

# Spiritual Growth 9. Its Means

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## Transcript

Spiritual Growth

9. Its Means

I

After what we have said previously it may seem almost superfluous to follow with a chapter devoted to a presentation of the principal means of spiritual growth. If success in the Christian life really narrows down to our obtaining fresh Supplies of grace from God, then why enumerate and describe in detail the various aids which are to be employed for the promotion of personal godliness? Because the expression "seeking fresh supplies of grace" is a far more extensive one than is commonly supposed: the "means" are really the channels through which that grace comes to us. When expounding Matthew 7:7 in our book Sermon on the Mount it was pointed out that, in seeking grace to enable the believer to live a spiritual and supernatural life in this world, though such enablement is to be sought at the Throne of Grace, yet that does not render useless nor exempt the Christian from diligently employing the additional means and agencies which God has appointed for the blessing of His people. Prayer must not be allowed to induce lethargy in those directions or become a substitute for the putting forth of our energies in other ways. We are called upon to watch as well as pray, to deny self, strive against sin, take to us the whole armor of God, and fight the good fight of faith. In the preceding portions of his sermon Christ had presented a standard of moral excellency which is utterly unattainable by mere flesh and blood. He had inculcated one requirement after another that lies not within the power of fallen human nature to meet. He had forbidden an opprobrious word, a malignant wish, an impure desire, a revengeful thought. He had enjoined the most unsparing mortification of our dearest lusts. He had commanded the loving of our enemies, the blessing of those who curse us, the doing good to those who hate us, and the praying for those who spitefully use and persecute us. In view of which the Christian may well exclaim "Who is sufficient for these things? Such demands of holiness are far beyond my feeble strength: yet the Lord has made them, what then am I to do?" Here is His own answer: "Ask, and ye shall receive, seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you." The Lord Jesus knew that in our own wisdom and strength we are incapable of keeping His commandments, but He at once informed us that the things which are ordinarily impossible to men can be made possible by God. Divine assistance is imperative if we are to meet the Divine requirements. We need Divine mercy to pardon and cleanse, power to subdue our raging lusts, quickening to animate our feeble graces, light on our path that we may avoid the snares of Satan, wisdom from above for the solving of our varied problems. Only God Himself can relieve our distresses and supply all our need. His

assistance, then, is to be sought: sought prayerfully, believingly, diligently and expectantly; and if it be thus sought, it will not be sought in vain: for the same passage goes on to assure us "What man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? If ye then being evil know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask Him!" (Matthew 7:9-11) What inducement is that! yet other means besides prayer are to be used by us if we are to obtain that help and succor which we so sorely need. There are three principal dangers against which the Christian needs to guard in connection with the various means which God has appointed for his spiritual growth. First, to lay too much stress upon and dependence in them: they are but "means" and will avail nothing unless God bless them to him. Second, going to the opposite extreme, by undervaluing them or imagining he can get above them. There are some who give way to fanaticism or persuade themselves they have been so "baptized by the Spirit" as to be independent of helps. Third, to look for that in them which can come only from God in Christ. No doubt there is room for differences of opinion as to what are the particular means which are most conducive unto Christian prosperity, and certainly there is a considerable variety of method among those who have written on this subject, some throwing their main emphasis on one aspect of it and some on another. Nor is there any agreement in the order in which they set forth the several aids to growth. We shall therefore present them to the reader according as they appear to us in the light of Scripture.

1. Mortifying of the flesh. In order to obtain fresh supplies of grace constant watchfulness needs to be exercised that we do not cut ourselves off from the Source of those supplies. If such a statement jars upon some of our readers, having to them a "legalistic" or Arminian sound in it, we fear it is because their sensibilities are not fully regulated by the teachings of Holy Writ. Would it not be foolish for me to blame the bulb for emitting no light if I had switched off the electrical current? Equally vain is it to attribute any lack of grace in me to the unwillingness of God to bestow it if I have severed communion with Him. Should it be objected that to draw such an analogy is carnal, we reply, our object is simply to illustrate. But does not the Lord Himself distinctly affirm "Your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear" (Isa. 59:2): then how can I draw from the Fountain of grace if I have cut myself off from it! None but a fanatical enthusiast will argue that a Christian may obtain a fuller knowledge of God's will and increased light on his path while he neglects his Bible and books and preaching thereon. Nor will the Holy Spirit open the Word to me while I am indulging in the lusts of the flesh and "allowing" sin in my heart and life. Equally clear is it that no Christian has any Scriptural warrant to expect he will receive wisdom and strength from above while he neglects the Throne of Grace and should he keep up the form of "praying" while following a course of self-will and self-pleasing, answers of peace will be withheld from him. "If I regard [cherish] iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me" (Ps. 66:18). "Ye ask and receive not because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts" (James 4:3). The Holy One will be no lackey unto our carnality. "He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law [i.e., refuses to tread the path of obedience, in subjection to God's authority], even his prayer shall be abomination" (Prov. 28:9), for under such circumstances praying would be downright hypocrisy, a mocking of God. It is therefore apparent that there is something which must take precedence of either prayer or feeding on the Word if the Christian is to make progress in the spiritual life. Whether or not we have succeeded in making that evident to the reader, Scripture is quite plain on the point. We are bidden to "receive with meekness the ingrafted Word," but before we can do so we most first comply with what immediately precedes, namely, "lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness (James 1:21). Room has to be made in our hearts for the Word: the old lumber has to be cleaned out before the new furnishings can be moved into it. We are exhorted "As new-born babes, desire the sincere milk of the word that ye may grow thereby" (1 Peter 2:2). Ah, but there is something else before that, and which must

