

CHAPTER XII

THE SUPREME OBJECT OF BIBLE STUDY

OUR consideration of various methods of studying the Word of God naturally leads us to the ultimate aim and purpose of all uses of the Bible. For there is an ultimate and supreme object in all our association with Scriptures, and one never to be overlooked, still less set aside. This culmination of our study is the devotional use of the Bible, the study of it as the revelation of God to the soul of man. On this subject of the devotional study of Holy Scripture we must notice several points.

ITS SPECIAL IMPORTANCE.

The first stage of all study in relation to the Bible is that known as Textual Criticism—the discovery of the true text, the assurance that we have as nearly as is possible for us to obtain them the words of the sacred writers. But this stage of study is obviously only introductory. It is essential as the foundation, but it is only the foundation.

The next stage is that which is known as Literary

Criticism—the study of the Bible as literature, the consideration of its composition, authorship, date, style, and contents. This also is important and essential, for without it we should lose much of the beauty and glory of the Bible. Yet there is something more and better to which we must proceed. The Bible is literature, but it is more, and if we rest content at this stage we shall fail at a vital point.

The third stage of Bible study is concerned with Biblical Exegesis—that is, the true interpretation of the contents of the Bible, the exact meaning of passages, sections and verses. This involves a knowledge of language and grammar, of manners and customs, of literary and rhetorical forms of expression. This is obviously of the greatest moment and imperative of all true study. Still, it is not everything, and it is only too possible to become occupied with details of interpretation, and all the while to be missing the essential spiritual power.

The fourth stage of our work with the Bible is occupied with Biblical Theology—the consideration of the religion revealed in the Scriptures, its doctrines, morals and duties. This is the highest point of Christian scholarship, and it is of the utmost value to be able to see what is the theological teaching of each stage of God's revelation of Himself, from the first days until the time of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Yet even here we do not get finality ; for it is only too possible to be occupied with the intellectual contents of the Bible, to have it all arranged and grasped in our minds, and still to be devoid of the substance and power of the Word of God. The message is " Excelsior ! " even here.

Through and above all stages we must press until we arrive at the summit, which is the use of the Bible as God's personal Word to our own souls, " What saith my Lord unto His servant ? " " What wilt Thou have me to do ? " The Scriptures are intended to lead the soul direct to God, to introduce it to His presence, and to convey His revelation of truth and grace. And if we fail to realise this, we fail at the critical point, and all our other knowledge, great and valuable though it be, will count for little or nothing. Bible study above all else is intended to bring and keep the soul in direct contact with God. The highest privilege and holiest possibility of the Christian religion is fellowship with God in Christ, and this is absolutely impossible apart from constant devotional dealings with the Word of God.

ITS SPIRITUAL REQUIREMENTS.

Any one with brains can become an expert in the first four stages of Bible study referred to above. The fifth stage needs qualities and conditions far beyond intellectual capacity and attainment.

The soul must be accepted with God in Christ. Fellowship with God is only possible to a saved soul, to one pardoned and accepted in Christ. Sin must be dealt with before communion is realised, and consequently there can be no genuine devotional study of Scripture apart from the position of a believer in Christ and the assurance of personal salvation. The "natural" man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, or, to take St. Paul's word literally, "does not welcome" them. But, more than this, as the apostle goes on to say, "neither is he able to experience them" (1 Corinthians iii. 14, Greek); he has not the faculty which will enable him to do so. He must be changed into a "spiritual" man, for these things are "spiritually discerned." It is for lack of realisation of this patent and potent fact that so much error is abroad to-day. Men study the Bible without being at all conscious that it demands spiritual as well as intellectual qualifications.

