

PREPARATION FOR CONSULTING THE ORACLES OF GOD

by Edward Irving

Irving's devotional guide on how to study and interpret Scripture properly, emphasizing that the Bible is God's complete revelation and final guide for truth. He encourages a serious, reverent approach to biblical study.

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Preparation for Consulting the Oracles of God Search the scriptures.—John 5:39.

There was a time when each revelation of the word of God had an introduction into this earth, which neither permitted men to doubt whence it came, nor wherefore it was sent. If at the giving of each several truth a star was not lighted up in heaven, as at the birth of the Prince of Truth, there was done upon the earth a wonder, to make her children listen to the message of their Maker. The Almighty made bare His arm; and, through mighty acts shown by His holy servants, gave demonstration of His truth, and found for it a sure place among the other matters of human knowledge and belief. But now the miracles of God have ceased, and nature, secure and unmolested, is no longer called on for testimonies to her Creator's voice. No burning bush draws the footsteps to His presence chamber; no invisible voice holds the ear awake; no hand cometh forth from the obscurity to write His purposes in letters of flame. The vision is shut up, and the testimony is sealed, and the Word of the Lord is ended, and this solitary volume, with its chapters and verses, is the sum total of all for which the chariot of heaven made so many visits to the earth, and the Son of God Himself tabernacled and dwelt among us. The truth which it contains once dwelt undivulged in the bosom of God; and, on coming forth to take its place among things revealed, the heavens and the earth, and nature, through all her chambers, gave reverent welcome. Beyond what it contains, the mysteries of the future are unknown. To gain it acceptance and currency, the noble company of martyrs testified unto the death. The general assembly of the first-born in heaven made it the day-star of their hopes, and the pavilion of their peace. Its every sentence is charmed with the power of God, and powerful to the everlasting salvation of souls.

Having our minds filled with these thoughts of the primeval divinity of revealed wisdom when she dwelt in the bosom of God, and was of His eternal Self a part, long before He prepared the heavens, or set a compass upon the face of the deep; revolving also how, by the space of four thousand years, every faculty of mute nature did solemn obeisance to this daughter of the Divine mind, whenever He pleased to commission her forth to the help of mortals; and further meditating upon the delights which she had of old with the sons of men, the height of heavenly temper to which she raised them, and the offspring of magnanimous deeds which these two—the wisdom of God, and the soul of man—did engender between themselves—meditating, I say, upon these mighty topics, our soul is smitten with grief and shame to remark how in this latter day she hath fallen from her high estate; and fallen along with her the great and noble character of men. Or, if there be still a few names, as of the missionary martyr, to emulate the saints of old—how to the commonalty of Christians her oracles have fallen into a household commonness, and her visits into a cheap familiarity; while by the multitude she is mistaken for a minister of terror sent to oppress poor mortals with moping melancholy, and inflict a wound upon the happiness of human kind. For there is now no express stirring up the faculties to meditate her high and heavenly strains—there is no formal sequestration of the mind from all other concerns, on purpose for her special entertainment—there is no house of solemn seeking and solemn waiting for a spiritual frame, before entering and listening to the voice of the Almighty's wisdom. Who feels the sublime

dignity there is in a saying, fresh descended from the porch of heaven? Who feels the awful weight there is in the least iota that hath dropped from the lips of God? Who feels the thrilling fear or trembling hope there is in words whereon the destinies of himself do hang? Who feels the swelling tide of gratitude within his breast, for redemption and salvation, instead of flat despair and everlasting retribution? Yea, that which is the guide and spur of all duty, the necessary aliment of Christian life, the first and the last of Christian knowledge and Christian feeling, hath, to speak the best, degenerated in these days to stand, rank and file, among those duties whereof it is parent, preserver, and commander. And, to speak not the best, but the fair and common truth, this book, the offspring of the Divine mind, and the perfection of heavenly wisdom, is permitted to lie from day to day, perhaps from week to week, unheeded and unperused, never welcome to our happy, healthy, and energetic moods; admitted, if admitted at all, in seasons of sickness, feeble-mindedness, and disabling sorrow. Yes, that which was sent to be a spirit of ceaseless joy and hope within the heart of man, is treated as the enemy of happiness, and the murderer of enjoyment; and eyed askance, as the remembrancer of death, and the very messenger of hell.