needs first be attended to: "Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings" (v. 1). There has to be a purging of our corruptions ere there will be a spiritual appetite for Divine things. The natural man may "study the Bible" to become intellectually informed of its contents, but there has to be a "laying aside" of the things God hates before the soul will really hunger for the Bread of Life. That to which we have just called attention has not been sufficiently recognized. It is one thing to read the Scriptures and become acquainted with their teaching, it is quite another to really feed upon them and for the life to be transformed thereby. God's Word is a holy Word, and it requires holiness of heart from the one who would be profited by it: the soul must be attuned to its message and transmission before there will be any real "reception." And in order to holiness of soul sin has to be resisted, self-denied, corrupt lusts mortified. What we are here insisting upon is illustrated and demonstrated by the uniform order of Scripture. We have to "hate the evil" before we "love the good" (Amos. 5:15), and "cease to do evil" ere we can "learn to do well" (Isa. 1:16, 17). Self has to be denied and the cross taken up, before we can "follow" Christ (Matthew 16:24). We have to "cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit" if we would be "perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (2 Cor. 7:1). We cannot "put on the new man" (Eph. 2:22) until we have "put off concerning the former conversation [or "manner of life"] the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts" (Eph. 2:20)! Sin indwells all Christians and is actively opposed to the principle of grace or "new nature." When they would do good, evil is present with them. Indwelling sin or "the flesh"—corrupt nature—has "no good thing" dwelling in it (Rom. 7:18). Its nature is entirely evil. It is beyond reclamation, being incapable of any improvement. It may put on a religious garb, as in the case of the Pharisees, but beneath is nothing but rotteness. As one has truly said "No good can be educed out of it: fire may as soon be struck out of ice as good dispositions and motions be produced in the corrupt heart of the regenerate. It will never be produced in the corrupt heart of the regenerate. It will never be prevailed upon to concur with the new principle in any of those acts which it puts forth: hence the mind of the believer is at no time wholly spiritual and holy in its acts: there is more or less of a resistance in his soul for what is holy at all seasons." As the "flesh" continually opposes what is good, so it ever disposes the will to what is evil: its desires and motions are constantly towards objects which are vain and carnal. So far as it is permitted to control the Christian, it beclouds his judgment, captivates his affections, and enslaves his will. Now the principle of grace, "the spirit" has been communicated to the saint for the express purpose of opposing the solicitations of the flesh and for the inclining of him unto holiness. Thus the whole of his duty may be summed up in these two timings: to die unto sin and to live unto God. And he can only live unto God in exact proportion as he dies unto sin. That should be self-evident, for since sin is hostile to God, entirely and inveterately so, only so far as we rise above its evil influences are we free to act Godwards. Therefore our progress in the Christian life is to be measured by the degree of our deliverance from the power of indwelling sin, and that, in turn, will be determined by how resolutely, earnestly, and untiringly we set ourselves to this great task of fighting against our corruptions. The weeds must be plucked up before the flowers can grow in the garden, and our lusts must be mortified if our graces are to flourish. Sin and grace each demand the governance of the soul, and it is the Christian's responsibility to see to it that the former is denied and the latter given the right to reign over him. For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die; but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live" (Rom. 8:13). That at once shows us the fundamental and vital importance of this duty: our attendance or nonattendance thereto is a matter of life or death. Mortification is not optional but imperative. The solemn alternative is plainly stated. Those words are addressed to the saints, and they are faithfully warned "if ye live after the flesh ye shall die," that is, die spiritually and eternally. To "live after the flesh" is to live as do the unregenerate, who are motivated, actuated, and dominated by nothing but their own fallen nature. To "live after the flesh" refers not to a single action, minor even a whole series of

actions in one particular direction, but for the whole man to be regulated by the evil principle. Education and culture may produce a refined exterior; family training or other influences may lead to a "profession of religion": but the love of God prompts neither, nor is His glory the end. To "live after the flesh" is to allow our fallen nature to govern our character and guide our conduct, and such is the case with all the unregenerate. "But if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live." Note well the "if ye do": it is a duty assigned the Christian it is a task which calls for self-effort. Yet it is not a work for which he is sufficient of himself: it can only be accomplished "through the Spirit." But care has to be taken at this point lest we lapse into error. It is not, if the Spirit through you," but "if ye through the Spirit." The believer is not a cipher in this undertaking. The Spirit is not given to relieve us of the discharge of our responsibility in this all-important matter, but rather to equip us for our discharge of the same. The Spirit operates by making us more sensible of indwelling sin, by deepening our aspirations after holiness, by causing the love of Christ to constrain, by strengthening us with His might in the inner man. But we are the ones who are required to "mortify the deeds of the body," that is, resist the workings of sin, deny self, put to death our lusts, refuse to "live after the flesh." We must not under the guise of "honoring the Spirit" repudiate our accountability or under the pretext of "waiting for the Spirit to move us" or "empower us," lapse into a state of passivity. God has called us to "cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and of the spirit" (2 Cor. 7:1), to "put off concerning the former conversation the old man. (Eph. 4:22), to "keep yourselves from idols" (1 John 5:21); and He will not accept the excuse of our inability as a valid plea. If we be His children, He has infused His grace into our hearts, and that grace is to be employed in this very task of mortifying our lusts, and the way to get more grace is to make a more diligent use of what we already have. We do not "honor the Spirit" by inertia: we honor Him and "magnify grace" when we can say with David "I kept myself from mine iniquity" (Ps. 18:23), and with Paul "But I keep under my body and bring it into subjection" (1 Cor. 9:24). True, it was by Divine enablement, yet it was not something which God did for them. There was self-effort—rendered successful by Divine grace. Observe it is not "If ye have through the Spirit mortified the deeds of the body," but "if ye do . . . mortify." It is not something which may be done once for all, but a continuous thing, a lifelong task which is set before the Christian. The term "mortify" is here used figuratively, inasmuch as it is a physical term applied to that which is immaterial; yet its force is easily perceived. Literally the word signifies "put to death," which implies it is both a painful and difficult task: the weakest creature may put up some resistance when its life be threatened, and since sin is a most powerful principle it will make a mighty struggle to preserve its existence. The Christian then is called upon to exert a constant and all-out endeavor to subdue his lusts, resist their inclinations, and deny their solicitations, "striving against sin" (Heb. 12:4)—not only against one particular form of its outbreaks, but against all of them, and especially against the root from which they proceed—"the flesh." How is the Christian to set about this all-important work? First, by starving his evil nature: "make not provision for the flesh" (Rom. 13:14). There are two ways of causing a fire to go out: to cease feeding it with fuel and to pour water upon it. God does not require us to macerate our bodies nor to adopt severe external austerities, but we are to abstain from pampering and pleasing them. "To ask meat for our bodies is necessary, a duty; but to ask meat for our lusts is provoking to God—Ps. 78:18" (Matthew Henry). "Provision for" the flesh is anything which has the least tendency to minister unto its appetites: whatever would stir our carnal lusts must be abstained from. There are mental lusts as well as physical: such as pride, covetousness, envy, malice, presumption—these too must be starved and denied, for they are "filthiness of the spirit" (2 Cor. 7:1). Avoid all excesses: be temperate in all things. Second, refuse army familiarity with worldlings: "have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness" ( Eph. 5:11). Shun evil companions, for "a companion of fools shall be destroyed" (Prov. 13:20). "Enter not into the path of the wicked . . . avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it" (Prov. 4:13, 14). Even those "having a form of godliness"

