

Profiting From the Word

How the Scriptures Help us Against Sin

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Summary: We profit from the Word when the Word convicts of sin (Isaiah 6:5) – when the Word makes us sorrowful over sin (Romans 7:24) – when the Word leads to confession of sin (Psalm 32:3-5) – when the Word produces a deeper hatred of sin in him (Psalm 97:10) – when the Word causes him to forsake sin (2 Timothy 2: 19) – when the Word fortifies against sin (Psalm 119:11) – when the Word causes him to practice the opposite of sin (1 John 3:4).

Introduction

There is a serious reason to believe that much Bible reading and study in recent years have brought no spiritual profit to those who engaged in them. Yes, we go further; we greatly fear that in many instances it has proved a curse rather than a blessing. We are aware that this is strong language, yet no stronger than the case warrants. Divine gifts may be misused, and Divine mercies abused.

This is evident in the fruits produced. Even the natural man may (and often does) take up the study of the Scriptures with the same enthusiasm and pleasure as he might the sciences. Where this is the case, his store of knowledge increases, and so does his pride. Like a chemist engaged in interesting experiments, the intellectual searcher of the Word is elated when he makes a discovery in it, but the joy of the Bible student is no more spiritual than that of the chemist. Again, just as the successes of the chemist generally increase his sense of self-importance and cause him to look with disdain on others with less knowledge than himself, so it is often the case with those who have investigated Bible numbers, typology, prophecy and other subjects.

The Word of God may be studied for various motives. Some read it to satisfy their literary pride. In some circles, it is expected to have some general knowledge of the Bible. Some read it to satisfy their curiosity, as they might any other book of note. Others read it to satisfy their sectarian or denominational pride. They consider it a duty to be well-versed in the doctrines of their own denomination and so search eagerly for proof-texts in support of "our doctrines." Yet others read it to argue successfully with those who differ from them. But in all this, there is no thought of God,

no yearning for spiritual edification, and therefore no real benefit to the soul.

What does it mean, then, to profit from the Word? 2 Timothy 3:16-17 gives us a clear answer to our question.

"All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works" (KJV).

The Holy Scriptures are not given to us for intellectual gratification and carnal speculation, but to prepare us for "all good works," by teaching, reproving, and correcting us.

First, an individual is spiritually profited when the Word convicts him of sin. The Word's first task is to reveal our depravity, expose our vileness, and make our wickedness known. A man's moral life may be irreproachable, his dealings with others faultless; but when the Holy Spirit applies the Word to his heart and conscience, opening his eyes to his relationship with and attitude towards God, he cries, *"Woe is me, for I am lost"* (Isaiah 6:5).

Each saved soul recognises their need for Christ, as *"those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick"* (Luke 5:31). It is only when the Spirit applies the Word in Divine power that one feels truly sick unto death.

Such a conviction, which vividly demonstrates the devastating effects of sin on the human soul, isn't limited to the moment before one turns to God. Every time God's Word touches my heart, I become increasingly aware of how far I fall short of His standard, which is "you also be holy in all your conduct" (1 Peter 1:15). So the first test I must apply is this: when I read about others' failures in Scripture, does it make me see how much I resemble them? When I read about Christ's perfect life, does it remind me how vastly unlike Him I am?

Second, an individual is spiritually profited when the Word makes him sorrowful over sin. It is said of the stony-ground

hearer in the parable of the sower that he *"hears the word and immediately receives it with joy, yet he has no root in himself"* (Matthew 13:20-21). But of those who were convicted under the preaching of Peter, it is recorded that they were pricked in their hearts (Acts 2:37). The same contrast exists today.

Many will listen to a flowery sermon or an address that displays oratorical power or the speaker's intellectual skill, yet it usually contains no searching application to the conscience. It is received with approbation, but no one is humbled before God or brought into a closer walk with Him through it. But let a faithful servant of the Lord bring the teaching of Scripture to bear upon character and conduct, exposing the failures of even the best of God's people. Though the crowd will despise the messenger, the truly regenerate will be thankful for the message that causes them to mourn before God and cry, "Oh, wretched man that I am" (Romans 7:24). So it is in the private reading of the Word when the Holy Spirit applies it in such a way that I see and feel my inward corruption. In that way, I am truly blessed.

