

Countless Treasures!

by J.C. Philpot

The Bible is a sealed book to many professed Christians, but the light of the Spirit opens the understanding to its truth and reveals the way of salvation.

Scripture: Psalm 18:28, Psalm 119:105, Psalm 119:130, Proverbs 20:27, Luke 1:78, John 8:12, John 12:39, 2 Corinthians 4:3, 2 Corinthians 4:6, Ephesians 1:18

Topics: "Spiritual Enlightenment", "Divine Teaching"

Description

J.C. Philpot preaches about the countless treasures found in the Bible, highlighting how the Scriptures are often heard without interest or understanding by many, leading to dangerous errors and stumbling in religious matters. He contrasts the darkness of those without divine light with the enlightening work of the Spirit in believers, guiding them to see their fallen state, the holiness of God, and the way of salvation through Christ. Philpot emphasizes the necessity of divine teaching to truly comprehend and apply the truths of Scripture, showing that without a living faith, the word of God remains a dark enigma to the unregenerate heart.

Transcript

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What a wonderful book is the Bible! What countless treasures of mercy and grace, wisdom and truth, are therein contained--hidden, indeed, from the natural eye, but opened up and revealed from time to time by the Blessed Spirit to the enlightened understanding of the family of God. That the word of God is a sealed book to the great mass of professed Christians--we mean by the term, those who, without any divine life in their soul, are in the habit of attending a place of worship--one or two facts will abundantly show. Though the Scriptures are in everybody's hand, and are read or heard habitually from childhood's hour to old age's lingering decay, not only are they not understood, they are not even remembered. We hesitate not to say, that you may take at a venture, a thousand people in the middle classes of society, of a good education, regular church-goers, and therefore hearing the Scriptures continually read, and you shall hardly find five out of them who could quote a text correctly, or tell you where it is to be found--at least, beyond some vague idea, gathered from the turn of expression, that it is in the Old Testament or New.

Does not this show that they are heard without the least interest taken in them? Would Shakespeare, or Milton, or Byron, be read in their ears as often, and not be remembered? The words of a foolish song are learned in a few minutes, and caught up at once by every boy in the street. But who remembers the word of God, except to misuse and blaspheme it? One reading gave "Uncle Tom" a firmer place in the memory of thousands than the Bible which they have read all their lives. How little, too, do they seem to understand its meaning! A few plain texts that speak of actions to be performed they may, at first sight, seem to comprehend; but even these they rive and tear from their spiritual meaning, laying them down as duties to be done by all men, instead of fruits brought forth by the Blessed Spirit in the hearts, lips, and lives of the family of God.

But this gross darkness of mind, as regards the Scriptures, is not merely a negative evil; it inevitably produces effects almost more dangerous than the very blindness itself. A blind man, as long as he sits still, may keep from stumbling. It is when he begins to move, to walk, that he tumbles about and breaks his limbs or his neck. So in religion; it is when the blind begin to move, and think they certainly will become religious, that they stumble and fall into one error after another. Without divine teaching, they cannot but go wrong; without divine light, they cannot but fall. We do not say they have not some natural light; but what is seen by them is seen from a wrong point of view; what is done by them is done from wrong motives; their faint and flickering views of right and wrong only mislead them into self-righteousness; and the very duties they try to perform only blind them more to the way of salvation by sovereign grace. Like a man lost in a wood, every seeming step out is to them, but a farther step in; or, like one benighted on a moor, or in a bog, every attempt at extrication wearies and fatigues, but only ends in deeper entanglement.

Ministers of truth are thought sometimes to speak too strongly of the dreadful state of man through the fall; but, in fact, it is impossible to exaggerate in language the blindness and darkness of the human heart; nor can pen or tongue adequately set forth the misery and utter helplessness of a condition such as the Scriptures describe in two most solemn passages--"Therefore they could not believe, because that Elijah said again, He has blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart; that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them"; (John 12:39, 40); "But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost; in whom the god of this world has blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them." (2 Cor. 4:3, 4.)

