

do or say? In Baptism you were made the children of God.<sup>p</sup> But remember, that in order to be numbered among the children of God, it is necessary that you be led by the Spirit of God. And are you led by that Spirit? You trust that you are members of, that you belong to, Christ. You are not to any profitable or saving purpose his members, unless you are influenced by his Spirit.<sup>q</sup>

Seriously lay these things to heart. Seek in earnest prayer for fresh supplies of the aid of the Spirit; and may God of his mercy grant, that the communion or fellowship of the Holy Ghost may be with us all evermore.

<sup>p</sup> Church Catechism.

<sup>q</sup> Rom. viii. 9.

## SERMON VI.

### READING THE SCRIPTURES.

JOHN v. 39.

Search the Scriptures.

**A** MAN who has any belief in a God, and in a future state of rewards and punishments, must naturally feel anxious to know, by what means God may be made his friend, and his future condition rendered happy. Upon these most interesting subjects of inquiry, however, man is by nature greatly ignorant. "Hardly do we guess aright at things that are upon earth, and with labour do we find the things that are before us: but the things that are in heaven who hath searched out?"<sup>a</sup> Man is often too at a loss, with respect to the line of conduct which he ought to pursue, and frequently most powerfully disposed not to pursue that course which his better judgment would point out to him. "The way of man," says the Prophet, "is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps."<sup>b</sup>

For the direction both of our faith and practice, God has been graciously pleased to give us the holy Scriptures. He has given them to be "a lantern unto our feet, and a light unto our paths."<sup>c</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Wisdom ix. 16.

<sup>b</sup> Jer. x. 23.

<sup>c</sup> Psalm cxix. 105.



It is upon the duty of hearing and reading the sacred volume, and upon the manner in which this duty should be performed, that I now wish to address you.

1. It can hardly be necessary to use many arguments for the purpose of enforcing the duty of reading and hearing the Scriptures, when you consider that they are the very word of God. "All Scripture," says St. Paul, "is given by inspiration of God;"<sup>d</sup> and we are taught by St. Peter, "that holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost."<sup>e</sup> Now, if the great and glorious God graciously condescends to speak to his creatures, it is plainly their duty humbly to listen to him. If he vouchsafes to send them a message, they clearly are bound diligently to attend to it. To neglect the Scriptures accordingly, is to neglect him whose word they are. When a message of importance is sent by some great and powerful man, it is received with attention and respect. If a kind and indulgent parent addresses a letter to his children, that letter is read with affectionate regard. And with respect and regard, beyond all comparison greater, ought we to attend to the word of him that speaketh from heaven, to the message of our Father and our God.

The duty of reading and hearing the Scriptures will farther appear, from the immense importance of the information which they convey to us. They were written for our learning, and are able to make us wise unto salvation.<sup>f</sup> Reflect on the meaning of this expression of being *wise unto salvation*. We are placed in this world in a state of trial, and are all hastening on, either to heaven or to hell, either to happiness or misery everlasting. How to obtain that happiness, or avoid that misery, we are by

<sup>d</sup> 2 Tim. iii. 16.

<sup>e</sup> 2 Peter i. 21.

<sup>f</sup> 2 Tim. iii. 15.

nature sadly ignorant; and by the same nature are sadly disposed to evil, strongly inclined to such a line of conduct, such tempers, and affections, of which misery must be the consequence. To rescue us from this state the word of God was given to us. It was given to show us the way that we should walk in, and to guide our feet into the way of peace. It points out to us him to whom all the Scriptures bear witness, him who is the great Author of eternal salvation to all them that obey him. If, then, the Scriptures are able to make us wise unto salvation; if they furnish a satisfactory answer to the anxious question, what shall I do to be saved? surely we act like the enemies of our own souls—as if we did not wish to save them—if we refuse to have recourse to this storehouse of saving knowledge, if we neglect to search the Scriptures.

After asserting in general that the Scriptures are able to make us wise unto salvation, St. Paul, in the next verse, proceeds to point out more particularly the beneficial effects of the knowledge of them, in order to this great end. They "are profitable," he tells us, "for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness."<sup>g</sup> They are profitable for *doctrine*; for teaching us all that it is important for us to know. They lead us to the knowledge of God and of ourselves. They teach us that the world was at first called into being by the voice of the Almighty; that man was created innocent and upright, but that he fell from his innocence, and by his fall entailed sin and death upon all his posterity. They teach us the method adopted by an all-merciful God to rescue us from this lost state, and instruct us, that as "by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead;" that "as in Adam all die, even so

<sup>g</sup> 2 Tim. iii. 16.



