

# HOW WE MAY READ THE SCRIPTURES WITH THE MOST SPIRITUAL PROFIT.

**BY REV. THOMAS WATSON**

“And it shall be with him, and he shall read it 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 to do these Statutes.” — Deut. 17.19.

What Cicero said of Aristotle’s politics, may not unfittingly 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, as to his election, and his religion.

1. His election, verse 15. “You shall in any way set him king over you, whom the Lord your God shall choose.” There is good reason that God should have the choice of their king, since “by him kings reign.” Prov. 8.15.

2. His religion, verse 18. “When he sits on the throne of his kingdom, he shall write him a copy of this law in a book, out of that which is before the priest.” Here

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was a good beginning of a king’s reign; the first thing he did after he sat upon the throne, was to copy out the word of God in a book. And in the text, “It shall be with him, and he shall read it, 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 to do these Statutes.” “It shall be with him.” The Book of the Law shall be his *Vade Mecum*, or 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 it.” It is not below the majesty of a prince to peruse the oracles of Heaven; in them are comprised sacred apothegms, Prov. 8.6: “I will speak of excellent things.” 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 it all the days of his life.” He must not leave off reading, till he has left off reigning. And the reasons why he must be conversant in the law of God, are in the subsequent words: 1. “That he may

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learn to fear the Lord his God.” Reading 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 it all the days of his life;” i. e. the Book of the Law.

The Holy Scripture is, as Austin<sup>1</sup> says, 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. Matt, 22.29: “You err, not knowing the Scriptures.” 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 like diligence we should read God’s word, which is our Magna Charta for Heaven. It is a mercy that the Bible is not

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<sup>1</sup> [Augustine of Hippo \(354 - 430\).](#)

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,

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when he was young, sucked the sincere milk of the word. Alphonsus, King of Arragon, read over 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 an 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. Gen. 2.17: “In the day you eat of it, you shall surely die.” 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 those who are strangers to the Scriptures? Hosea 8.12: “I have written to him the great things of my law, but they were considered as a strange thing.” Many lay aside the Scriptures like rusty armor. Jer. 8.9. “They are better-read in romances than in Paul; they spend many hours between the comb and the glass, but their eyes begin to be sore

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when they look at a Bible.” Even the Turks will rise up in judgment against these Christians. The Turks reverence the Books of Moses; and if they find just a leaf on which anything of the Pentateuch is written, they take it up and kiss it. Those who slight the written word, slight God himself, whose stamp it bears. To slight the king’s edict is an affront to the person of the king. Those who reject and vilify the Scriptures are in a state of condemnation. Prov. 13.13: “Whoever despises the word shall be destroyed.” Nor is it enough to read the word of God, but it should be our care to get some spiritual reward and profit by it, so that our souls may be nourished in the words of faith. 1Tim. 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 at, but he delivered it as a father delivers a stock of money to his son to improve on it. ‘Tis sad not to profit by the word, to be like the body in consumption, that does not thrive. Men would be loath to trade and get no profit. The grand question I am to speak to is this. How we may read the Scriptures with the

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most spiritual profit. In answering this question, I shall lay down several rules or directions about the reading of Scripture.

**1.** 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 that must be removed if you would profit by Scripture.

1. Remove the love of every sin. Let a physician prescribe ever so good recipes, if the patient takes poison, it will hinder the virtue and operation of the medicine. The Scripture prescribes excellent recipes, but sin that is lived in, poisons all. The body cannot thrive in a fever, nor can the soul thrive 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<sup>1</sup> which breeds in it, so are the souls of men destroyed by those sins in which they indulge.

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<sup>1</sup> That is, *fungus*.

2. Take heed of those thorns which will choke the word that is read. These thorns our Saviour 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 scarcely find time to read, or if he does, what errors does he commit

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in reading? While his eye is upon the Bible, his heart is upon the world; it is not the writings of the Apostles that he is so much taken up with, as the writing in his account books. Is this man likely to profit? You may as soon extract oil and syrup out of a flint, as for him to have any real benefit out of Scripture.

3. Take heed against 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, like a drunkard who having emptied his cups, calls to his fellows, “Give us your oil, for our lamps have gone out.” In the fear of God, beware of this. King Edward IV would not allow his crown to be jested with, but executed anyone who said *he would make his son heir to the Crown*, meaning the sign of the Crown on his tavern. Much less will God allow us to jest with his word. Eusebius relates about someone who took a piece of Scripture to jest with, that God struck him with panic. The Lord may justly give over such persons to a reprobate mind. Rom. 1.23.