but who in practice are "denying the power thereof," God says, "from such turn away" (2 Tim. 3:5). Third, "Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life" (Prov. 4:23). Take yourself firmly in hand and maintain a strict discipline over your inner man, especially your desires and thoughts. Unlawful desires and evil imaginations need to be nipped in the bud, by sternly resisting them at our first consciousness of the same. As it is much easier to pluck up weeds while they are young or to quench a fire before it takes a firm hold, so it is much simpler to deal with the initial stirrings of our lusts than after they have "conceived" (see James 1:15)—refuse to parley with the first temptation, suffer not your mind to cogitate upon anything Scripture disallows. Fourth, keep short accounts with God. As soon as you are conscious of failure, excuse it not, but penitently confess it to Him. Let not sins accumulate on your conscience, but frankly and promptly acknowledge them to the Lord. Bathe daily in the Fountain which has been "opened for sin and for uncleanness" (Zech. 13:1). It is strange that so many other writers on this subject have failed to place first among the means of spiritual growth this work of mortifying the flesh, for it should be quite obvious that it must take precedence over everything else. Of what avail can it be to read and study the Word, to spend more time in prayer, to seek to develop my graces, while ignore and neglect that within me which will neutralize and mar all other efforts. What would be the use of sprinkling fertilizer on my ground if I allowed the weeds to grow and multiply there? Of what avail would it be my watering and pruning of a rose-bush if I knew there was a pest gnawing at its roots? Settle it then in your mind, dear reader, that no progress can be made by you in the Christian life until you realize the paramount importance and imperative necessity of waging a ceaseless warfare against indwelling sin, and not only realize the need for the same, but resolutely gird yourself for and engage in the task, ever seeking the Spirit's help to give you success therein. The Canaanites must be ruthlessly exterminated if Israel was to occupy the land of milk and honey, and enjoy peace and prosperity therein. II

2. Devotedness to God. The lifelong work of mortification is but the negative side of the Christian life, being a means to an end: the positive aspect is that the redeemed and regenerated sinner is henceforth to live unto God, to wholly give up himself unto Him, to employ his faculties and powers in seeking to please Him and promote His glory. In his unregenerate days, he went "his own way" (Isa. 53:6) and did that which was pleasing unto himself, but at conversion he renounced the flesh, the world and the Devil, and turned unto God as his absolute Lord, supreme End, and everlasting Portion. Mortification is the daily renewing of that renunciation, a continuing to turn away from all that God hates and condemns. Devotedness to God is a living out of the decision and promise which the believer made at his conversion, when he gave himself unto the Lord (2 Cor. 8:5), chose Him for his highest Good and entered into covenant with Him to love Him with all his heart and serve Him with all his strength. In exact proportion to his strict adherence to his surrender to God at his conversion will be the believer's spiritual growth and progress in the Christian life. That mortification and devotedness unto God is the true order of the principal means for promoting spiritual prosperity appears, first, from the grand type furnished in the Old Testament. When God began His dealings with Israel He called them out of Egypt, separating them from the heathen, as He had their great progenitor when He called him to leave Ur of Chaldee—a figure of mortification. But that was merely negative. Having delivered them from their old manner of life and brought them over the Red Sea, He brought them unto Himself (Ex. 19:4), made known His will unto them and entered into a solemn covenant, to which they were consenting parties, declaring "all that the Lord hath said will we do and be obedient" (Ex. 24:7). Just so long as they adhered to their vow and kept the covenant all was well with them. Devotedness unto the Lord was the grand secret of spiritual success. This order appears again in that oft-repeated word of Christ's, which contains a brief but comprehensive summary of His requirements: "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me" (Matthew 16:24). There are the fundamental terms of Christian discipleship and the basic principles by which the

Christian life is to be regulated. Any one who "will come after me"—who chooses, decides, determines to enlist under My banner, throw in his lot with Me, become one of My disciples, "let him deny himself and take up his cross," and that "daily" (Luke 9:23)—which presents to us the work of mortification. But that is only preliminary, a means to an end: the principal thing is "and follow me," My example. What was the grand principle which regulated Him? What was the unchanging end of Christ's life? This: "I came down not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me" (John 6:38); "I do always those things that please him" (John 8:29). And we are not following Christ unless That be our aim and endeavor. That devotedness to God is the outstanding mark, the essential duty, the pre-eminent thing in the Christian life, is also clear from the teaching of the Epistles. "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service" (Rom. 12:1). That appeal is made unto Christians and begins the hortatory section of that Epistle. Up to that point the apostle had set forth the great facts and doctrinal contents of the gospel, and only once did he break the thread of his discourse by interjecting an exhortation, namely, in 6:11-22, the force of which is here gathered up into a concise but extensive summary. The "yield yourselves unto God as those that are alive from the dead" (6: 13) and the "yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness" (6:19) is here paraphrased as "present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God." In substance it is parallel with that word, "Son, give me thine heart, and let thine eyes observe my ways (Prov. 23:26). The place which is given to this precept in the New Testament intimates its paramount importance: "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service" (Rom. 12:1). That is the first exhortation of the Epistles addressed to the saints, taking precedence of all others! First, there is the duty which God requires from us. Second, the ground on which it is enforced or the motive from which it is to be performed, is made known. Third, the reasonableness of it is affirmed. The duty to which we are here exhorted is a call to the unreserved dedication and consecration of the Christian to God. But since those are terms which have suffered not a little at the hands of various fanatics we prefer to substitute for them the devoting of ourselves entirely to God. That word "devote" is employed in Leviticus 27:21, 28 where it is defined as "a holy thing unto the Lord" yea, "every devoted thing is most holy unto the Lord," that is, something which is set apart exclusively for His use. Joshua 6 contains a solemn illustration of the force and implications of that term. Israel's commander informed the people that "the city [of Jericho] shall be devoted, even it, and all that are therein, to the Lord" (v. 17). Since it was His power that delivered this city of the Canaanites into their hands, He claimed it as His, to do with as He pleased, thereby precluding the Israelites from seizing any of its spoils for themselves. So that there might be no uncertainty in their minds, it was expressly added "But all the silver and gold, and vessels of brass and iron, are consecrated unto the Lord; they shall come into the treasury of the Lord" (v. 19). Therein lay the enormity of Achan's sin: not only in yielding to a spirit of covetousness, not only in deliberately disobeying a Divine commandment, but in taking unto himself that which was definitely devoted or set apart unto the Lord. Hence the severity of the punishment meted out to him and all his household. A monumental warning was that for all future generations of how jealously God regards that which is set apart unto Himself, and the awful seriousness of putting to a profane or common use what has been consecrated to Him! "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice" signifies, then, that you devote them unto God, that you solemnly set them apart to Him, for His use, for His service, for His pleasure, for His glory. The Hebrew word for "devote" (charam) is rendered "consecrate" in Micah 4:13, and "dedicated" (cherem) in Ezekiel 44:29. The Greek word for "present" (paristemi) occurs first in Luke 2:22, where we are told that the parents of Jesus "brought Him to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord," which in the next verse is defined as "holy to the Lord." How deeply significant and suggestive that its

