

*COUNSELS TO CONVERTS.*

II

**A**S most of you know already, the especial object of our meeting is to continue the subject of last Tuesday evening. On that evening, I sought to lend a helping hand to beloved Christian friends, specially the younger brothers and sisters, who are setting out in the divine life.

As one who for fifty years has known the Lord, and has laboured in word and doctrine, I ought to be able, in some little measure, to lend a helping hand to these younger believers. And, by the grace of God, I can say, I am able to lend this helping hand; that is, if God will only condescend to use my own failures, to which I have freely referred, and my experience, as a help to others in walking on the road to heaven, I trust that your coming here will not be in vain. As I already told you, this was the very purpose of my leaving home, that I might help these dear young brethren.

I have already referred to seven different points, which appeared to me to be of great moment. There still remain, however, some other deeply important ones to be considered.

THE MANNER OF READING THE WORD.

One of the most deeply important points is, that of attending to the careful, prayerful reading of, and meditation on the word of God. I would ask your particular attention to one verse in the epistle of Peter (1 Peter ii. 2) where we are especially exhorted by the Holy Spirit through the apostle, regarding this. For the sake of the connection, let us read the first verse, “Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speaking, as now born babes, desire the sincere milk of the Word, that ye may grow thereby; if so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious.”

The particular point to which I refer is contained in the second and third verses, “as new-born babes, desire the sincere milk of the Word.” As growth in the natural life is attained by proper food, so in the spiritual life, if we desire to grow, this growth is only to be attained through the instrumentality of the word of God. It is not stated here, as some might be very willing to say, “the reading of the Word may be of importance under some circumstances.” That you may gain more by reading this tract, or this and that book, is not the statement here; it is “the Word,” and nothing else, and, under all circumstances,

STICK TO THE WORD OF GOD.

You say that the reading of this tract or that book often does you good. I do not question it at all. Nevertheless, the instrumentality which God has been pleased to appoint and use is that of the Word itself; and just in the measure in which the disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ attend to this, they will become strong in the Lord; and in so far as it is neglected, so far will they be weak. There is such a thing as babes being neglected, and what is the consequence? They never become healthy men or women, because of that early neglect.

Perhaps—and it is one of the most hurtful forms of this neglect—they obtain improper food, and therefore do not attain to the full vigour of manhood or womanhood. So with regard to the divine life. It is a most deeply important point, that we obtain right spiritual food at the very beginning of that life. What is that food? It is “the sincere milk of the Word;” that is the proper nourishment for the strengthening of the inner man. Listen, then, my dear brethren and sisters, to this advice with regard to the Word.

CONSECUTIVE READING.

First of all, it is of the utmost moment that we regularly read through the Scripture. We ought not to turn over the Bible, and pick out chapters as we please here and there, but to read it regularly through. We should read carefully and regularly through the Scriptures. I speak advisedly, and as one who has known the blessedness of thus reading the Word for the last forty-six years. I say forty-six years, because for the first four years of my Christian life I did not carefully read the word of God. I used to read a tract, or an interesting book; but I knew nothing of the power of the Word. I read next to nothing of it, and the result was, that, though a preacher then, and though I had preached in connection with the establishment again and again, yet I made no progress in the divine life. And why? Just for this reason, that I neglected the word of God. But it pleased God, through the instrumentality of a beloved Christian brother, then labouring in this very city and neighbourhood, with whom I became acquainted in Devonshire, to rouse in me an earnestness about the Word, and ever since then I have been a lover of it.

Let me, then, press upon you my first point, that of attending regularly to reading through the Scripture. I do not suppose that you all need the exhortation: many, I believe, have already done so, but I speak for the benefit of those who have not. To those I say, my dear friends, begin at once. Begin with the Old Testament, and when you have read a chapter or two and are about to leave off,

put a mark that you may know where you have left off. I speak in all simplicity, for the benefit of those who may be young in the divine life. The next time you read, begin the New Testament, and again put a mark where you leave off. And thus go on always, whether in the Old or New Testaments, putting in a mark, and reading alternately the Old and the New Testaments. Thus, by little and little, you will read through the whole Bible; and when you have finished, just begin again at the beginning.

THE CONNECTION OF SCRIPTURE.