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2. If you would profit, ***prepare your hearts for reading the word***; the heart is an instrument that needs to be tuned. 1Sam 7.3: “Prepare your hearts to the Lord.” The heathen, as Plutarch notes, thought it was 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 about to do. Our thoughts are stragglers; therefore rally them together.

2. In purging those unclean affections which 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; it is no wonder that if they come without *preparation*, they go away without *profit*.

3. ***Read the Scriptures with reverence***; think about every line you read; God is speaking to you. The ark in which the law was put, was overlaid with pure gold, and was carried on bars, so that the Levites might not touch it. Ex. 25, Why was this if not to breed in the people a reverence for the law? When Ehud told Eglon he had a message for him

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from God, Eglon arose from his throne. Judges 3.20, The written word is a message from Jehovah; we should receive it with that veneration.

4. ***Read the books of Scripture in order***. Though circumstances 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.

5. ***Get a right understanding of Scripture***. Psalm 119.73: “Give me understanding, that I may learn your commandments.” Though there are some knots in Scripture which are not easily

untied, yet the Holy Ghost has plainly pointed out to us things essential to salvation. 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 first be lighted before the affections can be inflamed. Get what knowledge you can by comparing scriptures, by conferring with others, and by using the best annotators.<sup>1</sup> Without knowledge, the Scripture is a sealed book; every line is too high for us; and if the word shoots above our head, it can never hit our heart.

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**6. Read the word with seriousness.** If one goes over the Scripture cursorily, says Erasmus, there is little good to be got by it; but if he is serious in reading it, it is the savor of life; and we may well be serious if we consider the importance of those truths which are bound up in this sacred volume. Deut. 32.47: “It is not a vain thing for you; it is your life.” If a letter were to be opened and read, in which a man’s whole estate were concerned, how serious would he be in reading it? In the Scripture, our salvation is concerned; it addresses 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 himself. Christ loved us more than his own life; indeed, though we had a hand in his death, yet he would not leave us out of his will. This is a love that *passes knowledge*; who can read this without seriousness? The Scripture speaks of

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the mystery of faith, the eternal recompenses, and the paucity of those who shall be saved. Matt. 20.16: “Few chosen.” Someone said the names of all the good emperors of Rome might be engraved in a little ring; and there are but (comparatively) few names in the Book of Life. The Scripture speaks of striving for heaven as in an agony. Luke 13.24. It cautions us not to fall 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 Passover in haste); and so 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.

**7. Labor to remember what you read.** Satan would steal the word out of our 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.<sup>2</sup> Psa 119.52: “I remembered your judgments of old.”

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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 does not stay 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.

**8. Meditate upon what you read.** Psalm 119.15: “I will meditate on your precepts.” The Hebrew word to meditate, signifies to be *intense* in the mind. In meditation there must be a fixing of the

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<sup>1</sup> That is, commentators such as Calvin, Matthew Henry, John Gill, etc.

<sup>2</sup> Refers to 1Sam 6.4-8; the ark and the chest containing the gold guilt offerings were kept together.

thoughts upon the object. Luke 2.19: “Mary pondered those things.” 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,<sup>1</sup> 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; and by meditation, we work it into the hive of our mind, and so

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it turns to our profit. Meditation is the bellows of the affection. Psalm 39.3: “While I was musing the fire burned.” The reason we come away so cold from reading the word, is because we do not warm ourselves at the fire of meditation.

**9. Come to the reading of Scripture with humble hearts;** acknowledge how unworthy you are that God would 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? James 4.6: “God gives grace to the humble.” 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 his teachers.” Psalm 119.99: but how humble he was. Psalm 22.6: “I am a worm and no man.”

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**10. Give credence to the written word; believe it is of God;** see the name of God in every line. The Romans, so that they might gain credit for their laws, reported that they were inspired by the gods at Rome. Believe the Scriptures to be divinely inspired. 2Tim. 3.16: “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God.” Who but God could reveal the great doctrines of the Trinity, the atonement of Jesus Christ for sinners, and the resurrection? From where would the Scriptures come, if not from God?

1. *Sinners* could not be the authors of Scripture. Would they indite<sup>2</sup> 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 says the Lord,” to a book of their own devising?
3. *Angels* could not be the authors of Scripture. What angel in heaven dares impersonate God, and say, “I am the Lord?”

