

Reading the Scriptures With Profit

by Thomas Watson

To profit from reading the Scriptures, one must remove obstructions, prepare their heart, read with reverence, and cultivate a love for the Word.

Scripture: Proverbs 8:15

Topics: "Biblical Literacy", "Spiritual Growth"

Description

Thomas Watson preaches about the importance of reading the Scriptures with spiritual profit, emphasizing the need for kings and all individuals to diligently read and apply the Word of God in their lives. He provides detailed instructions on how to read the Scriptures effectively, including removing hindrances, preparing the heart, reading with reverence, understanding, seriousness, and humility, and applying the Word to one's personal life. Watson encourages believers to seek spiritual nourishment, meditate on the Word, and approach Scripture with love, honesty, and a desire for practical application. He highlights the significance of Christ's prophetic office, the role of godly teaching ministries, and the necessity of prayer for understanding and profit from the Scriptures.

Transcript

How We May Read the Scriptures with Most Spiritual Profit

by Thomas Watson

"And it shall be with him (the King), and he shall read therein all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the Lord his God, to keep all the words of this Law and these statutes, to do them." Deuteronomy 17:19

This book of Deuteronomy is full of golden eloquence. In this chapter, God instructs the Jews about setting a king over them, and there are two things specified, as to his election, and his religion.

1. His election, Deut 17:15. "You shall be sure to appoint over you the king the LORD your God chooses." Good reason that God should have the choice of their king, since "by him kings reign." Prov 8:15.

2. His religion, Deut 17:18. "When he takes the throne of his kingdom, he is to write for himself on a scroll a copy of this law." Here was a good beginning of a king's reign; the first thing he did after he sat upon the throne, was to copy out the Word of God in a book. And in the text, "It shall be with him, and he shall read therein, all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the Lord his God, to keep all the words of this Law

and these Statutes, to do them."

"It shall be with him." The Book of the Law shall be his daily companion. Charles the Great used to set his crown upon the Bible. Indeed the Bible is the best support of government.

"And he shall read therein." It is not below the majesty of a prince to peruse the oracles of Heaven; in them are comprised sacred writings. Prov 8:6, "I will speak of excellent things." In the Septuagint it is "grave things," in the Hebrew, "princely things," such as are fit for a God to speak--and a king to read. Nor must the king only read the Book of the Law at his first installment into his kingdom--but he "shall read in it all the days of his life." He must not leave off reading--until he left off reigning. And the reasons why he must be conversant in the law of God, are in the subsequent words:

1. "That he may learn to fear the Lord his God." Reading of the Word is the best means to usher in the fear of the Lord.
2. "That he may keep all the words of this Law, to do them."
3. "That he may prolong his days in his kingdom."

I shall now confine myself to these words, "He shall read in it all the days of his life;" that is--in the Book of the Law.

"The Holy Scripture is a golden epistle sent to us from God!" This we are to read diligently. Ignorance of Scripture is the mother of error--not of devotion. Matt 22:29, "You are in error--not knowing the Scriptures." We are commanded to "search the Scriptures." John 5:39. The Greek word signifies to search as for a vein of gold. How diligently does a child read over his father's will! With the like diligence, should we read God's Word, which is our Magna Charta for Heaven. It is a mercy that the Bible is not prohibited. Let us inquire at this sacred oracle. Apollos was "mighty in the Scriptures." Acts 18:24. Melancthon, when he was young, sucked the sincere milk of the Word. Alphonsus, King of Arragon, read over the Bible fourteen times. That Roman Lady, Cecilia, had by much reading of the Word, made her heart the Library of Christ. Were the Scriptures confined to the original tongues, many would plead excuse for not reading; but when the sword of the Spirit is unsheathed, and the Word is made plain to us by being translated, what should hinder us from a diligent search into these holy mysteries?

