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THE STUDY OF THE HOLY SCRIPTURES

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The subject matter I desire to impress upon your mind to-day is the necessity and duty of every one to study the Holy Scriptures.

St. Paul, in his Epistle to Timothy, reminded him of the advantage he had obtained in his having been acquainted with the Holy Scriptures from a child, which were able to make him wise unto salvation, through faith in Jesus Christ. And be added, “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, and for instruction in righteousness; that the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto every good work”. And our Lord in His teaching said, “Search the scriptures, for in them ye think ye have eternal life, and they are they which testify of me” (John V, 39). And throughout His personal history we are continually reminded that such and such things happened, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Prophets. And so in the Epistles, continual reference is made in them to the Old Testament as the source from whence the Apostles either derived their doc-

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trine, or else they are appealed to in confirmation of it. As, for example, the Apostle Paul, in his teaching upon the death and resurrection of Christ (I Cor. xv) says, "I delivered to you first of all that which I also received; how that Christ died for our sins, according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried and rose again according to the Scriptures". In like manner, our Lord appeals to the same authority when He overtook two of His disciples on their way to Emmaus as they walked together and were sad. He enquired into the cause of their sadness, and after they had told him, in surprise at His supposed ignorance, of what had taken place at Jerusalem, and of the report of the women who had been at the Sepulchre concerning His Resurrection, and how they had trusted it had been He who should have redeemed Israel; He said, "O fools and slow of heart to believe all that the Prophets have spoken. Ought not Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?"; as much as to say, If you had known and believed what the Prophets have written concerning Christ, you would have been expecting these things, instead of being unbelieving and sad upon account of them. And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.

Now we know that the Scriptures referred to are the Old Testament Scriptures, given by inspiration of

God; and we know also that they are of that typical and mystical character that no human understanding can penetrate into or comprehend their meaning unless it be enlightened by the Spirit of God. And even when they are understood, as to their general character, the Lord has still kept us dependent upon the revelation of His Spirit as to their special application, so that Scripture shall not be of any private interpretation.

As an example of this, in their application to the death and resurrection of Christ, the Apostle Peter, on the Day of Pentecost, quotes a verse from the 16th Psalm, "Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt Thou suffer Thine Holy One to see corruption". And in allusion to the same event, our Lord refers us to the History of Jonah as typical of His death and resurrection: "For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the whale's belly, so shall the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth"; and by no process of reasoning could we have come to such an application of these texts unless we had had such an infallible Interpreter of them. So the Apostle Paul, under the same direction of the Spirit, explains the Sacrifices of the Law as applying to the Sacrifice of Christ for the sin of the world, and sees in the entrance of the High Priest into the Holiest of all the Ascension of Christ into heaven itself, there to appear in

the presence of God for us. And in the High Priest coming out to bless the people; the return of the Lord to bless the earth, or without sin unto salvation.

The same Apostle teaches the divine institution of Tithes, from the circumstance of Abram paying tithes to Melchizedec; and argues from the fact of Levi paying tithes to Abram that it is to the Melchizedec Priest that tithes are now due, and concerning whom it is witnessed that He yet liveth; and that that Priest is Christ. And so as to the institution of God in sustaining the Christian Ministry or priesthood by these means, the Apostle argues both inferentially and from the Law the right of this Melchizedec Priesthood to be so sustained. For he says, "Who goeth a warfare at his own charges? Who planteth a vineyard and eateth not of the fruit thereof? Who feedeth a flock and eateth not of the milk of the flock? Say I these things as a man? or saith not the law the same also? For it is written in the law of Moses, Thou shalt not muzzle the mouth of the ox that treadeth out the corn. Doth God take care for oxen? Or saith He it altogether for our sakes? For our sakes, no doubt, this is written: that he that plougheth should plough in hope; and that he that thrasheth in hope should be partaker of his hope". (I Cor. IX, 7-10).[02]

We have numerous examples of the same kind, so that the New Testament is little less than a commentary upon the Old, so far as it has been explained; and without such a commentary we could not have known the spirit and character of the Old Testament Scriptures. And it is this difficulty of understanding them (when the Church has come into an unspiritual condition, and has quenched the light of the Holy Ghost) that makes her learned men say: We do not understand them, for it is a sealed Book; and her unlearned men say, We do not understand them, for we are not learned. And the Priesthood of Rome, taking advantage of this difficulty, denies the reading of them to the laity; lest in the reading of them their own ignorance should be discovered.

Nevertheless, it is the duty and privilege of every Christian man to be fully acquainted with the Holy Scriptures which are able to make us wise unto salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. And Christian men do well to meet together to aid each other in the understanding of these holy records; and to deny them this privilege is of the spirit of Antichrist, and not of Christ, who has bidden us to search them for His hidden wisdom. Nor is there any danger of persons knowing too much, or of being too well acquainted with their contents, if they use them aright, and in obedience to the ordinances of Christ over them.

MINISTRY NO.2. - 1ST APRIL, 1851.

In continuation of my last ministry, let me again exhort you to the habitual and careful study of the Scriptures as one of the means which God has appointed for your perfecting; and because the more you know of His mind as revealed therein, the better will you be prepared to fulfil it.

“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect”. (2 Tim. III, 16-17).