Believe that the pedigree of Scripture is sacred, and that it comes from the Father of light. The antiquity of Scripture speaks its divinity. No extant human history reaches further than Noah’s flood; but the Scripture addresses things before time. Besides that, the majesty, profundity, purity and harmony of

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<sup>1</sup> In Greek and Roman mythology, Castor and Pollux were twin brothers, together known as the Dioscuri. Castor was the mortal son of Tyndareus, king of Sparta, and Pollux was the divine son of Zeus. In Latin the twins are known as the Gemini. When Castor was killed, Pollux asked Zeus to let him share his own immortality with his twin to keep them together, and they were transformed into the constellation Gemini.

<sup>2</sup> *Indite*: to produce, compose, or write.

Scripture, show it could be breathed from none but God himself. Add to this the *efficacy* that the written word has upon men's consciences. By reading Scripture, they have been turned into other men, as may be instanced in Austin, Junius, and others. If you were to set a seal upon a piece of marble, and it left a print behind, you would say there was a strange virtue in that seed; so that, when the written word leaves a heavenly print of grace upon the heart, it argues that it is of divine authority. If you were to profit by the word, you must believe it is of God.

Some skeptics question the verity of Scripture. Though they have the articles of religion in their creed, yet they do not have it in their belief. Unbelief enervates<sup>1</sup> the virtue of the word and makes it abortive.<sup>2</sup> Who will obey truths that he does not believe? Heb. 4.2: "The word did not profit them, not being mixed with faith."

**11. *Highly prize the Scriptures.*** Psalm 119.72: "The law of your mouth is better to me than thousands of gold and silver *pieces*." Can someone be proficient in any art if he slights and depreciates it? Prize this book of God above all other books. Gregory calls

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the Bible the heart and soul of God. The Rabbies say that there is a mountain of sense upon every point and tittle of Scripture. Psalm 19.7: "The law of the Lord is perfect." 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 practise; it is able to make us wise unto salvation. 2Tim. 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 price, is hidden; it is a rock of diamond; it is a sacred Collyrium, or eye-salve; it mends the eyes of those 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. The Scripture is the breeder and feeder of grace. How is the convert born, but by

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"the word of truth?" James 1.18. How does he grow but by "the sincere milk of the word?" 1Peter 2.2. The written word is the book out of which our evidences for heaven are fetched; it is the sea-mark<sup>3</sup> 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 on which the shields of our faith hang. Take away the word, and you deprive us of the sun, said Luther. The written word is above an angelical embassy, or a voice from heaven. 2 Peter 1.18: "We heard this voice which came from heaven; we also have a more sure word." If Caesar so valued his Commentaries, that in preserving them he lost his purple robe, how should we estimate the sacred oracles of God? Job 23.12: "I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food." King Edward VI, on the day of his coronation, had three swords presented to him, signifying that he was monarch of three

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<sup>1</sup> *Enervate*: To reduce the strength or energy of something; debilitate.

<sup>2</sup> *Abortive*: Failing to accomplish an intended result.

<sup>3</sup> *Seamark*: an elevated object serving as a beacon to mariners of rocky shoals.

kingdoms. The King said there was one sword missing; being asked what that was, he answered, “the Holy Bible, which is the sword of the spirit, and it is to be preferred before all these ensigns of royalty.” Robert, King of Sicily, so prized God’s word that, speaking to his friend Petrarch, he said, “I protest that the Scriptures are dearer to me than my kingdom, and if I must be deprived of one of them, I would rather lose my diadem than the Scriptures.”

**12. *Get an ardent love for the word.*** Prizing something relates to the judgment; love relates to the affections. Psalm 119.159: “Consider how I love your precepts.” He is likely to grow rich who delights in his trade; a lover of learning will be a scholar. Austin tells us that before his conversion he took no pleasure in the Scriptures, but afterwards they were his delights. David thought the word was sweeter than the honey which drips from the comb. Thomas `a Kempis used to say he found no contentment except in a corner, with the book of God in his hand. Did Alphonsus, King of Sicily, recover from a fit of sickness because of the great pleasure he took in reading Quintus Curtius? <sup>1</sup> Then what infinite pleasure

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we should take in reading the book of life! There is enough in the word to breed holy satisfaction and delight; it is a specimen and demonstration of God’s holy love for us. The Spirit is God’s love-token; the word is his love letter; and how one rejoices to read over his friend’s letter! The written word is a divine treasury, or store-house. Truth is scattered in it like pearls to adorn the inner man of his heart. The written word is the true manna, which has all sorts of sweet taste in it. It is a sovereign elixir; it gives wine to those with a heavy heart. I have read of an ancient Rabbi, who, in a great concourse of people, proclaimed a sovereign cordial which he had to sell. Many resorted 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; Psalm 119.50: “This is my comfort in my affliction; for your word has quickened me.” Chrysostom compares the Scripture to a garden; every line in it is a fragrant flower which we should not wear in our pocket but in our heart.