Further, the soul thus accepted in Christ must be kept right with God, if Bible study is to be of the highest and best. The life of the believer must be true to God. The conscience must be kept pure and sensitive; the mind must be kept teachable, self-distrustful, and ever wishful to learn of God; the will must be kept submissive and obedient, and ready to do what God appoints. The secrets of the

Lord are only revealed to "them that fear Him;" for "to this man will I look, even to him that . . . trembleth at My Word." Many a believer finds the Word of God dark to him because he is out of spiritual condition. There is no "open vision" because his soul is not right with God. The devotional study of the Bible is at once a cause and an effect in relation to the spiritual life. It is a cause of increased spiritual vitality, power, insight and blessing, while in turn this spiritual reality of life leads to yet more spiritual revelation of God in His Word. Prayer and Obedience are organs of knowledge, and the more of these the more knowledge. "If any man wills to do . . . he shall know." For spiritual power in life we must use the spiritual food of the Word of God.

ITS SIMPLE METHODS.

For the devotional and spiritual use of the Word of God there are three rules, but these three, though simple, are all-inclusive.

We must *search* (St. John v. 39). God's thoughts are never revealed to listless readers, but only to eager searchers. The glories of the Scriptures are not to be discovered without diligent search. The Bible is like a mine, and its jewels are not to be picked up on the roadside. It affords opportunity

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for thought, and requires its exercise. Its words, phrases and sentences are full of meaning and power. Like our Lord's parables, the Bible at once conceals and reveals its message. Strenuous thought is imperative if we would obtain from the Word the blessing it contains. We must ponder its statements, dwell on its meaning, grasp its message, and dwell lovingly and earnestly on its revelation of God in Christ. Nothing in it is without some purpose, and what this is, the Lord will reveal in response to His servants' faithful search.

We must *meditate* (Joshua i. 8; Psalm i. 2). "Meditation" comes from a Greek word meaning "to attend," and this is essentially the idea of Bible meditation. It is reading with attention. More than this, it is reading with intention. It is concerned at each point with personal application. And it must be our own thought, our own musing, our own application. Look well at this text, made as clear as the printer's art can emphasise its teaching: "MY meditation of HIM" (Psalm civ. 34). "My" meditation, not merely some one else's. The great, the primary, the essential point is *first-hand* meditation on God's Word as the secret of Christian living.

Dr. Andrew Murray has reminded us in one of his books that milk represents food which has already passed through digestive processes before it is taken

by us. And so we may say that all the little books of devotion, the helps to holiness, the series of manuals of thought and teaching, however valuable, represent food that has passed through the spiritual digestion of others before it comes to us, and it has to be used as such. Do we then decry all these? Far from it; yea, we establish them, but only in their place and for their purpose. If they are put first, to the exclusion of the Bible alone, and the Bible day by day, they become dangerous and disastrous, crutches that prevent vigorous exercise, and lead to spiritual senility. If they are put second, they become delightful and valuable, inspirations to further thought and pathways to deeper blessings. When we have had our own meditation of the Word we are the better able to enjoy what God teaches us through others of His children, and especially those whom God honours with special gifts of teaching. So it must be first, foremost and constantly, "MY meditation of HIM."

Meditation must be real. It must be "the meditation of my heart" (Psalm xlix. 3), and "the heart" in Scripture means the centre of the moral being, which includes the intellect, the emotions, and the will. It implies that we come to the Word to be searched thoroughly, guided definitely, and strengthened effectually. The hour of meditation is not a time for dreamy, vague imaginings, but for living,

actual blessing, whether in the form of guidance, warning, comfort, or counsel.

Meditation will also be practical. What are its stages or elements? *First*, the careful reading of the particular passage or subject, thinking over its real and original meaning. *Next*, a resolute application of it to my own life's needs, conscience, heart, mind, imagination, will; finding out what it has to say to *me*. *Next*, a hearty turning of it into prayer for mercy and grace, that its teaching may become part of my life. *Next*, a sincere transfusion of it into a resolution that my life shall reproduce it. *Lastly*, a whole-hearted surrender to, and trust in, God for power to practise it forthwith, and constantly throughout the day. It is to be noted that the word "meditate," in our English version, represents two Hebrew words—one meaning to "muse" or "think," and the other implying "speech," or audible thinking (Psalm v. 1). These two elements should always be blended—thinking over the Word, its meaning, its application, its message, and then talking to God about it, in confession of the past failures, in prayer for future blessing, in fellowship in present joys or needs. Thus will meditation become so practical, so vital, so blessed, that we shall find in it our chief joy, and our indispensable daily power for service.

