The Scripture is the compass by which the rudder of our will is to be steered. It is the field in which Christ, the Pearl of great price, is hid. It is a rock of diamond. It is a sacred collyrium, or eye salve; it mends their eyes who look upon it. It is a spiritual optic glass, in which the glory of God is resplendent. It is the panacea or universal medicine for the soul. The leaves of Scripture are like the leaves of the tree of life for the healing of the nations (Rev. 22:2).

Scripture is the breeder and feeder of grace. How is the convert born, but by "the Word of truth" (Jas. 1:18)? How does he grow but by "the sincere milk of the Word" (1 Pet. 2:2)? The Word written is the book out of which our evidences for heaven are fetched; it is the seamark which shows us the rocks of sin; it is the antidote against error and apostasy — the two-edged sword which wounds the old serpent. It is our bulwark to withstand the force of lust, like the capitol at Rome, which was a place of strength and ammunition. The Scripture is the

tower of David, whereon the shields of our faith hang. Take away the Word and you deprive us of the sun, said Luther. The Word written is above an angelical embassy or a voice from heaven. "This voice which came from heaven we heard.... We have also a more sure word" (2 Pet. 1:18).

If Caesar so valued his commentaries that in preserving them he lost his purple robe, how much should we estimate the sacred oracles of God? "I have esteemed the words of His mouth more than my necessary food" (Job 23:12). King Edward VI, on the day of his coronation, had presented before him three swords, signifying that he was monarch of three kingdoms. The King said there was one sword wanting; being asked what that was, he answered, "The Holy Bible, which is the sword of the Spirit, and is to be preferred before all these ensigns of royalty." Robert, king of Sicily, did so prize God's Word, that, speaking to his friend Petrarch, he said, "I protest the Scriptures are dearer to me than my kingdom, and if I must be deprived of one of them, I had rather lose my diadem than the Scriptures."

XII. Get an ardent love to the Word. Prizing relates to the judgment; love, to the affections. "Consider how I love Thy precepts" (Ps. 119:159). He is likely to grow rich who delights in his trade; a lover of learning will be a scholar. Augustine tells us that before his conversion he took no pleasure in the Scriptures, but afterwards they were his delight. David thought the word sweeter than the honey which drops from the comb. Thomas à Kempis used to say he found no content but in a corner, with the book of God in his hand. Did Alphonsus, king of Sicily, recover from a fit of sickness from the great pleasure he took in reading Quintus Curtius? What infinite pleasure should we take in reading the book of life!

There is enough in the Word to breed holy complacency and delight; it is a specimen and demonstration of God's holy love to us. The Spirit is God's love token; the Word, His love letter; how doth one rejoice to read over his friend's letter! The Word written is a divine treasury or storehouse; in it is truth scattered as pearls to adorn the inner man of the heart. The Word written is the true manna which has all sorts of sweet taste in it; it is a sovereign elixir; it gives wine to them of a heavy heart. I have read of an ancient rabbi who, in a great

concourse of people, made proclamation of a sovereign cordial he had to sell; many resorting to him and asking him to show it, *he opened the Bible* and directed them to several places of comfort in it. Holy David drank of this cordial: "This is my comfort in my affliction: for Thy Word hath quickened me" (Ps. 119:50). Chrysostom compares the Scripture to a garden: Every line in it is a fragrant flower, which we should wear not in our bosom but in our heart.

Delight in the Word causeth profit; and we must not only love the *comforts* of the Word, but the *reproofs*. Myrrh is bitter to the palate, but good for the stomach.

XIII. Come to the reading of the Word with honest hearts. Christ speaks of the honest heart (Luke 8:15).

What is it to read the Word with an honest heart?

1) To come with a heart willing to know the whole counsel of God. A good heart would not have any truth concealed, but says as Job: "That which I see not teach Thou me." When men pick and choose in religion, they will do some things the Word enjoins them, but not others; these are unsound hearts, and are not benefited by Holy Writ. These are like a patient, who having a bitter pill prescribed and a julep, will take the julep but refuses the pill.