Jeremiah 31:19 says, *"after I was instructed, I struck my thigh; I was ashamed, and I was confounded, because I bore the disgrace of my youth."* Do you, my reader, know anything of such an experience? Does your study of the Word produce a broken heart and lead to a humbling of yourself before God? Does it convict you of your sins in such a way that you are brought to daily repentance? The paschal lamb had to be eaten with "bitter herbs" (Exodus 12:8).

As we feed on the Word, the Holy Spirit makes it "bitter" to us before it becomes sweet to our taste. Note the order in Revelation 10:9, *"So I went to the angel and told him to give me the little scroll. And he said to me, 'Take and eat it; it will make your stomach bitter, but in your mouth it will be sweet as honey.'"*

This is the experimental order; there must be mourning before comfort (Matthew 5:4) and humbling before exalting (1 Peter 5:6).

Three, an individual is spiritually profited when the Word leads to confession of sin. Paul says that the Scriptures are profitable for "reproof" (2 Timothy 3:16). It is said of the carnally minded, *"For everyone who does wicked things hates the light*

and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed" (John 3:20). But the renewed heart cries, "God be merciful to me a sinner," and every time we are quickened by the Word, we again see our transgressions before God. *"Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy"* (Proverbs 28:13). There can be no spiritual prosperity or fruitfulness while we conceal our guilty secrets. We only enjoy his mercy as our sins are freely owned before God.

There is no peace for the conscience and no rest for the heart while we bury the burden of unconfessed sin. Relief comes when we fully open our hearts to God. Consider David's experience, who said, *"For when I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer"* (Psalm 32:3-4). Is this language unintelligible to you, or does it explain and illustrate your own spiritual history?

There are many verses in Scripture for which personal experience is the best commentary. A blessing follows sincere and open confession of sin: *"I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity; I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the LORD,' and you forgave the iniquity of my sin."* (Psalm 32:5).

Four, an individual is spiritually profited when the Word produces a deeper hatred of sin within him. *"You who love the LORD, hate evil!"* (Psalm 97:10). C. H. Spurgeon said,

"We cannot love God without hating that which he hates. We are not only to avoid evil, and refuse to continue in it, but we must be up in arms against it, and bear towards it a hearty indignation."

One of the surest tests of true conversion is the heart's attitude towards sin. Where the principle of holiness has been planted, there will necessarily be a loathing of all that is unholy. If our hatred of evil is genuine, we are thankful when the Word reproves even the evil we had not suspected.

This was David's experience: "Through your precepts I get understanding; therefore I hate every false way" (Psalm 119:128,

KJV). It is not merely "*I abstain from,*" but "I hate." Not only "some" or "many," but "*every false way.*" And not only "every evil," but "*every false way.*"

But it is the very opposite for the wicked; "For you hate discipline, and you cast my words behind you" (Psalm 50:17). In Proverbs 8:13, we read, "*The fear of the LORD is hatred of evil,*" and this godly fear comes through reading the Word (see Deuteronomy 17:18, 19). It has been rightly said, "Until sin be hated, it cannot be mortified; you will never cry against it, as the Jews did against Christ, Crucify it, Crucify it, until sin be really abhorred as he was" (Edward Reyner, 1635).

Five, an individual is spiritually profited when the Word moves him to forsake sin. "*Let everyone that names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity*" (2 Timothy 2:19). The more the Word is read with the aim of discerning what is pleasing and what is displeasing to the Lord, the more his will is revealed. If our hearts are right with him, the more our ways will be conformed to his will. We will "walk in the truth" (3 John 4).

There are precious promises given to those who separate themselves from unbelievers (2 Corinthians 6:17-18). Watch how the Holy Spirit makes them. He does not say, "*Since we have these promises, be comforted and become complacent thereby,*" but rather, "*Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God*" (2 Corinthians 7:1).

There is another important rule by which we should test ourselves. Is the reading and study of God's Word producing a purging of my ways? Jesus said, "*Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you*" (John 15:3).

The Psalmist asked, "*How can a young man keep his way pure?*" and the answer is "*By guarding it according to your word*" (Psalm 119:9). Yes, not simply by reading, believing, or memorising it, but by the personal application of the Word to our "*way.*" It is by taking heed to such exhortations as "*Flee from sexual immorality*" (1 Corinthians 6:18), "*Flee from idolatry*" (1 Corinthians 10:14), "*Flee these things*" (1 Timothy 6:11), and "*Flee also youthful passions*" (2 Timothy 2:22) that the Christian is brought into

practical separation from evil. Sin not only has to be confessed but also "forsaken" (Proverbs 28:13).

