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"The Entrance of THY WORDS Giveth Light"

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THE WORD OF GOD AND THE MAN OF GOD

BY THE LATE PROF. W. H. GRIFFITH THOMAS, D.D.*
A Bible Conference Address

“Abide thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; and that from a babe thou hast known the sacred writings which are able to make thee wise unto salvation, through faith which is in Christ Jesus. Every Scripture inspired of God is also profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction which is in righteousness: that the man of God may be complete, furnished completely unto every good work.”—2 Timothy 3:14-17.

In all Christian work there are three elements absolutely indispensable: the Spirit of God as the *power*, the Word of God as the *message*, and the man of God as the *instrument*. The Spirit of God uses the message by means of the man. In that hand-book for Christian workers, the Acts of the Apostles, we have these three elements in order brought before us. The first eleven chapters are full of the Spirit of God. The next nine chapters have less of the Spirit and more of the Word of God. The last eight chapters have very little about the Spirit, and very little about the Word but a great deal about the man of God. Eleven, nine, eight: that is the order and the proportion. The Spirit first, the Word second, and the man third. The Spirit greatest and foremost, then the Word, and only last of all the man. You will find, if you work through a concordance, that the references to the Spirit, the Word, and the man are exactly along this line. These three are indispensable and inseparable from all Christian work that is worthy of the name.

Two of these are very prominent in the passage I have read to you, and the other is at least implied in one word contained

* It is significant that some of the valuable books by this great teacher have been republished in America and in England in recent months, and are making a fresh appeal to Christian workers and students. Amongst these are his commentary on John's Gospel and Epistles, the Epistle of Peter, and the smaller book *Christianity is Christ*. The above article bears a definite Message today.

therein. My subject, therefore, I hope and believe in keeping with this Bible Conference, is *the Word of God in relation to the man of God for the purpose of the service of God*. There are three ideas round which I want to gather the various thoughts and suggestions of this passage.

1. What the Scriptures are

1. *They are Divinely Inspired*. We have that phrase, or word, as it really is, in verse sixteen, "Every Scripture inspired of God," or "all Scripture is given by inspiration of God." We are all aware that the phrase, as thus rendered, is one word in the original: "God-breathed". Every Scripture "God-breathed", or all Scripture is "God-breathed". I need not trouble to refer to the difference I have suggested between the Authorized Version and the Revised Version. The Authorized Version is, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable." The Revised Version is, "Every Scripture inspired of God is also profitable." We shall have differences of opinion but so far as I am concerned my preference here is decidedly for the Authorized. Yet I do not think there is very much in the difference, because in either case the reference must be to the Old Testament Scriptures. Either it is a statement that they are inspired and profitable; or else that, being inspired, they are also profitable. One reason that makes me prefer the old version in this case is that there are six or seven texts which in the Greek are exactly like this, with a noun and three adjectives connected by "and;" and this fact seems to me to suggest that we ought to translate this passage in the same way, which would be according to the Authorized rather than the Revised.

The one point I want to make is that the Scriptures are Divinely inspired, "God-breathed." How are they inspired? The only possible answer to that question is that we cannot tell. We know the results, but we do not know the method. The method is really of no consequence whatever, so long as we can be sure that the result *is* Divine inspiration. We must distinguish between our theories of the method and the blessed *reality of the fact* of inspiration; and, if we think of it, this is exactly according to what we have in other aspects of experience. Life, for instance,

cannot be defined in its essence; it can only be described in its effects. So with the Scriptures. You cannot define them in their essence, but you can describe them in their effects.

There are three reasons why we believe that the Scriptures are Divinely inspired, God-breathed. The *first* is, the testimony of the Lord Jesus Christ. Not only before, but after His resurrection, He bore His testimony to the Old Testament Scriptures in such a way that they were for Him the absolute and supreme authority. The *second* reason is the testimony of history. If there is one thing clearer than another it is the testimony of all Christian history to the inspiration of Holy Scripture. And, of course, the *third* reason is the testimony of experience. There is in this book that which, as Coleridge says, "finds us," something unique, something inexplicable, inexpressible, and yet something so real and so true and so blessed that we can say, and say with all our hearts, "This is from God." So that the Bible is the key to the lock of human nature. You can test these things for yourselves. When you put two and two together, you know, by the certain principle of mathematics, that four will be the result. When you bring human nature and the Bible together you will find that one is the problem and the other is the solution. All Scripture, every Scripture, is God-breathed; Divinely inspired.

