

Profitable Things

Alfred P. Gibbs

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Profitable Things --Part 1

Profitable Things

Part 1

Alfred P. Gibbs

This article is the first in a series by our esteemed brother Alfred P. Gibbs. It is his intention to direct us in learning things which God considers profitable.

These articles should be conducive to the deepening of spiritual life, to the control of Christian conduct, and to the strengthening of our personal testimony.

While each is complete in itself, all articles are complementary to the others; to miss one is to miss an important link in the chain.

Profitable Things

Introduction

It will surely be conceded that we are living in a world characterized very largely by materialism and governed by a mercenary spirit. It is a day of "big business," and of huge combines which employ thousands of workers, each of whom is carefully selected, trained and paid to contribute his part to the smooth and efficient functioning of the whole, so that the employer will be able to run his business on a profitable basis. Thus the words, "profit and loss," play a large part in the councils governing the management of these combines, for it goes without saying that no business can operate, for long, at a loss.

In view of the strong competition which obtains today, many businesses employ the services of efficiency experts, who are skilled in the fine art of detecting anything that would contribute to the loss of efficiency in the manufacturing of the article they produce. In this way, leaks are discovered and remedied, production speeded up, and the profit increased.

By the word “profit” is meant a gain, benefit or advantage. The person who invests his capital in an enterprise does so because he is convinced it will be to his monetary advantage, and yield him an adequate gain on his investment. This, of course, is perfectly right and proper. It is the basis of all business enterprise. Every firm sees to it that, at least once a year, an inventory is made of the stock and a record is prepared and published. This record makes careful note of the income derived from the sale of their product and the expenditure necessary to its production. The difference between these figures represents either their profit or their loss.

Eliphaz, in the oldest book of the Bible, asks a question every person should seriously consider: “Can a man be profitable unto God?” (Job 22:2). The incarnate Son of God, who is described as being both “the power and the wisdom of God” (1 Cor 1:24), and who spake as no man ever spake, propounded a question that still challenges humanity: “For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?” (Mark 8:36). Here is a problem that each person is well advised to face, for to gain the world’s wealth, power, position and popularity, at the cost of the loss of one’s own soul, is a tragedy no human language can describe.

Solomon, the great king of Israel, to whom God gave wisdom, wealth, power and glory above all his compeers, turned away from God and plunged into a life of voluptuous and sinful self-indulgence. Satiated, wearied and utterly disgusted with all the world had to offer, the backslidden and profligate monarch confessed petulantly: "There was no profit under the sun!" (Ecc. 2:11). The Book of Ecclesiastes is the inspired record of the working of man's deceitful heart. It represents the findings of a man of the world, as he tried, but in vain, to obtain satisfaction from all the pleasures the world had to offer. At the end of his fruitless search, he declared: "Then I looked on all works that my hand had wrought, and on the labor that I had labored to do: and behold, all was vanity (or emptiness) and vexation of spirit, and there was no profit under the sun." At the conclusion of the Book he repeats: "Vanity of vanities ... all is vanity!" (Ecc. 12:8).

Elihu, the mediator, in a magnificent passage, (from which many a gospel sermon has been preached) declared of God: "He looketh upon men, and if any say: I have sinned and perverted that which is right, and it profiteth me not; He will deliver his soul from going down to the pit, and his life shall see the light. Lo, all these things worketh God oftentimes with man." (Job 33:27-29).

In the great summing up of the spiritual condition of all men by nature as being alike guilty, lost, helpless and undone, in the sight of God, occurs the inclusive statement: "They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one" (Rom. 3:12). Every unregenerate person would be far better employed in filling his papers

for spiritual bankruptcy than congratulating himself on his possession of material riches, for God has written: "Unprofitable," over the life of all who do not know Christ as their personal Saviour and Lord. A person's life, before his regeneration, is written in the red, and is utterly profitless as far as God and spiritual values are concerned.

Our Lord's own statement as to this fact should merit the earnest consideration of all, for He declared emphatically: "The flesh profiteth nothing!" All man's vaunted intelligence, his prideful achievements, his boasted superiority, if performed only in the energy of the flesh and divorced from the knowledge of God, is utterly unprofitable in God's estimation.

Paul indulges in a delightful play on words as he sends a letter to his friend Philemon, by the hand of Philemon's runaway slave, Onesimus, who had been converted through Paul's ministry in Rome. Paul now sends him back to his master with a personal letter explaining the reason for his return. In it, Paul uses these words concerning Onesimus: "Which in time past was to thee unprofitable, but now profitable to thee and me." The significance of these words will be appreciated when it is learned that the meaning of Onesimus' name is "profit." Thus, while Onesimus had belied his name and became unprofitable by running away from his master, he is now returning to live up to his name by rendering profitable service to his Christian master.

Paul also realized the fact of the profitlessness of a life lived in the flesh. After a recital of all his many natural advantages in the way of birth, education, religion, zeal, position and popularity, he concluded: "But what things

were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but refuse, that I may win Christ" (Phil. 3:7-8).

The Bible speaks of many things which are profitable, and it will be to our spiritual advantage if we consider some of these profitable things revealed in the Holy Scriptures. God has declared: "I am the Lord thy God which teacheth thee to profit" (Isa. 48:17). May it be ours to "learn, mark and inwardly digest" these things which God has described as being profitable to know and practise, and thus be of profit to the One who has redeemed us unto Himself at such infinite cost!

Profitable Things --Part 2

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Part 2

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The Holy Scriptures (2 Tim. 3:16, 17).

“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect (or mature), thoroughly furnished unto all good works.”

First and foremost in this list of things to profit is the Bible, the divinely inspired Word of God, concerning which Sir Walter Scott, perhaps quoting Byron, wrote:

“Within this sacred volume lies

The mystery of mysteries.

Happiest they of human race,

Of whom their God has given grace

To lift the latch and force the way,

To read, to learn, to watch, to pray.

But better had they ne’er been born

Who read to doubt, or read to scorn!”

We will state three reasons for the unestimable profit of this Book of Books.

1. It is Profitable Because of its Origin:

God is its Author. It came from Him, through the instrumentality of holy men of God who wrote under the absolute control of the Holy Spirit. We are definitely informed that, "The prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved (lit. borne along) by the Holy Ghost" (2 Pet. 1:21). In other words, the Spirit of God so energized and controlled certain specially selected men that what they wrote were the very words of God Himself.

The words, "by inspiration of God," in 2 Timothy 3:16 is expressed by one word in the Greek, "Theopneustos" (From "Theos," God, and "pneo," breathe). Thus the Scriptures are declared to be the God-breathed record of the Divine revelation to man. As in creation God "formed man out of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul," so God has taken the material of human language and breathed into these human words the breath of His life, and the Holy Scriptures have become a living book which, when received into the heart by faith, generates spiritual life in the believing soul. See Hebrews 4:12; Acts 7:38; 1 Peter 1:23. One has only to open the Bible to read very many times, such expressions as, "And God spake all these words," "And God said," "Thus saith the Lord," etc. etc. Thus the Bible itself flatly states it is the revelation of God to man.

Someone has summed up beautifully the message of the Bible in these words: "This" Book contains the mind of God, the state of man, the way of salvation, the doom of sinners and the happiness of believers. Its doctrines are

holy, its precepts are binding, its histories are true and its decisions are immutable. Read it to be wise, believe it to be safe and practise it to be holy. It contains light to direct you, food to support you and comfort to cheer you. It is the traveler's map, the pilgrim's staff, the pilot's compass, the soldier's sword and the Christian's charter. Here paradise is restored, Heaven opened and the gates of hell disclosed. Christ is its grand subject, our good its design and the glory of God its end. It should fill the memory, rule the heart and guide the feet. Read it slowly, frequently and prayerfully. It is a mine of wealth, a paradise of glory and a river of pleasure. It is given you in life, will be opened at the judgment and be remembered for ever. It involves the highest responsibility, will reward the greatest labor and condemns all who trifle with its sacred contents."

Not only does the Bible claim to be the Word of God to man, but it can be demonstrated to the unbiassed reader that this claim is true in many ways. We will name but seven of these evidences: First, its fulfilled prophecies. These were given with meticulous detail hundreds of years before the event was fulfilled exactly as had been predicted. Second, its historical accuracy. Names, places and events are recorded which have been proved beyond a shadow of doubt to be true. Third, the unity of its revelation. Here are 66 different books written over a period of hundreds of years, and yet each book fits into each other book to present a complete exposition of the great truth of Redemption and the revelation of the glorious Person of the Lord Jesus Christ. Fourth, the exhaustless depth of its teaching yet conveyed in simple language. Thus profundity of thought is combined with simplicity of expression. Fifth, its indestructability. In

spite of all the attacks on the part of its many enemies throughout the centuries, it has emerged scathless, and stands like a great mountain peak unmoved above the wrecks of time. Sixth, its influence for good in the lives of those who believe its truths and practise its precepts. A tree is known by the fruit it produces. Lastly, its many translations and vast circulation throughout the nations of the world. It has been translated into over 1200 different languages, and each year over 25 million copies are published throughout the world.

The Holy Scriptures are not only profitable because of their origin and Author, but they are essential to a knowledge of the true and living God of the universe, to whom alone belong omniscience, omnipotence, omnipresence and immutability, and who desires “all men to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim. 2:4). How thankful we should be for such a divine revelation concerning God, Christ, sin, redemption, the Holy Spirit, salvation and eternal blessedness.

2. It is Profitable Because of the Person it Reveals:

This Person is the eternal Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ. The Bible exists for the purpose of revealing one Person, the Lord Jesus, and the exposition of one theme, redemption through His most precious blood. Christ is predicted in the Law and the Prophets; typified in the offerings of Leviticus and the tabernacle; presented in the four Gospels; preached in the Acts of the Apostles; expounded in the Epistles and described as glorified in the Revelation. The whole Book is redolent with the Son

of God. If Christ were removed from the Bible only the covers of the Book would remain!

Notice the Saviour's own testimony to this fact, "Search the Scriptures, for in them ye think ye have eternal life, and they are they which testify of Me" (John 5:40). To the two disciples on their way to Emmaus, "He expounded unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself" (Luke 24:27). Ere He ascended back to Heaven He declared, "These are the words which I spake unto you while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses and in the Prophets and in the Psalms concerning Me" (Luke 24:44).

Speaking prophetically by the Spirit in the Psalms, our Lord declared hundreds of years before He came, "Lo, I come: in the volume of the Book it is written of Me, I delight to do Thy will, O My God" (Psalm 40:7-8; Heb. 10:7). Two things are here plainly affirmed; the Divine Person who was to come, and the Divine volume in which it was revealed, the Holy Bible.

The Old Testament was the only Scripture the early disciples had. From its pages they proved that all the prophecies concerning the Messiah of Israel had been fulfilled by the incarnation, life, ministry, miracles, teaching, death, resurrection and glorification of the Lord Jesus Christ. Peter could say "To Him give all the prophets witness" (Acts 10:43).

Christ thus rides forth on the chariot of the Holy Scriptures, and is presented, in all His dignity as the essential and eternal Son of God who "through the eternal Spirit, offered Himself without spot to God" as a substitutionary sacrifice on behalf of sinners, and

thereby secured eternal salvation for all who will receive Him as Saviour and own Him as the Lord of their lives. See Hebrews 9:13-14; Romans 10:1-17.

Profitable Things --Part 3

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The Word of God is profitable because of the purpose for which it was given. This purpose is seven-fold.

(1) To make us wise unto salvation (2 Tim. 3:15): “Able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.” Man, in his natural state, has no desire for or capacity to understand spiritual things. He is ignorant of eternal realities, and is described as being “Alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their hearts” (Eph. 4:18). Though man may pride himself on his possession of secular wisdom, and his great advance in scientific knowledge and his prowess in invention, yet he remains in abysmal ignorance of the true, eternal and spiritual realities that God has revealed in His word. Moreover he is described as being incapable of “receiving the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him, neither can he know them, for they are spiritually discerned” (1 Cor. 2:14).

God’s commentary on the boasted wisdom of this world is not calculated to inflate its ego, for we read: “Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this world? Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For after that, in the wisdom of God, the world by (its) wisdom knew not God, it pleased God, by the foolishness of preaching, to save them that believe” (1 Cor. 1:20-21).

The age-long question of Job: "Where shall wisdom be found?" (Job 28:12), has its complete answer in the statement: "The holy Scriptures which are able to make thee wise unto salvation." Within the pages of this Book, the believing reader may be made wise as to his true condition as a guilty, lost, helpless and hell-deserving sinner in the sight of a holy God (Rom. 3: 1-23). He will be made wise as to God's wonderful provision for his lost condition in the gift of His beloved Son, whose incarnation, substitutionary sacrifice, death, resurrection and glorification have made possible a full, free and eternal salvation for all who will own their need and receive Him as Saviour and own Him as Lord (Rom. 10:6-17). He will be made wise as to the true and eternal blessedness of all who have been born again by the Spirit of God (Eph. 1:3-14).

Well may we lift our voices in grateful praise to God for this inspired revelation of His Word, by which we are granted divine wisdom and enabled to understand these things which make for our eternal profit!

(2) To reveal doctrine: By doctrine is meant teaching. The great foundation truths of Christianity are found within its pages, and are woven into the warp and woof of this divine revelation from Genesis to Revelation. The Bible is not like a book of systematic theology, where each great doctrine is first stated, and then all the Scripture verses relating to this doctrine are gathered together to verify its veracity and authority. In the Bible, all these great truths are woven into the fabric of the entire Book. In fact, the word, "text," comes from the Latin, "textus," which means something woven.