You desire perfection: this is one of God’s means for attaining it. And it is worthy of remark that the fourfold use of Scripture is associated with the perfection of the Christian man by the same Apostle who also writes that Apostles, Prophets, Evangelists, and Pastors and Teachers were given for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the Body of Christ; till we all come in the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God unto a perfect man. (Eph. IV, 11-13).

1st. We readily associate doctrine with the office of Apostles, and believe that they are the ordinance of God for declaring it to His Church.

2nd. In like manner, if we take our example from the scripture, we shall connect reproof or rebuke with the office of the Prophet; for God used His prophets of old to rebuke His people for their departure from Him, and refusing to walk in His ways. And the golden snuffers belonging to the Candlestick of the Holy Place have been, as you know, interpreted to represent “the utterance of prophetic rebuke”; thus connecting reproof with prophecy.

3rd. So the correction of men as to their way of life, and the turning of them from darkness to light and from the power of Satan, unto God, is the part of the Evangelist.

4th. And the instruction of men in the way of righteousness and the right ways of the Lord is the office of the Pastor and Teacher.

This fourfold profitableness of Scripture, and fourfold form of ministry - and for the same end - is too remarkable for us to suppose that it is merely accidental, or that the Spirit of God has not a lesson to teach us thereby. And what can this lesson be but the great importance of each of these means for our perfecting; and that we shall never attain this perfection if we neglect either of these means. We are also taught that the basis of all ministry is the word of

God, and that nothing else will profit or carry us on unto perfection; and that if we fail to understand and to minister it, (and to understand, we must make it our study) we shall fail, as our Fathers have failed and, in the end, corrupt our way as the Roman, and every other sect in Christendom, has done by neglecting one or other or both of these means, and have chosen ways and ordinances of their own.

There are few ministers who will at all doubt the propriety of an habitual study of the Word of God; but there may be many private persons who will say: What benefit can we obtain from the study of the Scriptures ? We have little or no time, and when we attempt it, we do not understand them. But say not this, brethren, nor suffer the occupations and cares of this life to deter you from devoting some of your time to this duty, or deprive you of its reward; for in due time you will reap if you faint not. The Eunuch of Ethiopia might have made the same excuse, and shut up his Bible in despair or disgust at not understanding it. He might often have read the same passage in Isaiah, and asked himself the question which he asked of Philip, “Of whom speaketh the Prophet this [03], “of himself or of some other man ?“ (Acts VIII, 34). And God at length rewarded him for his diligence, and sent him a messenger, even one of His own ministers, to answer the question and to preach

to him Jesus. Thus his darkness was turned into light, and he went on his way rejoicing.

Others may object to the private study of the Scriptures on the plea that every *heresy* and *error* of the Christian Church has arisen from this source. Such is the plea of Rome. And no doubt, brethren, every duty is surrounded with its difficulties, and not unfrequently with danger. It is in the fulfilment of our highest duties that Satan seeks to lay his subtlest and deadliest snares. But is, therefore, the man of God to be deterred from fulfilling his duty because Satan tries to ensnare him? Rather let him walk on and fear nothing, putting his trust in the Lord, who will not permit those to fall into the snares of the fowler who are found walking in obedience to Him.

Every Christian duty is more or less difficult to fulfil in our present condition, through the antagonism of the world, the flesh, and the devil. Faith ever is, and ever has been, a fight; and ever will be, until the powers of evil are destroyed. Our Lord Himself has said, "Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way that leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it". (Matt. VII, 1k). He said this, not among the Heathen, but among those who professed and believed themselves to be walking in His way. Yet it is most certain from Our Lord's words that but few of them had

found it, and of whom He said, "Ye have not His word abiding in you. Search the Scriptures", etc. (John V, 38-39).

Not every circumcised Jew was of the seed of faith; so not every baptised man has the faith of Christ and the word of God abiding in him. Those who have, delight themselves in the knowledge of God, and will search the Scriptures, for in them they know there is the record of eternal life, and that they are *they* which testify of Christ.

And by the study of the Scriptures I do not mean the reading, or the hearing of them read in the church or the family as a part of Christian worship, but the careful study of them in private, with prayer to God for the guidance and illumination of His Holy Spirit, that we may understand His mind as revealed therein. And in this study we should use every help which may come to our hand. And, if possible, every one, and especially ministers, should be able to read them in the languages in which they were written, as it is not only certain, but natural to expect, that any translation must be inferior to the original, and something therefore must be lost by translation. God indeed is not bound by our knowledge, or limited to our means of obtaining it in His revelation to us; yet we ought to labour as though all our success depended

upon ourselves. And in connection with our own labour, we should continually look to the Ministry of the Word in the House of God, as pupils look up and listen to a Preceptor to be taught the meaning and use of that which we have learned in part by ourselves: and it is among such a people that the ministers of Christ will be able best to fulfil their own duty, and minister as the lively oracles of God.

We have great cause for thankfulness to God for the light and knowledge He has already given us upon His written word; and which, we may say without any boast, far exceeds the light and knowledge of any other people in Christendom. Let it be unto us a pledge that the Lord will reveal unto us all His mind, and lead us onward to Perfection.

And let us be warned by the failing of the Church in past generations, that neither the Ministry or Priesthood without the written word, nor the study of the written word without the Ministry can lead us on to perfection, and that if either be neglected, they will both in the end become corrupted.