Adam was forbidden upon pain of death to taste of the tree of knowledge. Gen 2:17, "In the day you eat thereof, you shall surely die!" But there is no danger of touching this tree of Holy Scripture; if we do not eat of this tree of knowledge--we shall surely die! What will become of those who are strangers to the Scriptures? Hos 8:12, "I have written to him the great things of my law--but they were counted as a strange thing." Many lay aside the Scriptures as rusty armor. Jer 8:9, "They have rejected the Word of the Lord, so what wisdom do they really have?" They are better read in romances, than in Paul; they spend many hours between the comb and the looking-glass--but their eyes begin to be sore when they look at a Bible!

The very Turks will rise up in judgment against these Christians. They reverence the Books of Moses; and if they find but a leaf whereon anything of the Pentateuch is written, they take it up and kiss it. They who slight the written Word, slight God himself, whose stamp it bears. To slight the king's edict is an affront offered to the person of the king. They who reject and vilify the Scriptures are in a state of condemnation. Prov 13:13, "Whoever despises the Word shall be destroyed."

Nor is it enough, to read the Word of God--but it should be our care to get some spiritual nourishment and profit by it, that our souls may be nourished up in the words of faith. 1 Tim 4:6. Why else was the Scripture written--but that it might profit us? God did not give us his Word only as a landscape to look upon--but he delivered it as a father delivers a stock of money to his son--to improve. It is sad not to profit by the Word, to be like the body in a consumption, which does not thrive. Men would be reluctant to trade--and get no profit.

The grand question I am to speak to, is this. How we may read the Scriptures with most spiritual profit. In answering this question, I shall lay down several rules or directions about the reading of Scripture.

A. If you would profit from the Scriptures--remove those things which will hinder your profiting. That the body may thrive, obstructions must be removed. There are three obstructions which must be removed, if you would profit by Scripture.

1. Remove the love of every SIN. Let a physician prescribe ever so good a remedy, if the patient takes poison, it will hinder the virtue and operation of the medicine. The Scripture prescribes excellent remedies--but sin lived in, poisons all. The body cannot thrive in a fever, nor can the soul under the feverish heat of lust. Plato calls the love of sin--a great devil. As the rose is destroyed by the canker which breeds in it--so are the souls of men by those sins in which they indulge.

2. Take heed of those THORNS which will choke the Word. These thorns, our Savior expounds to be the cares of this world. Matt 13:22. By "cares" is meant covetousness. A covetous man has such diversity of secular employment, that he can scarcely find time to read God's Word; or if he does, what slips does he commit in reading! While his eye is upon the Bible--his heart is upon the world! It is not the writings of the Apostles, which he is so much taken up with, as the writing in his account books! Is this man likely to profit? You may as soon extract oil out of a rock--as he extract any real benefit out of Scripture!

3. Take heed of JESTING with Scripture. This is playing with fire. Some cannot be merry unless they jest about God. When they are sad, they bring forth the Scripture as their harp to drive away the evil spirit. In the fear of God, beware of this! God will not endure to have his Word jested with! Eusebius relates of one who took a piece of Scripture to jest with, and God struck him with madness. The Lord may justly give over such people to a reprobate mind. Rom 1:28.

B. If you would profit from the Scriptures--prepare your hearts for the reading of the Word. The heart is an instrument which needs putting in tune. 1 Sam 7:3, "Prepare your hearts to the Lord." The heathen, as Plutarch notes, thought it indecent to be too hasty or rash in the service of their supposed deities. This preparation for reading consists in two things:

1. In summoning our thoughts together to attend to that solemn work we are going about. The thoughts are stragglers, therefore rally them together.

2. In purging out those unclean affections which indispose us to reading. Before we come to the water of life, let us cast away the poison of impure affections. Many come rashly to the reading of the Word, and it is no wonder if they come without preparation, that they go away without profit.

C. Read the Scriptures with reverence. Think every line you read, that God is speaking to you. The ark wherein the law was put, was overlaid with pure gold, and was carried on bars, that the Levites might not touch it. Exod 25. Why was this but to breed in the people reverence to the law? When Ehud told Eglon he

had a message to him from God, he arose from his throne. Judg 3:20. The written Word is a message from Jehovah; with what veneration should we receive it.

D. If you would profit from the Scriptures--Read the books of Scripture in order. Though occurrences may sometimes divert our method--yet, for a constant course, it is best to observe an order in reading. Order is a help to memory. We do not begin to read a friend's letter in the middle.