Oh! if books had but tongues to speak their wrongs, then might this book well exclaim: Hear, O heavens! and give ear, O earth! I came from the love and embrace of God, and mute nature, to whom I brought no boon, did me rightful homage. To men I come, and my words were to the children of men. I disclosed to you the mysteries hereafter, and the secrets of the throne of God. I set open to you the gates of salvation, and the way of eternal life, hitherto unknown. Nothing in heaven did I withhold from your hope and ambition; and upon your earthly lot I poured the full horn of Divine providence and consolation. But ye requited me with no welcome, ye held no festivity on my arrival; ye sequester me from happiness and heroism, closeting me with sickness and infirmity; ye make not of me, nor use me for, your guide to wisdom and prudence, but put me into a place in your last of duties, and withdraw me to a mere corner of your time; and most of ye set me at naught and utterly disregard me. I come, the fulness of the knowledge of God; angels delighted in my company, and desired to dive into my secrets. But ye, mortals, place masters over me, subjecting me to the discipline and dogmatism of men, and tutoring me in your schools of learning. I came, not to be silent in your dwellings, but to speak welfare to you and to your children. I came to rule, and my throne to set up in the hearts of men. Mine ancient residence was the bosom of God; no residence will I have but the soul of an immortal; and if you had entertained me, I should have possest you of the peace which I had with God, "when I was with Him and was daily His delight, rejoicing always before Him. Because I have called you and ye have refused, I have stretched out my hand and no man regarded; but ye have set at naught all my counsel and would none of my reproof; I also will laugh at your calamity, and mock when your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind, when distress and anguish cometh upon you. Then shall they cry upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me." From this cheap estimation and wanton neglect of God's counsel, and from the terror of the curse consequent thereon, we have resolved, in the strength of God, to do our endeavor to deliver this congregation of His intelligent and worshiping people—an endeavor which we make with a full perception of the difficulties to be overcome on every side, within no less than without the sacred pale; and upon which we enter with the utmost diffidence of our powers, yet with the full purpose of straining them to the utmost, according to the measure with which it hath pleased God to endow our mind. And do Thou, O Lord, from whom cometh the perception of truth, vouchsafe to Thy servant an unction from Thine own Spirit, who searcheth all things, yes, the deep things of

God; and vouchsafe to Thy people “the hearing ear and the understanding heart, that they may hear and understand, and their souls may live!”

Before the Almighty made His appearance upon Sinai, there were awful precursors sent to prepare His way; while He abode in sight, there were solemn ceremonies and a strict ritual of attendance; when He departed, the whole camp set itself to conform unto His revealed will. Likewise, before the Savior appeared, with His better law, there was a noble procession of seers and prophets, who decried and warned the world of His coming; when He came there were solemn announcements in the heavens and on the earth; He did not depart without due honors; and then followed, on His departure, a succession of changes and alterations which are still in progress, and shall continue in progress till the world’s end. This may serve to teach us, that a revelation of the Almighty’s will makes demand for these three things, on the part of those to whom it is revealed: A due preparation for receiving it; a diligent attention to it while it is disclosing; a strict observance of it when it is delivered. In the whole book of the Lord’s revelations you shall search in vain for one which is devoid of these necessary parts. Witness the awestruck Isaiah, while the Lord displayed before him the sublime pomp of His presence; and, not content with overpowering the frail sense of the prophet, dispatched a seraph to do the ceremonial of touching his lip with hallowed fire, all before He uttered one word into his astonished ear. Witness the majestic apparition to Saint John, in the Apocalypse, of all the emblematical glory of the Son of Man, allowed to take silent effect upon the apostle’s spirit, and prepare it for the revelation of things to come. These heard with all their absorbed faculties, and with all their powers address them to the bidding of the Lord. But, if this was in aught flinched from, witness, in the persecution of the prophet Jonah, the fearful issues which ensued. From the presence of the Lord he could not flee. Fain would he have escaped to the uttermost parts of the earth; but in the mighty waters the terrors of the Lord fell upon him; and when engulfed in the deep, and entombed in the monster of the deep, still the Lord’s word was upon the obdurate prophet, who had no rest, not the rest of the grave, till he had fulfilled it to the very uttermost.