Why is this so deeply important? Simply that we may see the connection between one book and another of the Bible, and between one chapter and another. If we do not read in this consecutive way, we lose a great part of what God has given to instruct us. Moreover, if we are children of God, we should be well acquainted with the whole revealed will of God—the whole of the Word. “All Scripture is given by inspiration, and is profitable.”

And much may be gained by thus carefully reading through the whole will of God. Suppose a rich relative were to die, and leave us, perhaps, some land, or houses, or money, should we be content with reading only the clauses that affected us particularly? No, we would be careful to read the whole will right through. How much more, then, in the will of God, ought we to be careful to read it right through, and not merely one and another of the chapters or books.

BENEFIT OF CONSECUTIVE READING.

And this careful reading of the word of God has this advantage, that it keeps us from making a system of doctrines of our own, and from having our own particular favourite views, which is very pernicious. We often are apt to lay too much stress on certain views of the truth which affect us particularly. The will of the Lord is, that we should know His whole mind. Again, variety in the things of God is of great moment. And God has been pleased to give us this variety in the highest degree; and the child of God, who follows out this plan, will be able to take an interest in any part of the Word.

Suppose one says, “Let us read in Leviticus.” Very well, my brother. Suppose another says, “Let me read in the prophecy of Isaiah.” Very well, my brother. And another will say, “Let us read in the gospel according to Matthew.” Very well, my brother; I can enjoy them all; and whether it be in the Old Testament, or in the New Testament, whether in the prophets, the gospels, the

Acts, or the Epistles, I should welcome it, and be delighted to welcome the reading and study of any part of the divine Word.

A SPECIAL BENEFIT.

And this will be particularly of advantage to us, in case we should become labourers in Christ's vineyard; because, in expounding the Word, we shall be able to begin at the beginning. We shall equally enjoy the reading of the Word, whether of the Old or the New Testament, and shall never get tired of it. I have, as before stated, known the blessedness of this plan for forty-six years, and though I am now nearly seventy years of age, and though I have been for nearly fifty years in the divine life, I can say, by the grace of God, that I more than ever love the word of God, and have greater delight than ever in reading it.

And this day, though I have read the Word nearly a hundred times right through, I am as fond as ever of reading the Scripture; I never have got tired of reading it, and this is more especially through reading it regularly, consecutively day by day, and not merely reading a chapter here and there, as my own thoughts might have led me to do.

READING THE WORD PRAYERFULLY.

Again, we should read the Scripture prayerfully, never supposing that we are clever enough, or wise enough, to understand God's Word by our own wisdom. In all our reading of the Scriptures let us seek carefully to have the help of the Holy Spirit; let us ask, for Jesus' sake, that He will enlighten us; He is willing to do it.

I will tell you how it fared with me, at the very first; it may be for your encouragement. It was in the year 1829, when I was living in Hackney, not far from here. My attention had been called to the teaching of the Spirit by a dear brother of experience, "Well," I said, "I will try this plan; and will give myself to the careful reading and meditation of the word of God after prayer, and I will see how much the Spirit is willing to teach me in this way."

AN ILLUSTRATION OF THIS.

I went accordingly to my room, and locked my door, and putting the Bible on a chair, I went down on my knees at the chair. There I remained for several hours in prayer and meditation over the word of God; and I can tell you that I learned more in those three hours which I spent in this way, than I had learned

for many months previously. I found the blessing was so great, that all the manuscripts, which I had written down from the lectures of the professors of Divinity in the university that I previously attended, I now considered to be of so little value, that when, soon after, I moved into Devonshire, I did not think them worth the carriage. This was because I now found the Holy Spirit to be a better teacher than professors of Divinity. I obtained the teaching of the divine Spirit, and I cannot tell you the blessedness it was to my own soul. I was praying in the Spirit, and putting my trust in the power of the Spirit as I had never done before.

You cannot, therefore, be surprised at my earnestness in pressing this upon you, when you have heard how precious to my heart it was, and how much it helped me.

#### MEDITATE ON THE WORD.

But again, it is not enough to have prayerful reading only, but we must also meditate on the Word. As in the instance I have just referred to, kneeling before the chair, I meditated on the Word; not simply reading it, not simply praying over it; all that, but, in addition, pondering over what I had read. This is deeply important. If you merely read the Bible, and no more, it is just like water running in at one side and out at the other. In order to be really benefited by it, we must meditate on it.

Not all of us, of course, can spend many hours, or even one or two hours, each day thus. Our business demands our attention. Yet, however short the time you can afford, give it regularly to reading, prayer, and meditation over the Word, and you will find it well repaid.