initial reference should be to our Great Exemplar! It is found again in 2 Corinthians 11:2, "that I may present you a chaste virgin to Christ." It is the term used in Ephesians 5:27, "that ye might present it to himself a glorious church." It is the same word that is translated "yield yourselves unto God" in Romans 6:13. It therefore means a definite, voluntary, personal act of full surrender to God. This duty which is enjoined upon the Christian is here set forth, more or less, in the language of the Old Testament types, as the term "a living sacrifice" clearly intimates, while the word "present" is a temple term for the bringing thither of anything to God. This duty was announced in Old Testament prophecy: "they shall bring all your brethren for an offering unto the Lord out of all nations" (Isa. 66:20), not to be slain and burned in the fire, but to be presented for God's use and pleasure. So, too, it was revealed that when "our God shall come" He will say, "Gather my saints unto me, those that have made a covenant with me by sacrifice" (Ps. 50:3, 5). There were three principal things taught by the Levitical offerings. First, our sinfulness, guilt, and pollution, which could only be expiated by "a life for a life"; and that was for our humiliation. Second, the wondrous provision of God's grace: Christ a substitute and surety, dying in our stead; which was for our consolation. Third, the love and gratitude due unto God, and the new obedience which He requires from us; and that is for our sanctification. The Christian is required to surrender the whole of his being to God. The language in which that injunction is couched in Romans 12:1 is taken from the usages of the Mosaic economy. "Present your bodies a living sacrifice" connotes, present yourselves as embodied intelligences. Our "bodies" are singled out for specific mention to show there is to be no reservation, that the entire man is to be devoted to the Lord: "The very God of peace sanctify you wholly, and your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless" (1 Thess. 5:23). When God called Israel out of Egypt He said "there shall not a hoof be left behind" (Ex. 10:26). Our "bodies are the members of Christ" (1 Cor. 6:15) and therefore does He bid us "yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness" (Rom. 6:19). It is through the body that our new nature expresses itself. As 1 Corinthians 6 tells us, the body is "for the Lord, and the Lord for the body" (v. 13). And again, "know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit . . . therefore glorify God in your body" (vv. 19, 20). This duty is expressed in Old Testament terms because the apostle was comparing Christians to sacrificial animals whose bodies were devoted as offerings to the Lord, and because he would thereby particularly emphasize that obligation which devolved upon them to be and do and suffer whatever God required. The "living sacrifice" points a parallel and not a contrast, for no animal carcase could be brought by an Israelite. A living victim was brought by the offerer and he laid his hand upon his head to signify he transferred to God all his right and interest in it, then he killed it before God, after which the priests, Aaron's sons, brought the blood and sprinkled it upon the altar (Lev. 1:2-5). In the application of this term to the Christian it may also include the idea of permanency: present your bodies a perpetual sacrifice: as in Christ "the living bread" (John 6:51) and "a living hope" (1 Peter 1:3); it is not to be a transient "sacrifice," but one never to be recalled. "Holy" means unblemished, and set apart solely for God's use, as the vessels of the tabernacle and temple were devoted exclusively to His service. The Christian is called upon to give up himself to God, and that cannot be done without cost, without proving that a "sacrifice" is indeed a sacrifice, even though a willing one; yet it is only by so doing we can be conformed to the death of Christ (Phil. 3:10). It is to be done intelligently, voluntarily, as a free will offering to God, with full and hearty consent, as one gives himself or herself to another in marriage, so that the believer can now say "I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine" (Song of Sol. 6:3). Yet it is to be done humbly, with grief and shame for having so long delayed, for having wasted so much of my time, and strength in the service of sin. It is to be done gratefully, from a deep sense of Divine grace and mercy, so that the love of Christ constrains me. It is to be done unreservedly, with no reservation, arm unqualified devoting of myself unto God. It is to be done purposefully, with the sincere desire, intention and endeavor to be ruled by Him in all things, ever preferring and putting His interests and pleasure before my own. But

