

**The Scriptures**  
**and**  
**How to Use Them**

**BY**  
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## FOREWORD.

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THE vitality of the Bible is its most evident characteristic. It has survived alike the indifference of some ages and the active opposition and the hostile criticism of others. It is necessary always to bear in mind the fundamental laws of the Universe in which we live, and among these not the least important is that there is no effect without adequate cause. What then is the sufficient cause of the survival of the Bible through the vicissitudes of the millenniums of its existence? The cause is not to be found in its literary value, though that is high. Nor in any sanctity clothing it in mystery, for it is open to all to read 'in their own tongues' as well as in the languages in which it was originally written.

The vitality of the Bible is capable of but one explanation. It is of Divine origin. Only God could thus hold the mirror to the soul of man, only God could thus plumb the depths of human personality, and only God could thus meet every human need. Hence its searchings which lay bare the inmost heart of the reader and its promises which bring with them peace, courage, and victory. In some way not readily defined, but not at all to be evaded, when men read the Bible they are constrained to say very much what the posse of constables sent to arrest the Lord Jesus said of Him, 'Never book speaks as does this Book'.

There is a condition, however, for only to the diligent does it yield its treasures. If the Scriptures are indeed God-breathed (not 'inspired' but 'God-inspired' is the word the Apostle Paul used in the famous passage in his letter to Timothy), whatever else the term may mean, at least it means that they were written with care, that they are an accurate record of the message of God to men. It follows then that they must be read with care, that the reader who begrudges pains in his reading stands to lose and to be led astray. For while the way of Salvation is set forth with the simplicity appropriate to such a theme, this is not the sole content of the Bible, which has for its object also "that the man of God may be complete, furnished completely unto every good work" (2 Tim. 3. 15-17).

To render some help to those who desire to use the Bible intelligently, and with a good conscience, is the purpose of the following pages.

C.F.H.

# The Scriptures, and How to Use Them.

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## The Voice of God.

THE Scriptures are the voice of God to the soul of man. He who reads them to listen to that voice finds what the Apostle Paul said to Timothy confirmed in his own experience, that they are “profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction which is in righteousness”, 2 Tim. 3. 16; profitable for teaching, since he learns the will of God; profitable for reproof, since what is wrong in his life is revealed and acknowledged; profitable for correction, since his ways are ‘directed to the keeping of God’s statutes’; profitable for instruction in righteousness, since by the understanding gained from the Scriptures he not only ‘cleanses his way’ but learns to ‘hate every false way’ and to ‘walk in the way of righteousness’. Obedience to the Word of God begets increasing delight in it. This is implied by the writer of Psalm 119, when he says, “My soul hath observed Thy testimonies; and I love them exceedingly”, v. 167. To him who thus obeys their voice the Scriptures are a constant subject of happy meditation. His soul is fed by them, and they become ‘sweet to his taste’ and produce spiritual growth. They become his counsellor in all circumstances and upon all

occasions, his guide in difficulties, giving light to his path, his comfort in adversity, giving him patience and hope, his weapon in spiritual warfare, giving him victory over his adversaries. Storing them in his memory, and so 'laying them up in his heart', he proves them to be a power against sin and temptation.

### **Witness - Bearing.**

This private use of the Word of God is, however, inseparable from another. For the light shines into our own souls that it may shine out to others. Every Christian is called to bear witness to the truth. To this end we are exhorted to be "seen as lights in the world, holding forth the Word of Life", and by a godly life to "adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things". The right use of the Scriptures in this respect produces a new translation of them, not into a written language, but into deeds and words and ways, a translation "known and read of all men".

Next in importance to the private reading of the Scriptures as the voice of God to the individual soul is the prayerful and methodical study of them. The subject of Bible study, however, is too comprehensive for our present pages, and must be reserved for separate treatment. We proceed to consider the use of the Scriptures for the purposes of imparting instruction. And firstly as to public reading, which should be an effective means to this end.