Inasmuch as doctrine forms an integral part of Holy Scripture, it is essential that every Christian should make himself well acquainted with the Bible as a whole. In so doing, he will become “nourished up in the words of faith and of good doctrine”

(1 Tim. 4:6). We are living in days of drift, doubt, declension and denial of the truth of the Word of God. These great foundation truths of the Bible are being attacked, denied and discredited, not only by men of the world, but by those who profess to be ministers of the gospel, and who occupy pulpits which are professedly Christian in character.

The tragedy is that vast numbers of professing Christians, through lack of the reading and study of the Word of God, are ignorant of these foundation truths, and consequently unable to combat the encroachments of the enemy. They do not realize the truth of that statement from the good Book: “If the foundations be destroyed, what shall the righteous do?” (Psa. 11:3). It is in view of this that the believer is urged to: “Sanctify Christ in your heart as Lord, and be ready to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is within you with meekness and fear” (1 Pet. 4:15). It is to be feared that many Christians, if challenged by a worldlyling as to the truth of some doctrine of the Word of God, would be unable to give an answer that would either satisfy or silence the inquirer.

Let us state a few of these great doctrines which Scripture reveals and which form the foundation of Christianity. Every believer should familiarize himself with these truths, by earnest and concentrated study of Holy Scripture. There is no substitute for this personal

study of the Bible. This is the solemn responsibility of each believer who must determine he will both make and take time for the daily reading and systematic study of the Word. It is still true that “The entrance of Thy Word giveth light; it giveth understanding to the simple” (Psa. 119:130). Now let us look, very briefly, at a few of these fundamental doctrines of our most holy faith which are found in the Word.

1. The divine Triunity of the eternal Godhead, consisting of the Father the Son and the Holy Spirit. These are not three Gods, but one Godhead, subsisting in three Persons, each equal and eternal with each other, and each possessing all the prerogatives of Deity and the essentials of personality. This is a truth entirely beyond our finite comprehension, but not beyond faith’s apprehension for it is clearly revealed in Scripture. See Matthew 28:19; John 15:26; Hebrews 9:13-14; Ephesians 2:18; 2 Corinthians 13:14.

2. The essential and eternal Deity of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God. His virgin birth, sinless and real humanity, substitutionary sacrifice to secure our eternal redemption, bodily resurrection, ascension, glorification and present ministry as the great high Priest in the presence of God and His literal and personal second coming. See Hebrews 1:3; Luke 1:26-35; 2 Corinthians 5:21; 1 Peter 2:22; 1 Corinthians 15:3-4; 1 Timothy 2:5-6; Acts 1:6-11; Hebrews 4:14-16; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18.

3. The Deity and personality of the Holy Spirit, who inspired the writing of the Bible; who convicts the sinner of his lost and guilty state before God and, on the sinner’s acceptance of Christ as his own personal

Saviour and Lord, regenerates, indwells and empowers him to live a godly life and effectually serve the Lord Jesus on earth. See 2 Peter 1:19-21; John 16:7-15; Ephesians 1:13-14; 1 Corinthians 6:19-20.

4. The Bible is the divinely inspired, authentic and authoritative revelation from God, and is therefore the Christian's complete guide and final authority on all matters of faith and practice. See 2 Timothy 3:14-16; Matthew 24:25; Psalm 119:11, 89, 105.

5. That salvation from sin's penalty, secured at the infinite cost of the precious blood of Christ, has been provided for every sinner who will avail himself of it. This salvation is wholly of grace and therefore entirely apart from human merit in any shape or form. It is conditioned by simple faith in Christ's finished work of redemption which He accomplished on the cross, acceptance of Him as one's own personal Saviour and confession of Him as Lord. See John 3:14-18; 5:24; 10:9; 14:6; Romans 10:9-10; Ephesians 2:8-9; Romans 4:1-5; 1 John 5:10-13.

6. Each regenerated believer is not only eternally secure in Christ but, by the Holy Spirit, has been united to the mystical body of Christ, the Church, of which Christ is the sole Head and every believer a member. See John 10:27-30; 1 Corinthians 12:12-27; Ephesians 1:15-23.

7. The eternal retribution of God upon all who die in their sins, either rejecting, despising or neglecting the great salvation provided by the redemptive sacrifice of the Son of God. See John 3:36; 8:21-24; 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10; Hebrews 2:3; Revelation 20:11-15.

Such, in condensed form, are some of the principal fundamental doctrines on which the truth of Christianity

rests. Each Christian should therefore know, love, proclaim and defend these truths and thus become a profitable servant of his Lord and Master.

Profitable Things --Part 4

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The last article about Profitable Things asserted that the Word of God the Holy Bible, was profitable to make wise unto salvation and profitable to reveal doctrine; we now are to learn that it is profitable:

(3) To administer reproof.

The Bible not only furnishes us with the foundation doctrines of the faith, but it also acts as a plumbline, or a decisive test, by which any deviation from correct doctrine may be detected and judged. The Bible puts it thus: "To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them" (Isa. 8:20). Thus it is affirmed that all the teachings of men must be judged in the light of the complete revelation of God's Word concerning the particular thing that was taught. If it does not meet the test of the general teaching of the Word of God, then it must be rejected, however greatly gifted and highly respected the person may be who taught it.

Note the words: "the general teaching of the Word of God." Most wrong teaching can find apparent support from some isolated texts of Scripture, as the false teaching of some present day cults will demonstrate. But when this teaching is examined in the light of all the Bible has to say on this particular subject, its falsity becomes apparent to the intelligent believer. It goes to

prove the truth of the old adage: “Text, without context, is a pretext.”

The best way to effectually demonstrate the crookedness of a wall is to place a straight-edge on it. A plumbline, when placed on a wall, will quickly reveal whether or not it is perfectly perpendicular. A spirit level, when placed on the foundation of a house, will speedily convince an architect as to whether it is level or not. Likewise, all that a person teaches must be subjected to the test of all the Word of God, and only if it successfully passes this test should it be accepted. Much error, now current in Christendom, would have been killed at its birth if this test had been applied faithfully and impartially. Therefore the need of constant vigilance on the part of all Christians. “Prove all things, and hold fast that which is good” (1 Thess. 5:21). The Lord Himself advised His disciples “Take heed what ye hear” (Mark 4:24).

It will be recalled that after Paul had warned the elders of Ephesus of the false teachers that should arise among them, he commended them to “God, and the Word of His grace, which is able to build you up” (Acts 20:38-32). With the Word of God in his hands and the Spirit of God in his heart, each Christian is divinely fitted to test all he hears by the infallible Book of books, which is “profitable for reproof.”

(4) To provide correction.

The Greek word translated “correction,” is “epanorthosis,” which means a restoration from a fallen position to an upright one, or from a fallen condition to an upright one.

Thus the Word of God not only reveals and pulls down that which is wrong but, this time on a good foundation, now restores and builds up. Thus the same Scriptures which reprove also provide the means by which the error may be corrected. In other words, what the straightedge, the plumb-line and the spirit level revealed in the way of doctrinal or moral crookedness, the hammer of the Bible may now be applied to straighten and correct, or restore. In fact, God likens His Word to a hammer which breaks and straightens (Jer. 23:29). Thus the same word that exposes the error now expounds the truth, so that by the acceptance of the truth the error may be corrected.

In his letter to Timothy, Paul speaks of this very thing: “The servant of the Lord must not strive, but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves, if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth” (2 Tim. 2:24-25). Error should ever be recognized by a knowledge and love of the truth, and not truth by a knowledge of error. It is possible for a person to become so occupied with combating wrong doctrines that he neglects to teach and emphasize sound doctrine. Negative reproof must always be followed by positive correction, and this must be done kindly but faithfully, so that the person who holds the false teaching may not only be convinced of his error, but genuinely converted to the truth.

(5) To instruct in righteousness.

The Scriptures, which have made a person wise unto salvation, revealed to him the cardinal truths of the Christian faith, administered reproof to any error and

provided the means of correction, must now instruct him as to the kind of life he must live before God, his fellow believers and the world.

The Christian life is an eminently practical thing. It has been well defined as “the outliving of the in-living Christ.” The world cannot see the inward and invisible work of regeneration that the Spirit produces in the believer; but it can and certainly should see the outward and visible manifestation of it in the moral, honest, industrious and righteous life which he lives before them.

Peter, by divine inspiration, puts it thus: “Dearly beloved, I beseech you, as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul; having your conversation (or manner of life) honest among the Gentiles: that whereas they speak against you as evil doers they may, by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation” (1 Pet. 2:11-12). Thus the lip and the life must agree. Believing must ever be balanced by behaving. The goodly talk must be backed up by a Godly walk, or the world may be pardoned for doubting the reality of our profession. Emerson once remarked: “What you are speaks so loud the world cannot hear what you say!” Carlyle put it in another way: “The life laughs through and spits at the creed!”

The Lord, in His wonderful sermon on the mount, emphasized the necessity for a righteous life on the part of all who named His name. He declared: “Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in Heaven.” (Matt. 5:16). He also enunciated what has been aptly termed:

“The golden rule,” which reads as follows: “All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them; for this is the law and the prophets” (Matt. 7:12).

No Christian, who reads his Bible, should be in any doubt as to what kind of life he should live before the world, for the Word of God is full of practical exhortations regarding this matter. The epistles constantly exhort the believer to live a godly and consistent life before the world. In Titus 2:12-14 we read: “For the grace of God, that bringeth salvation to all men, hath appeared, teaching us that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts we should live soberly, righteously and godly in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ; who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar (or purchased) people, zealous of good works”.

From the very few Scriptures we have mentioned, it will surely be clear that the Word of God is full of needed instruction in practical righteousness. May it be ours to heed its exhortations, so that “the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and ye in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Thess 1:12).

(6) To develop Christian maturity.

The word translated “perfect” is “artios.” This carries the thought of being fitted or complete, and this suggests maturity. It does not imply sinless perfection, a thing to which no Christian can attain in this life. One of the tragedies in Christendom is the large number of

professing Christians who have failed to “grow in grace and in the knowledge of their Lord and Saviour” (2 Pet. 3:18). They have remained spiritual infants and failed to grow into spiritual adulthood. They have remained in God’s kindergarten when they should be graduating from God’s college. They are still on the milk bottle when they should be feeding on the strong meat of the Word (Heb. 5:13-14). They are “bearded babies,” and seemingly quite content to remain such.

Babyhood is a charming thing, but not when this condition is unduly prolonged: it then becomes a stark tragedy. The Bible speaks of three causes for this protracted spiritual baby-hood. Paul, writing to the believers in Corinth, had to say: “I could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ” (1 Cor. 3:1). This carnality was evidenced by their “envying, strife and divisions,” and this had stunted their spiritual growth. Writing to some of the Galatian believers, Paul said: “My little children, (or babies) of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you ... I stand in doubt of you” (Gal. 4:19-20). The cause of their failure was legalism, a turning back from the liberty which was theirs in Christ Jesus to the merit of the works of the law. The third reference is in Hebrews 5:12, where we read: “When for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God.” The cause, in this case, was spiritual laziness, due to an avoidance of the effort involved in the reading and study of the Word of God.

Whatever may be the cause of failure to develop into Christian maturity, the result is always tragic. The key phrase of the Epistle to the Hebrews is: “Let us go on

unto perfection!" (or maturity, Heb. 6:1). Peter likewise urged his readers to be diligent in adding to their faith such virtues as courage, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness and love. He then added: "If these things be in you and abound, ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. 1:3-8).

The normal Christian life should therefore be characterized by a steady development in spiritual stature, which has its outcome in spiritual maturity. This is the "perfection" which the study of and obedience to the Word of God will produce.

The Lake of Fire

Adapted for Food for the Flock, J.B.N.

Profitable Things --Part 5

Profitable Things

Part 5

Alfred P. Gibbs

The Word of God is not only profitable to give instruction and to develop Christian maturity but to equip the believer.

(7) To fully furnish the man of God: God wants His people to be fully furnished with all those things essential to “life and godliness” (2 Pet. 1:3). An unfurnished flat, room or house is a cold proposition. There it stands, with its bare floor and walls, with nothing to sit on, lie on, or eat on. The Lord deliver us from having lives like this: blank, colorless, barren and bare of the spiritual furniture needed to make it livable to ourselves, glorifying to God and attractive to others.

The great woman of Shunem can supply us with a hint as to necessary articles by which to fully furnish the man of God. See 2 Kings 4. First, she provided a bed on which Elisha could rest. This surely indicates the necessity for each Christian to “Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him” (Psa. 37:7). In this busy work-a-day world we need to heed the injunction of the Lord when He said: “Take My yoke upon you and learn of Me, for I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls” (Matt. 11:29).

She next supplied him with a table at which he might sit and partake of her provision for his needs. This illustrates the bounteous provision of the God of all

grace for His people. David could testify that the Lord had prepared a table for him in the wilderness, at which all his needs were abundantly met. The table speaks also of the fellowship into which every child of God has been brought, for we have been seated at the table of the Lord and “Blessed... with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (Eph. 1:3).