2) To read the Word with an honest heart is to read that we may be made better by it. The Word is the medium and method of sanctification, and we come to it not only to illuminate but to consecrate us. "Sanctify them through Thy truth" (John 17:17). Some go the Bible as one goes to the garden to pick flowers, that is, fine notions. Augustine confesses that before his conversion he went to hear Ambrose — more for the elegance of speech and quaintness of notion than the spirituality of the matter. This is like a woman who paints her face, but neglects her health. But this is to have an honest heart: When we come to the Scriptures as Naaman to the waters of Jordan, to be healed of our leprosy. "Oh," says the soul, "that the sword of the Spirit may pierce the rock of my heart; that this blessed Word may have such a virtue in it as the water of jealousy, to kill and make fruitful, that it may kill my sin, and make me fruitful in grace" (cf. Num. 5:27).

XIV. Learn to apply Scripture; take every word as if spoken to yourselves. When the Word thunders against sin, think

thus: God means *my* sins; when it presseth any duty, God intends *me* in this. Many put off Scripture from themselves, as if it concerned only those who lived in the time when it was written; but if you intend to profit by the Word, bring it home to yourselves. A medicine will do no good unless it be applied. The saints of old took the Word as if it had been spoken to them by name. When King Josiah heard the threatening which was written in the book of God, he applied it to himself; "he rent his clothes" (2 Ki. 22:11) and humbled his soul before the Lord.

XV. Observe the preceptive part of the Word, as well as the promissory. The precepts carry duty in them, like the veins which carry the blood; the promises carry comfort, like the arteries which carry the spirit. Make use of the precepts to direct you, the promises to comfort you. Such as cast their eye on the promise, with a neglect of the command, are not edified by Scripture; they look more after comfort than duty. They mistake their comforts — as Apollo embraced the laurel tree instead of Daphne. The body may be swelled with wind as well as flesh; a man may be filled with false comfort, as well as that which is genuine and real.

XVI. Let your thoughts dwell upon the most material passages of Scripture. The bee fastens on those flowers where she may suck most sweetness. Though the whole texture of Scripture is excellent, yet some parts of it may have a greater emphasis, and be more lively and pungent. Reading the names of the tribes or the genealogies of the patriarchs, is not of the same importance as faith and the new creature. Mind the great things of the law (Hos. 8:12). They who read only to satisfy their curiosity, do rather busy than profit themselves. The searching too far into Christ's *temporal reign* has weakened His *spiritual reign* in some men's hearts.

XVII. Compare yourselves with the Word. See how the Scripture and your hearts agree; how your dial goes with this sun. Are your hearts, as it were, a transcript and counterpart of Scripture? Is the Word copied out into your hearts? The Word calls for humility; are you not only *humbled*, but *humble*? The Word calls for regeneration (John 3:7); have you a change of heart — not only a moral and partial change, but a spiritual? Is there such a change wrought in you, as if another soul did

live in the same body? "Such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified" (1 Cor. 6:11). The Word calls for love to the saints (1 Pet. 1:22). Do you love grace where you see it? Do you love grace in a poor man as well as in a rich? A son loves to see his father's picture, though hung in a mean frame. Do you love grace though mixed with some failings, as we love gold though it be in the ore? The bringing of the rule of the Word and our hearts together, to see how they agree, would prove very advantageous to us. Hereby we come to know the true complexion and state of our souls, and see what evidences and certificates we have for heaven.

XVIII. Take *special notice* of those Scriptures which speak to your *particular case*. Were a consumptive person to read Galen or Hippocrates, he would chiefly observe what they said about a consumption. Great regard is to be had to those paragraphs of Scripture which are most apposite to one's present case. I shall notice three cases: *affliction, desertion, and sin*.

1) Affliction. Has God made your chain heavy? Consult these Scriptures. "If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons" (Heb. 12:7). "By this therefore shall the iniquity of Jacob be purged" (Is. 27:9). "Your sorrow shall be turned into joy" (John 16:20). "Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory" (2 Cor. 4:17). The limner lays his gold upon dark colors; God first lays the dark color of affliction, and then the golden color of glory.

2) Desertion. Are your spiritual comforts eclipsed? See Isaiah 54:8, "In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee." The sun may hide itself in a cloud, but it is not out of the firmament; God may hide His face, but He is not out of the covenant. "Neither will I be always wroth: for the spirit should fail before Me, and the souls which I have made" (Is. 57:16). God is like the musician; He will not stretch the strings of His lute too hard, lest they break. "Light is sown for the righteous" (Ps. 97:11). A saint's comfort may be hidden as seed under the clods, but at last it will spring up into a harvest of joy.