### Public Reading.

The public reading of the Word of God was ordered for Israel from the earliest times of their existence as a nation in Canaan. Moses had given command that at the end of every seven years, at the Feast of Tabernacles, the priests should 'read the Law before all Israel in their hearing', Deut. 31. 10-13. After his earliest conquests in Canaan Joshua similarly read "all the words of the Law" to assembled Israel, omitting "not a word of all that Moses had commanded", Josh. 10. 3, 4. Again, Nehemiah records of Ezra that on the completion of the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem he read the Law to all the people, and, of the Levites, that "they read in the book, in the Law of God, distinctly; and they gave the sense", Neh. 8. 1-8. In later times the Law was read regularly in the synagogues. The New Testament also gives abundant evidence that public reading obtained in the gatherings of the earliest Christian churches. To such ministry Paul referred in his injunction to Timothy, "Till I come give heed to reading", intending thereby reading in public, for he couples with it exhortation and teaching, 1 Tim. 4. 13, and similarly John, in the introduction to the Apocalypse, "Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear", Rev. 1. 3.

There is no gathering of Christians in which the reading of Scripture is out of place. In the home the daily assembling of

the household for the purpose is of the utmost importance. God is honoured, and the family derives incalculable benefit. The recognition of this leads many to gather the household twice in the day to hear the Word. A family without Scripture reading is like a ship without chart and compass: In a prayer meeting the reading of a suitable portion is a valuable help, where the nature and purpose of the meeting and the appropriate length of time available for prayer are duly considered. Again, where Bible addresses form one of the special objects of a meeting, the reading of the Word should have prominence. There is a tendency to overestimate the value of an address in comparison with the reading which introduces it. It is, however, of paramount importance that the company present should hear God's voice directly from His Word; important and necessary as the service of exposition is, it is yet subsidiary to this. Of a certain servant of God the remark was made that to hear him read a chapter from the Bible was a sermon in itself.

There is perhaps nothing in public ministry demanding more care and attention than the reading of Scripture. It is required in a reader that he should endeavour to enter intelligently into the meaning and force of what he is reading, in order that he may read earnestly, for in the reading of Scripture earnestness is but the handmaid of reverence.

Soulless reading fails to impress the hearer. The greater the reader's discernment of the Divine meaning of the Word the more intelligent and earnest his utterance. Accordingly the measure of his spirituality is the measure of the spiritual effect produced.

In addition to this the force of the words can be properly conveyed only (1) when they are rightly pronounced and distinctly articulated, (2) when emphasis is given to the particular word or words which require it, (3) when the reading is characterised by that deliberateness of utterance which, without being drawled, is sufficiently slow for the hearer to grasp the sense, and (4) when the necessary pauses are duly observed, pauses not only grammatical but rhetorical, as, for example, after the subject of a sentence when it consists of more than one word, or after an emphatic word. Other points are important, such as the attitude of the body and the proper modulation of the voice. Good reading has been described as "like the conversation of an earnest person thinking to himself aloud". This being so, the voice will be natural and yet expressive, and the reading will be as much like speaking and as little like reading as possible.

### **The Teacher: His Responsibilities.**

One of the offices of the Spirit of God is to guide the Christian into all the truth contained in His Word. This implies the need

of supernatural guidance to understand its teachings, and forbids anyone to attempt to expound the Scriptures save those who are themselves taught of the Spirit.

The mere, unaided intelligence is incapable of understanding or rightly expounding the oracles of God. That which has been "given by inspiration of God" requires spiritual life and understanding in him who handles it. "The natural man receiveth not the things of the spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him; and he cannot know them, because they are spiritually judged", 1 Cor. 2. 14.

The Bible lifts its voice against any attempt to add to it or take from it: "Ye shall not add unto the Word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish from it", Deut. 4. 2. "Add thou not unto His words, lest He reprove thee, and thou be found a liar," Prov. 30. 6. The word of Jeremiah, too, is ever to be remembered in dealing with the Holy Scriptures in the way of exposition, "He that hath My Word, let him speak My Word faithfully", Jer. 23. 28. James found it necessary to warn his brethren against being "many teachers", "knowing", he says, "that we shall receive the heavier judgment", James 3. 1. Timothy, who was enjoined by Paul to "give heed to reading, to exhortation, to teaching", to "be diligent in these things", and give himself wholly to them, was also exhorted to 'give diligence

to present himself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, handling aright the word of truth', 1 Tim. 4. 13, 15, 2 Tim. 2. 15.