#### MAKE THE MEDITATION PERSONAL.

In connection with this, we should always read and meditate over the word of God, with reference to ourselves and our own heart. This is deeply important, and I cannot press it too earnestly upon you. We are apt often to read the Word with reference to others. Parents read it in reference to their children, children for their parents, evangelists read it for their congregations, Sunday-school teachers for their classes. Oh! this is a poor way of reading the Word; read so it will not profit. I say it deliberately and advisedly, the sooner it is given up, the better for your own souls. Read the word of God always with reference to your own heart, and when you have received the blessing in your own heart, you will be able to communicate it to others.

Whether you labour as evangelists, as pastors, or as visitors, superintendents of Sunday schools, or teachers, tract distributors, or in whatever other capacity you may seek to labour for the Lord, be careful to let the reading of the Word be with distinct reference to your own heart. Ask yourselves, How does this suit me, either for instruction, for correction, for exhortation, or for rebuke? How does this affect me? If you thus read, and get the blessing in your own soul, how soon will it flow out to others.

READ IN FAITH.

Another point. It is of the utmost moment in reading the word of God, that the reading should be accompanied with faith. “The word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it.” As with the preaching, so with the reading—it must be mixed with faith. Not simply reading it as you would read a story, which you may receive or not: not simply as a statement, which you may credit or not, or as an exhortation, to which you may listen or not; but as the revealed will of the Lord: that is, receiving it with faith. Received thus, it will nourish us, and we shall really reap benefit. Only in this way will it benefit us; and we shall gain from it health and strength, in proportion as we receive it with real faith.

BE DOERS OF THE WORD.

Lastly, if God does bless us in reading His word, He expects that we should be obedient children, and that we should accept the Word as His will, and carry it into practice. If this be neglected, you will find that the reading of the Word, even if accompanied by prayer, meditation, and faith, will do you little good. God does expect us to be obedient children, and will have us practice what He has taught us. The Lord Jesus Christ says: “If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them.” And in the measure in which we carry out what our Lord Jesus taught, so in measure are we happy children. And in such measure only can we honestly look for help from the Father, even as we seek to carry out His will.

If there is one single point I would wish to have spread all over this country, and over the whole world, it is just this, that we should seek, beloved Christian friends, not to be hearers of the Word only, but doers of the Word. I doubt not that many of you have sought to do this already, but I speak particularly to those younger brethren and sisters who may not yet have learned the full force of this. Oh, seek to attend earnestly to this; it is of vast importance. Satan will seek with much earnestness to put aside the word of God; but let us seek to car-

ry it out and to act upon it. The Word must be received as a legacy from God, which we have by the Holy Ghost,

THE FULNESS OF THE REVELATION GIVEN  
IN THE WORD.

And remember that, to the faithful reader of this blessed Word, it reveals all that we need to know of the Father—all that we need to know about the Lord Jesus Christ, all about the power of the Spirit, all about the world that lieth in the wicked one, all about the road to heaven, and the blessedness of the world to come. In this blessed book we have the whole gospel, and all rules necessary for our Christian life and warfare. Let us see, then, that we study it with our whole heart, and with prayer, meditation, faith, and obedience.

PRAYER.

The next point on which I will speak for a few moments, has been more or less referred to already; it is that of prayer. You might read the Word and seem to understand it very fully, yet, if you are not in the habit of waiting continually upon God, you will make little progress in the divine life. We have not naturally in us any good thing, and cannot expect, save by the help of God, to please Him. Therefore, it is the will of the Lord, that we should always own our dependence upon Him, and it becomes us to follow in prayer the earnestness of the Lord Jesus Christ.

That blessed One gave us an example in this particular, He gave whole nights to prayer, and we find Him on the lonely mountain engaged by night in prayer. And as in every way He is to be an example to us, so, in particular, on this point, He is also an example to us. The old evil, corrupt nature is still in us, though we are born again; therefore we have to come in prayer to God for help. We have to cling to the power of the Mighty One. Concerning everything we have to pray. Not simply when great troubles come, when our house is on fire, or our beloved wife is on the point of death, or our dear children are laid down in sickness, not simply at such times, but also in little things. From the very early morning, let us make everything a matter of prayer, and let it be so throughout the day, and throughout our whole life.