let us notice now the ground on which this duty is enforced, or the motive by which it is to be performed. "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God." It is not "I command you," for it is not the Divine authority to which appeal is made. "Beseech" is the tender language of loving entreaty, asking for a gracious response to the amazing grace of God. The "therefore" is a deduction made from what precedes. In the foregoing chapters the apostle had, from 3:21 onwards, set forth the gospel "mercies" or riches of Divine grace. They consist of election, redemption, regeneration, justification, sanctification, with the promise of preservation and glorification—blessings that pass knowledge. What, then, shall be our response to such inestimable favors? It was as though the apostle anticipated his Christian brethren being so overwhelmed by such lavish displays of God's goodness to them, they would exclaim "What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits'? What possible return can I make to Him for His surpassing love? Here, says Paul is the answer to such a query, to such a heart longing. "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God." It is thus you will manifest your gratitude and evince your appreciation of all God has done for, to, and in you. It is thus you will exhibit the sincerity of your love for Him. It is thus you will prove yourselves to be "followers" of Christ and adorn His gospel. It is thus you will please Him who has done everything for you: not merely by vocal thanksgiving, but by personal thanksgiving. Thus did the apostle begin to present and press those obligations which are involved by the blessed favors and privileges set forth in the preceding chapters. Those doctrinal disclosures are not so many speculative things to engage our brains, but are precious discoveries for the inflaming of our hearts. The contents of Romans 3 to 8 are given not only for the informing of our understandings, but also for the reforming of our lives. We should never abstract privilege from duty, nor duty from privilege, but take them together. The "therefore" of 12:1 points the practical application to all that goes before. "Acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service." Poor and paltry as is such a return to the Divine munificence, yet God is pleased to receive the offering up of ourselves and to announce that such an offering is agreeable to Him. That is in striking and blessed contrast from "the sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination unto the Lord" (Prov. 15:8). The words "reasonable service" are susceptible of various renditions, though we doubt if any are better than that of the Authorized Version. Logical or rational are warrantable alternatives, for God certainly requires to be served intelligently and not blindly or superstitiously. Literally, it may be translated "your service according to the Word." "Service" may be rendered "worship," for it is an act of homage and a temple service which is here in view, and thus accords with the idea of "sacrifice": God requires the worship of our body as well as of the mind. But in the light of the preceding "therefore" we prefer "reasonable service." "Which is your reasonable service." And is it not so? "Those that obey not the Word are called 'fools' (Jer. 8:9) and 'unreasonable men' (2 Thess. 2:3), because lacking in wisdom to discern the excellency and equity of God's ways. What can be more reasonable than that He who made all things for Himself should be served by the creatures that He made? That we should live unto Him who gave us being? That the Supreme should be obeyed, the infallible Truth believed, that He who can destroy should be feared, that He who doth reward should be loved and trusted in?" (E. Reynolds, 1670). It is reasonable because it is what Omniscience requires of us: this is the fundamental part of our covenant when we choose Him as our God: "One shall say, I am the Lord's and another shall subscribe with his hand unto the Lord" (Isa. 44:5). By our own solemn consent we acknowledge God's right in us and yield to His claims. He requires that His right be confirmed by our consent: "take my yoke upon you"—He forces it on none. "Which is your reasonable service." And again we ask, Is it not so? Does not a change of masters involve a changed order of life? Should not those who have been recovered from sin to God show the reality of that change in being as earnest in holiness as before they were in sin? Talk is cheap, but actions speak louder than words. If God gave Christ to us as a sin-offering, is it too much to ask that we devote ourselves to Him as

a thank-offering? Christ was content to be nothing that God might be all, and is it not "reasonable" that our judicial oneness with Christ should have for its complement practical conformity to Him. If we have by regeneration passed from death unto life, is it not reasonable and meet that we devote ourselves as a "living sacrifice" to God and walk in newness of life? Are not the "mercies of God," appropriated by faith and realized in the heart, sufficient inducement to move His people to give up themselves entirely to His will, to be ordered, employed, and disposed of according to His good pleasure? Are any inclined to ask, What has all the above to do with spiritual growth or Christian progress? We answer, much every way. Genuine conversion is a giving up of ourselves to God, an entering into covenant with Him that He should be our God, and His promises are made to "such as keep his covenant and to those that remember his commandments to do them" (Ps. 10:3). But if we turn from devoting ourselves to God to sin and the world, and thereby break the covenant, what possible spiritual prosperity can we enjoy or progress make? Christ died for all His people "that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him who died for them, and rose again" (2 Cor. 5:15). If then I relapse into a course of self-pleasing, so far from advancing in the Christian life, I have backslidden, repudiated the initial dedication of myself to God and have east Christ's yoke from off me. Spiritual growth consists of increasing devotedness to God and being more and more conformed unto Christ's death. It is one of the most effectual means for spiritual growth to live in the daily realization that Christ has "redeemed us to God" (Rev. 5:9): to restore His rights over us, to admit us to His favor and friendship, to enjoy fellowship and communion with Him, that we may be for His pleasure and glory; then to conduct ourselves accordingly. Only as we are wholly devoted to His service and praise, only as all our springs and joy are in Him, do we actualize the design of our redemption. No progress in the Christian life can be made any further than as we are regulated by the fact "ye are not your own, for ye are bought with a price" (1 Cor. 6:19, 20). When that is really apprehended in the heart, the soul will become the consecrated priest and his body will be the living sacrifice offered unto God daily through Jesus Christ. Then will it be the devotedness not of constraint but of love. The more fully we are conformed to Christ's death, the more closely we be following the example he has left us, the more (and the only) true Christian progress are we making. III

3. Honoring the Word. By which we mean according to God's holy and infallible Word the place which is due it in our affections, thoughts, and daily lives. But we shall only do so as we are deeply impressed with whose Word it is and the reasons for which it has been given to us. God has "magnified his word above all his name" (Ps. 138:2), and if we be in our right minds we shall value it far more highly than anything else (Ps. 119:72). Apart from the Word we are in total darkness spiritually (Eph. 5:8). Without the Scriptures we can know nothing about the character of God, His attitude toward us, or our relation to Him. Without the Scriptures we are ignorant of the nature of sin and its infinite demerits, nor are we capable of discovering how to be saved from the love, guilt and pollution of it. Without the Scriptures we know not whence we sprang, whither we are going, nor how to conduct ourselves in the interval between. Even as Christians, we have no other means for ascertaining God's will for us, the path we should tread, the enemies we must fight, the armor we require, and how to obtain grace to help in time of need. All who profess to be Christians will give at least a mental assent to what has just been pointed out. But when it comes to the applying or working out of the same, there are wide differences of practice. In the matter of what use is to be made of God's Word there is considerable diversity of opinion. Rome does all she can to withhold the Scriptures from the people, forbidding the reading of them; or, where that is deemed Impolitic, seeking to discourage the same. Her evil leaven has spread far and wide, for multitudes of nominal "Protestants" who do not formally accept the dogmas of the Papacy suppose that the Bible is a mysterious Book, quite beyond the comprehension of the uninitiated and that "the church" alone is competent to explain its teachings. Therefore they are quite content to receive their religious instructions secondhand, accepting