To the question put by Philip to the eunuch, "Understandest thou what thou readest?" Acts 8. 30, the responding question, "How can I, except some one shall guide me?" expresses generally the needs of the seeker after truth; and though the Author of the Word oftentimes communicates directly the meaning of some portion of it to the inquiring soul, He ordinarily employs human instrumentality, as He did for the Ethiopian in the desert of Gaza. Human instruments, however, require Divine preparation, and the character of this we now briefly indicate.

### The Teacher: His Qualifications.

Granted the enjoyment of the first indispensable possession, spiritual life in Christ through the new birth, the requisite qualifications of one who engages in exposition of the Word of God may be comprehended under the following three headings: (1) *Subjection to the Word*; (2) *Sense of its sacredness*; (3) *Soundness of judgment*.

#### (1) *Subjection to the Word of God.*

"If any man willeth to do His will, he shall know of the teaching", John 7. 17. In these words the Lord laid down an all-important condition, applicable to that acquirement of the knowledge of Scripture

which is essential for the teacher of its doctrines. The knowledge that results in obedience leads to increased power to apprehend the meaning of the truths of Scripture. A subject will beget an understanding heart. One cannot yield submission to God's Word without gaining an increased understanding of it. The understanding which is necessary in order to teach it is in direct proportion to our conformity to the will of God revealed in it. "If ye abide in My Word, then are ye truly My disciples; and ye shall know the truth," John 8. 31, 32. A disciple is, literally, a learner. That anyone is a teacher presupposes that he has first been a learner. Discipleship of Christ, however, involves the practice of what has been taught by Him, and that is what is implied by "abiding in His Word" For the learner, precept must come before practice; for the teacher, practice before precept.

This, then, is the progressive order inevitable for one who is to unfold the meaning of holy writ—subjection of heart, conformity of life, increase of understanding, capacity for teaching. So it was with the Apostles whom the risen Lord was about to commission to go forth to preach and teach. His work of tender grace and loving patience in moulding their wills to His own was completed. There was not one of them of divided heart toward Him. Then it was that He "opened their mind, that they might understand the Scrip-

tures'', Luke 24. 45. That was evidently a special preparation for their work. Loyalty of the heart to Him, and minds enlightened by Him, this, with the Holy Spirit's power, rendered their ministry effective. Preparation for all right exposition of God's Word must be of this character.

(2) *Sense of Its Sacredness.*

The Word of God is a hallowed shrine, and one who enters its precincts must bear in mind that it is holy ground—holy, because its "Architect and Maker is God". God Himself is there. There, too, He has enshrined His Son. The description "the Holy Scriptures'', as used by Paul in writing to Timothy, 2 Tim. 3. 15, was evidently that by which the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms were known at that time. By the word "Holy" they were distinguished from other writings. And what is there stated of the writings of the Old Testament was intended to be equally applicable to those of the New, for in the succeeding verse the Apostle refers, with special emphasis, to the New Testament Scriptures, though of course embracing in his statement the whole, both Old and New.

What God has said as to the character of His Word is calculated to make us weigh well the responsibility attached to handling it. "The words of the Lord are pure words; as silver tried in a furnace on the earth, purified

seven times," Psa. 12. 6. How great the need, then, of a heart which has first experienced the effects of their purity and learned to stand in awe of their holiness! He who has not learned to tremble at God's Word is not fit to expound its truths. Simple mental apprehension of the meaning of Scripture is imperfect machinery for giving instruction in it. Where the mind is darkened spiritually, educational training is unavailing in this respect. For there are two sides to the sacredness of Scripture; it is both holy itself, and is intended to make men holy.

The power of the Word to affect the heart and mould the life is the great reason why we are bidden to "take heed" to it; and the very passage which thus warns us also declares of the words of the prophets that in uttering them they were "borne along" by the Holy Ghost, not putting their private interpretation upon what God revealed to them, 2 Peter 1. 19-21. By implication, therefore, private interpretation on the part of others is forbidden. The holy regard begotten by the realisation that we are dealing with the Word of God will debar us from ascribing to any portion a meaning which is not supported by the rest of Scripture, and from receiving teaching from any man without examining it ourselves in the light of that Word. The believer is to "prove all (teachings)" and to "hold fast that which is good", 1 Thess. 5. 21.