Now, judging that every time we open the pages of this holy book, we are to be favored with no less than a communication from on high, in substance the same as those whereof we have detailed the three distinct and several parts, we conceive it due to the majesty of Him who speaks, that we, in like manner, discipline our spirits with a due preparation, and have them in proper frame, before we listen to the voice; that, while it is disclosing to us the important message, we be wrapt in full attention; and that, when it hath disburdened itself into our opened and enlarged spirits, we proceed forthwith to the business of its fulfilment, whithersoever and to whatsoever it summon us forth. Upon each of these three duties, incumbent upon one who would not forego the benefit of a heavenly message, we will discourse apart, addressing ourselves in this discourse to the first-mentioned of the three. The preparation for the announcement.—“When God uttereth His voice,” says the Psalmist, “coals of fire are kindled; the hills melt down like wax; the earth quakes; and deep proclaims itself unto hollow deep.” These sensible images of the Creator have now vanished, and we are left alone, in the deep recesses of the meditative mind, to discern His coming forth. No trump of heaven now speaketh in the world’s ear. No angelic conveyance of Heaven’s will taketh shape from the vacant air; and having done his errand, retireth into his airy habitation. No human messenger putteth forth his miraculous hand to heal nature’s immedicable wounds, winning for his words a silent and astonished audience. Majesty and might no longer

precede the oracles of Heaven. They lie silent and unobtrusive, wrapt up in their little compass, one volume among many, innocently handed to and fro, having no distinction but that in which our mustered thoughts are enabled to invest them. The want of solemn preparation and circumstantial pomp, the imagination of the mind hath now to supply. The presence of the Deity, and the authority of His voice, our thoughtful spirits must discern. Conscience must supply the terrors that were wont to go before Him; and the brightness of His coming, which the sense can no longer behold, the heart, ravished with His word, must feel. For the solemn vocation of all her powers, to do her Maker honor and give Him welcome, it is, at the very least, necessary that the soul stand absolved from every call. Every foreign influence or authority arising out of the world, or the things of the world, should be burst when about to stand before the fountain of all authority; every argument, every invention, every opinion of man forgot, when about to approach to the Father and oracle of all intelligence. And as subjects, when their honors, with invitations, are held disengaged, though preoccupied with a thousand appointments, so, upon an audience, fixt and about to be holden with the King of Kings, it will become the honored mortal to break loose from all thralldom of men and things, and be arrayed in liberty of thought and action to drink in the rivers of His pleasure, and to perform the mission of His lips.

Now far otherwise it hath appeared to us, that Christians as well as worldly men come to this most august occupation of listening to the word of God; preoccupied and prepossessed, inclining to it a partial ear, and straitened understanding, and a disaffected will. The Christian public are prone to preoccupy themselves with the admiration of those opinions by which they stand distinguished as a Church or sect from other Christians, and instead of being quite unfettered to receive the whole counsel of the Divinity, they are prepared to welcome it no further than it bears upon, and stands with opinions which they already favor. To this pre-judgment the early use of catechisms mainly contributes, which, however serviceable in their place, have the disadvantage of presenting the truth in a form altogether different from what it occupies in the world itself. In the one it is presented to the intellect chiefly (and in our catechisms to an intellect of a very subtle order), in the other it is presented more frequently to the heart, to the affections, to the emotions, to the fancy, and to all the faculties of the soul. In early youth, which is so applied to those compilations, an association takes place between religion and intellect, and a divorcement of religion from the other powers of the inner man. This derangement, judging from observation and experience, it is exceedingly difficult to put to rights in afterlife; and so it comes to pass, that in listening to the oracles of religion, the intellect is chiefly awake, and the better parts of the message—those which address the heart and its affections, those which dilate and enlarge our admiration of the Godhead, and those which speak to the various sympathies of our nature—we are, by the injudicious use of these narrow epitomes, disqualified to receive. In the train of these comes controversy with its rough voice and unmeek aspect, to disqualify the soul for a full and fair audience of its Maker's word. The points of the faith we have been called on to defend, or which are reputable with our party, assume, in our esteem, an importance disproportionate to their importance in the Word, which we come to relish chiefly when it goes to sustain them, and the Bible is hunted for arguments and texts of controversy, which are treasured up for future service. The solemn stillness which the soul should hold before his Maker, so favorable to meditation and rapt communion with the throne of God, is destroyed at every turn by suggestions of what is orthodox and evangelical—where all is orthodox and evangelical; the spirit of such readers becomes lean, being fed with abstract truths and formal propositions; their temper uncongenial, being ever