Then she supplied a stool on which he might sit. This speaks of instruction. It will be recalled that Paul speaks of being instructed at the feet of the great teacher, Gamaliel. Mary also knew the value of the stool, for she sat at the feet of the Lord Jesus and drank in His wonderful words of life. For this she received the commendation of the Lord who declared she had chosen the good part (Luke 10:39-42). In a magnificent passage in Deuteronomy 33, God’s people are described as sitting down at God’s feet to receive of His words. Thus the stool of instruction is an important article of furniture for the Christian.

The last thing she placed in the room was a candlestick. This, of course, speaks of the spiritual illumination each Christian needs as he journeys to his home in Heaven. David could testify: “Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path... The entrance of Thy Word giveth light” (Psa. 119:105 and 130). In a world characterized by darkness, the child of God has, in the Word of God, all needed light for guidance. As he follows the light of the Word, he will be led on to walk in ways pleasing to the One who has saved him by His matchless grace, for “light accepted bringeth light.” It is written: “Then shall we know as we follow on to know the Lord” (Hos. 6:3).

May it be ours to make good use of the bed, the table, the stool and the candlestick, so that we may be thoroughly furnished to live for and serve the One who has made us forever His at such tremendous cost, and who desires to glorify Himself through those He has redeemed by His precious blood. By this means, His desire for our spiritual profit will be fulfilled, and we, in turn, shall so live that our “profiting may appear to all” (1 Tim. 4:15).

The next profitable thing we shall consider is:

Godliness Of Life (1 Tim. 4:8)

Paul, writing to Timothy, his son in the faith, declared: “Godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.”

The words: “Godly,” and “godliness,” are frequently found in the New Testament. The word is “eusebeia,” from “eu” meaning “well,” and “sebomai” meaning to “be devout.” Thus it carries the meaning of that piety and reverence for God which should characterize every child of God. In other words, godliness implies God-likeness. Just as the physical likeness of earthly parents is often reproduced in their children; so the spiritually regenerated children of God should reproduce, in some measure, the spiritual likeness of their Father in Heaven. By this they demonstrate that they are, in verity and truth, “the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:26). All the exhortations to holiness of life, in the Word of God, are based on the existence of this relationship of the believer to his Father in Heaven. We read: “As He that hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; because it is written: Be ye holy, for I am holy” (1 Pet. 1:16).

A good illustration of this physical resemblance is found in Judges 8:13-19. Here Gideon is described as asking Zeba and Zalmunna, the kings of Midian, whom he had defeated in battle: "What manner of men were they whom ye slew at Tabor?" The kings answered: "As thou art, so were they, each one resembled the children of a king." At this, Gideon exclaimed: "They were my brethren, even the sons of my mother!" Just as these heathen kings could discern in Gideon, a likeness to the men they had slain, so the worldlings, with whom the Christian must rub shoulders day by day, should see, in his godly manner of life, some moral likeness to the God whom he claims to be his Father, and into whose family he has been spiritually born.

When Peter and John were arrested by the Jewish authorities in Jerusalem and brought before them for trial, they so courageously testified for their Lord and Master that these Jewish leaders, we are told, "took knowledge of them that they had been with Jesus" (Acts 4:1-13). Thus these disciples reflected, both in their character and conduct, some of the moral and spiritual qualities of the One whom they loved, and with whom they had companied for over three years.

This surely should have a voice for all who profess to know, love and serve the Lord Jesus, and who claim to be walking with Him on Heaven's highway. Surely both our fellow believers and our unsaved neighbors should perceive an ever increasing likeness to Christ in our lives that shall bring glory to the One, whose we are, and whom we serve" (Acts 27:23). The poet has expressed it thus:

"Not merely in the words you say,

Not merely in your deeds confessed;
But in the most unconscious way
Is Christ expressed.
For me, 'twas not the truth you taught,
To you so clear, to me so dim;
But when you came to me you brought
A sense of Him.
And from your eyes He beckons me
And, from your heart His love is shed;
'Till I lose sight of you and see
The Christ instead."

It is said that in Italy, a woman who is a devotee at the shrine of some particular saint, and before whose image she constantly bows and prays, will unconsciously reflect in her own countenance, the facial appearance of the image she looks upon so often. Attention has also been drawn to the fact that many old married couples who have lived together in harmony for many years, have gradually grown similar in appearance to each other. Their constant occupation and communion with each other has brought about a similarity to each other.

This is certainly true of the believer. The measure of his transformation into the moral likeness of his Saviour and Lord is dependent entirely upon the measure of his occupation and communion with Him. 2 Corinthians 3:18 sums it up thus: "We all, with open face beholding (or reflecting) as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are (being) changed into the same image from glory to glory even as by the Spirit of the Lord."

The poet has beautifully expressed it in these well known words:

“Yet sure, if in Thy presence
My soul more constant were,
Mine eye would more familiar
Its brighter glories bear.
And thus Thy deep perfections
Much better should I know,
And, with adoring fervour,
Should in Thy likeness grow.”

(J. N. Darby)

Profitable Things --Part 6

Profitable Things

Part 6

Alfred P. Gibbs

Seeing that God Himself speaks of the profitableness of godliness, we shall do well to look further into this subject. Let us think of three things concerning this matter of godliness. First, the necessity for it. Second, the means by which it may be attained. Third, the reward of it.

The Necessity For Godliness

(1) God desires it: He has left us in no doubt as to this, and has stated, in clear, definite and unmistakable language, in the Holy Scriptures, that godliness of life is an essential requirement for all His blood-bought people. We have already referred to Titus 2:11-15, where we are told that “the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men.” This passage also teaches the believer to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously and godly in this present world. The well-known words from “The Battle Hymn of the Republic” express it well:

“He died to make us holy,

And He lives to make us good,

While His truth goes marching on...”

Each believer is urged to diligently add to his faith certain things which will deliver him from the tragedy of a barren and unfruitful life. Not the least in this list of

Christian virtues is godliness. See 2 Peter 1:3-8. Paul urged Timothy to flee certain sins, which war against the soul; and to “follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience and meekness” (1 Tim. 6:10-11). The words “follow after”, in this passage have the thought of a purposeful pursuit, as one would pursue a calling, giving it his earnest consideration and undivided concentration of purpose.

In 1 Timothy 2:1-3, believers are exhorted to engage in earnest intercessory prayer on behalf of all kings and for those who are in positions of authority. The reason given for this exhortation is: “That we may lead a quiet and peaceable life, in all godliness and honesty. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour, who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.” From these Scriptures, and many more that might be quoted, it should be abundantly clear that one of the chief purposes God had in saving us was that we might live holy lives, characterized by godliness.

(2) Christianity demands it: Christianity was made possible by the incarnation, life, death, resurrection and glorification of Christ. Apart from Him it cannot possibly exist, for “Christianity is Christ.” It does not consist of a code of ethics to be followed, but involves the out-living of the in-living Christ. While Christianity confers inestimable blessings upon the Christian, it also involves the glad acceptance and faithful discharge of certain solemn responsibilities.

The Lord Jesus did not minimize the cost of being one of His disciples. He stated frankly what it would involve in the way of the world’s hatred and persecution, and also

emphasized the necessity for strict self-denial and sacrificial service on His behalf. He declared: "Whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for My sake and the gospel's, the same shall save it" (Mark 8:35). By this standard we may surely learn that it is possible for a person to save himself into oblivion, or to lose himself into immortality: the choice remains with us.

Someone once remarked that Christianity does not come to a person tariff free, but there is always a "duty" involved in it! It furnishes both delights and duties. It brings with it great honour, but is balanced by equally great obligations. The great Sermon on the Mount will serve to drive home this fact to all who have ears to hear, minds to comprehend and hearts to obey the precepts laid down by the One who spake as no man ever spake, who demands what no other person does, and who exemplified, in His life, all He expressed by His lips. (See Matt. Chapters 5 to 7). He alone could testify, when asked who He was: "Even the same that I said unto you from the beginning" (John 8:24). In other words, Christ declared: "I am what I say. All that I emphasize in My teaching, I exemplify in My life." It was this fact that silenced the carping critics. He could challenge them: "Which of you convinceth Me of sin?" and none could point to any inconsistency between His creed and His conduct (John 8:46). He was literally the sum-total of all He said.

We must never allow ourselves to forget that the Lord Jesus, as our Saviour, has not only saved us and, as our Lord, now possesses us; but He is also our example for us to follow. Our Lord's call to His disciples is still, as of old: "Follow Me." He has left us an example that we

should “follow His steps” (1 Pet. 2:21). As the Shepherd of His flock, He still says: “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me” (John 10:27).

The demands of Christianity are high, as a study of our Lord’s commands will clearly indicate. Therefore, godliness of life is an imperative requirement for all who profess to name His name, and who claim to be His disciples.

(3) The world needs it: The world is described as being enshrouded in the darkness of sin, ignorance, superstition and enmity to God (John 1:5,10; Rom. 3:19; Eph. 4:18). Christ’s advent is described as the Light shining in the darkness (John 1:5). Our Lord declared: “I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on Me should not abide in darkness” (John 12:26). He also said: “I am the light of the world: he that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life” (John 8:12).

Before Christ left this world to return to His Father, He said to His disciples: “Ye are the light of the world... Let your light so shine before men” (Matt. 15:14-16). Thus each Christian has been left in the world in order to shine for his absent Lord. By his godliness of life before the world, he is to witness to the reality of God’s saving grace to him, the Holy Spirit’s regenerating and enabling power within him, and the Saviour’s satisfying presence with him. Paul wrote to the believers in Philippi and urged them to: “Do all things without murmurings and disputings, that ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world; holding forth the word of

life" (Phil. 2:14-16). Thus, by their godly and consistent lives and bold and persistent witness in the gospel, these believers became lighthouses for Christ.

Thousands of worldlings have been convicted of their need of God's salvation by seeing it exemplified in the godly life of a believer which backs up his faithful testimony in the gospel. The Lord said to a man out of whom He had cast a legion of demons: "Return to thine own house, and show how great things God hath done unto thee." Great blessing followed this evidence of his changed life and bold testimony to the Saviour's grace and power in his experience (Luke 8:39; Mark 5:19-20).

Paul could write to the Thessalonian believers, and remind them of the manner of his life among them when he first came to them with the gospel message: "Ye are our witness, and God also, how holily and justly and unblamably we behaved ourselves among you" (1 Thess. 2:10). This practical combination of courageous lips and consistent lives is still being used of God to awaken the lost to a sense of their need, and lead them to put their trust in the Saviour. Though the world may not be much interested in reading the Bible, they are expert in their ability to read the Christian, and are quick to detect any inconsistency between what he says and how he lives. Paul wrote to the believers at Corinth: "Ye are our epistle, written in our hearts, known and read of all men" (2 Cor. 3:2). It was this verse that prompted Annie Johnston Flint to write:

"We are the only Bible

The careless world will read;

We are the sinner's gospel,

We are the scoffer's creed.

We are the Lord's last message

Given in deed and word:

What if the type is crooked?

What if the print is blurred?"

A man, when asked what version of the Bible he preferred, replied:.

"My mother's version, which she translates into terms of a godly life lived to the honor of her Saviour." In the case of many Christians, a revised version would certainly be in order! A preacher once remarked: "Every Christian is either a Bible that presents Christianity, or a libel that misrepresents Christianity!"

Yes, the world needs to see that genuine godliness of life exhibited in those who claim to belong to Christ, for this will have the effect of convincing them of the reality of Christianity, and rob them of any excuse for remaining in the darkness of sin, "having no hope and without God in the world" (Eph. 2:12). May it be yours and mine to furnish the world with a good measure of this godliness of life, which shall effectually evidence the reality of our profession of Christianity!

Profitable Things --Part 7

Profitable Things

Part 7

Alfred P. Gibbs

II. The means that God has provided for this godliness of life.

God does not ask a believer to live this godly life without providing the means and clearly stating the way by which it may be brought about. We are told that He has “given us all things that pertain to life and godliness” (2 Pet. 1:2). Let us briefly look at some of these things that God has provided and which enable a Christian to live a godly life.

(1) He has given the Holy Spirit to indwell us, and impart to us a divine nature, in the strength and power of which this life may be lived. The Word of God clearly teaches the fact that every sinner, on resting in Christ’s finished work on Calvary, and receiving Him as his own personal Saviour, is, that moment, indwelt by the Holy Spirit, sealed by Him unto the day of redemption, and is made a partaker of a divine nature. (See Eph. 1:13; 4:30; 1 Cor. 6:19-20). The Christian life would be utterly impossible apart from this. In order to start the Christian life, it is necessary to have the Christian life to start with, and this God has supplied to all who trust His beloved Son (John 1:11-13; 3:16; 5:24). As the Holy Spirit is allowed to remain ungrieved by our misconduct (Eph. 4:24-32); unquenched by our disobedience to His leading (1 Thess. 5:19-20) and unlimited by our unbelief (Ps. 78:41); He will guide us into all truth (Jn. 16:13),

empower us for service (Acts 1:8), and glorify Christ in our lives (John 16:14).

(2) The deliberate presentation of our bodies to God as a living sacrifice (Rom. 12:1-2. cp Rom. 6-13).

No one will amount to much in the Christian life until he has made this willing and definite commitment of himself to the One Who owns him, body, soul and spirit. Remember, Paul was writing to Christians when he said: "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service." Every Christian would be well-advised to give this earnest appeal his most serious consideration, and rest not until he can say from his heart:

"Take my life and let it be
Consecrated, Lord, to Thee;
Take my moments and my days,
Let them flow in ceaseless praise."