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

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**13. *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 did: “What I do not see, teach me.” When men pick and choose in religion, they will do some things that the word enjoins them from, but not others. These are unsound hearts, and they are not benefited by holy writ. These are like a patient, who having a bitter pill prescribed, and a mint julep, he will take the julep, but he 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* ourselves. John 17.17: “Sanctify them through your truth.” Some go to the Bible as

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<sup>1</sup> Probably Quintus Curtius Rufus, a 1<sup>st</sup> century Roman historian who wrote *the Life of Alexander the Great*.

one goes to the garden to pick flowers, i.e. for fine notions. Austin confesses that before his conversion

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he went to hear Ambrose, more for the elegant speech and quaint notions, than for the spirituality of the matter. This is like a woman that paints her face, but neglects her health. But this is to have an honest heart: when we come to the Scriptures as Naaman came to the waters of the Jordan, to be healed of our leprosy. "O," 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." Num. 5.27.<sup>1</sup>

**14. *Learn to apply Scripture;*** take every word as spoken to yourselves. When the word thunders against sin, think this way: God means *my* sins; when it presses any duty, God intends *me* in this word. Many put off Scripture from themselves, as if it only concerned those who lived in the time when it was written; but if you intend to profit by the word, then bring it home to yourselves. A medicine will do no good unless it is 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

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written in the book of God, he applied it to himself; he "rent his clothes and humbled his soul before the Lord." 2 Kings 22.11.

**15. *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 in them, like the arteries which carry the spirit. Make use of the *precepts* to direct you, and the *promises* to comfort you. Those who keep their eye on the promise, while neglecting the command, are not edified by Scripture; they look more for comfort than duty. They mistake their comforts, just as Apollo embraced the laurel tree instead of Daphne.<sup>2</sup> 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.

**16. *Let your thoughts dwell on the passages of Scripture that matter.*** The bee fastens on those flowers where she may suck the most sweetness. Though the whole context of Scripture is excellent, yet some parts of it may have a greater emphasis, and be more quick and pungent. Reading the names of the tribes, or the

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genealogies of the patriarchs, is not of the same importance as faith and the new creature. Mind the "great things of the law." Hosea 8.12. Those who read only to satisfy their curiosity, busy themselves, rather than profit themselves. Searching too far into Christ's *temporal* reign has weakened his *spiritual* reign in some men's hearts.

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<sup>1</sup> Num 5:27 `When he has made her drink the water, then it shall be, if she has defiled herself and behaved unfaithfully toward her husband, that the water that brings a curse will enter her and become bitter, and her belly will swell, her thigh will rot, and the woman will become a curse among her people.

<sup>2</sup> In Greek mythology, Apollo insulted the young god Eros for playing with bow and arrows. Eros took two arrows, one gold to incite love, and other lead to incite hatred. He shot Daphne with the lead arrow, and Apollo with the gold. Apollo was seized with love for the beautiful Daphne, but she abhorred him. Apollo chased her everywhere but Daphne fled from him. She asked her father, the River God, to change her form so she could stop running. He transformed her into a laurel tree. Apollo still embraced her branches, but even the branches shrank from him.



**17. Compare yourself 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 a counterpart of Scripture? Is the word copied out into your hearts? The word calls for humility; are you not only *humbled*, but also *humble*? The word calls for regeneration: John 3.7; do you have a change of heart? Is there not only a moral and partial change, but a spiritual change? Is there such a change wrought in you, that it is as if another soul lived in the same body? 1 Cor. 6.11: "Such were some of you, but you are washed, you are sanctified." The word calls for love toward the saints; 1Peter 1.22. Do you love grace where you see it? Do you love grace in a poor man as well as in a rich man? A son loves to see his father's picture, though hung in a poor frame.

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Do you love grace even though it is mixed with some failings, just as we love gold even while it is in the ore? Bringing the rule of the word and our hearts together, to see how they agree, would prove very advantageous to us. By this we come to know the true complexion and state of our souls, and we see what evidences and certificates we have for heaven.