We must *compare* (1 Corinthians ii. 13). God's

Word is like a kaleidoscope with many combinations. In addition to our search and meditation of one particular passage, we must compare passages together, in order to arrive at the full meaning of the Word which has been given to us in "many parts and many manners" (Hebrews i. 1). The various aspects of truth are thus seen in their entirety and proportion, and our spiritual life becomes fully informed and completely equipped. There are so many topics or subjects scattered throughout God's Word, that only as we collect and compare them can we appreciate the fulness and glory of God's revelation.

In illustration of this let us take two or three examples out of many. It is only by this method of comparison that we can arrive at the full truth of the doctrine of justification in its sixfold aspect. God the Author (Romans iii. 26); Grace the Source (Romans iii. 24); Blood the Ground (Romans v. 9); Resurrection the Acknowledgment (Romans iv. 25); Faith the Channel (Romans v. 1); and Works the Fruit (James ii. 24).

Again, the Will of God is the centre of all life, but it is only as we start with Matthew and go through the New Testament, collecting all the passages about the will of God, that we can realise the wondrous fulness and glory of His claim on us. Once more, when we turn to the Old Testament it is essential to institute comparisons of the various

titles of God, if we would discover the complete meaning of His relation to us. An illustration of this can be seen in Prebendary Webb-Peploe's book on *The Titles of Jehovah*, presenting the various aspects of God's revelation to the believer.

Many more instances of the necessity of this comparison might be given ; indeed, there is scarcely any truth in the Word of God that can be fully understood by one passage alone. We *must* compare. It need only be added that very much helpful and " sane " spiritualising is possible by this method, as, for instance, by comparing the mountains of the Bible and their spiritual associations, or the valleys, or the " windows." Or we might take such a phrase as the " all things " of the Scripture and see how " all things are of God " ; " all things are yours " ; " all things are for your sakes " ; " all things work together for good." The possibilities of this method are almost endless.

For this method we need a good concordance and a good reference Bible. There are references which do not refer ! Hence the need of discrimination. The recent edition of the Revised Version, with its entirely new set of references, is far and away the best, though the references in other editions are often valuable.

All that has been said may be summed up in the words of Job : " I have esteemed the words

of His mouth more than my necessary food ;” and of Jeremiah : “ Thy words were found and I did eat them ;” and of the Psalmist : “ How sweet are Thy words to my taste !” The Bible must be our daily food if we are to be strong and vigorous. Not quantity, but quality, determines the nutritive value of food. What we must emphasise is capacity to receive, power to assimilate, and readiness to reproduce. As some one has well put it, the process is threefold—infusion, suffusion, transfusion.

The Word thus becomes all-sufficient and all-powerful in our life—the mirror to reveal (James i.) ; the water to cleanse (Ephesians v.) ; the milk to nourish (1 Peter ii.) ; the strong meat to invigorate (Hebrews v.) ; the honey to delight (Psalm cxix.) ; the fire to warm (Jeremiah xxiii.) ; the hammer to break and fasten (Jeremiah xxiii.) ; the sword to fight (Ephesians vi.) ; the seed to grow (Matthew xiii.) ; the lamp to guide (Psalm cxix.) ; the statute-book to legislate (Psalm cxix.) ; and the gold to treasure in time and for eternity (Psalm xix.).

CHAPTER XIII

THE STUDENT'S TWO BIBLES

Two Bibles are essential to all Bible study. One is not sufficient, and without two we are liable to lose a great deal of blessing.

THE BIBLE FOR KNOWLEDGE.

By this is meant Bible study in general, and the processes and methods of Bible knowledge and information. We ought to have one Bible specially, if not exclusively, devoted to intellectual study.