(3) The daily devotional reading, systematic study of, and meditation in God's Word, accompanied by prompt obedience to its teaching. No one can possibly grow in grace and godliness apart from this. The Bible is the "sincere milk of the Word" for the babes in Christ, and the "strong meat" for the mature believer (1 Pet. 2:1-2; Heb. 5:12-14). This regular devotional reading of the Holy Scriptures is a must for every child of God. No day should be allowed to pass without opening its pages. It is spiritual food to sustain, divine light to lead and a sword to defend (Matt. 4:4; Ps. 119:105; Eph. 6:13-18). Like David, we should be able to testify: "Thy Word have

I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against Thee" (Ps. 119:11).

(4) The cultivation of prayer, praise and worship. God has provided a throne of grace to which each believer is invited to come and, with holy boldness, make known all his needs, and thus "obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Heb. 4:16). The Christian will speedily discover that the hymn writer was perfectly correct when he wrote:

"Prayer is the soul's sincere desire,

Uttered or unexpressed;

The motion of a hidden fire

That trembles in the breast.

Prayer is the burden of a sigh,

The falling of a tear;

The upward glancing of an eye

When none but God is near."

Prayer provides the means by which the believer may spread all his needs before God, his Father, and be assured he speaks to no unresponsive ear. Praise is the means by which the believer expresses his appreciation to God for all His multitudinous mercies. His numberless blessings, and His wonderful answers to his prayers. Worship is the Christian's highest occupation, for it consists of being occupied with God, not so much because of what He has done, is doing, or will do; but because of Who and what He is, as revealed in His divine attributes. Worship is worthship, or the ascription of worth to One who is infinitely worthy. As the Father,

God is said to be seeking for worshippers, who will worship Him in Spirit and in truth (John 4:23-24).

(5) By a life of separation from the world. By the world, in this sense, is not meant the world of nature, but the sum total of those persons, pleasures, places and pursuits from which God is left out. This is the “world” concerning which the Christian is exhorted thus: “Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life is not of the Father but is of the world” (1 John 2:15-16). This is the world that “crucified the Lord of glory,” and would do it again if it had the opportunity, for its attitude to Christ is unchanged.

However, it is important to notice that separation from the world does not mean isolation from it. Our Lord was separate from the world, but not isolated from it. He moved among men, spake with them, ate with them, companied with them but, at the same time, was perfectly “holy, harmless, undefiled and separate from sinners” (Heb. 7:26). In the great prayer to His Father, recorded in John 17, our Lord said: “I pray not that Thou shouldest take them (His disciples) out of the world, but that Thou shouldest keep them from the evil. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world” (Jn. 17:15-16). Thus, while the Christian is in the world, he is definitely not of it. He is in the position of a ship which, though it is in the sea, yet the sea is not in the ship.

The Christian, therefore, must decline the world’s pleasures, its unequal partnerships, and all that would tend to cool his love for Christ, His Word and work. A

godly woman, who had spent many years in the Lord's service, was once approached by a young believer who enviously exclaimed: "I'd give the world to have your Christian experience!" The dear old Christian calmly replied: "That's exactly what it cost me!" The Christian should be able to reply to all the world's seductive temptations:

"O worldly pomp and glory,
Your charms are spread in vain!
I've heard a sweeter story,
I've found a truer gain!"

(6) The prompt confession and forsaking of all known sin: Perhaps the best advice anyone could receive in this connection would be: "Keep short accounts with God!" Known sin should be confessed immediately and frankly. God's Word to the believer is: "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 Jn. 1:9). Failure to confess the sin promptly will result in a loss of communion, joy and peace of heart. When David sinned, and failed to confess it to the Lord he declared: "When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long. For day and night Thy hand was heavy upon me, my moisture is turned into the drought of summer. I acknowledged my sin unto Thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said: I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord, and Thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin" (Ps. 32:3-5).

We may well thank God for this provision He has made for the restoration of His people when they sin. We must ever distinguish between relationship and fellowship.

The first depends on one's birth, and the second on one's behaviour. A Christian does not cease to be a child of God when he sins, his relationship remains the same, but he ceases to be a happy child of God, and will remain so until he confesses the sin that has disrupted the fellowship, or the enjoyment of his relationship, with his Father in Heaven. Once the sin has been confessed and turned from, forgiveness is assured and communion restored.

We could illustrate this by a child in an earthly family who disobeys his father. This does not sever his relationship in that family, but he certainly ceases to be a happy child, because of the displeasure he has brought to his parents, and for which he is chastised. Once he expresses his sorrow for his wrong act, he is forgiven and restored to favour and is happy again. The relationship has remained unaltered, it was only the fellowship that was affected. Yes, "Keep short accounts with God," is good advice for all Christians!

(7) Service for the Lord Jesus. Every Christian is described in the Bible as "a servant (or bond slave) of the Lord Jesus." Therefore the lifetime occupation of the believer should be to serve his Lord and Master to the best of his ability. Surely no one could possibly have a grander Master. Godliness of life is most emphatically not a life of laziness and indolence, which is evidenced by the shirking of one's responsibilities in the home, office, workshop and the assembly; but it is a life actively devoted to the service of the One who has called him to be His servant.

The first question that Paul asked, after he had come to know Christ as Saviour and Lord was: "Lord, what wilt

Thou have me to do?" (Acts 9:6). The rest of his life was spent in doing the will of the Master. There is plenty of work for every Christian to do, for the field is large and the laborers are few. There are many different avenues of service, in which all may profitably engage. There is the personal witnessing for Christ to others, as opportunity provides. A course in personal evangelism would be helpful in this respect. There is no joy comparable to that of winning souls for Christ. Tract distribution is a good aid in this direction, and often helps to open up a conversation on spiritual matters with a person who needs the salvation of God, and many have been won in this way.

The regular and punctual attendance at the meetings of one's home assembly is a must for the person who wishes to go on for God; for he needs the help and comfort of his fellow believers, and they, in turn, need his. The teaching of a Sunday School class, or helping in the open air gospel meeting, or the visitation of hospitals, prisons and other institutions, provide a fruitful field of service. The great chapter on the resurrection concludes with the following stirring exhortation, which should be laid to heart by every person who desires to live a life characterized by godliness: "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord (1 Cor. 15:58).

Profitable Things --Part 8

Profitable Things

Part 8

Alfred P. Gibbs

III The reward of godliness

It has been well said that "virtue is its own reward." This is certainly true of godliness, as we shall see. The reward of godliness is twofold, for we read: "Godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come." Thus it is profitable for the present, and also for the future. Let us think of this double reward.

(1) The Present Enjoyment Of The Life That Now Is.

(a) Godliness of life leads to a closer intimacy with the Lord Jesus, and a greater realization and appreciation of conscious communion with Him. David discovered this, and declared: "But know that the Lord hath set apart him that is godly for Himself" (Ps. 4:3). Again he said: "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him; and He will show them His covenant" (Ps. 25:14). The price for this more intimate fellowship with the Lord is high, but it is an investment with great profit; for the high cost of living for Christ is only exceeded by the higher cost of not living for Him! Paul could testify: "I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things and do count them but dung that I might win Christ" (Phil. 3:8).

There is no substitute for heart devotion to the Lord Jesus, nor can anything compensate the believer for the loss of this conscious communion with his Lord and Saviour. The experience of those two disciples on the Emmaus highway may well illustrate what takes place when Jesus Himself draws near and walks with His own. It is no wonder, after this season of communion, that they testified: "Did not our heart burn within us, while He talked with us by the way, and while He opened to us the Scriptures?" (Luke 24:13-32). No wonder the poet expressed himself in the following lines:

"I must have the Saviour with me,
For I dare not walk alone;
I must feel His presence near me,
And His arm around me thrown."

(b) Godliness of life leads to an abounding joy in the Lord, for we are told: "In Thy presence is fullness of joy; at Thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore" (Ps. 16:11). The Lord wants a rejoicing people, and in that wonderful "abiding" chapter of John 15 the Lord said to His disciples: "These things have I spoken unto you that My joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full" (Jn. 15:11). It was for "the joy that was set before Him" that our Lord "endured the cross and despised the shame" (Heb. 12:2). That joy was the perfect accomplishment of His Father's will. This joy is the present portion of all who seek to adjust their lives to His will. Such will prove the truth of that Scripture which affirms: "The joy of the Lord is your strength" (Neh. 8:10).

Though it is still true that: "All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution;" it is equally true that all that will live godly shall also experience that abounding joy of the Lord which is more than adequate compensation for the suffering endured. It is recorded of the early disciples that after they had been beaten for preaching Christ, they departed ... "rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name" (Acts 5:40-41). A joyful Christian is one of the best recommendations for Christianity, and many a worldling, sickened by the emptiness of this world's fleeting pleasures, pomp, popularity and policy, has been led to seek the salvation of God because of its evidence in the joyous life of those who "live godly in Christ Jesus."

(c) Contentment of heart

We are told that "godliness, with contentment, is great gain" (1 Tim. 6:6). Here godliness could be likened to the capital, out of which the interest of contentment may be drawn as often and as much as we wish. The person whose life is characterized by godliness will not be much interested in the foolish pursuit of "keeping up with the Jones'." He will heed the injunction: "Let your life be without covetousness, and be content with such things as ye have: for He hath said: 'I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee'" (Heb. 13:5). He will be content with such things as he has, in the shape of "all spiritual blessings" which are his in Christ Jesus (Eph. 1:3).

He will not be "envious at the prosperity of the wicked" (Ps. 73:3-17); for he knows that he possesses God's exceeding great and precious promises which have constituted him a spiritual billionaire. "Therefore

having food and raiment," he will "be therewith content" (1 Tim. 6-8). As he seeks to be over-anxious for nothing, prayerful in everything and thankful for anything, he will know what it means to have "the peace of God, which passeth all understanding," set up a garrison in his heart and mind through Jesus Christ (Phil. 4:6-7). Surely all will be prepared to admit that such godliness, with its consequent contentment, is a most profitable acquisition!

(d) Usefulness and fruitfulness in His service.

Like the blessed man of Psalm 1, the one whose delight is in the law of the Lord, he shall be "like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season: his leaf also shall not wither, and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper." He will experience the truth of his Saviour's words when He said: "Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine, no more can ye, except ye abide in Me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: he that abideth in Me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without Me ye can do nothing" (John 15:4-5).

This godliness of life, which stems from a vital union with Christ and constant communion with the Lord, results in the believer being both usable by the Lord and fruitful for the Lord. Surely such a life can truly be described as being "profitable unto all things." God's desire for His redeemed people is that they "might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God" (Col. 1:10). This well sums up what is implied by godliness of life. Would that we all knew more of it!

(2) The future profit in the life that is to come.

This present comparatively short life is but a training ground or school, which prepares us for the “ages to come” in the which God is to “shew the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us through Christ Jesus” (Eph. 2:7). At the second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, those who have died in Christ are to be raised and given glorified bodies. Their spirits, which are already with Christ, He will bring with Him, to be reunited to their glorified bodies. Those Christians who are alive at His coming shall then be raptured and, in their now glorified bodies, shall be caught up to be for all eternity with the One who loved them and gave Himself for them (1 Thess. 4:13-18). This is the great hope of the Christian.

The profitableness of godliness, as seen in a life lived for Christ, in a world that crucified Him, will then be realized in full measure. We are told that “When He shall appear, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is” (1 John 3:2). The flesh will be left behind forever, no more to mar our communion with Him. In our glorified bodies, we shall stand before His judgment seat, and He will then correctly evaluate the quality of our devotion to Him, and our service for Him which we have rendered on earth, and reward us accordingly. There will be no regrets then that we lived godly and Christ-honoring lives for Him. The only regret will be that we were not more devoted to Him. (See Rom. 14:10; 2 Cor. 5:10).

In that coming day, every Christian will agree with Paul that “the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us” (Rom. 8:18). His: “Well done, thou good and faithful servant ... enter thou into the joy of thy Lord!” will prove

more than ample compensation for all we endured while seeking to live “godly in Christ Jesus” (Matt. 25:21). Yes, the day of examination, compensation and glorification is ahead!

May it be ours, to so adjust our lives, in the light of His coming, that we shall merit the commendation and the crown He will give to those who have acted on the proposition that “Godliness is profitable unto all things, having the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come!”

“Let all that look for hasten

That coming joyful day,

By earnest consecration,

To walk the narrow way;

By gathering in the lost ones

For whom our Lord did die,

For the crowning day that’s coming

By and by!”

O the crowning day is coming!

Is coming by and by

When our Lord shall come in power

And glory from on high!

O the glorious sight will gladden

Each waiting, watchful eye,

In the crowning day that’s coming

By and by.

Profitable Things --Part 9

Profitable Things

Part 9

Alfred P. Gibbs

The third profitable thing we shall consider is:—

Edifying Ministry (1 Cor. 14:6)

“Now bretheren, if I come to you speaking with tongues, what shall I profit you, except I shall speak to you either by revelation or by knowledge, or by prophesying, or by doctrine?”

In Paul’s letter to the Corinthian assembly, he deals by divine inspiration, with many subjects, mostly in a corrective manner, for the believers there had been guilty of many abuses. This was due to their carnality, evidenced by their carelessness and ignorance of the godly order which God desired in the gatherings of His saints (1 Cor. 3:1-3; 4:33-40).