“in Christ shall all be made alive.”<sup>h</sup> They farther make known to us the great doctrines, of the satisfaction made for sin by the death of the Son of God; of the renovation of our natures by the Holy Spirit; and all other things which a Christian ought to know and believe for his soul’s health. In the most comprehensive sense of the word, therefore, they are profitable for *doctrine*. They are profitable also for *reproof*. The word which is here translated reproof, means also *conviction* or *refutation* of error. When left to himself, man is not only ignorant of what is true, but too frequently ready to embrace that which is false. There is perhaps hardly any imagination however vain, hardly any error however gross, which has not been adopted and upheld as true at some period of the world. When compared with the truth of the Scripture, all these errors fall to the ground. Errors in opinion have a natural tendency to produce a faulty and vicious practice. *Reproof* of every bad practice, of every sinful habit, comes most profitably from the holy Scriptures; for they form a standard, by which every work is to be tried, whether it be good, or whether it be evil; and their reproofs are enforced by the threatening of eternal suffering.

But the word of God will not only serve to reprove what is wrong in practice, but to *correct* it, or set it right. It is profitable for *correction*. When a man is going on in a way that leads to destruction, without considering or being aware of it, it is some advantage to be told that he is wrong; but this information will but fill him with apprehensions, and perhaps despair, unless at the same time the right way is pointed out to him. This is the work of the holy Scriptures. When any one has contracted a sinful habit, they not only reprove

<sup>h</sup> 1 Cor. xv. 21, 22.

him, and set before him the things that he hath done, but also correct him or set him right; they “will guide his feet in the way of peace,” and teach him the true and right way to happiness.

The Scriptures are indeed “profitable for instruction in righteousness,” in every sense of the expression. They point out to us the righteousness of living, which God commands; the sober, righteous, and godly disposition and conduct, which he enjoins; and, above all, they direct us to him, who for our sakes fulfilled all righteousness, and through faith in whose atonement and mediation we are accounted righteous in the sight of God.

In another passage, St. Paul, speaking of the same Scriptures, says, “whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures, might have hope.”<sup>i</sup> The Scriptures do indeed furnish the strongest ground for comfort and consolation in every sorrow. If we are depressed by poverty, and by anxious fears lest we or our families should be left utterly destitute, the Scriptures direct us to cast all our care upon him who careth for us; upon him who feedeth the fowls of heaven, and clotheth the lilies of the field, and will much more take care of the children of men.<sup>k</sup> If we are mourning the death of those we love, the Scriptures tell us, that “blessed are the dead which die in the Lord;”<sup>l</sup> that our departed friends have but passed before us on the journey of life; and they bid us not to sorrow like men that have no hope. If we are cast down by the sense of our numberless sins, and are overwhelmed with the dread of the divine displeasure, the Scriptures here also furnish us the strongest ground of consolation and encouragement. They guide our thoughts to

<sup>i</sup> Rom. xv. 4.

<sup>k</sup> Matt. vi. 28, &c.

<sup>l</sup> Rev. xiv. 13.



him, who died that we might live: they tell us, that though our sins be as scarlet, yet if we heartily repent of, and forsake them, and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, they shall through his death "become as white as snow."<sup>m</sup>

And with respect to afflictions in general, the Scriptures tell us, that calamities are not to be considered as happening by chance: that "affliction cometh not forth of the dust, neither doth trouble spring out of the ground,"<sup>n</sup> but proceeds from him by whom the "hairs of our head are all numbered;"<sup>o</sup> from him without whose permission even "a sparrow doth not fall on the ground;" and that he means them for our good, that he chastens us for our profit. The sacred volume accordingly assures us, that afflictions are not to be regarded as marks of God's displeasure, but rather as tokens of his love; that "whom the Lord loveth he correcteth, even as a father the son in whom he delighteth;"<sup>p</sup> that as many as he loves he rebukes and chastens; that consequently "happy is the man whom God correcteth;"<sup>q</sup> blessed "is the man whom thou chastenest, O Lord, and teachest in thy way." The Scriptures instruct us, like all the distinguished servants of God, to bow ourselves with meek resignation under his hand, to submit ourselves entirely to his good pleasure, to be prepared to say from our hearts, "it is the Lord; let him do what seemeth him good:"<sup>r</sup> "Lord, not my will, but thine be done." Above all, the Scriptures furnish the most strong consolation and the most animating *hope*, hope full of immortality, by directing our view beyond this lower world, to that world where sorrow hath no place. Afflictions here, however painful, are to

<sup>m</sup> Isaiah i. 18.    <sup>n</sup> Job v. 6.    <sup>o</sup> Prov. iii. 12.    <sup>p</sup> Job v. 17.

<sup>q</sup> 1 Sam. iii. 18.

be regarded as light, because they endure but for a moment. If they last our whole life, that still is but as a moment, when compared with eternity. The word of God accordingly teaches us to set our hearts upon that place, "where only true joys are to be found;" that place, where God shall wipe away all tears from the eyes "of his servants;" where "there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain."<sup>r</sup> A hope of entering into this state is set before us in the Scriptures; a hope founded on the promises of him who cannot lie, and therefore to be taken as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast.