**18. Take special notice of those Scriptures which speak to your particular case.** If a person with consumption<sup>1</sup> were to read Galen or Hippocrates,<sup>2</sup> he would chiefly observe what they said about consumption. Great regard is to be had to those paragraphs of Scripture which are most appropriate to one's present case.

I will note three cases: 1. Affliction. 2. Desertion. 3. Sin.

*1. Affliction.* Has God made your chain heavy? Consult these Scriptures. Heb. 12.7: "If you endure chastening, God deals with you as sons." Isaiah 27.9: "By this the iniquity of Jacob shall be purged." John 16.20: "Your sorrow shall be turned into joy." 2Cor. 4.17: "Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, works for

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us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." The limner<sup>3</sup> lays his gold on 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 you, for a moment; but with everlasting kindness I will have mercy on you." 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. Isaiah 57.16: "I will not be always angry, for the spirits would fail before me, and the souls which I have made." God is like the musician; he will not stretch the strings of his lute too hard, lest they break. Psalm 97.11: "Light is sown for the righteous." A saint's comfort may be hidden as seed is hidden under the clods of dirt; but at last it will spring up into a harvest of joy.

*3. Sin.*

1. Are you drawn away with lust? Read Gal. 5.24; James 1.15; 1Peter 2.11: "Abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul." 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."

<sup>1</sup> That is, tuberculosis or other wasting lung disease.

<sup>2</sup> Famous physicians of Rome and Greece respectively.

<sup>3</sup> An illuminator: a painter who overlays his artwork or portraiture with gold paint, thus gilding it.

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2. Are you under the power of unbelief? Read Isaiah 26.3: “You will keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you.” Mr. Boltor speaks of a distressed soul who found much comfort from this Scripture on his sick bed. 2 Samuel 22.31: “The word of the Lord is tested; he is a buckler to all that trust in him.” John 3.15: “That whoever believes in him should not perish.” Unbelief is a God-affronting sin. 1John 5.10: “He that does not believe God has made him a liar.” It is a soul-murdering sin. John 3.36: “He that does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.” Thus, in reading, observe those Scriptures which touch upon your particular case. Although all of the Bible must be read, yet be sure to put a special star upon those texts which point most directly to your condition.

**19. 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 God has punished proud men!

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Nebuchadnezzar was turned to eat grass; Herod was eaten up with vermin. How God has plagued idolaters! Numbers 25.3, 4, 9; 1Kings 14.9, 10. What a swift witness he has been against liars! Acts 5.5, 10. These examples are set up as sea-marks to avoid. 1Cor. 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 lion’s den. These examples are props to our faith, and spurs to holiness.

**20. Do not stop reading in the Bible, till you find your hearts warmed.** Psalm 119.93: “I will never forget your precepts, for you have made me alive with them.” 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. Jer. 23.29: “Is not my word like a fire?” says the Lord. Do not go from the word till you can say as those disciples said, Luke 24.32: “Did our hearts not burn within us?”

**21. Begin the practice of what you read.** Psalm 119.66: “I have done your commandments.” A student in medicine does

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not satisfy himself to read over a system or body of medicine, but he begins its practice. The life-blood of religion lies in the practical part. So it is in this text: “He shall read in the book of the law all the days of his life, so 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,<sup>1</sup> but few observed them. The written word 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.” Psalm 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

<sup>1</sup> Xenophon was a Greek historian of Athens ca. 400 B.C.; Lycurgus was the lawgiver of Sparta ca. 800 B.C., who established the military-oriented reformation of Spartan society. All his reforms were directed towards the three Spartan virtues: equality (among citizens), military fitness, and austerity.

duties which the word commands. *Reading without practice will be but a torch to light men to hell.*

**22. 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 its seals. Rev. 5.5.

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Christ so teaches, as he enlivens. John 8.12.<sup>1</sup> The philosopher says, 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: "You have taught me how sweet your words are to my taste." Psalm 119.102, 103. It is one thing to read a promise, and another to taste it. Those who would be proficient in Scripture, let them get Christ to be their teacher. Luke 24.45: "Then he opened their understanding, that they might understand the Scriptures." Christ not only opened the Scriptures, but he opened their understanding.