disturbed with controversial suggestions; their prayers undevout recitals of their opinions; their discourse technical announcements of their faith. Intellect, old intellect, hath the sway over heavenward devotion and holy fervor. Man, contentious man, hath the attention which the unsearchable God should undivided have; and the fine, full harmony of heaven's melodious voice, which, heard apart, were sufficient to lap the soul in ecstasies unspeakable, is jarred and interfered with, and the heavenly spell is broken by the recurring conceits, sophisms, and passions of men. Now truly an utter degradation it is of the Godhead to have His word in league with that of man, or any council of men.

What matter to me whether the Pope, or any work of any mind, be exalted to the quality of God? If any helps are to be imposed for the understanding, or safeguarding, or sustaining of the word, why not the help of statues and pictures of my devotions? Therefore, while the warm fancies of the Southernns have given their idolatry to the ideal forms of noble art, let us Northernns beware we give not our idolatry to the cold and coarse abstractions of human intellect. For the preoccupations of worldly minds, they are not to be reckoned up, being manifold as their favorite passions and pursuits. One thing only can be said, that before coming to the oracles of God they are not preoccupied with the expectation and fear of Him. No chord in their heart is in unison with things unseen; no moments are set apart for religious thought and meditation; no anticipations of the honored interview; no prayer of preparation, like that of Daniel before Gabriel was sent to teach him; no devoutness like that of Cornelius before the celestial visitation; no fastings like that of Peter before the revelation of the glory of the Gentiles! Now to minds which are not attuned to holiness, the words of God find no entrance, striking heavy on the ear, seldom making way to the understanding, almost never to the heart. To spirits hot with conversation, perhaps heady with argument, uncomposed by solemn thought, but ruffled and in uproar from the concourse of worldly interests, the sacred page may be spread out, but its accents are drowned in the noise which hath not yet subsided in the breast. All the awe, and pathos, and awakened consciousness of a Divine approach, imprest upon the ancients by the procession of solemnities, is to worldly men without a substitute. They have not yet solicited themselves to be in readiness. In a usual mood and vulgar frame they come to God's word as to other compositions, reading it without any active imaginations about Him who speaks; feeling no awe of a sovereign Lord, nor care of a tender Father, nor devotion to a merciful Savior. Nowise deprest themselves out of their wonted dependence, nor humiliated before the King of Kings—no prostrations of the soul, nor falling at His feet as dead—no exclamation, as of Isaiah, "Wo is me, for I am of unclean lips!"—no request "Send me"—nor fervent ejaculation of welcome, as of Samuel, "Lord, speak, for Thy servant heareth!" Truly they feel toward His word much as to the word of an equal. No wonder it shall fail of happy influence upon the spirits which have, as it were, on purpose, disqualified themselves for its benefits by removing from the regions of thought and feeling which it accords with, into other regions, which it is of too severe dignity to affect, otherwise than with stern menace and direful foreboding! If they would have it bless them and do them good, they must change their manner of approaching it, and endeavor to bring themselves into that prepared, and collected, and reverential frame which becomes an interview with the High and Holy One who inhabiteth the praises of eternity.

Having thus spoken without equivocation, and we hope without offense, to the contradictoriness and preoccupation with which Christians and worldly men are apt to come to the perusal of the

Word of God, we shall now set forth the two master-feelings under which we shall address ourselves to the sacred occupation.