### (3) *Soundness of Judgment.*

No other book has been written the words of which may be made to bear so many meanings as the words of the Bible. This is owing both to the fact that its purpose is to convey spiritual truth, and to the figurative nature of much of its language. The limitations of our minds necessitate the employment of things material for instruction in things spiritual. But the very variety of the forms of figurative expression, the different senses in which the same expression is used for embodying various spiritual ideas, and the spiritual teaching underlying many of the statements of historical fact, present dangers for the teacher. He needs to guard against the bias of opinions which he may have derived from others, and his imagination and fancy require due restraint, lest he should attribute to a passage of Scripture a meaning not intended by its Author.

Now the soundness of judgment which is necessary for this is to be derived only from communion with God, and is therefore largely the outcome of the subjection to His Word and the regard for its sacredness which we have been considering. The discretion which enables one to judge what is truth and what is error comes by constant and prayerful meditation in and study of the Word of God in its entirety. This it is, too, which guards the teacher against giving prominence to any doctrine at the expense of other teachings of

Scripture. He learns also to discern what is figurative and what is literal, what historical facts have an allegorical meaning, and what is written to convey spiritual instruction simply and directly. Vivid conception is not without its value, but, apart from the restraining influences to which reference has been made, it leads a teacher to imagine in the narratives of Scripture circumstances unwarranted by the facts stated, or to spiritualise these historical records to the beclouding of the truths embodied in them. Fanciful exposition is not glorifying to God; His people are not thereby built up on their holy faith.

Guided by a sanctified judgment the faithful teacher of God's Word, while not refusing any legitimate aid to the study of its pages, will turn to the Word itself for the light it throws upon its own teachings.

### **The Teacher: His Guiding Principles.**

Right exposition of the Word of God is based upon the recognition of certain broad principles, the most important of which may now be enunciated and illustrated.

*The Scriptures Present an Essential and All-pervading Unity.*

To enter at length upon this subject would be beyond the scope of these pages; we refer to it briefly to indicate its importance for the teacher. Variety of theme and treatment is a marked characteristic of Scripture, but it

is a variety blended into harmony. God's Word, like His works, presents unity in diversity. The consideration of a particular subject therefore demands due regard to the various aspects in which it is found in different parts of the Book. To take, for instance, the Gospel, its promises are given in the Old Testament, the Person Who constitutes its subject is revealed in the Gospels, the record of its testimony is given in the Acts, and the exposition of its nature in the Epistles. Recognition of the unity of Scripture will keep before us that balance of truth which involves the due consideration of widely different yet closely associated subjects, such as Divine sovereignty and human responsibility, or, again, the necessity of faith without works, and of works as the evidence of faith.

This unity is especially to be borne in mind when comparing the contents of the New Testament and those of the Old. This is illustrated by the revelation of the character of God. One of the early errors of the present era was that of Marcion, in the second century, who declared that the Old Testament reveals the righteousness and holiness of God while the New Testament reveals His goodness and mercy. The truth is that Scripture throughout reveals God as infinitely merciful in His justice and infinitely just in His mercy. That greater prominence is given to one side of God's character in one part of Scripture than

in another is obvious, but in considering such subjects we must keep before us that blending of truth which is revealed in the whole.

Men often speak of the discrepancies of Scripture. Careful study shows that as a rule these are only apparent. It must be recognised that in some cases, as, for instance, of numbers or the order of events, it is not easy to see how certain statements can be harmonised, but the man of faith will rest assured that even in these cases further light from God would remove all difficulty. And it is often found that what at first sight seemed discrepancies, so far from marring the unity of Scripture, afford, when they are really understood, striking instances of it, and thus add their quota to the proof of the genuineness of the books in which they occur. An instance occurs in the Lord's explanation of the parable of the sower. Matthew's Gospel describes the one who brings forth fruit as "he that heareth the Word and *understandeth* it", Matt. 13. 23; the corresponding word in Mark's Gospel is "*accept*", Mark 4. 20; the word given by Luke is "*hold fast*", Luke 8. 15. How comes it that three different words are given for the Lord's single utterance? Apart from other considerations, the language spoken by Christ was not that used in the Gospels, the writers of which represented in the Greek tongue what the Lord spoke in the Aramaic. This at once accounts for variety of rendering, for of this the word used was

doubtless capable. The point for the careful expositor is the harmony contained in this variety, the progression of thought which is evidenced in the three words. To bear fruit one must first understand the Word, then receive it, and then hold it fast. Thus while one idea pervades the whole, the different expressions convey additional teaching to that of the facts of the parable itself. Possibly one word might have sufficed to represent that used by the Lord; but the Spirit of God had other purposes in view, and chose to use the three distinct words for the purposes of imparting instruction in their variety. Thus so far from discrepancy there is harmony.