what the prelate or preacher tells them from the pulpit, and since they do not "search the Scriptures" for themselves, they are unable to test what he tells them, and are liable to be deceived concerning their eternal interests. Thus there is no difference in this respect between them and the infatuated Papists. But there are others who "read the Bible" for themselves: but here there are many types. Some do so traditionally, because their parents and grandparents read a portion each day, yet in few cases do they give evidence of possessing a saving knowledge of the truth. Others read it superstitiously, regarding the Bible as a sort of religious charm: when in great perplexity or deep sorrow they turn to the Book they generally neglect, hoping to find guidance or solace from it. Many read it educationally. If their closest friends are more or less religious they would feel ashamed if unable to take an intelligent part in the conversation, and so seek a general acquaintance with its contents. Others read it denominationally, that they may be equipped to defend "our Articles of Faith" and hold their own in controversy, seeking texts which will refute the beliefs of others. A few read it professionally: it is their textbook. Their principal quest is material suitable for sermons and "Bible readings." Some read it inquisitively, to satisfy curiosity and feed intellectual pride: they specialize on prophecy, the types, numerics, and so on. Now one may read the Bible from such motives as those until he is as old as Methuselah and his soul be profited nothing? One may read and re-read the Bible through systematically from Genesis to Revelation, he may "search the Scriptures" diligently—comparing passage with passage, he may become quite an accomplished "Bible student, and yet, spiritually speaking, be not one whit better off for his pains. Why so? Because he failed to realize the chief reasons why God has given us His Word and to act accordingly, because his motive is faulty, because the end he had in view is unworthy. God has given the Word to us as a revelation of Himself: of His character, of His government, of His requirements. Our motive in reading it, then, should be to become better acquainted with Him, with His perfections, with His will for us. Our end in perusing His Word should be to learn how to please and glorify Him, and that, by our characters being formed under its holy influence and our conduct regulated in all its details by the rules He has there laid down. The mind needs instructing, but unless the conscience be searched, the heart influenced, the will moved, such knowledge will only puff us up and add to our condemnation. In the preceding chapters we pointed out that in order to spiritual growth the Christian must needs engage daily in mortifying the flesh and in devoting himself as a living sacrifice to God, giving our reasons for placing them first and second among the principal aids to prosperity. Obviously giving due place to the Word comes next, for only by its instructions can we learn what has to be mortified and how to please God In our walk. Some thought was required on how best to formulate this third grand help. Many have described it as studying the Word, but as pointed out above one may "study" it (as the "scribes" of our Lord's day had) and yet be none the better for it. Others use the expression feeding on the Word, which is better, though today there are thousands who think they are feeding thereon and yet give little or no sign their souls are being nourished or that they are becoming more fruitful branches of the Vine. We have therefore chosen honoring the Word as being a more comprehensive term. Now in order to honor the Word we must ascertain the purposes for which God has given it to us, and then regulate our efforts accordingly. The Word expressly informs us the chief ends for which it was written. "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" (2 Tim. 3:16). Since they are inspired by God it naturally and necessarily follows that they are "profitable," for He could not be the Author of what was purposeless and useless to its recipients. For what are the Scriptures "profitable"? First, for doctrine, that is, for sound and wholesome doctrine, "doctrine which is according to godliness" (1 Tim. 6:3). The word doctrine means "teaching" or instruction, and then the principle or article received. In the Scriptures we have the truth and nothing but the truth on every object and subject of which they treat, such as no mere creature could have arrived at or invented. The unfolding of the doctrine of God is a revelation of his Being

and character, such as had never been conceived by philosophers or poets. Their teaching concerning man is such as no physicist or psychologist had ever discovered by his own unaided powers. Such, too, is its doctrine of sin, of salvation, of the world, of Heaven, of Hell. Now to read and ponder the Scriptures for "doctrine" is to have our beliefs formed by its teachings. So far as we are under the influence of prejudice, or receive our religious ideas on human authority, and go to the Word not so much with the desire to be instructed on what we know not, but rather for the purpose of finding some thing which will confirm us in what we have already imbibed from man, be it right or wrong, so far we exercise a sinful disregard to the Sacred Canon and may justly be given up to our own deceits. Again; if we set up our own judgment so as to resolve not to accept anything as Divine truth but what we can intellectually comprehend, then we despise God's Word and cannot be said to read it either for doctrine or correction. It is not enough to "call no man Master": if I exalt my reason above the infallible dictates of the holy Spirit, then my reason formulates my creed. We must come to the Word conscious of our ignorance, forsaking our own thoughts (Isa. 55:7), with the earnest prayer "that which I see not, teach thou me" (Job 34:32), and that, so long as we remain on earth. First and foremost then the inspired Scriptures are profitable for doctrine: that our thoughts, ideas and beliefs concerning all the subjects of Divine revelation may be formed and regulated by their infallible teachings. How that rebukes those who sneer at theological instruction, who are prejudiced against the doctrinal exposition of the gospel, who ignorantly account such "dry" and uninteresting, who are all for what they term "experimental religion." We say "ignorantly," for the distinction they seek to draw is an unscriptural and invalid one. The Word of God nowhere draws a line between the doctrinal and the experimental. How could it? when true experimental piety is nothing but the influence of truth. upon the Soul under the agency of the Holy Spirit. What is godly sorrow for sin but the influence of the truth upon the conscience and heart! Is it anything else than a realization or feeling sense of the heinousness of sin, of its contrariety to what ought to be, of its being committed against light and love, dissolving the heart to grief? Until those truths are realized there will be no weeping over your sin. Peace and joy in believing: yes, but you must have an Object to believe in; take away the great doctrine of the Atonement and all your faith and peace are annihilated. Yes, first and foremost the Scriptures are "profitable for doctrine": God says so, and those who declare otherwise are liars and deceivers. That refutes and condemns those who are prejudiced against the doctrine of the gospel on the pretense that it is unfriendly to the practical side of the Christian life. That personal piety or holy living may be neglected through an excessive attachment to favorite theological tenets is readily granted, but that doctrinal instruction is inimical to following the example which Christ has left us, we emphatically deny. The whole teaching of Scripture is "the doctrine which is according to godliness" (1 Tim. 6:3): that is to say, it is the doctrine which inculcates "godliness, which supplies motives to godliness, and which therefore promotes it. If Divine truth be received according to the lovely proportions in which it is presented in the Word, so far from such a reception of it enervating practical godliness, it will be found to be the life of it. Doctrinal, experimental and practical religion are so necessarily connected together, they could have no existence apart from each other. The influence of the truth upon our hearts and minds is the source of all our spiritual feelings, and those feelings and affections are the springs of every good word and work. Second, the inspired Scriptures are profitable "for reproof" or conviction. Five times the Greek word is rendered "rebuke" and once "tell him his fault" (Matthew 18:15). Here is the chief reason why the Scriptures are so unpalatable to the unsaved: they set before him a standard concerning which he knows he falls far short: they require that which is thoroughly distasteful to him and prohibit those things which his evil nature loves and craves. Thus, their holy teachings roundly condemn him. It is because the Word of God inculcates holiness and censures every form of evil that the unregenerate have such a disrelish for it. It is because the Word convicts its reader of his sins, upbraids him for his ungodliness, blames him for his inward as