A Christian lady said, lately, that thirty-five years ago she heard me speak on this subject in Devonshire; and that then I referred to praying about little things. I had said, that suppose a parcel came to us, and it should prove difficult to untie the knot, and you cannot cut it; then you should ask God to help you, even to

untie the knot. I myself had forgotten the words, but she has remembered them, and the remembrance has been a great help to her again and again. So I would say to you, my beloved friends, there is nothing too small for prayer. In the simplest things connected with our daily life and walk, we should give ourselves to prayer; and we shall have the living, loving Lord Jesus to help us. Even in the most trifling matters I give myself to prayer, and often in the morning, even ere I leave my room, I have two or three answers to prayer in this way.

Young believers, in the very outset of the DIVINE life, learn, in childlike simplicity, to wait upon God for everything! Treat the Lord Jesus Christ as your personal Friend, able and willing to help you in everything. How blessed it is to be carried in His loving arms all the day long! I would say, that the divine life of the believer is made up of a vast number of little circumstances and little things. Every day there come before us a variety of little trials, and if we seek to put them aside in our own strength and wisdom, we shall quickly find that we are confounded. But if, on the contrary, we take every-thing to God, we shall be helped, and our way shall be made plain. Thus our life will be a happy life!

FAITH MUST COME FIRST.

There are two passages in the word of God of the deepest moment to Christians, and I would therefore speak on them. The first is in 2 Peter i. 5: "Besides this, add to your faith virtue," etc. It is here supposed that we have faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, because we are commanded to add to our faith virtue, and these other graces. The apostle Peter is addressing believers, and here tonight I am supposing that I am speaking to believers. Yet, peradventure, there may be some who are not believers. To you, if there be any such, I would say, you are sinners. You may be young in this life, or you may be advanced in years; you may be very moral, or otherwise; but in the sight of God you are sinners. This you must, if you would be saved, realize and understand that you are sinners, and not only so, but sinners deserving punishment. You are lost, and have no power of your own to save yourselves. The world talks about turning over a new leaf, but that will not satisfy Divine justice. The record of your past sins stands against you, and must be blotted out. What then? You are sinners, and sinners deserving of punishment, nothing but punishment. You must either suffer that eternal punishment yourselves, or obtain another to bear it. Well, the Lord Jesus Christ came into the world to bear this punishment. He has borne it in our room and stead. He has suffered for us. And now the only one thing that God looks for from the sinner is, that we should put our trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, and in Him alone, for the salvation of our souls. We must look entirely

to Himself; we must look only to the blessed Lamb of God, who was nailed to the Cross. Whosoever trusteth in Him shall be saved. Let his sins be never so many, yet he shall have forgiveness for all his transgressions. He is born again—is regenerated, through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. He will be made a child of God, an heir of God, and joint-heir with Christ. Thanks be to His name. “who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of His dear Son.” [ Col. 1:13]

If we have believed in the Lord Jesus, we are, however, not to be satisfied with this, but to seek to add to our faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness.

COURAGE.

“Add to your faith virtue.” “Virtue” here means fortitude, or courage; implying that the very first thing after believing on the Lord Jesus Christ, is, to own our attachment to Him. You must stand boldly out and make confession of Him. Some dear children of God think we may keep our religion to ourselves; there is no use in bringing it before our friends, companions, or relations—no use getting into trouble with them about it. What is the result? The Lord Jesus Christ will not stand on our side to strengthen us, if we will not take our stand by Him. Weak we are, weak we must remain, as long as we are in this state. I do not say you will go to hell. But you are half-hearted, and the Master wants valiant soldiers. He looks for fortitude. He will have us let those around us know whose we are, honestly and openly. Therefore we ought to be decided for Christ; that is of the utmost moment. The more we come out from the world, the better it will be for us in the things of God. We shall be strengthened, and the bolder we are for Christ, the happier will it be for ourselves. Let me impress this on the hearts of my younger brethren, and sisters in Christ; and if they have not already done so, let them make confession of Christ.

KNOWLEDGE.

“Add to your faith, virtue, and to virtue, knowledge.” Here, again, we have something to learn. I have already spoken of the importance of reading and meditating on God’s word; but here comes a special exhortation to add to your faith, knowledge. We are not to be satisfied with knowing that we are sinners, and that Christ is our Saviour, but we must seek to make progress in knowledge. Why is this? Because to increase in knowledge, is to increase in the knowledge of God. And as we increase in this knowledge of Him, we learn more and more

of His love; and that it is the very joy of His heart to do us good. We see more and more what a lovely Being God is; and the result of this again is, that we are satisfied with His dealings with us.