Since almost all themes of Scripture are treated of by more than one of its writers, and most themes by a large number, it is important in taking up a subject to study all that Scripture reveals concerning it, so as to have a well-proportioned view of the truth.

*Revelation in Scripture is Progressive.*

Associated with the unity of the Word of God is the continuity and progressive character of His communications therein recorded. Since to Him Who "inhabits eternity", to Whom therefore the future is as real as the present, the whole plan of His dealings was known from the beginning, it was in full view of all subsequent revelations that the earliest were given. Each revelation contains the germ of those that follow it, and

by them accordingly receives its explanation. No better example is afforded than the sublimely comprehensive declaration given immediately after the Fall, "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed: it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel", Gen. 3. 15. In that primal prediction lay the foreshadowing of the conflict between the kingdoms of Light and Darkness with which later revelations of the Scripture are concerned, and which received its great fulfilment in the Cross of Christ.

If, however, the earlier revelations were capable of development, in none was there essential defect. Though incomplete, according to the providential arrangement of God, each was, like His own character, perfect in itself. Each admitted of expansion, but not of rectification. The manifestation of a new method in His dealings with men does not indicate inherent imperfection in any of the methods that preceded it. Whatever limitations characterised the earlier, they were limitations imposed by God Himself, according to His foreknowledge of the conditions of humanity at the time, and with a view to those dealings which were to follow. This is well illustrated by the case of the Law given at Mount Sinai. In writing to the Galatians, Paul refers to it as "weak and beggarly rudiments", Gal. 4. 9. This does not indicate any defect in the Law itself,

which is thus described only by way of contrast with the succeeding revelation of the Gospel. In itself, "the Law is holy, and the commandment holy, and righteous, and good", Rom. 7. 12. It was given in view of the Gospel age which was to follow it, and was itself instrumental in the fulfilment of the promises given in the age which preceded it. Nor when the Gospel was declared was the Law repudiated. "What the Law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God, sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and as an offering for sin, condemned sin in the flesh; that the ordinance of the Law might be fulfilled in us," Rom. 8. 3, 4. Here, then, we have both continuity and progression. A recognition of the progressive character of revelation helps us to obtain that perspective of the ways of God with men which forms the basis of the true exegesis of Scripture.

*Scripture Interprets Itself.*

The unity of the Scriptures and the progressive nature of their revelations sufficiently establish the Divine origin of the Bible. For it is not possible to show that any two of the nearly fifty writers agreed together that their statements should not be found at variance. To the contrary, indeed, the discrepancies already mentioned testify. Moreover, the books were written at intervals through a period of over fifteen hundred years.

The Divine origin of the Bible, however,

involves a divinely established relationship of thought in the writers. The obvious conclusion from which is that this Book is self-explanatory. And such is found to be the case. Truths and topics are interwoven throughout the volume; and in such a way as to demand that those who would know the mind of God concerning any part of the Scriptures should search the whole of them. In this connection no little significance attaches to that useful array of references which fills the margin of many editions of the Book, both testifying to its uniqueness and giving evidence that the people of God have been guided to look to His Word itself for illumination upon all its passages.

The light of Scripture is usually thrown upon a passage in one or more of three ways: (*a*) by the context, (*b*) by the scope of the book in which it occurs, and (*c*) by some parallel passage or passages.

### **Text and Context.**

(*a*) What is generally understood as the context is that which immediately precedes and follows a Scripture. This definition, though largely true, is, however, inadequate. The word "context" means 'what is woven together', and in this sense is not inappropriate, as having to do with the web, so to speak, of a written discourse. The context, indeed, embraces the whole series of statements or arguments connected with the

passage in view. Unless this is taken into consideration, the meaning directly intended by God, which is of course the main thing in exposition, is not unlikely to be missed.