In Chapter 12 he deals particularly with the matter of the bestowal of those spiritual gifts which the risen Lord had given to the members of His Body, the Church, and by means of which each local church was to be edified or built up. In Chapter 14, he speaks of the administration, or exercise, of these spiritual gifts in the local assembly, and shows how they should be profitably used to “edification, exhortation and comfort” (1 Cor. 14:3). The intervening 13th chapter is devoted to a description of the atmosphere, or motivating power, in which all these gifts should be exercised in the assembly: namely, in love. Only as love is the

constraining and energizing principle will the ministry be spiritually profitable and, therefore, edifying to the saints.

This important matter of edifying ministry, whether oral or written, should be of great interest to those believers who seek to gather together in scriptural simplicity, for assembly fellowship, in the Name of the Lord Jesus, either for prayer, praise, worship or the public reading and exposition of the holy Scriptures. The purpose of all these gatherings is intended by God to make for the mutual edification and the consequent spiritual profit of all present. The Bible puts it thus: "The manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal" (1 Cor. 12:7). Weymouth renders it: "But to each of us a manifestation of the Spirit has been granted for the common good." Thus the edification of the people of God is the test by which the profit of all ministry is to be measured.

In 1 Corinthians 14:19 Paul declared: "In the Church I had rather speak five words with my understanding, that by my voice I might teach others also, than ten thousand words in a tongue" (not understood). An old teacher of the Word used to say: "The test of edifying ministry lies in meeting the challenge of those five words: "What shall I profit you?" (v. 6). This question might well be used to challenge the right of any person to address a company of believers. If what he has to say is not to the profit of his hearers, he would be well advised to remain silent while some other person occupies the time in a profitable manner.

It will surely be agreed that much unprofitable and unedifying ministry would never have been inflicted on a

longsuffering audience if this simple test had been honestly faced, and right action taken in regard to it. One thing is quite certain: no person is a competent judge of the value of his own oral ministry, for he is palpably predisposed in his own favor! The hearers are surely in the best position to judge as to its profit, or otherwise. The Scriptures put it thus: "Let the prophets speak two or three, and let the other judge" (1 Cor. 14:29). An audience is quick to discern whether or not the ministry to which it listens is edifying and therefore profitable.

Let us think of several things regarding this subject of profitable ministry.

1. The Fact Of The Possession Of The Gift Of Prophecy Or Speaking To Edification.

Prophecy, in the New Testament sense of the term, refers not so much to the foretelling of the future events, as to the forthtelling of the mind of God as found in His Word, as led by the Holy Spirit. There is a very illuminating comment as to this in "Notes on Thessalonians" by Hogg and Vine, which reads: "In such passages as 1 Corinthians 12:28 and Ephesians 2:20, the 'prophets' are placed after the 'apostles,' since not the prophets of Israel are intended, but the gifts of the ascended Lord (Eph. 4:8,11 and Acts 13:1).... The purpose of their gifts was to edify, comfort and encourage the believers (1 Cor. 14:3). The effect upon believers was to show that the secrets of a man's heart are known to God, to convict of sin, and to constrain to worship (1 Cor. 14:24-25). With the completion of the canon of Scripture, prophecy apparently passed away (1 Cor. 13:8-9). In his measure, the teacher has taken the

place of the prophet. Compare the significant change in 2 Peter 2:1. The difference is that, whereas the message of the prophet was a direct revelation of the mind of God for the occasion, the message of the teacher is gathered from the completed revelation contained in the Scriptures.”

Prophecy, or the ability to minister the Word of God to profit, is one of the spiritual gifts given by the Lord Jesus to certain individuals, by which they are enabled to expound the truths contained in the Scriptures to the edification of their fellow members in the Body of Christ. We read: “He (that is Christ) gave some apostles; and some prophets, and some evangelists; and some pastors and teachers; for the perfecting (or maturing) of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the Body of Christ” (Eph. 4:10-22). Thus prophecy is a distinct gift and is not possessed by every believer. Each believer is described as being a priest unto God, a servant of God, and a witness for Christ; but not all believers are prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. These are distinct gifts.

Each believer, however, has been given some gift by the Lord, and it should be each Christian’s ambition to discover what his own particular gift is, and then seek to develop it by diligent exercise, and then discharge it to the glory of his Lord and Saviour. We read in 1 Peter 4:10: “As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.” Paul urged the Corinthian believers to “covet earnestly the best gifts,” and also to “desire spiritual gifts, but rather that ye may prophesy” (1 Cor. 12:31, 14:1).

While this gift of public ministry is to be coveted by the Christian, yet only God can impart it. Once the gift has been imparted, it must then be developed in the spiritual atmosphere of diligent study of the Word of God, earnest prayer to God, and constant and faithful exercise of the gift. There is no royal and easy road to the development of one's gift. The expert pianist becomes such, not only because he was given a musical capacity at his birth, but by the diligent developing of it by many painstaking hours of practice. The same is true of any other gift and the gift of ministry is no exception. True, some Christians are more gifted than others in their ability to discern and declare the counsel of God, yet each should strive to be his best for God. The reward, in a coming day, is to be given, not to the successful, but to the "faithful servant" (Matt. 25-21).

2. The Purpose Of Ministry.

In one word, it is the edification, or the building up of the hearers in the faith, whether it be in the form of rebuke, comfort, exhortation, or exposition. We are told that: "He that prophesieth speaketh unto men unto edification and exhortation and comfort." This is geared to meet the three-fold need of the hearer: edification for his intellect, exhortation for his will, and comfort for his emotions. The great aim of all ministry is for the spiritual profit of the hearer. If it fails to accomplish this, it has fallen short in its purpose. Unprofitable ministry has been wittily defined as the attempt to stir up a gift that is not within us, and this results in the stirring up of a lot of objections from around us! Paul's exhortation to Timothy is pertinent to this: "Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them; that thy profiting

may appear to all. Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee” (1 Tim. 4:1516).

Gift does not exist for its own sake, but for the benefit and edification of others. Just as every member of the human body exists for the benefit of the body as a whole; so the gifts of Christ to the members of His mystical Body are for the benefit of the whole Body or, as we read in Ephesians 4:12: “For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the Body of Christ.” Profitable Christian ministry should therefore serve the purpose of waking up, warming up, lifting up, tuning up, cheering up and building up the saints. Such ministry, needless to say, is as much needed today as it was in the early days of the history of the Church.

Profitable Things --Part 10

Profitable Things

Part 10

Alfred P. Gibbs

3. The Preparation Necessary For This Edifying Ministry.

He who has been gifted and called to minister the Word of God must also realize he is also called upon to study, to develop his gift, and this, Solomon tells us, is “a weariness of the flesh” (Ecc. 12-12). The person who defined study as “the application of the seat of the trousers to the seat of the chair until the subject has been mastered,” wasn’t far wrong, for the maintenance of this point of contact is anything but easy! He who teaches English is enabled to do so because he has studied the subject.

There is therefore the constant need for the daily devotional reading, meditation and study of the Word of God. He must know much of supplication in prayer, together with praise and worship, and accompanied by true humility of spirit, and genuine heart devotion to the Lord Jesus, as seen in a yielded life, together with the confession and forsaking of all known sin. This is the ideal that is set before us in the Scriptures, and each Christian needs to keep it constantly before him, lest he suffer from what has been aptly termed, “The barrenness of a busy life.”

4. The Conscientious Preparation Of The Message.

This also calls for much prayer for guidance as to what portion of the Scriptures the Lord would have us to select for exposition, and also for the needed spiritual wisdom to understand it clearly, interpret it correctly and expound it helpfully and powerfully, so that the hearers will be profitably edified through it. Once this has been determined, the passage selected should be read again and again, until its meaning is clear, for if it is not clear to the reader, it certainly cannot be made clear to the hearer, for one can only teach what he knows. Our Lord could say: "We speak that we do know" (John 3-11).

After the words of the passage of Scripture to be expounded have been carefully considered, the central theme, or the main subject should be discovered, and then stated in one's own words. Then all the contributing thoughts in the passage, which give further light on the theme, or which naturally spring from the theme, should be carefully noted and written down. All these contributing thoughts should now be arranged in their logical sequence so that they will combine to effectually present the central theme of the passage. This is what is called, "expository preaching." It has been well likened to a wheel. The theme is the hub, and the contributing thoughts the spokes of the wheel. By this method, all the truth in this particular passage of Scripture can be exposed, explained and applied. This is undoubtedly the best and most effective method of preaching.

An old preacher has aptly said: “Really trying to preach involves persistent, careful and prayerful preparation of the sermon in all its details, its doctrines, its homiletical order, its vigorous English, its grammatical correctness, the proper pronunciation of its words, its winsome delivery in modulated vocalization, clear enunciation and correct gesticulation” (Jeff D. Day). If all this suggests the idea of hard work, the reader has come to a perfectly correct understanding of what this proper preparation involves. For those who object to the word, “sermon,” and prefer the word, “address,” it is good to know they both mean the same thing! A sermon by any other name is just as good — or bad! Writing will also prove to be a most helpful aid in clarifying one’s thoughts, and become a great help in the use of correct and forceful English.

A preacher of three thousand years ago has put on record what this exposition of the Word involves in the way of studious preparation and said: “Because the preacher was wise, he still taught the people knowledge; yea, he gave good heed, and sought out and set in order many proverbs. The preacher sought to find acceptable words; and that which was written was upright, even words of truth. The words of the wise are as goads and as nails fastened by the Master of assemblies, which are given from one Shepherd” (Ecc. 12-9-11). This good advice, though hoary with age, is very much up to date, and should be “read, marked and inwardly digested” by all who seek to preach or teach effectively and profitably.

Should the reader desire to further his studies in this matter of the preparation of the Word of God, he may obtain additional help by consulting: “The Preacher and

His Preaching," 476 pp, Price \$5.00. (Published by Walterick Publishing Co., Box 2216, Kansas City, Kansas 66110). In this book, the various types of sermons, together with hints on how to prepare and deliver them are given. Seeing that preaching and teaching is the God-ordained means of spreading the gospel and teaching the Scriptures; all who have been gifted by the Lord to this end should seize every opportunity to increase their knowledge of the best means of preparing and presenting the message God desires them to give.

5. The Presentation Of The Ministry

It is one thing to prepare a message from the Word of God, and another to actually deliver it to an audience. It is the same difference that exists between preparing a meal in the kitchen and serving it in the dining room, The ministry of the Word to be Profitable to the hearers should meet certain definite requirements laid down in the Word of God. Let us note four of these essentials of edifying ministry.

(1) It should be intelligent, or "with the understanding" (1 Cor. 14:19). It surely goes without saying that unless the speaker understands clearly what he is talking about, he will only succeed in "darkening counsel by words without knowledge" (Job 38:2). If he is not able to intelligently grasp the subject on which he speaks, how are those who listen to him to understand it? It will simply be a case of the "blind leading the blind." It has been pointed out that the similarity between shallow and muddy water and very deep and clear water is that we cannot see the bottom, but there the similarity ends! Muddled thinking results in muddled ministry, and the result is a muddled audience who

cannot understand what the speaker is trying to say. To be understood is therefore an essential requirement to edifying ministry.

Profitable Things --Part 11

Profitable Things

Part 11

Alfred P. Gibbs

The beloved author of "Profitable Things," a frequent contributor to FOOD FOR THE FLOCK, was suddenly called home to be with the Lord on September 9, 1967.

Alfred Perks Gibbs was born in England, October 22, 1890, and as a boy of thirteen moved with his family to South Africa. In 1919 he followed his twin brother Edwin to Chicago, U.S.A.

Since 1920 brother Gibbs has devoted himself fully and unreservedly to the work of the Lord in the United States, Canada, Great Britain, Australia, South Africa, etc. He will long be remembered by the hymns and choruses he composed, and the books, tracts, pamphlets and articles he wrote.

On September 15, at Augusta, Georgia, this brother beloved and faithful minister of Christ was laid to rest. Mr. George Landis, an intimate friend, addressed the large audience at the funeral services, paying tribute to brother Gibbs for what he had meant spiritually in directing him into a fuller knowledge of the ways of the Lord. Mr. Robert Thompson, Houston, Texas, Mr. August Van Ryn, Florida, Mr. William Pell, Grand Rapids, Michigan, and others shared in the services.

Our readers, like ourselves, have suffered a great loss, but in our sorrow our hopes become the brighter for we are nearing the hour of fulfilment when the dead in

Christ shall rise first and we which remain shall be caught up together with them. What a bright morning that will be!

To be found educationally deficient at one's conversion is no disgrace; but to be content to remain in that condition when the means to remedy it has been provided, is inexcusable. God places no premium on ignorance. The penalty of wilful ignorance is deeper, darker and crasser ignorance. One such person was heard to boast: "I am very thankful for my ignorance!" A brother replied: "Well dear brother, you certainly have much to be thankful for!" There is a tendency, on the part of some unthinking people to depreciate "scholarship;" but surely the Lord has given His people brains in order that they may develop and use them for Him! While it is true brains are not everything, most Christians would find it somewhat awkward to get along without them! Regeneration does not rob a person of his intelligence, but enlightens, ennobles and empowers it for the purpose for which it was given — the glory of God and the profit of others.

The reading and study of the Bible is in itself a liberal education. No one's education is complete without it. Viewed as literature alone, it is unsurpassed. As Maclagan has well said: "It is cast into every form of constructive composition and good writing: history, prophecy, poetry, allegory, emblematic representation, judicious interpretation, literal statement, precept, example, proverbs, disquisition, epistle, sermon and prayer; in short, all the rational shapes of human discourse."