well as outward lack of conformity thereto, that the natural man shuns it. Flesh and blood resent interference, chafe against being censured, and is angry when told his or her faults. It is much too humbling for the pride of the natural man to be rebuked for his failures and chided for his errors. Therefore he prefers "prophecy" or something which pricks not his conscience! "Profitable for reproof." Are you, am I, willing to be reprov'd? Are we really, honestly desirous of having made known to us everything in us which is contrary to the law of the Lord and is therefore displeasing to Him? Are we truly agreeable to be searched by the white light of the truth, to bare our hearts to the sword of the Spirit? The true answer to that question reveals whether or no we are regenerate, whether a miracle of grace has been wrought in us or whether we are still in a state of nature. Unless the answer be in the affirmative, there cannot possibly be any spiritual growth for us. Of the wicked it is said "They despised all my reproof" (Prov. 1:30). On the one hand we are told "lie that hateth reproof is brutish" and "shall die" (Prov, 12:1; 15:17); on the other, "reproofs of instruction are the way of life," "he that heareth reproof getteth understanding" (Prov. 6:23; 15:32). If we are to profit from the Scriptures we must ever approach them with an honest desire that all amiss in us may be rebuked by their teachings and be humbled into the dust before God in consequence thereof. Third, the Scriptures are profitable "for correction." The Greek word occurs nowhere else in the New Testament, but signifies "setting right." The reprov'g is but a means to an end: it is a showing us what is wrong that it may be put right. Everything about us, both within and without needs correcting, for the fall has put man all out of joint with God and holiness. Our thoughts on everything are wrong and need readjusting. Our affections are all disorderly and need regulating. Our character is utterly unlike Christ's and has to be conformed to His image. Our conduct is wayward and demands squaring with the Rule of righteousness. God has given to us His Word that under its guidance we may regulate our beliefs, renovate our hearts and reform our lives. Hence it answers but a poor end to read a chapter once or twice a day for the sake of decency, without any definite intention of complying with the mind of God as revealed therein. Since He has given us the Scriptures "for correction" we should ever approach them with a sincere purpose of bringing into harmony with them everything that is disorderly within us and irregular without us. Fourth, the Scriptures are profitable "for instruction in righteousness." That is the end for which the other three things are the means. As Matthew Henry pointed out: the Scriptures are "profitable to us for all the purposes of the Christian life. They answer all the ends of Divine revelation. They instruct us in that which is true, reprove us for all that which is amiss, direct us in all that which is good." "Instruction in righteousness" refers not to the imputed righteousness of Christ, for that is included in "doctrine," but relates to integrity of character and conduct—it is inherent and practical righteousness, which is the fruit of the imputed. For that we need "instructing" out of the Word, for neither reason nor conscience are adequate for such a task. If our judgment be formed or our actions regulated by dreams, visions, or supposed immediate revelations from Heaven, rather than by the plain meaning of the Holy Scriptures, then we slight them and God may justly give us up to our own delusions. If we follow the fashion, imitate our fellows, or take public opinion for our standard, we are but heathen. But if the Word of God is the only source of our wisdom and guidance, we shall be found treading "the paths of righteousness" (Ps. 23:6). The Bible is something very different from a picture-book for amusing children, though it contains beautiful types and depicts scenes and events in a manner no artist's brush could convey. It is something more than a precious mine of treasure for us to dig into, though it contains wonders and riches far more excellent than any unearthed at Kimberley. It has not been sufficiently realized that God has given us His Word for the ordering of our daily lives. "The secret things belong unto the Lord our God: but the things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children forever, that we may DO all the words of this law" (Deut. 29:29). How very rarely do we hear or see that last clause quoted! Is not the omitting of it a significant and solemn comment on our times? God has given us his Word not for intellectual

entertainment, not for the merely curious to exercise his imagination upon, not for making it a battleground of theological strife, but to be "a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path" (Ps. 119: 105)—to point out the way in which we should walk and to sedulously avoid those by-ways which lead to certain destruction. "For what things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope" (Rom. 15:4). Thus the whole of the Old Testament is for our instruction "in order that by patiently cleaving to the Lord in faith and obedience, and all our trials and temptations, and by taking comfort from the daily perusal of the Scriptures we might possess a joyful hope of Heaven, notwithstanding past sins and present manifold defects" (T. Scott). "Now all these things [concerning Israel's sins in the wilderness and God's judgments upon them] happened unto them for ensamples, and they are written for our admonition" (1 Cor. 10:11) or warning: for us to take to heart, to heed, to avoid. We shall meet with similar temptations and there is still the same evil nature in us as was in them, and unless it be mortified, the same awful fate will overtake us. "Make me to go in the path of thy commandments" (Ps. 119:35). It will profit us nothing, nay, it will add to our condemnation, if we read the preceptive parts of the Scriptures without attention and determination, through God's help, to conform our conduct thereto. "My little children, these things write I unto you that ye sin not" (1 John 2:1). That is the design, bearing, and end not only of this Epistle but of all the Scriptures. That is the object at which every doctrine, every precept, every promise aims: "that ye sin not." The Bible is the only book in the world which pays any regard to sin against God. The revelation which it makes of God's omniscience—"Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising, thou understandest my thoughts afar off" (Ps. 139:2)—says to me, sin not. So of His omnipresence—"The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good" (Prov. 15:3)—says to me, sin not. Are we taught the holiness of God? it is that we should be holy. Is the truth of resurrection revealed? it is that we "awake to righteousness and sin not" (1 Cor. 15:34). For what purpose was the Son of God manifested? that "He might destroy the works of the Devil" (1 John 3:8). Precious promises are given us with the express design that we should "cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (2 Cor. 7:1). "Desire the sincere milk of the word that ye may grow thereby" (1 Peter 2:2). In order to be nourished by the Word we must desire it, and like every other desire that one may be cultivated or checked—as after a time the manna was loathed by those who lusted for the flesh-pots of Egypt. The aim of that desire for the Word is "that ye may grow thereby": grow in knowledge, in grace, in holiness, "grow up into Christ in all things" (Eph. 4:15); grow in fruitfulness to God and helpfulness to your fellows. The Word must not only be desired, but "received with meekness" (James 1:21): that is, with yieldedness of will and pliability of heart, with readiness to be molded by its holy requirements. It must also be "mixed with faith" (Heb. 4:2): that is, received unquestioningly as God's own Word to me, appropriated and assimilated by me. It must be approached humbly and prayerfully, as the Hebrews had to bow down or go upon their knees to obtain the tiny manna on the ground. "Teach me thy statutes" (Ps. 119:12): their meaning, their application to all the details of my life, how to perform them. If we would read the Scriptures to advantage, if our souls are to be nurtured by them, if we are to make true Christian progress, then it must be by earnest prayer and constant meditation.. It is only by pondering the words of God that they become fixed in our minds and exert a salutary influence upon our thoughts and actions. Things forgotten have no power to regulate us, and Scripture is soon forgotten unless it be turned over and over in the mind. A wondrous blessing is pronounced upon the man who meditates in God's law day and night: "He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season, his leaf also shall not wither, and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper" (Ps. 1:3). "These things write we unto you that your joy may be full" (1 John 1:4). Holiness and happiness are inseparably connected. Destruction and misery are in the ways of the wicked (Rom. 3:16), but Wisdom's ways are "ways of pleasantness and all her paths are peace" (Prov. 3:17). IV