When, for instance, the Apostle Paul says "Ye are fallen away from grace", Gal. 5. 4, the statement, if detached from its connection, might be made to imply that it is possible for one who has been saved by grace to lose his salvation. The context, immediate and more remote, shows that the Apostle is remonstrating with those who were being led by false teachers to seek justification by the Law as well as by faith in Christ, and that he is protesting in vivid language that any who did so were putting themselves into a position incompatible with the grace brought to them by the Gospel. Again, the statement "Nothing is unclean of itself: save that to him that accounteth anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean", Rom. 14. 14, might, if isolated from its setting, be perversely used as a license for carnality. The context shows that the writer is treating, not of practices which, by the universal witness of the human conscience, as well as by express declarations of Scripture, are known to be wrong, but of meats and drinks and the observance of days, concerning which convictions may vary.

The context will frequently determine whether words have a literal or a figurative meaning. The statement of Christ, "He

that eateth Me, even he shall live by Me'', John 6. 57, was not intended to be understood literally. The more immediate context makes clear that He was speaking figuratively. For, firstly, the Lord had already shown the spiritual import of His words in His statement, "He that believeth on Me hath eternal life'', v. 47. Secondly, He subsequently said, "The words that I have spoken unto you are spirit, and are life'', v. 63. Thirdly, the larger context shows that He was speaking to the Jews with increasing obscureness of utterance because of their persistent unbelief and hardness of heart.

### Scope.

(b) The scope (literally, 'what is in view') of a book denotes the writer's aim, his design, general or particular, according as the whole or a section of his writing is under consideration. Clearly, if the meaning of a passage is to be obtained from this source, the book in which it occurs should be read through. Diligent perusal of the whole is indispensable for an understanding of the parts. A point that may of itself seem obscure often becomes clear in the light of the entire record. Sometimes the scope is directly mentioned. Here we may note that the scope of the Old Testament is briefly given us by the Apostle Peter under three headings, (1) "the grace that should come unto you" (lit., 'the grace unto you'), (2) "the sufferings of Christ"

(lit., 'the sufferings unto Christ'), (3) "the glories that should follow them", 1 Peter 1. 10, 11. Of much of the Old Testament the true exposition cannot be given save in view of these three themes. Again, the design of the Gospel of John is declared in the words, "these [things] are written that ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God ; and that believing ye may have life in His Name", John 20. 31.

### **Parallel Passages.**

(c) A third means of obtaining light upon a portion is by the study of parallel passages. These may be classed, firstly, as verbal. In this respect the help of a really good concordance is invaluable, especially one which shows readily, not only all the places where the same English word occurs, but also all those containing the same word in the original.

### **Verbal Parallels.**

A word or phrase used somewhat obscurely in one place may be clearly explained by the connection in which it occurs elsewhere. Thus, on comparing the word rendered in 1 Cor. 15. 20 "are asleep" (lit., 'have fallen asleep') with Dan. 12. 2, it becomes clear that, since the physically dead are there described as "them that sleep in the dust of the earth", the passage in 1 Corinthians refers, not to the soul or spirit, but to the body, to which alone the words "in the dust" are

applicable; and so with other occurrences of the word in a like connection in the New Testament.

To take another example; when it is suggested that since the word rendered "chosen" (R.V. "appointed") in 2 Corinthians 8. 19 literally denotes 'to extend the hand', and that therefore the churches may have made choice of a man by vote, we are safeguarded against the idea by noticing that the same word (extended by a prefix, which, however, does not affect the meaning so far as the word itself goes) is used in Acts 10. 41 of a choice made by God Himself.

Again, the study of all, or some of, the occurrences of a word often provides us with a complete view of a subject, so far as the Word of God gives it to us, light being frequently thrown on each occurrence by the others. Thus the word rendered "First-born" is used of Christ five times in the New Testament, in reference to (a) creation, Col. 1. 15, (b) His resurrection, Col. 1. 18, Rev. 1. 5, (c) His future position among His glorified saints, Rom. 8. 29, (d) His manifested glory in the earth, Heb. 1. 6, R.V. Each of these passages therefore has an important connection with the rest.

Again, the same word may be used in different senses or connections, and in such cases the context or the scope generally serves to give the true meaning. Thus the word "works", in Rom. 3. 27, 28, Gal.