E. If you would profit from the Scriptures--Get a right understanding of Scripture. Ps 119:73, "Give me understanding, that I may learn your commandments." Though there are some knots in Scripture which are not easily untied--yet things essential to salvation, the Holy Spirit has plainly pointed out to us. The knowledge of the sense of the Scriptures is the first step to profit. In the Law, Aaron was first to light the lamps, and then to burn the incense; the lamp of the understanding must be first lighted, before the affections can be inflamed. Get what knowledge you can by comparing Scriptures, by conferring with others, by using the best commentators. Without knowledge, the Scripture is a sealed book; every line is too high for us; and if the Word shoots above our head--it can never hit our heart!

F. If you would profit from the Scriptures--Read the Word with seriousness. If one go over the Scripture quickly, there is little good to be got by it; but if you are serious in reading it, it is the savor of life. And well may we be serious if we consider the importance of those truths which are bound up in this sacred volume. Deut 32:47, "They are not just idle words for you--they are your life!" If a letter were to be broken open and read, wherein a man's whole estate were concerned, how serious would he be in reading it. In the Scripture our salvation is concerned; it treats of the love of Christ, a serious subject. Christ has loved mankind, more than the angels that fell. Heb 2:7. The loadstone, indifferent to gold and diamond, draws the iron to it; thus Christ passed by the angels, who were of more noble extraction, and drew mankind to him. Christ loved us more than his own life; nay, though we had a hand in his death--yet he would not leave us out of his will. This is a love which passes knowledge; who can read this, without seriousness?

The Scripture speaks of the mystery of faith, the eternal recompenses, and the paucity of those who shall be saved. Matt 20:16, "Few are chosen." One says the names of all the good emperors of Rome might be engraved in a little ring. Just so, there are but comparatively few names in the Book of Life. The Scripture speaks of striving for heaven as in an agony. Luke 13:24. It cautions us of falling short of the promised rest. Heb 4:1. It describes the horrors of the infernal torments--the worm, and the fire. Mark 9:44. Who can read this and not be serious! Some have light, feathery, spirits; they run over the most weighty truths in haste--and they are not benefitted by the Word. Read with a solemn, composed spirit. Seriousness is the Christian's ballast, which keeps him from being overturned with vanity.

G. If you would profit from the Scriptures--Labor to remember what you read. Satan would steal the Word out of our mind; not that he intends to make use of it himself--but lest we should make use of it. The memory should be like the chest in the ark, where the ark was put. Ps 119:52, "I remembered your judgments of old."

Jerome speaks of that pious lady, Paula, that she had most of the Scriptures by heart. We are bid to have "the Word dwell in us." Col 3:16. The Word is a jewel; it adorns the hidden man, and shall we not remember it? If the Word stays not in the memory--it cannot profit. Some can better remember a piece of news, than a line of Scripture; their memories are like those ponds where the frogs live--but the fish die.

H. If you would profit from the Scriptures--Meditate upon what you read. Ps 119:15, "I will meditate in your precepts." The Hebrew Word to meditate, signifies to be intense in the mind. In meditation there must be a

fixing of the thoughts upon the object. Luke 2:19, "Mary pondered those things." Reading brings a truth into our head, meditation brings it into our heart. Reading and meditation, must always go together. Meditation without reading is erroneous; reading without meditation is barren. The bee sucks the flower, and then works it into the hive, and so turns it into honey; by reading we suck the flower of the Word, by meditation we work it into the hive of our mind, and so it turns to profit. Meditation is the bellows of the affection. Ps 39:3, "While I was musing--the fire burned." The reason we come away so cold from reading the Word, is because we do not warm ourselves at the fire of meditation.