(2) It should be intelligible, that is, it should be clearly heard and understood by the audience. The Bible puts the matter thus: "If the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself for the battle? So likewise ye, except ye utter by the tongue words easy to be understood, how shall it be known what is spoken? for ye shall speak into the air" (1 Cor. 14:8-9). Thus, though the message may be carefully and intelligently prepared, yet if it is not clearly delivered so that all may hear and understand, it has failed in its purpose of profitably edifying the hearers, and might just as well have been spoken into the empty air.

Sometimes an otherwise good message has been entirely lost on an audience because the speaker so mumbled his words that the audience couldn't possibly understand what the mass of inarticulate words were meant to convey. Still others speak in such a low tone that no one could possibly hear them. Thus, instead of doing the audience a service, this kind of speaker actually does it a great disservice. Some years ago a preacher, guilty of this mumbling type of speaking, had a tape recording made of a sermon he preached. When he listened to the tape he discovered, to his dismay, that even he couldn't understand what he had said! Every speaker should take particular care in the matter of enunciation and see to it that his words are clearly uttered, correctly pronounced and easily understood by his hearers. The use of a tape recorder would be most beneficial in enabling him to correct any deficiencies he may have in this direction. He should also both invite and welcome any criticism on his expressions, pronunciation, grammar, or any peculiar mannerisms he

has which tend to detract from the value of the message he brings.

(3) It should be instructive and informative. Only such ministry is really edifying. Paul's great aim in his ministry is given us in Ephesians 3:8-9 where we read: "That I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, etc." A good question for each person to ask himself after he has ministered the Word is: "Did I cause the audience to see, or understand the truth which I sought to present? Did I make it clear? Did I use simple language, with clear distinct enunciation? Was it accompanied by apt illustrations? Was the application pointed and definite?" One thing is certain, if the audience failed to see, then the effort to edify it was unsuccessful and consequently unprofitable.

The use of long words, when simple words would just as well convey the thought, are also to be avoided, for such only serve the purpose of drawing attention to the learning of the speaker instead of the subject of the message. Short declarative sentences are to be preferred to long and involved phraseology. Only those illustrations that really illustrate should be used. All others should be mercilessly scrapped. We have all had to endure those interminable illustrations that required other illustrations to illustrate what had supposedly been already illustrated! The act of writing out one's sermon is therefore a good discipline, for it demands clear thinking and correct statement, and also develops the ability to use good grammatical language, and this is no mean accomplishment.

(4) It could be inspirational. That is, through the Holy Spirit's presence and power, it could result in the outworking of the truth imparted in the shape of resolution and action. One of the basic laws of pedagogy is stated thus: "There is no true impression without a corresponding expression." Paul could write to those to whom he had ministered the Word and say: "For this cause also thank we God without ceasing because, when ye received the Word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the Word of God which effectually worketh also in you that believe" (1 Thess. 2:13).

It must ever be kept in mind that it is the blessed Holy Spirit who alone can use the word ministered to accomplish the purpose for which it is sent forth. He alone can illuminate the mind of the hearers, apply its truth to their hearts and "lead them into all truth," so that their lives shall be adjusted to the will of God. Therefore the absolute necessity for the person who brings the word, to be living in the energy of an ungrieved, unquenched and unlimited Holy Spirit. The words of Zechariah 4:6 need ever be before the preacher: "Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord!" While proper preparation is essential, yet apart from the power of the Holy Spirit, nothing can be accomplished for God.

May it be ours to so prepare and present the message God has given us, and be so led and empowered by the Spirit that it will fulfill the purpose for which God intended it, the conviction and conversion of the unsaved, and the profitable edification of the people of God. It will surely be perceived from what has been said, that not the least of these "profitable things" is Spirit-led

ministry that will enlighten and edify those who hear. In view of this, may all who rise to speak for God challenge themselves with the question with which we began this section: “What shall I profit you?”

Profitable Things --Part 12

Profitable Things

Part 12

Alfred P. Gibbs

Good Works

The fourth profitable thing we shall consider is good works. In his letter to Titus, Paul wrote: "This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable unto men" (Tit. 3-8).

This is one of the four faithful sayings of Paul, as recorded in his pastoral epistles. The others are found in 1 Timothy 1:15; 4:9; 2 Timothy 2:11. They present four great truths: 1. The gospel proclamation of Christ's Person and work. 2. The godly manifestation of the Christian life. 3. The self-denying identification with Christ in His rejection. 4. The Christian's practical demonstration of the reality of his salvation by his good works.

The Word of God makes it abundantly clear that good works performed by unregenerate men and women, in order to merit the favor of God or secure their salvation, are all utterly in vain. The finished work of Christ has demonstrated this fact beyond all possibility of contradiction. If a sinner could be saved by any other means than through faith in Christ and His work on the cross, then our Lord's sacrifice was offered in vain! Salvation has its origin in pure and sovereign grace,

which consists of the outward expression of love toward those who are utterly undeserving of it. It is God's offer of everything for nothing to those who do not deserve anything, except judgment. Every preacher of the gospel does well to emphasize the fact that "By grace are ye saved through faith... not of works lest any man should boast" (Eph. 2:8-9). Scripture presents salvation as a free gift purchased by the precious blood of Christ, and offered to whosoever will rest in the value of Christ's substitutionary sacrifice, and receive Him by faith as Saviour and own Him as Lord. God's message to the sinner is: "To him that worketh not, but believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness" (Rom. 4:5).

It is only when a person has been saved by the grace of God that good works become profitable before God, for they flow from faith in the Son of God, and are the evidence of the reality of an experienced salvation. It has been well put thus:

"I would not work my soul to save,
For this God's Son has done;
But I would work like any slave
From love to God's dear Son!"

Thus the Christian does not work in order to merit salvation, but because, by God's grace he has already experienced it through faith in the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. In other words, he works from salvation and not to salvation.

Now let us inquire as to why good works are described as being profitable for the Christian.

1. They are profitable because they fulfill the purpose God had in saving us.

We read in Ephesians 2:10: “We are His workmanship, (literally, His “poem”) created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.” Notice that little word, “unto.” We were not saved by our good works, but we were saved unto, or with a view to the doing of good works — a vast difference indeed. Thus the Christian, by the good works he performs, fulfills the purpose God had in saving him. We read: “As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith” (Gal. 6:10).

Christianity is not a system of negatives; it does not consist of a long list of “don’ts” but it is a positive thing. We read: “Whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by Him” (Col. 3:17). And again: “Whether therefore ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Cor. 10:31). Believers are urged to: “Do good, and to communicate forget not, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased” (Heb. 13:16). Timothy was advised by Paul to charge those of his hearers who were: “Rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy; that they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate” (1 Tim. 6: 17-18)

The words of Micah are surely in order at this point: “He hath skewed thee, O man, what is good and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy and to walk humbly with thy God” (Micah 6:8). A

person when asked what evidence he could give that he was a true Christian replied with a long list of negatives. He declared he “didn’t do this, or that, and didn’t go to this place or that place, etc.” His questioner bluntly replied: “All you’ve told me is what you don’t do. Now tell me what you do do;”

2. They are profitable because they evidence the genuineness of a faith that has been professed.

This fact is clearly brought out by James where we read: “What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works: can (that kind of) faith save him? ... Even so, faith, if it hath not works is dead, being alone. Yea, a man may say thou hast faith and I have works: show me thy faith without thy works and I will show thee my faith by my works... For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also” (James 2:14-26).

Many have supposed that Paul and James contradict each other, but this emphatically is not true. Instead, they complement each other. Paul declares, in effect, that works apart from faith is unseen by God. James points out that faith, apart from works is unseen by men. Faith is the means of our justification before God. Works is the means of our vindication before men. Both a foundation and a chimney are needed in a home, but they must be kept in their right position and relationship to each other. In other words, we are saved by faith alone, but not by that kind of faith that is alone. True faith is always evidenced by works.

Faith is a principle that cannot be seen, smelled, heard, tasted or felt; yet is infinitely more powerful than anything that can be seen, smelled, heard, tasted and

felt. Only God can see faith in its essence and reality. Man can only see it as it is evidenced by deeds. Thus, Paul and James present two aspects of the same truth of salvation. Paul is occupied with the source of salvation, James with its sequel. Paul with its origin, James with its outcome. Paul with its cause, James with its consequence. Paul with its root, James its fruit. Paul with its channel, James with its flow. Once this fact is appreciated, the so called “contradiction” disappears, and Paul and James, by divine inspiration, are seen to be in perfect harmony with each other.

Some have thought that we are justified by faith before God and by works before men; but that is not the thought here. James, by the Spirit, declares that the faith that justifies a person before God is the same faith that evidences itself by works. This can be seen by the three illustrations James uses. First, the case of the destitute brother or sister, whose desperate need for food is well known to the person to whom they appeal for help. But instead of supplying their need out of his abundance, he sends them away empty, saying as he does: “Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled!” James justly adds: “What does it profit? Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone” (Jas. 2:15-17).

His next illustration is that of Abraham, the father of the faithful, who, when he was commanded by God to offer up his only and well beloved son, obeyed, and thus demonstrated the reality of his faith by his actions. Both Paul and James use the same incident to illustrate the meaning of true faith. Paul looks at it from the Godward aspect and James from the manward. See Genesis 22:1-18; Romans 4:1-3; James 2:21-24. Note the

conclusion reached in Verse 24, and mark the word “only.”

The third illustration concerns Rahab. How did she prove that she really believed in the reality of the true and living God, and that He was about to give the whole land of Canaan into the possession of the nation of Israel? Did she content herself by repeating a creed in which she stated her correct belief as to these things? No, she did something about it. She received and hid the spies and then aided their escape. She received the promise of salvation, and rested securely behind the scarlet cord that hung from her window. Thus her faith, evidenced by her acts, resulted in her salvation from the destruction which came upon Jericho. See Joshua 6; James 2:25; Hebrews 11:31. Likewise, the constant repetition of a creed which embodies one’s belief in God, however orthodox may be its wording, has no saving virtue whatever. It is the definite reception of Christ as one’s own personal Saviour, and the bold confession of Him as the Lord of one’s life that results in salvation. See Romans 10:9-10.

Profitable Things --Part 13

Profitable Things

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All the great heroes of faith, which are described in Hebrews 11, proved the reality of their faith by what they did. Abel brought the offering God desired (V. 4), Enoch walked with God and witnessed for Him (V. 5, Jude 14). Noah built an ark (V. 7). Abraham left Ur and journeyed to the land of promise (V. 8). Moses turned his back on Egypt's pleasures, pomp and riches (V. 23). This great array of faith's unnamed heroes all proved the genuineness of their belief by their behaviour (Vs. 32-40). From all this we can surely learn the truth of the statement made at the beginning of the section: "We are saved by faith alone, but not by that kind of faith that is alone!"

3. They are profitable because the Lord Jesus Himself emphasized their necessity to discipleship.

Our Lord, in His wonderful sermon on the mount, addressing His disciples who believed on Him said: "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in Heaven" (Matt. 5:16). These words were spoken, not to a mixed multitude, but to His own disciples as Matthew 5:1-2 clearly indicates. In fact, the whole sermon on the mount is full of practical exhortations to those who professed to be His followers. Many, in order to avoid these practical exhortations, have sought to relegate this sermon to the dim and misty past, or postpone it to

the equally misty future. But these words of our Lord should surely have a voice to us in the living present. True, there is dispensational truth to be found in Matthew's gospel, but this should never be allowed to blunt the keen edge of our Lord's words concerning the necessity for good works, and which are so needed in this day of shallow thinking and careless living. In His parable of the good Samaritan, it will be recalled that the Lord's application of the story to the one who had provoked it was: "Go thou and do likewise!" (Luke 10:29-37).

We must never forget that the Lord Himself has left us "an example that we should follow His steps" (I Pet. 2:21-23). After Christ had washed His disciples' feet He said: "If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example that ye should do as I have done to you" (John 13:13-15). Peter, in his sermon to Cornelius and his household told how: "God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost, and with power, who went about doing good" (Acts 10:38). One has only to read the record of His life, as recorded in the four gospels, to see that the whole of our Lord's earthly ministry was characterized by good works, which were to the profit of all with whom He came into touch.

In that wonderful prayer, recorded in John 17, our Lord said: "As Thou hast sent Me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world" (V. 18). After His resurrection, He appeared to His disciples and said: "As My Father hath sent Me, even so send I you" (John 23:21). As, at His Father's request, He came into this world, and "went about doing good;" so He has sent His disciples into the world to do likewise. As He "loved and

gave Himself for us;" so we, in turn, must also love and give ourselves for others (1 Jno. 3:16). We must give of our time, energy, money and effort to carry out His commission. Just as a poet is known by his poems, an artist by his paintings, a pianist by his playing, an author by his writings, and an architect by his buildings; so faith is known by its works. "Show me thy faith without thy works (if you can!), and I will show thee my faith by my works" (James 2:18). We have surely gathered from what we have read that good works are declared to be profitable and by no less an authority than the Lord Himself.

4. They are profitable because they bring glory to God in the eyes of the worldling.

The Westminster Catechism is quite correct when, in answer to the question: "What is man's chief end?" it replies: "Man's chief end (or object in life) is to glorify God and enjoy Him for ever." In his epistle to the Romans, Paul, by the Spirit, points out that the Jews, who professed to have a superior knowledge of God had, by their inconsistent lives and scandalous behaviour, "caused God's name to be blasphemed" among the heathen (Romans 2:17-24). Their conduct had given the lie to their creed, for "they said and did not" (Matt. 23:1-3). Christ's most severe words of denunciation were addressed to the hypocritical Pharisees who professed to know God, but, by their lives denied Him (Matt. 23:13-33).