2. Then they are *Divinely powerful*. Notice that word, especially those who happen to know the Greek Testament, "the sacred writings which *are able*". Mark the precise force of the Greek phrase, "which are *continuously* powerful", implying the continuous process of power. We know what this is when we contrast this Book with other books. They are continuously powerful, they are able, continuously able, to do everything that man needs for time and for eternity. Divinely inspired; Divinely powerful.

3. They are also *Divinely profitable*. "Every Scripture inspired of God is also profitable." It is a marvelous thing to realise that this Book was written centuries ago yet is as living and fresh and profitable today as ever. Think of the sermons that are composed and preached from this Book week by week. Making every allowance for all dry sermons that come forth from the ministry, there are many sermons still well worth hearing, and, if they are,

they come from this Book. Take, again, the commentaries; almost every month you read or hear of some commentary coming from the press. When you take it up and go through it, if the writer is a scholar and a Christian, you are certain to find something in it that you have found in no other. There is nothing more delightful than to study a commentary by a man who is worthy to write it, and to find in it marvellous proof of, and testimony to, the freshness and profitableness of the Word of God. I shall never forget the joy I experienced in Oxford one summer, years ago, in the presence of two men, or rather of their books. I gave about three hours a day for five weeks to the "boiling down" into my notebook of Westcott and Vaughan on Hebrews. Although I believed fully in the inspiration of the Epistle before I began that piece of work, those two books, and Westcott in particular, deepened the conviction as I followed that marvellous grammarian profound scholar, and true Christian. Take Lightfoot, Hort, or any other of the great grammatical exegetes and allow yourself to be led step by step from point to point, and you will find such continuous freshness, until it is true of you, as it was true of Alford, who said that in preparation for his great Greek Testament he found something fresh every time he went over passages for the new editions. The profitableness of the Scriptures is one of the marvels of the present day. Every true Christian student knows this in his own experience. You may come to the most familiar passage, and in the power of the Holy Spirit you may see something you have never seen before. As John Robinson of Leyden says, it is still true that:

The Lord hath yet more light and truth
To break forth from His Word.

So the Scriptures are Divinely inspired, Divinely powerful, and Divinely profitable.

2. What the Scriptures do

1. The first thing they do is to *save*; "which are able to make thee wise unto salvation." They bring into our minds, darkened by sin, the illumination of God's truth and will, and the result is that the Christian man is a man who has not five but six senses; the sixth sense of *spiritual perception* that comes

as the result of God's Word being brought to bear upon the soul. You know the oft-quoted illustration of a lady who looked at one of Turner's masterpieces. She said to him, "I never saw such colours in nature." "No, madam," he replied, "don't you wish you could?" William Pitt was once taken by Wilberforce to hear Robert Cecil preach, and Wilberforce prayed that Pitt might get a blessing. Wilberforce was rejoicing in the message, and prayed that his friend might hear and heed. Pitt placed himself politely to listen, just as he would attend to a speech in the House of Commons. At the end Wilberforce was overflowing with joy and thankfulness for the message, and said to Pitt, "What did you think of it?" "Well," said Pitt, "I gave the gentleman my best attention, but I could not understand what he was driving at." Why not? These things are *spiritually* discerned. "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God," and we might go on to translate the Greek, "neither can he recognize them." He has not the faculty. It is the Holy Spirit, by the Scriptures, Who makes men wise unto salvation—salvation in the widest, greatest, deepest of all senses. Salvation for the past; the Holy Scriptures assure us of *justification*. Salvation for the present; the Scriptures assure us of *sanctification*. Salvation for the future; the Scriptures assure us of *glorification*. Thus, whether we think of salvation in the past, present, or future, the Holy Scriptures are able to make us *wise* unto it. There is nothing to compare with that spiritual perception which comes from personal reception in experience of the Holy Spirit and the Word. I never tire of quoting a phrase which I believe was uttered by James Hamilton, of Regent Square: "A Christian on his knees sees further than a philosopher on his tip-toes;" because he has been made wise unto salvation. That is why St. James is able to say "Receive with meekness the implanted word, which is *able to save your souls*."

2 Then the Holy Scriptures *guide* as well as save. Let us look very closely at this passage. "Profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction which is in righteousness." I take these together and include them in the one word "guide". You will find four distinct ideas. The *first* is positive: profitable for "teaching." The *second* and *third* are negative: for "reproof" and "correction." The *fourth* is positive: for "instruction which is in righteousness."