3) Sin. Are you drawn away with lust? Read Galatians 5:24 and James 1:15. "Abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul" (1 Peter 2:11). Lust kills with embracing (Prov. 7:10,22,23;

Prov. 22:14). Go to the waters of the sanctuary to quench the fire of lust.

Are you under the power of unbelief? Read Isaiah 26:3: "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on Thee: because he trusteth in Thee." Mr. Boltor speaks of a distressed soul who found much comfort from this Scripture on his sick bed. "The Word of the LORD is tried: He is a buckler to all them that trust in Him" (2 Sam. 22:31). "That whosoever believeth in Him should not perish" (John 3:15). Unbelief is a God-affronting sin. "He that believeth not God hath made Him a liar" (1 John 5:10). It is a soul-murdering sin. "He that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him" (John 3:36).

Thus, in reading, observe those Scriptures which do touch upon your *particular case*. Although all the Bible must be read, yet those texts which point most directly to your condition, be sure to put a special star upon.

XIX. Take special notice of the examples in Scripture; make the examples of others living sermons to you.

1) Observe the examples of God's judgments upon sinners. They have been hanged up in chains, as a terror. How severely has God punished proud men! Nebuchadnezzar was turned to eat grass; Herod eaten up with vermin. How has God plagued idolaters (Num. 25:3,4,9; 1 Ki. 14:9-10)! What a swift witness has He been against liars (Acts 5:5,10)! These examples are set up as sea-marks to avoid (1 Cor. 10:11; Jude 7).

2) Observe the examples of God's mercy to saints. Jeremiah was preserved in the dungeon; the three children in the furnace; Daniel in the lions' den. These examples are props to faith, spurs to holiness.

XX. Leave not off reading in the Bible till you find your hearts warmed. "I will never forget Thy precepts: for with them Thou hast quickened me" (Ps. 119:93). Read the Word not only as a history, but strive to be affected with it. Let it not only *inform* you, but *inflamm*e you. "Is not My Word like as a fire? saith the LORD" (Jer. 23:29). Go not from the Word till you can say as those disciples, "Did not our heart burn within us?" (Luke 24:32).

XXI. Set upon the practice of what you read. I have followed Thy commandments (Ps. 119:66). A student in physic does not

satisfy himself to read over a system, or body of physic, but he practices it. The lifeblood of religion lies in the practical part. So in the text as it were: "He shall read in the book of the law all the days of his life: that he may learn to keep all the words of this law and these statutes, to do them."

Christians should be walking Bibles. Xenophon said many read the laws of Lycurgus, but few observed them. The Word written is not only a rule of knowledge, but a rule of obedience; it is not only to mend our sight, but to mend our pace. David calls God's Word a "lamp to his feet" (Ps. 119:105). It was not only a light to his eyes to see by, but to his feet to walk by; by practice we trade the talent of knowledge, and turn it to profit. This is a blessed reading of the Scriptures — when we fly from the sins which the Word forbids, and espouse the duties which the Word commands. Reading without practice will be but a torch to light men to hell.

XXII. Make use of Christ's prophetic office. He is the Lion of the tribe of Judah, to whom it is given to open the book of God, and loose the seals thereof (Rev. 5:5). Christ doth so teach, as He doth quicken (John 8:12). The philosopher says that light and heat increase together; it is true here, where Christ comes into the soul with His light, there is the heat of spiritual life going along with it. Christ gives us a taste of His Word: "Thou hast taught me. How sweet are Thy words unto my taste" (Ps. 119:102-103)! It is one thing to read a promise, another to taste it. Such as would be proficient in Scripture must get Christ to be their teacher. "Then opened He their understanding, that they might understand the Scriptures" (Luke 24:45). Christ did not only open the Scriptures, but opened their understanding.

XXIII. Tread often upon the threshold of the sanctuary. Wait diligently upon a rightly constituted ministry. "Blessed is the man that heareth Me, watching daily at My gates" (Prov. 8:34). Ministers are God's interpreters; it is their work to open and expound dark places of Scripture. We read of *pitchers* and *lamps* within the pitchers (Judg. 7:16). Ministers are earthen pitchers (2 Cor. 4:7). But these pitchers have lamps within them, to light souls in the dark.