Such, then, are some of the reasons for searching the Scriptures. We should read and hear them because they are the word of God, the message from God to man; because they declare unto us the way of salvation; because they make known unto us the will of God; because they are profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; because they furnish us with ground for patience, consolation, and hope.

II. I will now, in the second place, proceed to say a few words on the manner in which this duty of searching the Scriptures should be performed.

Read them, then, *frequently*; read them with *humility*; read them with *attention*, and a desire to practise what you read; read them with *fervent prayer* to God, by whose Spirit they were indited, that he would assist you in understanding them, and in making them contribute to the salvation of your souls.

First, read them *frequently*. It is a reproach—and a heavy reproach—justly cast on some people, that the Bible, the book of God, lies unopened in their houses. Let not this reproach be cast on

<sup>r</sup> Rev. xxi. 4.



you. You know how strictly God enjoined the study of his law under the Mosaic dispensation. "These words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes. And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates."<sup>s</sup> And again, in his charge to Joshua, "This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein."<sup>t</sup> If the law deserved to have this diligent and constant study—and most certainly it did, inasmuch as it proceeded from God himself—how much rather does the Gospel? This careful study of the revealed will of God was always a mark of his faithful servants. In the description of a good man, in the first Psalm, it is said, "His delight is in the law of the Lord, and in his law will he exercise himself day and night." The 119th Psalm abounds in passages expressing the like sentiment. Thus, in the 9th verse, "Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way?—even by ruling himself after thy word." Again, "My delight shall be in thy statutes, and I will not forget thy word." And again, "My delight shall be in thy commandments, and my study shall be in thy statutes." It was the praise of the Bereans, that upon the first preaching of the Gospel, "they searched the Scriptures daily, whether these things were so."<sup>u</sup> The consequence was, that "many of them believed." And it is recorded to the honour of Timothy, the

<sup>s</sup> Deut. vi. 6—9.<sup>t</sup> Joshua i. 8.<sup>u</sup> Acts xvii. 11.

fellow-labourer of St. Paul, that from a child he had known the holy Scriptures, which were able to make him wise unto salvation, through faith which is in Christ Jesus.\*

Secondly, read them with *humility*; with an humble teachable disposition, with a readiness to submit your own reason to the teaching of God. Although all that is necessary to salvation in the Scriptures is plain enough for the unlearned to understand, so plain "that wayfaring men, though fools," though simple and of a slow understanding, "shall not err therein!"<sup>y</sup> yet there are many parts of the Bible which present so much of difficulty, that the most learned men have not been able to agree upon their meaning. These difficulties are increased from the Scriptures having been written in foreign languages, which have ceased to be spoken, and written in times and countries, the manners and customs of which were very different from our own. St. Peter, you know, says, that in St. Paul's Epistles "are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable," (*unstable*, not steady in their religious principles.) "wrest, as they do also the other Scriptures, unto their own destruction."<sup>z</sup> If a man sits down to read the book of God with a proud conceit of his own abilities, of the powers of his own reason, he will be apt to give new and strange interpretations of his own to the words of Scripture; or perhaps to be led by seeming difficulties to reject the Bible altogether, and with it to give up all well founded hope of a future life. Humility, an humble teachable disposition, will prevent these evils. When St. Philip asked the Ethiopian eunuch, "Understandest thou what thou readest?" the reply was, "How can I, except some man should guide me?"<sup>a</sup> Humility will dis-

<sup>x</sup> 2 Tim. iii. 15.<sup>y</sup> Isaiah xxxv. 8.<sup>z</sup> 2 Peter iii. 16.<sup>a</sup> Acts viii. 30, 31.



pose us in the study of the Scriptures to make use of the assistance which is offered to us.<sup>b</sup> A sincere member of the Church of England, in particular, will not without great reason depart from the interpretation of the doctrines of Scripture which is given by that Church in her articles and Prayer Book. The articles and Prayer Book were framed with great care and pains by men richly furnished with all learning, human and divine; men, like Apollos, "mighty in the Scriptures," in the languages in which they were originally written; men, too, who were ready to give up, and many of whom actually did give up, every thing, even life itself, for the doctrines in them expressed. Next to the declared sense of the Church of England, an humble minded member of that Church will be disposed to seek assistance in understanding the Scriptures from his spiritual pastor, the minister of the parish in which he dwells, who is regularly appointed over him to watch for his soul.