Knowledge must be gained—gained first by personal study. There are two methods of Bible study that should be prosecuted, if at all possible, side by side. One is the steady progress right through the Bible from Genesis to Revelation, taking God's Word as we have received it. For this purpose it is distinctly useful to belong to some organisation which follows this method. The oldest, and parent of the rest, is the Bible and Prayer Union (Mrs. Richardson, St. Benet's, Stepney, London, E.). This takes one chapter a day, from Genesis to

Revelation, and reads the Bible through in about three years and a quarter. Or there is the Christian Progress Scripture Reading and Prayer Union (Miss Boys, 34 and 35, Paternoster House, Paternoster Row, E.C.). Members read daily one chapter of the Old Testament, and a short evening portion of the New Testament, while associates read the New Testament only. Again, there is the plan adopted by the "College by Post," which affords help and guidance to students. Full particulars can be obtained from the admirable book already noticed in an earlier chapter, *Clews to Holy Writ*.

Side by side with this regular general reading through the Bible, there should be, if possible, special study of some book or period, but particularly of the New Testament. If any one will take the Calendar of the English Prayer Book, the reading of the Second Lesson each day will cover the New Testament in one year, with the exception of a few chapters in the Revelation. Or we might give three or six months to one book and do our best to master it. In any case there should be system and method, and perseverance therein.

In this study of the Bible it is essential that we should be definite in our work, and that we do not merely read, but think. For example, when we have our chapter or section before us it is well for us to ask ourselves, What is my purpose in

this study? What is it that I am going to do? Then we might go on to ask ourselves some or all of these questions:

1. Do I understand the meaning of the words and phrases of the passage? (Never hesitate to confess the need of a dictionary.) In Exodus ii. "to wit," "ark," "flags" are instances.

2. What persons and places are mentioned? Do these occur elsewhere in Scripture? (This means history and geography.)

3. Are there any allusions to Eastern manners and customs needing elucidation? (The Bible is such an Oriental book that many passages can only be properly understood in the light of Eastern life.)

4. What marginal references to other passages need attention? (Scripture wonderfully interprets Scripture.)

5. Is there any special doctrinal teaching on God, Christ, the Spirit, sin, grace, holiness, eternity? (See the chapter on doctrinal study.)

6. When reading in the New Testament, consider whether there is anything about the Old Testament? Or if in the Old Testament, am I reminded by it of anything in the New Testament?

7. Is there anything typical or prophetic in it?

We gain knowledge, too, from Bible classes and from books on the Bible. Contact with other minds

cannot fail to increase our store of knowledge. But we are now concerned first and foremost with our own personal study, and with our own study of the Bible as distinct from books on the Bible. Many more helps might have been suggested, but we have been anxious to urge the student to go direct to the Word first, and to be occupied with that mainly and primarily. We must thoroughly grasp its contents, discover its meaning, and receive its message as far as possible by immediate contact with its pages.

Knowledge must be gathered. How may we best store the results of our study? First, by means of a Bible with margins or interleaved pages. There is a cheap Bible with a very wide margin (Cambridge Press) admirably adapted for notes, and it is published in some at least of the separate books. Into this should be put all our "finds" and the other results of study. In this connexion may be mentioned Bible-marking. Mrs. Menzies' *How to Mark your Bible*, and Mr. Wells' *The Bible Marksman*, will prove suggestive. We would only urge great care about underlining and "railways," lest the Bible text become overloaded with such marks and its clearness almost obliterated. For thorough and minute Bible-marking one Bible should be devoted solely to the plan adopted.

There will, however, be many a note or extract

that cannot well be put in the margin of a Bible. For these we need a note-book, which we can arrange and index in such a way as to be easily available. The Note-Books published by Eason, Mid-Abbey Street, Dublin, are useful for this purpose, though almost any book will suffice. It is best to index by subject and by text, and put the number of the page of the note-book opposite the text in the margin of the Bible. Reference at any time thus becomes easy. In some such ways we may gather and garner the results of our study.

THE BIBLE FOR POWER.