In view of this, Peter's words should come with power to all who profess to be Christ's disciples: "Having your conversation (or manner of life) honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evil

Goers they may, by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation" (1 Pet. 2:12). To "glorify" means to display the excellence of a person or thing. Thus the excellence of God's Person and His regenerating power is displayed by its evidence in the godly lives and good works of those who claim to belong to Him. Many an unbeliever has been brought to see his need of God's salvation by seeing it evidenced in the honest behaviour and good deeds of Christians.

Still later, in his Epistle, Peter exhorts the believing wives of unbelieving husbands to so conduct themselves by purity of life and good works that: "If any obey not the Word, they also may, without the Word, be won by the conversation (manner of life) of the wives; while they behold your chaste conversation coupled with fear" (1 Pet. 3:1-6). Many an unsaved husband has been won for Christ by this means. It was not the constant nagging of the unsaved wife; but the quiet testimony, backed up by a consistent life in the home, by which the excellence of her Saviour was displayed. The Christian is never so effective for his Lord and Master as when he exemplifies by his kindness, courtesy, consideration and good works on behalf of others, the faith he has professed by his spoken testimony.

Just as our Lord glorified His Father by His testimony and manner of life on earth; so also must the believer follow the example of His Lord, and glorify Him by both word and deed before the world (Jn. 17:4). People are not saved by seeing the good works of believers, but by the hearing of the gospel concerning Christ's Person and work (Rom. 10:17). It is the double testimony of the spoken word, backed up by the consistent life, that is the ideal combination. The "shoes (or walk) of the

preparation of the gospel of peace,” illustrate this (Eph 6:15). The life lived prepares for the lips testimony.

Profitable Things --Part 14

Profitable Things

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5. They, good works, are profitable because of the present joy, peace, and satisfaction they bring to the believer himself.

Our Lord declared: "If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them" (John 13-17). Christ's words, unrecorded in the gospels, are quoted by Paul in his farewell address to the elders of the church at Ephesus: "I have showed you all things, how that so laboring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how He said: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive' " (Acts 20:35).

Good deeds, when motivated by love for Christ, bring to the doer multiplied joy and peace, together with the deep satisfaction that comes from doing the will of his Lord. Giving not only enriches the recipient of the gift, but far more greatly enriches the one who gave the gift. We are told that "God loveth a cheerful giver," and the reason is not far to seek: God is a cheerful Giver Himself (2 Cor. 9:7). When God loved, He loved the world; when He gave, He gave His own beloved Son, "That gift of gifts, all other Gifts in One!" We are told that Christ, "for the joy that was set before Him, endured the cross, despising the shame" (Heb. 12:2).

Just as sinful deeds bring their own punishment in the way of a guilty conscience, a defiled memory, and a

restlessness of spirit; so virtue and good works bring their own reward in terms of joy, peace and satisfaction. If there were no other reward than this, it would be compensation enough! The faithful servant is rewarded by entering into "the joy of his Lord" (Matt. 25:21). Christians may now, as they follow the example of their Lord, who "went about doing good," share the joy that was His in doing His Father's will.

"Go labor on, spend and be spent,

Thy joy to do the Saviour's will;

It is the way the Master went —

Should not the servant tread it still?"

6. They are profitable because of the future reward they shall receive at the judgment seat of Christ.

Before this judgment seat of Christ every Christian shall one day stand and receive from the Lord Himself, whatever reward he has earned by his conduct as a believer while he lived on earth. The Scriptures are clear as to this matter, for we read: "We shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ" (Rom. 14:10). And again: "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad" (2 Cor. 5:10). Still further, we read concerning this event: "Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is; if any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: yet he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire" (1 Cor. 3:10-15).

It is important to distinguish between the judgment seat of Christ, which is for Christians only, and the Great White Throne judgment, which is for the unsaved, and is described in Revelation 20:15-20. It is the same difference that exists between a civil case and a criminal case. In a civil case it is the case that is tried, not the person. In the latter, it is the person who is tried and not the case. The former illustrates the judgment seat of Christ, the latter the judgment of the Great White Throne.

The judgment seat is a translation from the Greek word, "Bema." This was used to describe the raised platform on which a judge sat to determine cases, or from which he gave awards for proficiency to those who had earned them by successful competition. At the judgment seat of Christ, each believer's works shall be examined, and their true worth estimated and rewarded. Paul had this in mind when he said: "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love His appearing" (2 Tim. 4:7-8).

God's Word assures the believer that: "God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labor of love, which ye have showed toward His name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister" (Heb. 6:10). Every good work done for the glory of Christ shall receive in that day a more than adequate reward. The Lord's commendation and crown shall fill the Christian's cup of joy to overflowing. He will then understand the significance of his Lord's words, "Great is your reward in Heaven" (Matt. 5:12). In view of this, we can readily

appreciate what Paul meant when he said: "I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us" (Rom. 8:18).

In view of the profitable character of good works, may it be ours, as disciples of our Lord and Master, to so live for Him, witness for Him and serve Him by our good works, which men shall behold that we may bring glory to His name on earth, enjoy the satisfaction such service brings to our own hearts, and also earn the reward of our Lord in that coming day.

Profitable Things --Part 15

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The next profitable thing we shall consider is

Bodily Exercise

“Bodily exercise profiteth a little” (Marg. “for a little time” - 1 Tim. 4:8).

It may appear strange that bodily exercise, on the part of the believer, should be included among the profitable things of Scripture; but inasmuch as the Word of God declared this to be so, it will be well worth our time to consider what the Bible has to say about the body of the believer and the necessity for him to keep it in good physical condition by the use of judicious exercise.

We shall think of four things which the Bible reveals concerning the physical body of the believer. First, it has been given to him by the Lord. Second, it has become the purchased possession of the Lord. Third, it is to be presented, as a living sacrifice, to the Lord. Fourth, it should be kept, as far as possible, in good condition for the Lord.

1. The believer's body has been given to him by the Lord.

Each Christian should recognize this fact.

(1) The Creator of it.

The Bible reveals the fact that man is the result of the direct creative act of God.

We read: "So God created man in His own image, in the image of God created He him, male and female created He them ... And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul" (Gen. 1:27; 2:7).

The introduction, wide dissemination and popular acceptance of the evolutionary hypothesis (guess), which has no foundation whatever in the facts of science, seeks to deny this fact, and to bow God out of His creation. It is a case of the wish becoming father to the thought. The thought of God and of man's personal responsibility to Him, as his Creator, was resented by many. When this theory of evolution was introduced by Darwin in his, "Origin of Species," it found immediate and willing acceptance on the part of those who said in their heart to God: "Depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of Thy ways. What is the Almighty, that we should serve Him? And what profit should we have, if we pray unto Him?" (Job 21:14-15).

Briefly stated by Le Conte, the theory of evolution can be defined as: "Continuous progressive change, according to fixed laws, and by means of resident forces." It affirms that all life, whether fish, bird, insect, reptile or animal, had its origin in a primordial germ which, through the millions of years which have elapsed since it began to be, has slowly but surely evolved or developed, by the innate forces of "natural selection," and "the survival of the fittest," to the various forms of life which are now existent on the earth, including man.

Thus the direct creative act of God, as described in Genesis, is ridiculed as a myth, and relegated to the scrap heap, as being “unscientific.”

Though it is only an unproved theory, evolution is taught today as though it were a proven scientific fact. Our young people from grade school to university, are being taught this God-denying theory, and thus being robbed of their faith in the divine revelation of the Bible. There are two schools of thought regarding this evolutionary hypothesis. The Atheistical school which eliminates God entirely, and the Theistic school, which declares that God created the original germ and then left the development of it to purely natural processes. The person who believes the Bible record rejects them both.

Many books have been written combating the theory of evolution, in which many of the findings of great scientists, who reject the theory, are clearly stated. It would be a real service to put into the hands of our young people such literature, and thus forewarn and forearm them against this faith-destroying heresy. Two little booklets are recommended for this purpose: “Evolution. Science Falsely So Called.” Published by International Christian Crusade, 12 Spadina Road, Toronto 4, Ontario, Canada. (108 pages, 25 cents per copy). “Why I Believe the Genesis Record” by J. R. Hand. Published by “Back to the Bible Broadcast” Box 233, Lincoln, Nebraska. (15 cents).

The person who accepts the evolutionary theory, must face the fact that he takes issue with the Son of God who, when referring to the creation of man declared: “From the beginning of the creation, God made them male and female” (Mark 10:6; Matt. 19:4). Since He was

the Creator, (Col. 1:16-17) His Word should surely be final on this question! The fact that man's body is the result of a divine creation should therefore invest it with a dignity only Deity could give.

(2) The Composition of it.

Scripture reveals that man is a tripartite being, composed of body, soul and spirit (1 Thess. 5:23). The body is the seat of world consciousness. Through the five senses: seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting and touching, we are able to receive impressions from and communicate with the world around us, in which we live, move and have our being.

Through the soul, we become aware of our own entity, and are able to analyse the impressions received through the senses, and arrive at certain conclusions regarding those impressions as to whether we like or dislike them. It is therefore the seat of self consciousness, the memory, intelligence and imagination, the faculty by which we reason.

The spirit, which is the highest part of man, and which distinguishes him from brute creation, is the seat of God consciousness. God can communicate Himself to man through the spirit which He has placed in him. The spirit of man is described in the Bible as "the candle of the Lord, searching all the inward parts" (Prov. 20:27). In the case of an unsaved person, the spirit is said to be in a state of darkness, so that he can neither see, understand nor appreciate spiritual things (Eph. 4:18; 2 Cor. 4:4; 1 Cor. 2:14). When a person is regenerated, his spirit is said to be illuminated and he is described as being "light in the Lord," and declared to be translated

“out of darkness into light” (See Eph. 5:8; 1 Pet. 2:9; 2 Cor. 4:6; John 8:12).

The body is therefore the house in which we live temporarily. It is called a “tabernacle” or a tent (2 Cor. 5:1). David, as he contemplated the complexity of the human body declared: “I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvelous are Thy works and that my soul knoweth right well” (Ps. 139:14). Some years ago, Dr. Alexis Carroll, a most skillfull physician, wrote a book entitled: “Man the Unknown,” in which he pointed out the marvel and mystery of the human body, which has defied all man’s efforts to thoroughly analyze and completely understand.

Here then, is man’s body, God’s masterpiece. It is composed of 245 bones, exquisitely carved and grooved; 500 muscles, large and small, some acting spontaneously and others at the will of man; three layers of skin with myriads of pores; a vast network of nerves, arteries and veins, penetrating to each part of the body and furnishing life and sensibility. Within the marvelous framework of this body are the vital organs, the brain, heart, lungs, liver, intestines, stomach, kidneys, etc. Each of these organs fulfills the purpose which the Creator intended when He designed and created it.

(3) The Capability of it.

Man is not only tripartite in his composition, but within that body is a personality, or individuality, which distinguishes each person from every other person on the face of the earth. This personality is expressed in a three-fold way. First, by an intellect, which enables him to obtain, retain, and reproduce knowledge. Second, by his emotions by which he reacts to what he learns: he

likes or dislikes, he loves or hates, etc. Third, by his will, by which he is enabled to determine on a course of action and carry it out. This, in reality, is what the Bible means by the word "heart" which is the motivating part of man. In some cases, when the word "heart" is mentioned, the emphasis is on the intellect (Luke 9:47; Eph. 4:18); at other times on the emotions (Luke 21:26; 24:32). Sometimes it is on the will (Eph. 6:6; Acts 11:23). Thus the "heart" represents the whole man: his intellect, emotions and will. This personality of man is a sacred thing which God never coerces, but to which He appeals by His Word and the Holy Spirit. Through the preaching of the Word, He seeks to enlighten the intellect, stir the emotions, and precipitate the will to a right decision and act.

What tremendous capabilities, either for good or evil are resident in the human body! It can become the means under God of bringing glory to Him and untold blessing to one's fellow-man; or it can become a dishonor to God and a curse to humanity. One has only to read the pages of history to have this fact verified. Think of Abraham, Joseph, Moses, Joshua, John, Peter, Paul, and hundreds of others whose bodies, when placed at God's disposal were used by Him to accomplish His purpose of blessing to man. Then think of others whose bodies became the tool of the devil and brought disaster and grief to untold millions.

Profitable Things --Part 16

Profitable Things

Part 16

2. The believer's body has become the purchased possession of the Lord.

This fact is plainly stated in the Scriptures: "What? Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost, which is in you, which ye have of God and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's" (I Cor. 6:19-20). Peter reminds his readers that they were "not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold ... but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot" (I Pet. 1:18-19).

(1) The Purchase of it.

No greater price was ever demanded, and no greater price was ever paid than that which God demanded and Christ paid at Calvary, nearly 2,000 years ago. Christians are assured that "all things are yours, whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours, and ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's" (1 Cor. 3:21-23). There is one thing, however, that does not belong to the believer, and that is his body! This belongs, body, soul and spirit, to the One whose "purchased possession" it is, to "the praise of His glory," and who, one day, at His second coming, shall glorify it,

and make it like unto “His own body of glory” (Eph. 1:14; Phil. 3:21).