It is a good custom, inherited from the hallowed days of Scottish piety, and in our cottages still preserved, though in our cities generally given up, to preface the morning; and evening worship of the family with a short invocation of blessing from the Lord. This is in unison with the practise and recommendation of pious men, never to open the Divine Word without a silent invocation of the Divine Spirit. But no address to heaven is of any virtue, save as it is the expression of certain pious sentiments with which the mind is full and overflowing. Of those sentiments which befit the mind that comes into conference with its Maker, the first and most prominent should be gratitude for His ever having condescended to hold commerce with such wretched and fallen creatures. Gratitude not only expressing itself in proper terms, but possessing the mind with one abiding and over-mastering mood, under which it shall sit impress the whole duration of the interview. Such an emotion as can not utter itself in language—tho by language it indicates its presence—but keeps us in a devout and adoring frame, while the Lord is uttering His voice.

Go visit a desolate widow with consolation, and help, and fatherhood of her orphan children—do it again and again—and your presence, the sound of your approaching footstep, the soft utterance of your voice, the very mention of your name, shall come to dilate her heart with a fulness which defies her tongue to utter, but speaking by the tokens of a swimming eye, and clasped hands, and fervent ejaculations to heaven upon your head! No less copious acknowledgment of God, the author of our well-being, and the Father of our better hopes, ought we to feel when His Word discloseth to us the excess of His love. though a veil be now cast over the Majesty which speaks, it is the voice of the Eternal which we hear, coming in soft cadences to win our favor, yet omnipotent as the voice of the thunder, and overpowering as the rushing of many waters. And though the evil of the future intervene between our hand and the promised goods, still are they from His lips who speaks, and it is done, who commands, and all things stand fast. With no less emotion, therefore, should this book be opened, than if, like him in the Apocalypse, you saw the voice which spake; or, like him in the trance, you were into the third heaven translated, companying and communing with the realities of glory which the eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived.

Far and foreign from such an opened and awakened bosom is that cold and formal hand which is generally laid upon the sacred volume; that unfeeling and unimpressive tone with which its accents are pronounced; and that listless and incurious ear into which its blessed sounds are received. How can you, thus unimpassioned, hold communion with themes in which everything awful, vital, and endearing meet together? Why is not curiosity, curiosity ever hungry, on edge to know the doings and intentions of Jehovah, King of Kings? Why is not interest, interest ever awake, on tip-toe to hear the future destiny of itself? Why is not the heart, that panteth over the world after love and friendship, overpowered with the full tide of the divine acts and expressions of love? Where is nature gone when she is not moved with the tender mercy of Christ? Methinks the affections of men are fallen into the yellow leaf. Of the poets which charm the world's ear, who is he that inditeth a song unto his God? Some will tune their harps to sensual pleasure, and by the enchantment of their genius well-nigh commend their unholy themes to the imagination of saints. Others, to the high and noble sentiments of the heart, will sing of domestic joys and happy unions, casting around sorrow the radiancy of virtue, and bodying forth, in undying forms, the short-lived visions of joy! Others have enrolled themselves the high-priests of mute nature's charms,

enchancing her echoes with their minstrelsy, and peopling her solitudes with the bright creatures of their fancy. But when, since the days of the blind master of English song, hath any poured forth a lay worthy of the Christian theme? Nor in philosophy, “the palace of the soul,” have men been more mindful of their Maker. The flowers of the garden and the herbs of the field have their unwearied devotees, crossing the ocean, wayfaring in the desert, and making devout pilgrimages to every region of nature for offerings to their patron muse. The rocks, from their residences among the clouds to their deep rests in the dark bowels of the earth, have a bold and most venturesome priesthood, who see in their rough and flinty faces a more delectable image to adore than in the revealed countenance of God. And the political warfare of the world is a very Moloch, who can at any time command his hecatomb of human victims. But the revealed suspense of God, to which the harp of David, and the prophetic lyre of Isaiah were strung, the prudence of God, which the wisest of men coveted after, preferring it to every gift which heaven could confer, and the eternal intelligence Himself in human form, and the unction of the Holy One which abideth—these the common heart of man hath forsaken, and refused to be charmed withal.

I testify, that there ascendeth not from earth a hosanna of her children to bear witness in the ear of the upper regions to the wonderful manifestations of her God! From a few scattered hamlets in a small portion of her territory a small voice ascendeth, like the voice of one crying in the wilderness. But to the service of our general Preserver there is no concourse, from Dan unto Beersheba, of our people, the greater part of whom, after two thousand years of apostolic commission, have not the testimonials of our God; and the multitude of those who disrespect or despise them!