Thirdly, read with *attention*. Many people, I fear, satisfy themselves with barely reading over a chapter or two of the Bible, without considering or endeavouring to impress upon their minds what they read. Such careless reading is attended with little advantage. We must not be satisfied with simply reading or hearing the Scriptures, but must "mark, learn, and inwardly digest them." And we must not only digest them inwardly, but must practise them outwardly in our daily conversation and

<sup>b</sup> I wish to take this opportunity of recommending to those who can afford it, the "Family Bible," lately published by the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge. All human works have their imperfections; but the notes to the Family Bible have been selected and brought together with much care and labour, and comprise a rich store of most useful information, and of strong and interesting incitements to practical piety — [This Bible, improved by a large body of additional notes, selected by Bishop Habart, has recently been published by T. & J. Swords, New-York, to whom orders for it may be sent.]

conduct. We must endeavour, by divine aid, to avoid whatever in thought, word, or deed, is contrary to the revealed will of God, and steadily to practise whatever the book of God commands. "In reading of God's word," says the homily of our Church, "he not always most profiteth that is most ready in turning of the book, or in saying of it without the book; but he that is most turned into it, that is most inspired with the Holy Ghost, most in his heart and life altered and changed into that thing which he readeth: he that is daily less and less proud, less wrathful, less covetous, and less desirous of worldly and vain pleasures: he that daily forsaketh his old vicious life, increaseth in virtue more and more."

Lastly, read the Scriptures with earnest prayer for divine assistance. We know that we can do nothing well without the help of the Holy Spirit, and we especially require the aid of that Spirit in reading the word of God. Our minds by nature are dark and blind, and stand in need of being enlightened by him who is the Father of lights. By nature we are sadly ignorant, and destitute of spiritual wisdom; but "if any of you lack wisdom," says St. James, "let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not."<sup>c</sup>

Allow me, my friends, to hope, that you will be diligent in searching the Scriptures, and attentive to the great truths which they contain. Those who are themselves unable to read, should embrace every opportunity of hearing them read by others, by their friends, their neighbours, or their children. All should be regular and attentive in listening to the sacred Scriptures in church.

Remember that God's word is intended to be a lantern unto your feet, and a light unto your path. If you neglect it, you will be in danger of walking

<sup>c</sup> James i. 5.



on still in darkness. The Scriptures are the best source of patience and consolation. If you neglect them, where can you look for support and comfort, under the changes and chances, the many sorrows and calamities of this mortal life? The Scriptures, finally, are able to make you wise unto salvation. If you neglect them, are you not guilty of neglecting the offer of salvation, of putting from you the gift of eternal life?

Let me, then, again exhort you to the diligent and constant, the *daily* study of the word of God. Pray earnestly to him to enlighten your understanding, and warm your hearts by the influence of that Spirit, by whose inspiration the Scriptures were given. In the words of the excellent collect of our Church, humbly beseech God, who "has caused  
" all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning,  
" to grant that we may in such wise hear them,  
" read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that  
" by patience and comfort of his holy word, we  
" may embrace, and ever hold fast, the blessed  
" hope of everlasting life, which he hath given us  
" in our Saviour Jesus Christ."<sup>d</sup>

<sup>d</sup> May I be permitted to suggest, that in reading the Scriptures, we should read those parts especially which are most applicable to ourselves, and most suited to our comprehension. Those who are young in years, or young in understanding, will comparatively derive little edification from great part of the prophetic writings; and from those parts of the books of Moses which relate to the building and service of the temple, to the Levitical rites, and to the municipal laws and regulations of the Jews; i. e. the latter part of Exodus, nearly the whole of Leviticus, and part of Numbers and Deuteronomy. Some of St. Paul's Epistles relate in great measure to questions and customs peculiar to the time in which they were written; and the doctrinal parts of his writings contain many things hard to be understood by young and unlearned persons. The twelfth and thirteenth chapters of Romans, the thirteenth chapter of the first Epistle to the Corinthians, and the three last chapters of Ephesians, all persons would do well to commit to memory.

## SERMON VII.

### PRAYER.

1 THESS. v. 17.

Pray without ceasing.

ONE of the most effectual means of maintaining a principle of religion in our hearts, is prayer. In discoursing on this duty, I shall endeavour to set before you, First, some of the principal arguments for, or motives to, prayer; Secondly, the frame and disposition of mind with which our prayers ought to be accompanied; and, Thirdly, the times at which they should be offered up; to point out to you, in short, 1st, *why* we ought to pray; 2dly, *how* we ought to pray; and, 3dly, *when* we ought to pray.

I. One great argument for prayer, is drawn from the consideration of the many necessities of our nature, for the supply of which we depend entirely on the bounty of that Being, to whom our prayers are to be addressed.

Of the body, the wants are numberless, and continually returning. We stand in constant need of food and clothing, of the protection of some roof to shelter us from the weather, of preservation from all kinds of evil accidents; and often of recovery from pain and sickness, or of fresh strength to enable us to bear it. As, for the supply of all