Now, contrast with this dreadful condition, so clearly, so graphically described, the state of the soul into which the true light, what the Lord calls "the light of life," has shone. This is beautifully described in two passages of scripture, which we will quote as counterparts of those just brought forward--"Through the tender mercy of our God, whereby the dayspring from on high has visited us, to give light to them that sit in darkness, and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace;" (Luke 1:78, 79); "For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, has shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." (2 Cor. 4:6.)

Many sweet and simple testimonies are there in the word of truth to this work of the Spirit on the heart, whereby he enlightens it with the light of the living. "The entrance of your words gives light." "In your light shall we see light." "The eyes of your understanding being enlightened." "He who believes in me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life." Happy the man thus enlightened by the Spirit from on high. He no longer walks on in darkness and in the shadow of death. Like Moses, he now sees him who is invisible. As this light penetrates into the dark corners and recesses of the heart--the true "candle of the

Lord, searching all the inward parts of the belly."

It discovers to him his own case and state as a fallen sinner; and as it shines upon the holiness and justice of God, as revealed in the Scripture, it makes known the breadth and spirituality of the law, the wrath of God due to sin, and his righteous judgment on all transgressors. Nor does the blessed Spirit stop here. He goes on to enlighten the soul to see the way of salvation. His special office is to take of the things of Christ and to reveal them to the soul. He therefore casts a light upon the mercy of God as revealed in his dear Son; shows how the soul is washed in his blood, and clothed in his righteousness; and not only so, but applies the blood, and brings near the righteousness; and blessing him with a manifestation of Christ, and a testimony to his interest in him, leads him onward to see more and more of the beauty of his Person, the riches of his grace, the breadth, length, depth, and height of his dying love, his suitability in all his covenant characters and offices, and what he is to all who love and confide in his name.

This same light, we, may further observe, spreads itself over the word of truth, as he reads from time to time the inspired page. We have often thought of the words, "Then he opened their understanding, that they might understand the Scriptures." Until this is done, the Scriptures are not understood. The eye, indeed, looks at them, but much as it looks at objects through a telescope before it gets the right focus. Everything is dim and distorted, hazy and obscure. Without Christ--the light of Christ in the understanding, and the life of Christ in the heart; without faith in his Person, hope in his mercy, or love to his name, the Scriptures are all a dark enigma. Not a doctrine can be understood, not an experience entered into, not a precept performed, not a promise believed, not an invitation accepted, not a truth enjoyed, without a living faith in the divine Revealer of them all.

The Scriptures are much and widely read, it is true, but merely as a duty, a daily or weekly self-imposed task, a religious performance in which a certain amount of merit is invested. It thus becomes a mere sop for conscience in some, and in others amounts at best to a perusing with the eye a certain quantity of words and letters, chapters and verses, unwillingly taken up, badly laid down. The beauty and blessedness, divine sweetness and inexpressible power and savor, seen and felt in the Scriptures by a believing heart are, to the unbelieving multitude unknown, untasted, unfelt, uncared for. Whatever be the subject, however solemn or weighty--and what can be so solemn and weighty as the soul's eternal happiness or misery?--the word of truth, without a divine application, absolutely makes no impression on the conscience. The threatenings produce no terror or trembling, create no fear or conviction, draw out neither sigh nor groan, no, nor raise up one faint, feeble cry, "God be merciful to me a sinner." The promises, the invitations, the portions that speak of Christ and his sufferings neither melt nor move, touch nor soften their conscience. The unregenerate heart responds to neither judgment nor mercy. Nothing stirs it Godwards. Hard as a stone, cold as ice, motionless as a corpse, it lies dead in trespasses and sins.

But not so with the heart which the finger of God has touched. It fears, it trembles, it melts, it softens; it is lifted up, it is cast down; it sighs, it prays, it believes; it hopes, it loves; it mourns, it rejoices; it grieves, it repents--in a word, it lives the life of God, and breathes, acts, and moves just as the Blessed Spirit visits and works in it by his gracious power and influence. Under his teaching, the Scriptures become a new book, read, as it, were, with new eyes, heard with new ears, thought and pondered over with new feelings, understood with a new understanding, and felt in a new conscience.