I. If you would profit from the Scriptures--Come to the reading of Scripture with humble hearts. Acknowledge how unworthy you are that God should reveal himself in his Word to you. God's secrets are with the humble. Pride is an enemy to profiting. It has been said that the ground on which the peacock sits is barren; however that is, I am sure that heart where pride sits is really barren. An arrogant person disdains the counsels of the Word, and hates the reproofs--is he likely to profit? James 4:6, "God gives grace to the humble." The most eminent saints have been of low stature in their own eyes; like the sun at the zenith, they showed least when they were at the highest. David had "more understanding than all his teachers." Ps 119:99--but how humble he was. Ps 22:6, "I am a worm and no man."

J. If you would profit from the Scriptures--Give credence to the written Word. Believe it to be of God; see the name of God in every line. The Romans, that they might gain credit to their laws, reported that they were inspired by the gods at Rome. Believe the Scriptures to be divinely inspired. 2 Tim 3:16, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God." Who but God could reveal the great doctrines of the Trinity, the atonement of Jesus Christ for sinners, the resurrection? Where did the Scriptures come from--if not from God?

1. The ungodly could not be the authors of Scripture. Would they indite such holy lines, or inveigh so fiercely against the sins which they love?

2. Saints could not be the authors of Scripture; how could it stand with their sanctity to counterfeit God's name, and put "thus says the Lord," to a book of their own devising?

3. Angels could not be the authors of Scripture. What angel in heaven dared impersonate God, and say, "I am the Lord?" Believe the pedigree of Scripture to be sacred, and to come from the Father of light. The antiquity of Scripture speaks its divinity. No human history extant, reaches farther than Noah's flood; but the Scripture treats of things before time. Beside, the majesty, profundity, purity and harmony of Scripture--show it could be breathed from none but God himself.

Add to this the efficacy the written Word has upon men's hearts and consciences; by reading Scripture they have been turned into other men, as may be instanced in Augustine, Junius, and many others. If you should set a seal upon a piece of marble, and it should leave a print behind--you would say there was a strange virtue in that seal. Just so, when the written Word leaves a heavenly print of grace upon the heart--it argues it to be of divine authority. If you would profit by the Word--you must believe it to be of God. Some skeptics question the verity of Scripture. Though they have the articles of religion in their creed--yet not in their belief. Unbelief enervates the virtue of the Word and makes it abortive; who will obey truths he does not believe? Heb 4:2, "The Word did not profit them--not being mixed with faith."

K. If you would profit from the Scriptures--Highly prize the Scriptures. Ps 119:72, "Your law is more valuable to me than millions in gold and silver!" Can he make a proficiency in any art, who slights and depreciate it? Prize this book of God above all other books. Gregory calls the Bible--the heart and soul of

God. The Rabbis say that there is a mountain of truth upon every point and tittle of Scripture. Ps 19:7, "The law of the Lord is perfect." The Scripture is the library of the Holy Spirit; it is a code of divine knowledge, an exact model, and platform of true religion. The Scripture contains in it the Credenda--the things which we are to believe; and the Agenda--the things which we are to practice. It is able to make us wise unto salvation. 2 Tim 3:15. The Scripture is the standard of truth, the judge of controversy. The Scripture is the pole star to direct us to heaven. The Scripture is the compass by which the rudder of our will is to be steered. The Scripture is the field in which Christ, the pearl of great price, is hidden. The Scripture is a rock of diamond. The Scripture is a sacred eye-salve; it mends the eyes of those who look upon it. The Scripture is a spiritual optic glass, in which the glory of God is resplendent. The Scripture is the panacea, or universal medicine for the soul. The leaves of Scripture are like "the leaves of the tree of life--for the healing of the nations." Rev 22:2.

The Scripture is the breeder and feeder of grace. How is the convert born--but by "the Word of truth?" James 1:18. How does he grow--but by "the sincere milk of the Word?" 1 Pet 2:2. The written Word is the book out of which our evidences for heaven are fetched. The Scripture is the sea-mark which shows us the rocks of sin. The Scripture is the antidote against error and apostasy. The Scripture is the two-edged sword which wounds the old serpent. It is our bulwark to withstand the force of lust, like the Capitol at Rome, which was a place of strength and ammunition. The Scripture is the tower of David, whereon the shields of our faith hang.