4. Occupation with Christ. Clearly this comes next. We must have the Scriptures before we can have Christ, for they are they which testify of Him (John 5:39): where the Bible has not gone Christ is unknown. But in the Scriptures He is fully revealed: in the volume of the Book it is written of Him. In Him all its teachings center, for they are "the doctrine of Christ" (2 John 9). In Him all its precepts are perfectly fulfilled. In Him all its promises are certified (2 Cor. 1:20). In Him all its prophecies culminate, for "the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy" (Rev. 19:10). Divorce doctrine from Christ and it is indeed "dry." Separate precepts from Christ and we have no perfect exemplification of them. Sever the promises from Christ and they are no longer "Yea and Amen." Part asunder the prophecies from Christ and they are of no profit to the soul, but rather enigmas for useless speculation. Christ is the Alpha and Omega of the written Word: "Jesus Christ" is the first name mentioned in the New Testament (Matthew 1:1) and the last (Rev. 22:21), and the Old is filled with foreshadowings and forecasts of Him. If the Christian desires the milk of the Word that he may grow thereby, it is that he "may grow up into him in all things, which is the Head, even Christ" (Eph. 4:15). It is unto the image of God's Son that the saint is predestinated to be conformed. It is upon Christ, now seated at God's right hand, he is to steadfastly set his affection (Col. 3:1). It is with his eyes fixed upon Christ that he is to run the race which is set before him (Heb. 12:2). It is of Christ he is to learn (Matthew 11:29), from His fulness he is to receive (John 1:16), by His commandments be directed (John 14:15). It is on Christ he is to feed, as Israel did on the manna in the wilderness (John 6). It is to Christ he is to go in all his troubles (Matthew 14:12), for He is a High Priest who can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities. It is for the honor and glory of Christ he is ever to aim (Phil. 1:20). In short, the Christian is so to act that he can say "For to me to live is Christ." Now in order to have fellowship with another there must be three things: that other must be known, he must be present, and I must have a free and familiar access to him. Thus it is with the soul and Christ. First, I must be personally acquainted with Him: He must be a living reality to my soul. Therefore it follows that if I am to have close fellowship with Him I must become better acquainted with Him, and in proportion as I do so, such will be my true progress. We agree with Pierce that the words "grow in grace" are explained (in part, at least) by the clause which immediately follows: "and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 3:18), for the second verse of that epistle tells us that grace and peace are multiplied unto us "through the knowledge of God and of our Lord Jesus." One of the chief things which retards the Christian, which renders him weak in faith and causes his graces to languish, is his failure to increase in the knowledge of his Lord and Saviour, and thereby attain to a deeper and more intimate acquaintance with Him. How can we fully trust or set our affections upon One who is well nigh a stranger to us? Though the Christian believes in an unseen Christ, he does not—he could not—trust in an unknown Christ. No, his testimony is "I know whom I have believed" (2 Tim. 1:12), which does not mean I know Him because I have believed, but rather I believed in Him because He stood revealed to my heart. Take the experience of the one who penned those words. There was a time when Paul was ignorant of Christ. Before his conversion the apostle knew Him not, and consequently he then had no faith in Him, no love for Him, no pantings after Him. And it is thus with all before regeneration: they knew not the things which belong to their everlasting peace. Paul was a great scholar, a strict moralist, a devout religionist, yet he was completely ignorant of the Lord Jesus Christ, whom to know is life eternal. He was trained by Gamaliel the famous teacher of that day, was deeply versed in the contents of the Old Testament, and had listened to the sermon of dying Stephen; and yet was a total stranger to the Christ of God. Nor did his theological training, philosophic mind or acquaintance with the Scriptures, lead him to a saving knowledge of Christ. All that Paul knew of Christ was by teaching from above. It was God who enlightened his mind with a saving knowledge of the truth and who drew his heart unto the Lord Jesus by His own invincible grace and love. And thus it is with each one whom the Lord God omnipotent calleth. Every person in his natural state

is altogether ignorant of the true God and is an utter stranger to the alone and all-sufficient Mediator, the righteous Redeemer, who is mighty to save. And how are they brought into an acquaintance with Him? It is wholly of grace and through the supernatural operations of the Holy Spirit upon their souls. As the Spirit of wisdom and revelation He is pleased to quicken the soul with spiritual life and to illumine the mind with a knowledge of Divine Truth, imparting an inward spiritual perception of Christ to the heart thereby. The outward revelation of Christ to us is in the written Word, which sets Him forth and testifies of Him, in which He is clearly, freely, and fully exhibited. But that external revelation has no saving effect upon us u

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