But apart from any special light which a man taught of God may have on particular passages of Scripture, such, for instance, as have been peculiarly opened up, applied, and blessed to his soul, there is what we may perhaps call a general light on the word of truth. There is harmony in God's word. Indeed, it cannot be

otherwise. It would be treason against the Blessed Spirit to think there could be any real discrepancy, any positive contradiction, in the inspired page. When, then, we are favored with a spiritual, experimental knowledge of God's truth, it is putting into our hands a master-key to open cabinets closed against the wise and prudent, a clue to guide the feet amid the mazes where learned doctors and studious theologians wander and are lost, a light penetrating and pervading the hidden depths of the sanctuary, on the threshold of which the scribe and the Pharisee stumble and fall.

There is one deep mine especially in Scripture, in which an amazing amount of profitable instruction is stored up, but which, without divine light, cannot be penetrated into and explored, and its golden treasure, for "it has dust of gold," laid bare. We mean the characters of Scripture, what may be called Scripture biography, as distinct from Scripture history. And as the Bible gives us the lives and actions of sinners as well as of saints, of professors as well as possessors, Scripture biography has two phases corresponding to these characters.

Take, for instance, the character of Saul. What a mine of instruction--fearful indeed, but profitable--is laid up in his history! What a description inside and out of a professor of religion, from the beginning to the end of his course! It is the history of a man upon whom worldly honor and a prominent position in the church of God are thrust in spite of himself, wrecked and ruined for the non-possession of grace. It seems as if God would show us in him that the fairest beginnings, brightest prospects, and most signal gifts serve only to thrust a man into deeper perdition, if he has not a living principle of faith, fear, and obedience in his soul. There are in the history of Saul elements of character given, from which, without the slightest exaggeration in drawing or coloring, a full-length portrait might be painted which would make a tender-hearted child of God tremble to the very center.

Take, again, the character of David, as brought out in the same way by his words and actions, and fixing your eye on that point, steadily pursue it through all his history. God seems to have designed to give us in him the counterpart of the character of Saul, and thus to show that, as without grace nothing can save, so with grace nothing can damn. Just where Saul stumbles and falls, David stands. All things, the brightest and the fairest, tend to Saul's downfall; all things, the darkest and foulest, tend to David's rise. Victory and defeat are alike ruinous to Saul; for when he conquers Agag, he destroys himself by sparing him; and when the Philistines prevail, he falls on his own sword. Victory and defeat are alike a blessing to David. If he conquers, as when he slew Goliath, it was, as winning the confidence and affections of the people, a step towards the throne; and if he is hunted as a partridge on the mountains, it is but a wholesome discipline and a needful training him to wear more steadily the crown. Yet, in reading their history, we cannot but own that Saul is justly punished, and David justly blessed. We fully acquiesce in the sentence of each. Nothing in either shocks our moral perceptions of right and wrong. The crookedness, selfishness, hypocrisy, disobedience, murderous, revengeful disposition and conduct of Saul we see justly to draw down upon him the vengeance of God.

Yet we feel, and in this much consists the instruction contained in his miserable history, that human nature being what it is, and circumstances being what they were, he could hardly act otherwise; though, at the same time, we feel that otherwise he would have acted, had he but possessed grace. We read his end, close the book, and tremble; but does the thought rise up as if God were unjust in letting him perish so miserably? Did he not sin against the clearest directions, the strongest warnings; and when once he began to turn aside, did he not go from sin to sin, from murder to witchcraft, until mercy herself turned aside her face, unable to say a word why the stroke of justice should not fall? David, on the other hand, not merely shows the triumph of grace as a saving principle, confirming and establishing us thereby in its

sovereign efficacy, but shines forth as a living evidence of what grace is as an active, influential principle. David is not borne on passively, mechanically to the throne, carried as if in a chariot from Bethlehem's sheepfolds to Hebron's court. Grace is seen not merely working in him, but worked out by him. His prayers, his tears, his faith, his obedience, his sincerity, his humility, his confiding trust, yes, and all his fears and conflicts too, are brought out; and what grace is, does, and can do is as clearly seen in him, as what nature is, does, and can do is seen in Saul.

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