"Take away the Word, and you deprive us of the sun!" said Luther. The written Word is above an angelical embassy, or a voice from heaven. 2 Pet 1:18, "This voice which came from heaven we heard; we have also a more sure Word." If Caesar so valued his Commentaries, that in preserving them he lost his purple robe, how should we estimate the sacred oracles of God? Job 23:12, "I have esteemed the Words of his mouth more than my necessary food." King Edward VI, on the day of his coronation, had presented before him three swords, signifying that he was monarch of three kingdoms. The King said there was one sword lacking; being asked what that was, he answered, "the Holy Bible, which is the sword of the Spirit, and is to be preferred before all these ensigns of royalty." Robert, King of Sicily, did so prize God's Word, that, speaking to his friend Petrarch, he said, "The Scriptures are dearer to me than my kingdom, and if I must be deprived of one of them, I had rather lose my diadem than the Scriptures!"

L. If you would profit from the Scriptures--Get an ardent LOVE to the Word. Prizing relates to the judgment, love to the affections. Ps 119:159, "Consider how I love your precepts." He is likely to grow rich, who delights in his trade; a lover of learning will be a scholar. Augustine tells us before his conversion he took no pleasure in the Scriptures--but afterwards they were his delights. David thought the Word was sweeter than the honey which drops from the comb. Thomas a Kempis used to say he found no contentment, but in a corner, with the book of God in his hand. Did Alphonsus, King of Sicily, recover of a fit of sickness from the great pleasure he took in reading a book of philosophy? What infinite pleasure should we take in reading the book of life!

There is enough in the Word to breed holy pleasure and delight; it is a specimen and demonstration of God's holy love to us. The Spirit is God's love-token--the Word his love-letter; how does one rejoice to read over his friend's letter! The written Word is a divine treasury, or storehouse; in it is scattered truth as pearls, to adorn the inner man of the heart. The written Word is the true manna, which has all sorts of sweet taste in it. The Word is a sovereign elixir; it gives wine to those of a heavy heart.

I have read of an ancient Rabbi, who, in a great concourse of people, made proclamation of a sovereign cordial he had to sell; many resorting to him and asking him to show it, he opened the Bible, and directed them to several places of comfort in it. Holy David drank of this cordial; Ps 119:50, "This is my comfort in my affliction; for your Word has quickened me." Chrysostom compares the Scripture to a garden; every line in it is a fragrant flower, which we should wear not in our bosom--but in our heart!

Delight in the Word causes profit, and we must not only love the comforts of the Word--but the reproofs. Myrrh is bitter to the palate--but good for the stomach.

M. If you would profit from the Scriptures--Come to the reading of the Word with HONEST hearts. Christ speaks of the "honest heart." Luke 8:15. What is it to read the Word with an honest heart?

1. To come with a heart willing to know the whole counsel of God. A good heart would not have any truth concealed--but says as Job, "What I see not--teach me." When men pick and choose in religion, they will do some things the Word enjoins them--but not others; these are unsound hearts, and are not benefitted by holy writ. These are like a patient, who having a bitter pill prescribed, will take a candy--but refuses the pill.

2. To read the Word with an honest heart, is to read that we may be made better by it. The Word is the medium and method of sanctification, and we come to it not only to illuminate us--but to consecrate us. John 17:17, "Sanctify them through your truth." Some go to the Bible as one goes to the garden to pick flowers, that is fine notions. Augustine confesses that before his conversion he went to hear Ambrose, more for the elegance of speech and quaintness of notion, than the spirituality of the matter. This is like a woman who paints her face--but neglects her health! But this is to have an honest heart--when we come to the Scriptures as Naaman to the waters of Jordan--to be healed of our leprosy! "O," says the soul, "that the sword of the Spirit may pierce the rock of my heart; that this blessed Word may have such a virtue in it--that it may kill my sin, and make me fruitful in grace!"

N. If you would profit from the Scriptures--Learn to APPLY Scripture. Take every Word as spoken to ourselves. When the Word thunders against sin, think thus, "God means my sins!" When it presses any duty, "God intends me in this!" Many put off Scripture from themselves, as if it only concerned those who lived in the time when it was written; but if you intend to profit by the Word, bring it home to yourselves. A medicine will do no good--unless it be applied. The saints of old took the Word--as if it had been spoken to them by name! When king Josiah heard the threatening which was written in the book of God, he applied it to himself; he "tore his clothes and humbled his soul before the Lord." 2 Kings 22:11.