**23. Tread often upon the threshold of the sanctuary.** Wait diligently upon a rightly constituted ministry. Prov 8.34: "Blessed is the man who hears me, watching daily at my gates." Ministers are God's interpreters; it is their work to open and expound dark places in Scripture. We read of *pitchers* and *lamps* within those pitchers. Judges 7.16. Ministers are earthen pitchers. 2Cor. 4.7. But these pitchers have lamps within them to light souls in the dark.

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**24. Pray that God will make you profit.** Isaiah 48.17: "I am the Lord your God, who teaches you to profit." Make David's prayer: "Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law." Psalm 119.18. Pray to God to take the veil off the Scriptures, so that you may understand it; and the veil on your heart, so that you may believe it. 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. Neh. 9.20: "You gave them your good Spirit to instruct them." Though the ship has a compass to sail by, and a store of tackle, yet without a gale of wind it cannot sail. Though we have the written word as our compass to sail by, and we make use of our endeavors as the tackle, yet unless the Spirit of God blows on us, we cannot sail with profit. When the Almighty is like *dew* to us, then "we grow as the lily, and our beauty is like the olive tree." Hosea 14.5, 6: by the anointing of the Holy Ghost. One may see the figures on a sun-dial, but he cannot tell how

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the day goes unless the sun shines. We may read many truths in the Bible, but we cannot know them savingly till God's Spirit shines into our souls. 2Cor. 4.6. The Spirit is a Spirit of wisdom and revelation. Eph. 1.17. When Philip joined himself to the eunuch's chariot, then the eunuch understood the Scriptures. Acts 8.35. When God's Spirit joins himself to the word, then it will be effectual to salvation. These rules being observed, the written word would, through God's blessing, become an "engrafted word." James 1.21. A good shoot grafted into a bad stock, changes the nature of the stock, 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.

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<sup>1</sup> **John 8:12** Then Jesus spoke to them again, saying, "I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life."

Thus I have answered this question, how we may read the Scriptures with the most spiritual profit. In conclusion,

1. Do not content yourselves with the bare reading of the Scriptures, but labor to find some spiritual improvement and profit from it. Get the word transcribed into your hearts. Psalm 37.31: “The law of his God is in his heart.”

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Those who profit by reading the book of God are the best Christians alive; they answer God’s cost, they credit religion, and they save their souls.

2. Those of you who 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 *hidden treasure*, and enriched you with saving knowledge. Some perish by not *having* Scripture, and others by not *improving* it. Bless God that he 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 is a *dead letter*, but to you it is the *savor of life*; that Christ should not only be revealed *to* you, but *in* you; Gal. 1.16. — You should be in an holy ecstasy of wonder, and wish that you had the hearts of seraphims burning in love toward God, and the voices of angels to make heaven ring with God’s praises!

But some of the godly may say they fear that they do not profit by the word they read. As in the body, when the vital spirits become faint,

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cordials<sup>1</sup> are employed. So let me apply a few divine cordials to those who are ready to faint under the fear of their non-proficiency [in the Scriptures].

1. You may profit by reading the word, even though you come short of others. The ground which brought forth thirty-fold was good ground. Matt. 13.8. Do not say you obtained no profit because you are not equal with other eminent saints; the others among David’s worthies were considered his strong men, even though they did not attain the honor of the first three. 2Sam. 23.19.

2. You may profit by reading the word, even though you are not quick to apprehend. Some impeach themselves because they are slow of understanding. When our blessed Saviour told of his sufferings to come, the apostles themselves did not understand, and it was *hidden from them*. Luke 9.45. The author to the Hebrews speaks of some who were dull of hearing. Heb. 5.11. Those who have weaker judgments may have stronger affections. A Christian with a little knowledge may be kept from sin, like a man with weak sight may be kept by a little knowledge from falling into the water.

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3. You may profit by reading Scripture, although you do not have *excellent memories*. Many complain that their memories leak. Christian, are you grieved that you can no longer remember? Then for your comfort,

1. You may have a good *heart*, even though you do not have so good a *memory*.

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<sup>1</sup> *Cordial*: a strong highly flavored sweet liquor, usually drunk after a meal.

2. Though you cannot remember all you read, yet you remember what matters most, and what you most need; at a feast we do not eat every dish, but we take only so much as nourishes. It is with a good Christian's memory as it is with a lamp: though the lamp is not full of oil, yet it has enough oil to make the lamp burn; though your memory is not full of Scripture, yet you retain enough to make your love towards God burn.

So then, be of good comfort. You profit by what you read, and you take note of that encouraging Scripture, John 14.26: "The Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, he shall bring all things to your remembrance." Amen.