First of all, the Scriptures inculcate truth; they are profitable for teaching. How true that is every one of us knows as he bows before the Scriptures and says, "Lord, send out thy light and Thy truth." They are profitable for "rebuke," or "conviction," whatever it may be. How true that is also. When we come to this Book, and there is something unconfessed and unforgiven in our soul the Scriptures convict, confute, rebuke us. If we regard iniquity in our heart the Lord will not hear us. That seems to be the meaning of the word; setting right all that is wrong. Many a life has to be corrected before it can be deepened. You must have the channel straight before you think of the depth of it. The fourth thing is positive: "instruction;" but it is really much more than that. It means "discipline," "making like a child," making us real "children of God." It is for "discipline which is in righteousness;" everything that is included in the combined ideas of the duties of parent and teacher. There is no discipleship worth the name without discipline, and not only etymologically but spiritually there is a close connection between these two words.

This is what I mean by guidance, everything for our daily life of sanctification in the fullest sense of that term; inculcation of truth, refutation of error, correction of our conduct and the exercise of our character and conduct. There is everything in the Word of God.

3. The third thing the Scriptures do is to equip. This comes at the end of verse seventeen; "that the man of God may be complete, furnished completely unto every good work." The words "complete" and "furnished" really mean jointed, adjusted, fitted; the reference is either to a piece of machinery fitted for its work or to the human body with every joint and part adjusted ready for action. "That the man of God may be complete unto every good work." That is what I mean by equipment. "The man of God." This is the last book in the Bible where the phrase "the man of God" occurs, and we are rather surprised to see it applied to such a weak, fragile person as Timothy. He is addressed twice by this title. In the Old Testament it was used for the prophets. Here in the New Testament it is actually given to Timothy. This is great encouragement for us, for it shows clearly that the weakest of us can have that highest of all titles, "man of God," one who is manly and godly; and when

you have manliness and godliness you are "God's man," a man of God through the Scriptures.

3. What the Scriptures Require

We have seen what the Scriptures are, what they do; now what do they require? This is the practical point of application for every one of us.

1. The first thing the Scriptures require is *knowledge*. We see this in the words: "the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; and that from a babe thou hast known the sacred writings." There were two generations behind this boy. He had been taught by his mother and by his grandmother from a babe these sacred writings. And he had also seen the Scriptures in their lives. The result was he knew them. This is what you and I need. First of all, we must *know* the contents of the Bible. Then we must seek to know the meaning of these contents. Thirdly, we must get to know their application to our life and to our service. I want to plead here for that. I plead for as full a knowledge of the actual contents of the Bible as we can possibly get. I would like to say two things to my ministerial brethren here. First, let us study the Bible itself rather than what has been said about it by others. I will undertake to say that there are scores of men in Oxford and Cambridge, possibly elsewhere, who know all about the critical theories of Deuteronomy, but who could not pass an examination on that book. And there are scores of men who know all about the critical theories of the Fourth Gospel, but who could not think their way through the twenty-one chapters of it and show how the whole Gospel is built up on two verses in chapter twenty. I would not set aside nor deem unimportant those critical theories, but I would say, with all my heart, if you want to know those critical theories at their proper value you must know the *contents* of the books *first*. Once grasp Deuteronomy or the Fourth Gospel in outline and you have a criterion for criticism that no one can touch and of which you never will be robbed.

The other thing is this. Let us study the books as they are, rather than their supposed sources. I do not mind, myself, whether Genesis has eleven sources or eleven hundred. But I want you to notice it is the book of Genesis in its *present form* that is the

world's classic. It is the book of Genesis as it is that is the power and inspiration of the Christian Church. Let us, first of all, master these books for ourselves. Knowledge, that is what we need above all things—intellectual, devotional, homiletical knowledge; but let us take care we do not put the homiletical first. Intellectual, what these books say and mean; devotional, what they mean to me; homiletical, what they mean to my people for next Sunday.

2. The second thing these books require is *trust*: “through *faith* which is in Christ Jesus.” That was Paul's view of the Old Testament. There are many people who do not take much account of the Old Testament Scriptures today, but Paul thought so highly of them that he said they were able to make wise unto salvation. They need trust. We all know how true that is. A promise comes to us; let us trust it. Let us trust Him who is the Promiser. In proportion to our faith in this Book we shall find the power of it in our daily life.

3. The third thing is *continuance*: “*Abide* thou in the things which thou hast learned.” Knowledge, trust, continuance. At least three times you have that idea of continuance, connected with the Word. “If ye *abide* in My Word, then are ye My disciples indeed.” “Continue thou in the things which thou hast learned.” “So Daniel continued.” “Continue instant in prayer.” “Continue ye in My love.” The secret of everything lies in knowledge and trust being continued day by day to the very end.