But, to return from this lamentation, which may God hear, who doth not disregard the cries of His afflicted people! With the full sense of obligation to the giver, combine a humble sense of your own incapacity to value and to use the gift of His oracles. Having no taste whatever for the mean estimates which are made, and the coarse invectives that are vented, against human nature, which, though true in the main, are often in the manner so unfeeling and triumphant, as to reveal hot zeal rather than tender and deep sorrow, we will not give in to this popular strain. And yet it is a truth by experience, revealed, that though there be in man most noble faculties, and a nature restless after the knowledge and truth of things, there are toward God and His revealed will an indisposition and a regardlessness, which the most tender and enlightened consciences are the most ready to acknowledge. Of our emancipated youth, who, bound after the knowledge of the visible works of God, and the gratification of the various instincts of nature, how few betake themselves at all, how few absorb themselves with the study and obedience of the Word of God! And when, by God’s visitation, we address ourselves to the task, how slow is our progress and how imperfect our performance! It is most true that nature is unwilling to the subject of the Scriptures. The soul is previously possess’d with adverse interests; the world hath laid an embargo on her faculties, and monopolized them to herself; old habit hath perhaps added to his almost incurable callousness; and the enemy of God and man is skilful to defend what he hath already won. So circumstanced, and every man is so circumstanced, we come to the audience of the Word of God, and listen in the worse tune than a wanton to a sermon, or a hardened knave to a judicial address. Our understanding is prepossess’d with a thousand idols of the world—religious or irreligious—which corrupt the reading of the Word into a straining of the text to their service, and when it will not strain, cause it to be skimmed, and perhaps despised or hated. Such a thing as a free and unlimited reception of all parts of the Scripture into the mind, is a thing most rare to be

met with, and when met with will be found the result of many a sore submission of nature's opinions as well as of nature's likings. But the Word, as hath been said, is not for the intellect alone, but for the heart, and for the will. Now if any one be so wedded to his own candor as to think he doth accept the divine truth unabated, surely no one will flatter himself into the belief that his heart is attuned and enlarged for all divine commandments. The man who thus misdeems of himself must, if his opinions were just, be like a sheet of fair paper, unblotted and unwritten on; whereas all men are already occupied, to the very fulness, with other opinions and attachments and desires than the Word reveals. We do not grow Christians by the same culture by which we grow men, otherwise what need of divine revelation, and divine assistance? But being unacquainted from the womb with God, and attached to what is seen and felt, through early and close acquaintance, we are ignorant and detached from what is unseen and unfelt. The Word is a novelty to our nature, its truths fresh truths, its affections fresh affections, its obedience gathered from the apprehension of nature and the commerce of the worldly life. Therefore there needeth, in one that would be served from this storehouse opened by heaven, a disrelish of his old acquisitions, and a preference of the new, a simple, child-like teachableness, an allowance of ignorance and error, with whatever else beseems an anxious learner. Coming to the Word of God, we are like children brought into the conversations of experienced men; and we should humbly listen and reverently inquire; or we are like raw rustics introduced into high and polished life, and we should unlearn our coarseness, and copy the habits of the station; nay we are like offenders caught, and for the moment committed to the bosom of honorable society, with the power of regaining our lost condition and inheriting honor and trust—therefore we should walk softly and tenderly, covering our former reproach with modesty and humbleness, hasting to redeem our reputation by distinguished performances, against offense doubly guarded, doubly watchful for dangerous and extreme positions to demonstrate our recovered goodness.

These two sentiments—devout veneration of God for His unspeakable gift, and deep distrust of our capacity to estimate and use it aright—will generate in the mind a constant aspiration after the guidance and instruction of a higher power; the first sentiment of goodness remembered, emboldening us to draw near to Him who first drew near to us, and who with Christ will not refuse us any gift; the second sentiment, of weakness remembered, teaching us our need, and prompting us by every interest of religion and every feeling of helplessness to seek of Him who hath said, "If any one lack wisdom let him ask God, who giveth liberally and upbraideth not." The soul which under these two master-feelings cometh to read, shall not read without profit. Every new revelation, feeding his gratitude and nourishing his former ignorance, will confirm the emotions he is under, and carry them onward to an unlimited dimension. Such a one will prosper in the way; enlargement of the inner man will be his portion and the establishment in the truth his exceeding great reward. "In the strength of the Lord shall his right hand get victory—even in the name of the Lord of Hosts. His soul shall also flourish with the fruits of righteousness from the seed of the word, which liveth and abideth forever."