I have passed through very many trials, some of them of no ordinary character; yet I have rejoiced in God. For nearly ten years—from 1838 to 1848—I had difficulty upon difficulty, scarcely anything but difficulty. But I had always the help of God, and always was joyous, even in the darkest day, because I knew that all came from God, my Father. On that account I say to you, seek to increase in knowledge; and then although there may fall upon you trial and affliction, even heavy trial, deep affliction, yet if you can say, “It is from my Father, my loving Father; from Him who spared not His Son for me, and from Him who hath said that He will make all things work together for good; having freely given up Jesus for me, He will freely give me all things; therefore this trial must be good for me, else He would not suffer it to befall me.” You can easily see how in such a state of mind, we can pass through these trials; and even in the midst of them we may have calmness and peace, and even holy heavenly joy. Thus we shall be able to meet them. That is the result of being really acquainted with God. And the only way to get this knowledge is, by diligent study of the Word, and by the teaching of the Spirit from that Word. Let us, therefore, aim after this knowledge, and not be satisfied with the simple belief that we shall get to heaven.

#### TEMPERANCE.

The apostle next says, add to your faith temperance. Now this is not merely abstaining from excess in drinking—though it does mean that; but self-control generally is here the meaning of this word. That is, regarding everything, whether meat or drink, or any other thing, that we do not give way to the abuse of anything God has given us. It is here used as regarding our temper, appetites, and deportment generally. Because by the way in which we conduct ourselves, or behave ourselves, do we glorify God or dishonour Him. The world is watching us, to see how so-and-so, who has become a Christian, behaves himself. And if they see us walk in-consistently, then do they speak against our Master; while if, on the other hand, they see us walk consistently, they are compelled to give honour to our God.

#### PATIENCE.

“And to temperance, patience;” that is, to be satisfied with the will of God. If we have this contentment, we shall be able to endure tribulation and suffering, and even bereavement and sickness, satisfied that it is for the best. If we are the children of God, we are but strangers and pilgrims here. This is not our home, we here have no abiding city; therefore we heed not the troubles or difficulties by the way, they will soon pass. Let us therefore aim after showing, by our quiet, patient demeanour, that we are satisfied with God.

GODLINESS.

Add to your faith godliness, that is, the habit of referring everything to God. That we pray about everything and do everything as seeing Him who is above; that we walk as confident that God is our strength; that we walk by day and by night, as in the sight of God; in short, that we walk in holy, precious fellowship with God; that we remember that He is before us, and with us; that the Father’s eye is upon us, and that we seek to be guided and directed in everything by Him. Oh that we might take up the meaning of all this, and carry it into our lives!

Now, my beloved Christian friends, is it your calm, quiet purpose to aim after all this? If so, you may be certain that God will give you more power to follow Him. God allows us, for His own wise purpose, to have our lot in this life cast amidst darkness in many respects. But think not of that; remember, we are getting nearer the end. The day is drawing near when the Lord Jesus Christ will come. I do not say by this that I can specify the time, or that it will be such and such a date; I know nothing of the precise time. But this is certain, we are getting nearer, nearer the end. Nearer the day when the Lord Jesus Christ will appear in glory to call His waiting saints to meet Him in the air.

How the thought ought to warm our hearts, and to fill us with a longing to serve Him, and to be like Him. If others are cold, then let us seek to warm them. If others are foolish, let us seek to teach them. If fire be lacking in others, let us, His servants, be burning coals to set them on fire. Let us remember, that it is more blessed to give than to receive. Oh, the blessedness of bearing much love to others, instead of receiving it only; of warming others instead of being warmed only; of teaching others instead of being taught ourselves only. Oh, therefore, beloved in Christ, let it be a matter of great moment to you, that you aim after godliness, living near to God in this life, that we may enjoy the blessedness of being living witnesses for Him! Let us seek that we may be made burning coals; and if all the brethren and sisters here were thus set on fire, how soon should we set Mildmay Park on fire. Then, would it not extend to Hackney? And then it would light up London itself. In helping to bless others we

shall be greatly blessed in our own souls; and the fire thus kindled will burn in our own hearts. The passage which follows this contains so much that I will rather leave it for our next meeting.