By this we mean the use of the Bible for spiritual life and power. And here we wish to emphasise in the strongest way the necessity and importance of having a separate Bible for devotional purposes alone, quite apart from the Bible for general study. Further, we urge the imperative necessity of this devotional Bible being kept *entirely free from marks*. We need to have a fresh message from God every day, and if we open our marked Bible for this we are almost certain to find our thoughts running in the groove of former messages suggested by our marks and notes. It is only a very strong and detached mind that can overcome this tendency, and hence it is far better to have a Bible with a clear page which allows the mind to be untrammelled in seeking its

new message. Then when the new message comes we can register any results in our Bible for notes. We venture to plead earnestly for this. The fruit of it will be abundant. Let this Bible be one with a good print, for it will last a lifetime and become "a little sanctuary."

In this devotional study let us ever beware of reading the Bible with an eye to our work. How great is the temptation to a worker to read with a view to sermons or classes! We must read it for ourselves first of all, and for no one else.

And this devotional study should become the very habit of our life. Our personal and direct contact with the Word of God will be an exact test of our discipleship and character. The Bible is the mirror, in which we see ourselves as we are and as God sees us, and it must be evident that if we never use, or rarely use the mirror, we cannot be sure of our real state before God. Christianity is largely a matter of the condition of soul; stress is laid on character, and character is power. Now character requires solitude for growth; solitude is "the mother-country of the strong"; but solitude without the Bible tends towards morbidity, while with the Bible it is a guarantee of vitality and vigour. Let us then be sure that amid the hurry and worry of life we "take time to be holy" by means of meditation on God in His Word. Not even Christian work must rob us

of this secret of true service and blessing. The superficiality of many lives warns us "to give heed to reading," "to meditate on these things," that "our profiting may appear to all," and at the same time glorify God.

The following suggestions are offered for this devotional study :—

1. Open all such occasions with prayer for the Holy Spirit's light (Psalm cxix. 18).

2. Ask to be guided to some definite thought for *yourself*.

3. Dwell prayerfully on this thought thus given—Is it a counsel? A precept? A warning? A promise? An experience? A command?

4. When its meaning is clear, use it as the basis of a prayer for grace to realise it in experience.

5. Yield the whole soul in full surrender to its truth and power.

6. Link it on to truths already known, and thereby strengthen the chain of experience.

7. Trust God to reproduce it in your life that day.

It is perhaps scarcely necessary to do more than call attention to the intimate and necessary connexion between prayer and all Bible study, whether the study be mainly critical or purely devotional. Bible knowledge is at once a cause and an effect of prayer. We need prayer for spiritual and intellectual en-

lightenment before and as we study the Word of God, while the results of our study will in turn lead to more prayer and increasing waiting on God in fellowship. Thus the two act and react on each other, for prayer in its simplest definition is just our speaking to God, and the Bible is God speaking to us. These two combined constitute true fellowship, that intimate friendship which is the very crown and culmination of God's revelation in Christ in relation to human life (1 John i. 3).

We have now come to the end of these chapters on Bible Study. They have of course only touched the fringe of a vast subject, but perhaps sufficient has been suggested to show the wonderful treasure we possess in the Word of God, and how great is the need and value of thorough, earnest, sustained study. Further help in the way of practical hints may be obtained from *How to Study the Bible for Greatest Profit*, by the Rev. R. A. Torrey; *Searching the Bible Mine*, by H. Hankinson (specially suited to educated young people); and an *Introduction to the Devotional Study of Holy Scripture*, by Dean Goulburn. If these and all similar works are used aright, and not allowed to do for us what we ought to do for ourselves, they will fulfil their mission by sending us to the Bible itself and compelling us to think over

and grasp its contents and apply its truth to our daily life. The end of all Bible study is information and inspiration, and it cannot be too often stated that we shall never realise this unless we give ourselves to the Bible first and foremost, and not to books about the Bible. For fulness of experience, for reality of character, for clearness of testimony, and for effectiveness of service, there is nothing to compare with definite daily Bible study and meditation. Then shall we "make our way prosperous, and then shall we have good success." "All Scripture is God-breathed, and is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be adjusted, thoroughly fitted for all good works."