Six, an individual is spiritually profited when the Word fortifies against sin. The Scriptures are given not only to reveal our sinfulness but also to teach us how to obtain deliverance from sin and how to be kept from displeasing God. "I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you" (Psalm 119:11). Each of us is required to do this.

It is particularly the commandments, the warnings, and the exhortations that we need to make our own and treasure. We need to memorise them, meditate on them, pray over them, and put them into practice. The only effective way to keep a plot of ground from being overgrown by weeds is to sow good seed on it; Paul says, "overcome evil with good" (Romans 12:21). So, the more Christ's Word dwells in us "richly" (Colossians 3:16), the less room there will be for sin in our hearts and lives.

It is not sufficient merely to agree with the truth of the Scriptures; they must be received into the affections. It is a solemn truth that the Holy Spirit specifies the ground of apostasy in these words: "because the love of the truth they received not" (2 Thessalonians 2:10, literal translation). Thomas Manton, the English Puritan, said,

"If it lie only in the tongue or in the mind, only to make it a matter of talk and speculation, it will soon be gone. The seed which lies on the surface, the fowls in the air will pick up. Therefore, hide it deeply; let it get from the ear into the mind, from the mind into the heart; let it soak in further and further. It is only when it has a prevailing sovereignty in the heart that we receive it in the love of it—when it is dearer than our dearest lust, then it will stick to us."

Nothing else will preserve us from the infections of this world, deliver us from the temptations of Satan, and be so effective a preservative against sin as the Word of God received into the affections. As the Psalmist said, "The law of his God is in his heart; his steps do not slip" (Psalm 37:31). If the truth is active within us, stirring the conscience, and we truly love it, we will be kept from

falling. When Joseph was tempted by Potiphar's wife, he said, *"How then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?"* (Genesis 39:9). The Word was in his heart, and it prevailed over his lusts.

The ineffable holiness and mighty power of God, who is able both to save and to destroy. None of us knows when he may be tempted; therefore, it is necessary to be prepared against it. *"Who among you will give ear to this, will attend and listen for the time to come?"* (Isaiah 42:23).

Seven, an individual is spiritually profited when the Word moves him to practice the opposite of sin. John tells us that "Sin is the transgression of the law" (1 John 3:4, KJV). God says, "You shall," sin says, "I will not," God says, "You shall not," sin says, "I will." Sin is rebellion against God, the determination to have my own way (Isaiah 53:6). Therefore, sin is anarchy in the spiritual realm and may be likened to waving a red flag in God's face.

Now, the opposite of sinning against God is submission to Him, just as the opposite of lawlessness is subjection to the law. Thus, to practice the opposite of sin is to walk in the path of obedience. Here is another reason the Scriptures were given: to make known the path that is pleasing to God. We profit from the Word not only in reproof and correction but also in "instruction in righteousness."

Here, then, is another important rule for testing our hearts. Are my thoughts being formed, my heart controlled, and my ways and works regulated by God's Word? This is what the Lord requires. *"But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves."* (James 1:22). This is how we express gratitude to and affection for Christ; *"If you love me, you will keep my commandments"* (John 14:15). We need Divine assistance for this. David prayed, *"Lead me in the path of your commandments"* (Psalm 119:35). Thomas Manton, again,

"We need not only light to know our way, but a heart to walk in it. Direction is necessary because of the blindness of our minds, and the effectual impulses of grace are necessary because of the weakness of our hearts. It will not answer our duty to have a naked notion of truths,

unless we embrace and pursue them"

Note that it is *"the path of your commandments."* It is not a self-chosen course but a marked one, not a public "road" but a private "path."

Conclusion

Let us, both writer and reader, honestly and diligently measure ourselves in the presence of God by the seven things here enumerated. Has your study of the Bible made you more humble or more proud – proud of the knowledge you have acquired? Has it raised you in the esteem of your fellow men, or led you to take a lower place before God? Has it produced in you a deeper abhorrence and loathing of self, or made you more complacent? Has it caused those you mingle with, or perhaps teach, to say, I wish I had your knowledge of the Bible; or does it cause you to pray, Lord, give me the faith, the grace, the holiness you have granted my friend or teacher? Meditate upon these things; give yourself wholly to them; that your profiting may appear unto all' (1 Timothy 6:15, KJV).