O. If you would profit from the Scriptures--Observe the PRECEPTIVE part of the Word, as well as the promises. The precepts carry duty in them, like the veins which carry the blood. The promises carry comfort, like the arteries which carry the spirit. Make use of the precepts--to direct you. Make use of the promises--to comfort you. Such as cast their eye on the promises, with a neglect of the commands--are not edified by Scripture; they look more after comfort than duty. They mistake their comforts--as Apollo embraced the laurel tree instead of Daphne. A man may be filled with false comfort--as well as that which is genuine and real.

P. If you would profit from the Scriptures--Let your thoughts dwell upon the most IMPORTANT passages of Scripture. The bee fastens on those flowers where she may suck most sweetness. Though the whole of Scripture is excellent--yet some parts of it may have a greater emphasis, and be more helpful and pungent. Reading the names of the tribes, or the genealogies of the patriarchs, is not of the same

importance as reading of faith and the new creature. Mind the "great things of the law." Hos 8:12. They who read only to satisfy their curiosity, do rather busy, than profit themselves. The searching too far into prophecies, has weakened grace in some men's hearts.

Q. If you would profit from the Scriptures--COMPARE yourselves with the Word. See how the Scripture and your hearts agree; how your dial goes with this sun. Are your hearts, as it were, a transcript and counterpart of Scripture? Is the Word copied out into your hearts? The Word calls for humility; are you not only humbled--but humble? The Word calls for regeneration, John 3:7; have you a change of heart? Not only a moral and partial change--but a spiritual change? Is there such a change wrought in you, as if another soul did live in the same body? 1 Cor 6:11, "Such were some of you--but you are washed, you are sanctified." The Word calls for love to the saints; 1 Pet 1:22. Do you love grace where you see it? Do you love grace in a poor man as well as in a rich? A son loves to see his father's picture, though hung in a poor frame. Do you love grace, though mixed with some failings--as we love gold though it is in the ore? The bringing the rule of the Word and our hearts together, to see how they agree, would prove very advantageous to us. Hereby we come to know the true complexion and state of our souls, and see what evidences and certificates we have for heaven.

R. If you would profit from the Scriptures--Take special notice of those Scriptures which speak to your particular case. Were a cancerous person to read medical book--he would chiefly observe what they said about cancer. Great regard is to be had to those paragraphs of Scripture which are most pertinent to one's present case. I shall notice three cases,

1. Affliction.

2. Desertion.

3. Sin.

1. Affliction. Has God made your chain heavy? Consult these Scriptures. Heb 12:7, "If you endure chastening, God deals with you as sons." Isa 27:9, "By this shall the iniquity of Jacob be purged." John 16:20, "Your sorrow shall be turned into joy." 2 Cor 4:17, "Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, works for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." The artist lays his gold upon dark colors. Just so, God first lays the dark color of affliction, and then the golden color of glory.

2. Desertion. Are your spiritual comforts eclipsed? See Isa 54:8, "In a little wrath I hid my face from you, for a moment--but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on you." The sun may hide itself in a cloud--but it is not out of the sky. Just so, God may hide his face--but he is not out of the covenant. Isa 57:16, "I will not always be angry." God is like the musician; he will not stretch the strings of his lute too hard, lest they break. A saint's comfort may be hidden, as seed under the clods--but at last it will spring up into a harvest of joy.

3. Sin.

1. Are you drawn away with LUST? Read Gal 5:24; James 1:15; 1 Pet 2:11, "Abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul." Lust kills with embracing. Prov 7:10,22-23; Prov 22:14, "Go to the waters of the sanctuary--to quench the fire of lust."