XXIV. Pray that God will make you profit. "I am the LORD thy God which teacheth thee to profit" (Is. 48:17). Pray David's

prayer: "Open Thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of Thy law" (Ps. 119:18). Pray to God to take off the veil from the Scriptures, that you may understand them; and the veil on your heart, that you may believe them. Pray that God will not only give you His Word as a *rule* of holiness, but His grace as a *principle* of holiness. Implore the guidance of God's Spirit. "Thou gavest also Thy good Spirit to instruct them" (Neh. 9:20). Though the ship has a compass to sail by, and a store of tackling, yet without a gale of wind it cannot sail; though we have the Word written as our compass to sail by, and make use of our endeavors as the tackling, yet unless the Spirit of God blow upon us, we cannot sail with profit. When the Almighty is as *dew* to us, then we grow as the lily, and our beauty is as the olive tree (Hos. 14:5-6) by the anointing of the Holy Ghost. One may see the figures on a dial, but he cannot tell how the day goes unless the sun shine. We may read many truths in the Bible, but we cannot know them savingly till God's Spirit shine into our souls (2 Cor. 4:6). The Spirit is a Spirit of wisdom and revelation (Eph. 1:17). When Philip joined himself to the eunuch's chariot, then he understood the Scriptures (Acts 8:35). When God's Spirit joins Himself to the Word, then it will be effectual to salvation. These rules observed, the Word written would, through God's blessing, become an "engrafted Word" (Jas. 1:21). A good scion grafted into a bad stock changes the nature of it and makes it bear sweet and generous fruit. So when the Word is grafted savingly into men's hearts, it sanctifies them, and makes them bring forth the sweet "fruits of righteousness" (Phil. 1:11).

Thus I have answered this question: How may we read the Scriptures with most spiritual profit?

In conclusion, 1) content not yourselves with the bare reading of the Scriptures, but labor to find some spiritual improvement and profit. Get the Word transcribed into your hearts. "The law of his God is in his heart" (Ps. 37:31). Such as profit by reading the Book of God are the best Christians alive; they credit religion and save their souls.

2) If you have profited by reading the Holy Scriptures, adore God's distinguishing grace. Bless God that He has not only brought the light to you, but opened your eyes to see it; that He has unlocked His *hid treasure* and enriched you with

saving knowledge. Some perish by not *having* Scripture and others by not *improving* it. That God should pass by millions, and the lot of His electing love should fall upon you; that the Scripture, like the *pillar of cloud*, should have a *dark side* to others, but a *light side* to you; that to others it should be a *dead letter*, but to you the *savor of life*; that Christ should not only be revealed to you, but *in* you (Gal. 1:16) — how should you be in a holy ecstasy of wonder, and wish that you had hearts of seraphims burning in love to God, and the voices of angels to make heaven ring with God's praises!

But some of the godly may say they fear they do not profit by the Word they read. As in the body when there is a fainting of the vital spirits, cordials are employed, so let me apply a few divine cordials to such as are ready to faint under the fear of nonproficiency.

1) You may profit by reading the Word, though you come short of others. The ground which brought forth thirtyfold was good ground (Matt. 13:8). Say not that you have obtained no profit because you are not equal with other eminent saints. Those were counted strong men among David's worthies, though they did not attain to the honor of the first three (2 Sam. 23:19).

2) You may profit by reading the Word, though you are not of quick apprehension. Some impeach themselves because they are slow of understanding. When our blessed Savior foretold His sufferings, the apostles themselves understood not, and it was *hid from them* (Luke 9:45). The author to the Hebrews speaks of some who were dull of hearing (Heb. 5:11). Such as have weaker judgments may have stronger affections. A Christian with little knowledge may be kept from sin, as a man that has but weak sight, yet is kept by it from falling into the water.

3) You may profit by reading Scripture although you have not *excellent memories*. Many complain that their memories "leak." Christian, are you grieved that you can remember no more? Then for your comfort, consider first, that you may have a good heart, though you do not have a very good *memory*; and secondly, though you cannot remember all you read, yet you do remember that which is most *material*, and which you need the most; at a feast we do not eat of every dish, but we take so much as nourishes. It is with a good Christian's memory as it is with a lamp; though the lamp be not full of oil, yet

it has enough oil to make the lamp burn; though your memory be not full of Scripture, yet you retain so much as makes your love to God to burn.

Then, be of good comfort, for you do profit by what you read. And take notice of that encouraging Scripture, "The Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost . . . He shall bring all things to your remembrance" (John 14:26). Amen.