3. 10, signifies observance of the law of God in contrast with faith. In James 2. 24 it signifies obedience to God's commands as resulting from, and in attestation of, faith.

Verbal parallels include quotations, and these invariably direct attention to the Scriptures whence they are taken.

### **Doctrinal Parallels.**

Parallel passages may further be classified as doctrinal. There are, for instance, three passages which speak of the provision and administration of spiritual gifts in the Church. Romans 12 represents them as derived from God, v. 3; Ephesians 4 as from Christ, vv. 7, 11; 1 Corinthians 12 as from the Holy Spirit, vv. 4, 11. The combined teaching of these passages thus reveals the activities of the three Persons of the Godhead on behalf of and in the Church.

### **Historical Parallels.**

Associated with doctrinal parallels are the historical, for the historical records are themselves doctrinal, 2 Tim. 3. 16. Historical facts in the Old Testament are interpreted in their illustrative and typical import by fact and doctrines recorded in the New. Again, parallels in the Old Testament, such as those of the books of Kings and Chronicles, and corresponding records of the prophets, and parallels in the New Testament, such as those in the Gospels, mutually supplement and explain

one another. There is nothing superfluous in the Word of God. What may seem to be repetition will be found, it may be in the light of a future age, to have had its divinely appointed purpose to fulfil in the declaration of the ways of God with men and of His sovereign will for them.

*A Scripture the meaning of which is obscure is to be explained by that which is clear.*

That there are passages in Scripture which are "hard to be understood" is the testimony of one of the writers, 2 Peter 3. 16, and is but consistent with the supernatural origin of the Book. One subject at least is everywhere expressed in the clearest terms, in language plain even to "wayfaring men". That subject is "The Way of Salvation". What, however, is not so clear, must be explained by means of, and in harmony with, those Scriptures the meaning of which is obvious. What is incidentally mentioned is to be viewed in the light of what is more fully revealed. On the other hand, what is not plain is not to be used to obscure what is clear. Sometimes the difficulty of a Scripture may be due to its brevity, a fuller expression, or an explanation, not having been demanded, perhaps, by the subject with which the writer was dealing. We read, for instance, that "the hour cometh, in which all that are in the tombs shall hear His voice [the voice of the Son of God] and shall come

forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done ill, unto the resurrection of judgment", John 5. 28, 29.

Two questions arise here: first, whether these resurrections will take place simultaneously; and second, whether life will be granted solely upon the condition of good works. Now the Lord did not say that all would be raised at the same time, nor would it be right to read that into His words. On this point Scripture is elsewhere perfectly clear. The word "hour" does not always signify a portion of a single day. The Lord's use of the word here is made clear by His similar expression in verse 25, where it denotes an extended period, cp. Rev. 3. 10. Then in reference to the first resurrection we are explicitly told in Revelation 20. 5 that the "rest of the dead lived not until the thousand years should be finished" (the past tense being prophetically used of what is yet future). Again, we may not gather from the words of Christ referred to above that He is speaking of good works from a merely human standpoint, *i.e.*, apart from the new birth. His brief utterance is to be explained in harmony with His explicit statements to Nicodemus, that no one can see the kingdom of God who is not born again, and that eternal life is granted only to him who believes on the Son of God. Other Scriptures also make it

plain that in the Divine estimate the doing of good depends on union with Christ by faith.

*The significance of a revelation is not always to be measured by the apprehension of the writer.*

Concerning the great theme of salvation, the prophetic writers of the Old Testament "sought and searched diligently, . . . searching what time or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did point unto, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glories that should follow them", 1 Peter 1. 10, 11. This clearly shows that, in this matter at least, to these writers the significance of their statements was not always fully revealed. The same Apostle says that "no prophecy ever came by the will of man: but men spake from God, being moved [or 'borne along'] by the Holy Ghost", 2 Peter 1. 21. We must not, however, suppose from this that the prophets, in some ecstatic condition, put on record words to which they attached no meaning. What they wrote was the expression of what was supernaturally communicated to their minds, though in many cases it went far beyond their comprehension.