2. Are you under the power of UNBELIEF? Read Isa 26:3, "You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you." Mr. Bolton speaks of a distressed soul who found much

comfort from this Scripture, on his sick bed. 2 Sam 22:31, "As for God, his way is perfect. All the Lord's promises prove true. He is a shield for all who look to him for protection." John 3:15, "Whoever believes in him should not perish." Unbelief is a God-affronting sin. 1 John 5:10, "He who believes not God--has made him a liar." It is a soul-murdering sin! John 3:36, "He who believes not the Son shall not see life--but the wrath of God abides on him!"

Thus, in reading, observe those Scriptures which do touch upon your particular case. Although all the Bible must be read--yet those texts which point most directly to your condition, be sure to put a special asterisk upon.

S. If you would profit from the Scriptures--Take special notice of the EXAMPLES in Scripture. Make the examples of others--living sermons to you.

1. Observe the examples of God's judgments upon sinners. They have been hanged up in chains, as a terror. How severely has God punished proud men! Nebuchadnezzar was turned to eat grass; Herod eat up with worms. How has God plagued idolaters! Num 25:3-4,9; 1 Kings 14:9-10. What a swift witness has he been against liars! Acts 5:5,10. These examples are set up as sea-marks to avoid! 1 Cor 10:11; Jude 7.

2. Observe the examples of God's mercy to saints. Jeremiah was preserved in the dungeon; the three Hebrew children in the furnace; Daniel in the lion's den. These examples are props to faith, spurs to holiness.

T. If you would profit from the Scriptures--do not leave off reading in the Bible, until you find your hearts warmed. Ps 119:93, "I will never forget your precepts, for with them you have quickened me." Read the Word not only as a history--but strive to be affected with it. Let it not only inform you--but inflame you. Jer 23:29, "Is not my Word like as a fire? says the Lord." Do not go from the Word, until you can say as those disciples; Luke 24:32, "Did not our hearts burn within us!"

U. If you would profit from the Scriptures--Set upon the PRACTICE of what you read. Ps 119:66, "I have obeyed your commandments." A medical student does not satisfy himself to read over a medical book--but he falls upon its practice. The life blood of religion lies in the practical part. So in the text, "He shall read in the book of the law all the days of his life, that he may learn to keep all the Words of this law and these statutes, to do them." Christians should be walking Bibles! Xenophon said many read the laws of Lycurgus--but few observed them. The written Word is not only a rule of knowledge--but a rule of obedience; it is not only to mend our sight--but to mend our pace. David calls God's Word a "lamp to his feet." Ps 119:105. It was not only a light to his eyes to see by--but to his feet to walk by. By practice, we turn our knowledge into profit. This is a blessed reading of the Scriptures--when we fly from the sins which the Word forbids--and espouse the duties which the Word commands. Scripture reading without practice--will be but a torch to light men to hell!

V. If you would profit from the Scriptures--Make use of Christ's prophetic office. He is the lion of the tribe of Judah, to whom it is given to open the book of God, and unlock its seals. Rev 5:5. Christ does so teach, as he does quicken. John 8:12. Where Christ comes into the soul with his light--there is the heat of spiritual life going along with it. Christ gives us a taste of his Word, "You have taught me how sweet are your Words to my taste." Ps 119:102-103. It is one thing to read a promise, another to taste it. Such as would be Scripture proficient, let them get Christ to be their teacher. Luke 24:45, "Then he opened their understanding, that they might understand the Scriptures." Christ did not only open the Scriptures--but opened their understanding!

W. If you would profit from the Scriptures--Tread often upon the threshold of the sanctuary. Wait diligently upon a godly teaching ministry. Prov 8:34, "Blessed is the man who hears me, watching daily at my gates." Ministers are God's interpreters; it is their work to open and expound dark places of Scripture. We read of pitchers, and lamps within the pitchers. Judg 7:16. Ministers are earthen pitchers. 2 Cor 4:7. But these pitchers have lamps within them, to light souls in the dark.

X. If you would profit from the Scriptures--Pray that God will make you profit. Isa 48:17, "I am the Lord your God, who teaches you to profit." Make David's prayer, "Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law." Ps 119:18. Pray to God to take the veil off the Scriptures--that you may understand it; and the veil on your heart--that you may believe it. Pray that God will not only give you his Word as a rule of holiness--but his grace as a principle of holiness.