Thus delivered from prepossessions of all other masters, and arrayed in the raiment of humility and love, the soul should advance to the meeting of her God; and she should call a muster of her faculties and have all her poor grace in attendance, and anything she knows of His excellent works and exalted ways she should summon up to her remembrance; her understanding she should quicken, her memory refresh, her imagination stimulate, her affections cherish, and her

conscience arouse. All that is within her should be stirred up, her whole glory should awake and her whole beauty display itself for the meeting of her King. As His hand-maiden she should meet Him; His own handiwork, though sore defaced, yet seeking restoration; His humble, because offending, servant—yet nothing slavish, though humble—nothing superstitious, though devout—nothing tame, though modest in her demeanor; but quick and ready, all address and wound up for her Maker's will.

How different the ordinary proceeding of Christians, who, with timorous, mistrustful spirits, with an abeyance of intellect, and a dwarfish reduction of their natural powers, enter to the conference of the Word of God! The natural powers of man are to be mistrusted, doubtless, as the willing instruments of the evil one; but they must be honored also as the necessary instruments of the Spirit of God, whose operation is a dream, if it be not through knowledge, intellect, conscience, and action. Now Christians, heedless of the grand resurrection of the mighty instruments of thought and action, at the same time coveting hard after holy attainment, do often resign the mastery of themselves, and are taken into the counsel of the religious world—whirling around the eddy of some popular leader—and so drifted, I will not say from godliness, but drifted certainly from that noble, manly and independent course, which, under steerage of the Word of God, they might safely have pursued for the precious interests of their immortal souls. Meanwhile these popular leaders, finding no necessity for strenuous endeavors and high science in the ways of God, but having a gathering host to follow them, deviate from the ways of deep and penetrating thought—refuse the contest with the literary and accomplished enemies of the faith—bring a contempt upon the cause in which mighty men did formerly gird themselves to the combat—and so cast the stumbling-block of a mistaken paltriness between enlightened men and the cross of Christ! So far from this simple-mindedness (but its proper name is feeble-mindedness), Christians should be—as aforesaid in this island they were wont to be—the princes of human intellect, the lights of the world, the salt of the political and social state. Till they come forth from the swaddling-bands, in which foreign schools have girt them, and walk boldly upon the high places of human understanding, they shall never obtain that influence in the upper regions of knowledge and power, of which, unfortunately, they have not the apostolic unction to be in quest. They will never be the master and commanding spirit of the time, until they cast off the wrinkled and withered skin of an obsolete old age, and clothe themselves with intelligence as with a garment, and bring forth the fruits of power and love and of a sound mind.

Mistake us not, for we steer in a narrow, very narrow channel, with rocks of popular prejudice on every side. While we thus invoke to the reading of the Word, the highest strains of the human soul, mistake us not as derogating from the office of the Spirit of God. Par be it from any Christian, much further from any Christian pastor, to withdraw from God the honor which is everywhere His due; but there most of all His due where the human mind labored alone for thousands of years, and labored with no success—viz., the regeneration of itself, and its restoration to the last semblance of the divinity! Oh! let him be reverently inquired after, devoutly meditated on, and most thankfully acknowledged in every step of progress from the soul's fresh awakening out of her dark, oblivious sleep—even to her ultimate attainment upon earth and full accomplishment for heaven. And there may be a fuller choir of awakened men to advance His honor and glory here on earth, and hereafter in heaven above; let the saints bestir themselves like angels and the ministers of religion like archangels strong! And now at length let us have a demonstration made of all that is

noble in thought, and generous in action, and devoted in piety, for bestirring this lethargy, and breaking the bonds of hell, and redeeming the whole world to the service of its God and King!

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