Certain prophecies can receive their full interpretation only in the light of further revelation or of subsequent events. This alone explains why a particular revelation was not fully apprehended by the prophet

to whom it was given. None but those who deny the fact of Divine inspiration in the Scriptural sense of the term (see 2 Tim. 3. 16, 2 Peter 1. 21) would suppose that Isaiah, for instance, in chapter 53 of his prophecies, was referring to some person contemporaneous with the period in which he lived. That the Servant of Jehovah of Whom he was writing, and Whose advent was still future, was the promised Messiah, was probably made known to him, but not so the exact application of his prophecy and the circumstances attending its accomplishment. In writing the 16th Psalm, David, foreseeing the fulfilment of God's promises, "spake of the resurrection of the Christ", Acts 2. 25-31. That does not indicate, however, that David understood the language of his Messianic Psalms as it is given to us to understand them in the light of the accomplished facts. Though the opening words of Psalm 22 may be read as a forcible description of the sorrows of the writer, we recognise that above and beyond the personal experiences of the Psalmist, and above and beyond his limited knowledge of the details of the fulfilment of God's promise, the Holy Spirit was directing his language with a precision unknown to him, and in such a way that its interpretation could be given only by a later and fuller revelation. And so with other prophets.

It is evident, therefore, that we are not

to measure the meaning of a revelation by the apprehension of the writer to whom and through whom it was communicated. What the Holy Spirit intended to teach we learn by means of His completed work, the full canon of Holy Writ.

*The true explanation of a Scripture never contradicts what is elsewhere revealed on the same subject.*

That God is omniscient and immutable is known to be a foundation truth of Scripture; with Him "can be no variation, neither shadow that is cast by turning", James 1. 17. Such words, therefore, as "it repented the Lord that He had made man on the earth, and it grieved Him at His heart", Gen. 6. 6, are not to be explained as if God had reversed His decisions, and His eternal counsels had altered. "God is not a Man that He should repent", 1 Sam. 15. 29. All His dealings are in exact accord with His predetermined and unalterable plans. The change is in man, not in God. Inconstancy and perverseness in man lead, by reason of the very immutability of God, to a change in His dealings with him. But both man's inconstancy and the consequent change in God's dealings were foreknown to him. The alteration is in His method, not in His nature. In this sense, then, is to be understood the word "repent" when used of God, Gen. 6. 6, 1 Sam. 15. 11,

Joel 2. 13, &c. Jeremiah makes it clear that its use in this respect is different from its use in reference to man, and is in complete accord with the facts of God's essential immutability, and with His universal providence (see Jer. 18: 7-10). Moreover, in thus speaking of Himself, and in order to make known His ways to us, the infinite God has but condescended to the limitations of our finite minds.

*Every doctrine is to be taught consistently with every other, and with the whole tenor of Scripture regarding it.*

When the Lord, speaking of His death, said, "I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Myself", the Jews protested, objecting that the Law said that "the Christ abideth for ever", John 12. 32-34. That was true, but it was not the whole truth. Their mistake was due to a defective apprehension of the teaching of Scripture concerning the Messiah. One truth was being pressed to the exclusion of another. Their objection was based upon such statements as those of Isaiah, "of the increase of His government there shall be no end", chap. 9. 7, and of Daniel, "His dominion is an everlasting dominion", chap. 7. 14. They had not considered, however, that the same prophets had foretold that the Messiah would be "cut off", Isa. 53. 8, Dan. 9. 26.

Their error is not without its lessons. It

## 32 The Scriptures, and How to Use Them.

is possible to lay such stress upon the doctrine of election, for example, that the responsibility of preaching the Gospel to the perishing is under-estimated or even set aside. Again, the great truth of justification by faith may not be treated as if it implied freedom from the necessity of works of righteousness on the part of him who has been justified. Each doctrine has its place and importance. Each is to be recognised and received. One must not be weakened or neglected in the interest of another. Attention devoted to a statement of any particular doctrine, without the consideration of all that Scripture teaches about it, leads to erroneous views. Undue stress upon one element of truth to the neglect of others has been largely responsible for heresy and sectarianism.

Are we called to the holy and solemn yet blessed work of teaching the Word of God, let us give ourselves to our teaching, Rom. 12. 7, continually seeking grace from God that we may never do so apart from the guidance of "the Spirit of truth", of Whom our Lord and Master has said, "He shall guide you into all the truth". Let us heed the injunction of the Apostle Peter, that he who speaks is to speak "as it were oracles of God: . . . that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, Whose is the glory and the dominion for ever and ever. Amen"