So I draw to a conclusion by asking you to notice first of all, the secret of personal power in Christian life. The Scriptures known, trusted, obeyed, and continued in; these things are the secret of personal power. Daily meditation, not weekly, otherwise it will become “weakly” in the other sense. If you live upon what you get from your minister on Sunday you will be a very poor specimen of the Christian life, for it will only be a secondhand Christianity. You will be a spoon-fed Christian all your life. If, day by day you come to God's Word for daily and definite meditation, you will find in that the secret of personal power. Your mind will become saturated with truth, your heart will be inspired by the love of the Scripture, your conscience will become ever-increasingly sensitive, your wills will be more and more subjected and submitted to the will and power of the

Scriptures. This is also the secret of ministerial power in Christian life. Some people are wondering what they shall preach about next Sunday, and they fear they will very soon come to an end of their Bible. If we keep close to the Greek New Testament or even to the English Bible, the difficulty will be, not what shall we preach about, but what must we leave out of the available abundance. If a man has been in the ministry for thirty or forty years, and follows this plan, at the end of the forty years there will be any number of subjects that he has never been able and never will be able to take, unless there are sermons up in heaven. The secret of ministerial freshness is *the power of God's Word*.

I sometimes wish we heard a little more about that one text in the Bible where the critic is associated with the Word of God, in Hebrews 4; "The Word of God is living, and active, and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing even to the dividing of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and is a critic of the thoughts and intents of the heart." There the Word of God is the critic of the man. If the minister would allow that book to criticise him a little oftener than perhaps he does what a difference it would make to his life and ministry! Prayerful and solitary study of the Word of God will make us indeed mighty in the Scriptures.

This is also the secret of *congregational* power. I want to speak, if I may, to my brothers and sisters who represent congregations here. This is the secret of congregational power. First, in regard to expository preaching from the pulpit. Secondly, in regard to Bible-class work. When I went once from one church to another as a curate, I inquired what kind of meetings they had during the week. There was a Bible-class on Monday. There was a church service and Bible-teaching on Wednesday. On Friday there was something similar, and on Saturday a prayer-meeting. Any concerts? No. I thought that was decidedly good. The entertainment element seemed entirely non-existent. All the time I was there my soul rejoiced in the fact that there were such opportunities, for Bible-teaching and exposition, teachers' preparation-classes, and prayer-meetings. The source of everything fruitful and mighty in the life of God's people is to be found there, in the Word of God. So let us determine that we

will go back to our churches and congregations with the words of the apostle upon our lips: "We will give ourselves to the ministry of the Word and prayer." Then it will be true of us: "I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and *the Word of God abideth in you*, and ye have overcome the evil one." "Thy Word have I hid in my heart that I might not sin against Thee." "The law of his God is in his heart; none of his steps shall slide."

INTERCESSION

If we pray in cold blood we are no longer the ministers of the Cross. True intercession is a sacrifice, a bleeding sacrifice, a perpetuation of Calvary, a "filling up" of the sufferings of Christ. St. Catherine told a friend that the anguish which she experienced, in the realization of the sufferings of Christ, was greatest at the moment when she was pleading for the salvation of others. "Promise me that Thou will save them!" she cried, and stretching forth her right hand to Jesus she again implored in agony, "Promise me, dear Lord, that Thou will save them. O give me a token that Thou wilt." Then her Lord seemed to clasp her outstretched hand in His, and to give her the promise and she felt a piercing pain as though a nail had been driven through the palm. I think I know the meaning of the mystic experience. She had become so absolutely one with the interceding Saviour that she entered into the fellowship of His crucifixion. Her prayers were red with sacrifice, and she felt the grasp of the pierced hand.

My brethren, this is that ministry which the Master owns, the agonised yearnings which perfect the sufferings of His own intercession. Are we in the succession? Do our prayers 'hurt'? Have we felt the painful fellowship of the pierced hand? I am so often ashamed of my prayers. They so frequently cost me nothing; they shed no blood. I am amazed at the grace and condescension of my Lord that He confers any fruitfulness upon my superficial pains.

Brethren, all vital intercession makes a draught upon a man's vitality. Real supplication leaves us tired and spent. Why the Apostle Paul, when he wishes to express the poignancy of his yearning intercession for the souls of men, does not hesitate to lay hold of the pangs of labour to give it adequate interpretation. "Ye remember, brethren, our travail." "My little children, of whom I travail in birth again till Christ be formed in you." Again I say, it was only the echo of a stronger word, "He shall see of the travail of His soul and shall be satisfied." Are we in the succession? Is intercession with us a travail, or is it a playtime, a recreation, the least exacting of all things, an exercise in which there is neither labour nor blood? *J. H. Jowett, M.A., D.D.*