Implore the guidance of God's Spirit. Neh 9:20, "You gave them your good Spirit to instruct them." Though the ship has a fine compass to guide it, and a good sail--yet without a gale of wind, it cannot make progress. Just so, though we have the written Word as our compass to sail by, and make use of our endeavors as the sail--yet unless the Spirit of God blows upon us, we cannot sail with profit. When the Almighty is as dew to us, then "we grow as the lily, and our beauty is as the olive tree." Hos 14:5-6. One may see the figures on a dial--but he cannot tell the time--unless the sun shines; we may read many truths in the Bible--but we cannot know them savingly until God's Spirit shines into our souls. 2 Cor 4:6. The Spirit is a Spirit of wisdom and revelation. Eph 1:17. When Philip joined himself to the eunuch's chariot--then he understood the Scriptures. Acts 8:35. When God's Spirit joins himself to the Word--then it will be effectual to salvation.

These rules observed, the written Word would, through God's blessing, become an "engrafted Word." James 1:21. A good scion grafted into a bad stock, changes the nature of it and makes it bear sweet and generous fruit. So when the Word is grafted savingly into men's hearts, it does sanctify them, and make them bring forth the sweet "fruits of righteousness." Phil 1:11. Thus I have answered this question, how we may read the Scriptures with most spiritual profit. In conclusion,

1. Content not yourselves with the bare reading of the Scriptures--but labor to find some spiritual improvement and profit. Get the Word transcribed into your hearts. Ps 37:31, "The law of his God is in his heart." Such as profit by reading the book of God, are the best Christians alive; they answer God's cost, they credit religion, they save their souls.

2. You who have profited by reading the Holy Scriptures, adore God's distinguishing grace. Bless God that he has not only brought the light to you--but opened your eyes to see it! He has unlocked his hidden treasure--and enriched you with saving knowledge. Some perish by not having Scripture, and others by not improving it. That God should pass by millions, and the lot of his electing love should fall upon you; that the Scripture, like the pillar of cloud, should have a dark side to others--but a light side to you; that to others it should be a dead letter--but to you the savor of life; that Christ should not only be revealed to you--but in you; Gal 1:16; --how should you be in a holy ecstasy of wonder, and wish that you had hearts of seraphim burning in love to God, and the voices of angels to make heaven ring with God's praises!

But some of the godly may say, that they fear they do not profit by the Word they read. As in the body when there is a failing of the vital organs--cordials are employed; so let me apply a few divine cordials to such as are ready to faint under the fear of non-proficiency.

1. You may profit by reading the Word, though you come short of others. The ground, which brought forth thirty fold, was good ground. Matt 13:8. Do not say that you have obtained no profit--because you are not equal with other eminent saints; those were counted strong men among David's worthies, though they did not attain to the honor of the first three. 2 Sam 23:19.

2. You may profit by reading the Word, though you are not of quick apprehension. Some impeach themselves because they are slow of understanding. When our blessed Savior foretold his sufferings, the apostles themselves understood not, and it was hidden from them. Luke 9:45. The author to the Hebrews speaks of some who were dull of hearing. Heb 5:11. Such as have weaker minds--may have stronger affections. A Christian with little knowledge may be kept from sin--as a man who has but weak sight--yet is kept by it from falling into the water.

3. You may profit by reading Scripture, although you have not excellent memories. Many complain their memories leak. Christian, are you grieved that you can remember no more? Then for your comfort,

1. You may have a good heart--though you have not so good a memory.

2. Though you can not remember all you read--yet you remember that which is most important, and which you have most need of. At a feast we do not eat of every dish--but we take so much as nourishes. It is with a good Christian's memory as it is with a lamp; though the lamp is not full of oil--yet it has so much oil as makes the lamp burn; though your memory is not full of Scripture--yet you retain so much as makes your love to God to burn.

Then, be of good comfort--you do profit by what you read. Take notice of that encouraging Scripture, "The Comforter, who is the Holy Spirit, he shall bring all things to your remembrance." John 14:26.

Amen.

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