Though the believer’s body belongs to Christ, it is now called “the body of our humiliation” (R.V.), for it is subject to disease, pain, suffering, decay and death. One day, however, every believer will have a glorified body, incapable of disease, decay and death. This will take place at the return of Christ, and it is termed: “the redemption of the body.” For this great event, every Christian waits with glad anticipation (Rom. 8:23 cp 1 Cor. 15:47-57; 1 Thess. 4:13-18).

(2) The purpose.

Christ has purchased the body of the believer in order that, through it, He may express Himself and be magnified. Paul realized this fact and declared: “According to my earnest expectation and my hope, that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but that with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life, or by death. For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (Phil. 1:20-21).

The Lord Jesus is in Heaven, but the bodies in which believers live are on earth. His desire is to use these bodies of ours to accomplish His purposes. He desires to use our lips to witness for Him; our eyes to see the needs of others and alleviate them; our feet to go at His command and proclaim the gospel to the unsaved; our hands to work for Him, and our ears to listen to His voice and translate His will into the terms of a life lived to His honor and praise. 2 Thessalonians 1:12 sums up the whole matter. Mark the words carefully: “That the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and ye in Him, according to the grace of our God and

the Lord Jesus Christ.” This is the Christian ideal. May it be ours to make it our ambition to fulfill it!

(3) The believer’s body should be presented, as a living sacrifice, to the Lord.

Paul, by the Spirit, after a masterly setting forth of the mercies of God in the provision of His free, full and eternal salvation, appeals thus to the believers to whom he is writing: “I beseech you therefore, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service” (Rom. 12:1).

This is one of the great passages of the greatest of all books, the Bible. It should be carefully read, preferably upon one’s knees and in privacy, and prayerfully and sincerely considered by every Christian and allowed to challenge him in respect to his life as a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. There are thousands of professing Christians who are living aimless, shallow, purposeless and fruitless lives, because they have never honestly faced this stirring appeal, and responded to it by a glad dedication of their bodies to the Lord whom they profess has bought them to be His possession.

Remember, this appeal was made to these who had already been saved by the grace of God, whose bodies were indwelt by the Holy Spirit, and who had been “blessed with all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus.” It is not a formal command, but a loving appeal, based on their possession of the multitudinous mercies of God, and who desires the glad response of their appreciation of all He is and has done for them.

Perhaps a true incident may serve to illustrate this presentation of one's body to the Lord as a willing and glad sacrifice. Many years ago, and under compulsion, the great Kohinoor diamond was ceded to Great Britain by a very young Rajah in India. When this Rajah had grown to manhood, he paid a visit to England and was received by Queen Victoria, who asked him if there was anything she could do that would make his visit more pleasurable. He replied: "Yes, Your Majesty. I would like to see the Kohinoor diamond, which was once in my possession as a child, but which was taken from me, and is now owned by Great Britain." The Queen granted his request and the beautiful gem was placed in his hand. After he had examined the diamond carefully and appreciated its great beauty and worth, he handed it back to the Queen and said: "Your Majesty, this jewel was taken from me as a child, when I did not appreciate its beauty and value; but now, fully realizing both its beauty and great value, I gladly present it to Your Majesty."

Surely this beautifully illustrates what is involved by the willing presentation of our bodies to the Lord. When we were first saved, we did not fully realise all that was involved in our salvation. We thought chiefly of deliverance from hell and of the forgiveness of our sins, and the possession of eternal life. But now, fully aware of the fact that we were bought by Him, we are privileged, out of gratitude, to present our bodies to Him that He may be glorified through them. May it be ours to say:

"Not my own, O Lord,

Thine alone I'd be;

Take Thou full control
As I yield to Thee.
By a righteous life,
Service, glad and free:
Glorify Thyself, O Lord,
Just as Thou wilt through me!"

Profitable Things --Part 17

Profitable Things

Part 17

Alfred P. Gibbs

4. The believer's body should be kept, as far as possible, in good condition for the Lord.

Inasmuch as the believer's present physical body is the divinely appointed vehicle by which the Holy Spirit expresses Himself on earth; it will be readily appreciated that it should be kept, as far as is humanly possible in good physical condition by proper food, clothing, exercise and rest. The privilege of living in a body purchased by the Lord must be balanced by the responsibility of taking good and proper care of it, so that it will be at its best for Him. It has been well said: "A disembodied spirit cannot function at peak efficiency on earth!" Once the human spirit leaves the body at death, the body can no longer function on earth for the Lord, and is, therefore, laid in the grave to await the resurrection, when the spirit will be reunited to the glorified body.

Dr. A. T. Schofield, an eminent nerve specialist, a devoted Christian and an able expositor of the Word, used to say that when Christians forget what God remembers, they get into trouble. He would then quote Psalm 103:14 to support his contention. This reads: "He (God) knoweth our frame, He remembereth that we are dust." He would then go on to apply his homily and say: "When a Christian forgets that he is dust, and imagines

he is made of cast iron, and abuses his body by over-taxing his nervous energy, God has to lay him aside until such time as he recovers his health."

Many devoted Christians have had to learn the hard way the truth of this sage advice. There are two extremes to be avoided. One is that of rusting out through slothfulness and love of ease, and the other is wearing out through overwork. The best method is to sensibly wear out for the Lord. The ideal is to have a healthy soul in a healthy body, and this calls for a good supply of that uncommon commodity known as common sense. Many a life that promises much useful service has been cut short because of a failure to observe the rules governing sensible living.

One of these things, as Paul by the Spirit indicates, is the profitable use of judicious exercise by which the body is kept fit for the service of the Lord. Recreation, therefore plays no small part in the maintenance of bodily health. The Christian should, therefore, be reasonably careful what food he eats, and learn to avoid that which disagrees with him. He should see to it that he is suitably clothed to meet whatever climatic conditions in which he finds himself. He should see to it that he gets enough sleep, so as to keep mentally alert and enabled to do his work efficiently.

The body should therefore not be despised, but developed for the Lord. It should neither be neglected nor molly-coddled. While the physical body is certainly not everything, yet it is something that God has given to each believer. It should, therefore, be accepted as a sacred trust, and developed to the best advantage for the Lord, for we are told: "The body is ... for the Lord

and the Lord for the body" (1 Cor. 6:13). We should not become unduly anxious about it lest we lapse into a state of hypochondria and become morbidly occupied with our aches and pains, real or otherwise. Nor should we become careless about it, but ever remember that the body is the temple of the Holy Spirit and therefore should be kept clean and usable for Him.

There is a false theory that the physical body is the source of evil and must be punished by self-inflicted torture. Under this erroneous assumption, people scourge themselves with a whip or chain until covered with blood. This is called "flagellation." Others wear a most uncomfortable hair shirt, or walk with shoes in which pebbles have been placed or compel their body to endure privation in the way of insufficient food or clothing. Still others will shut themselves up in a cell and practise abstemiousness for long periods, imagining in so doing that they are pleasing God by punishing their bodies. But all this is in vain. It is not the body that is evil, but the sinful nature within the body, and only the regenerating power of the Spirit of God can take care of this.

Profitable Things --Part 18

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In Hebrews 12:6-11 we read: “For whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards and not sons. Furthermore, we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but He for our profit, that we might be partakers of His holiness. Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness, unto them which are exercised thereby.”

God’s chastening may not seem to be a very attractive addition to this list of profitable things, but we may be certain it is a very necessary thing, or it would never have been mentioned in the Bible as one of the evidences of spiritual legitimacy, and one of the means by which the believer may become a partaker of God’s holiness.

By “chastening” is meant instruction, discipline and child training. The word is PAIDEIA, translated “nurture” in Ephesians 6:4; “chastisement” in Hebrews

12:5, 7, 8; and “instruction” in 2 Timothy 3:16. It refers to the sum total of all those things which God allows to come into the lives of His children, and by means of which their spiritual training and development is made possible. Chastening is thus the process by which the teaching of the teacher becomes the learning of the learner. It does not refer exclusively to corrective punishment, though this is included; but to the whole process of child training, including such things as teaching politeness, obedience, kindness, consideration for others, mercy, generosity, honesty, industry, as well as secular and spiritual instruction at school and in the home.

The word “discipline” is derived from the word “disciple,” which means a learner or a follower. Hence those chosen by the Lord to follow Him were called “disciples.” In the Christian sense of the term, a disciple is a person who has come under the tuition, or discipline of the One who said: “Take My yoke upon you and learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls” (Matt. 11:29). Thus the whole of the Christian’s life on earth from its commencement to its conclusion becomes a course of discipline or training.

C. H. Morrison, in “The Ministry of Interruption” has an excellent comment on God’s discipline: “With every separate and individual soul God has his separate and individual dealings. There are touches in the discipline of every man to which nowhere is there any replica. Just as each face is different from all others, and every fingerprint has its own impress; so there is something peculiar and distinctive in the divine handling of every soul — some mark of grace, so personal and private,

some chastisement so exquisitely fitting, that in no other life is it repeated.”

Many Christians wrongly imagine that every accident, sickness or loss from which a believer suffers is a punishment from the Lord because of some wrong on his part, but this is not so. If it were so, then every Christian who dies as a result of his last illness dies under the displeasure of God, and the death rate of each Christian, for quite a long time, has been one per person! Job’s “friends” labored under this misapprehension, and were rebuked by the Lord for their folly (Job 42:7, 8). The Christian lives in a body which is subject to disease and decay, and God gives no guarantee of immunity from the ills to which flesh is heir, but promises that He will work “all things together for their good” (Rom. 8:28). Thus the believer can sing:

“Ill that is blest is good,
And unblest good is ill;
And all is right
That seems most wrong,
If it be God’s good will.”

Having defined what is meant by chastening or discipline, let us consider three things: first, the necessity for discipline; second, the purpose of discipline; third, the results of discipline.

Profitable Things --Part 19

Profitable Things

Part 19

Alfred P. Gibbs

1. The necessity for discipline

We can be absolutely certain of one thing: unless it were necessary God would never permit it. We have all been made painfully aware of those children whose foolish and over indulgent parents have allowed them to do exactly as they wished, say what they liked, and go where they chose with no restraint whatever, and no punishment ever administered for their wrong doing. People refer to them contemptuously as “spoiled brats,” and give them as wide a berth as possible. God, as the Father of the largest family on earth, is not interested in raising “spoiled brats;” but sees to it that all His regenerated children experience a good measure of His discipline which will fit them to live the Christian life in a way that will bring glory, honor and praise to His name.

(1) Discipline is needed because it is a scriptural thing. The Scripture puts it thus: “The rod and reproof give wisdom, but a child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame ... Correct thy son, and he shall give thee rest; yea, he shall give delight unto thy soul” ...he that spareth his rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes” (Prov. 29:15, 17; 13:24). Inasmuch as every Christian is viewed as being a member of the family of God, the force of these

Scriptures should be obvious. If an earthly father is thus exhorted to exercise proper discipline in his family, so that his children shall be a credit to him, how much more shall our Father in Heaven?

No child naturally desires or appreciates parental discipline at the time; yet, instinctively, each child recognizes its necessity and actually respects the one who can maintain it in love and administer it with impartiality. Most children will also recognize the necessity for an occasional spanking for some act of disobedience to a known command, and bear no ill will if their disobedience has merited such a form of discipline, particularly if it is given after due consideration and not in the moment of hot anger. The appreciation, needless to say, comes afterward and not at the time!

(2) Discipline is needed because of our weakness and immaturity in knowledge, growth and proper behaviour. A new born baby is given immediate attention when it begins to cry but, as it grows older its cries are not answered so quickly. It thus learns a measure of self control. The time of weaning is usually quite a test, as the child is taught to be less dependent on its mother and to relinquish the bottle for a spoon with which to feed itself. Each lesson properly taught and learned aids in the normal development of the child from helpless babyhood to active, self reliant boyhood, youth and manhood. So also is this true in the spiritual realm. There is the need for constant discipline from our Father, so that we shall learn the necessary lessons for each stage of life, and be enabled to thus grow in grace, knowledge and spiritual stature.

It has been well expressed, in the secular realm, by this poem entitled "Good Timber."

"The tree that never had to fight
For sun and air and sky and light,
That stood out in the open plain,
And always got its share of rain,
Never became a forest king,
But lived and died a scrubby thing.
The man who never had to toil,
To rise above the common soil,
Who never had to win his share
Of sun and sky and light and air,
Never became a manly man,
But lived and died as he began.
Good timber does not grow in ease:
The stronger wind, the tougher trees,
The farther sky, the greater length,
The more the storm, the greater strength.
By sun and cold, by rains and snows,
In tree or man, good timber grows.
Where thickest stands the forest growth,
We find the patriarchs of both.
And they hold converse with the stars,
Whose broken branches bear the scars
Of many winds and much of strife —

This is the common law of life."

(Douglas Malloch)

In the spiritual realm this thought could be stated thus: "It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth" (Lam. 3:27). The pathway of true success from infancy to manhood is the deliberate assuming and faithful discharging of the responsibilities of each stage of life. The old adage: "Well begun is half done," contains a good measure of truth.

Still another is: "As the twig is bent, so grows the tree." The Bible puts it thus: "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it (Prov. 22:6). Thus childhood discipline is essential to the development of adult maturity.

(3) Discipline is needed because of our natural wilfulness. A child naturally wants to go its own way without any interference from its parents. It early evidences this fact by resisting the will of its parents, and sometimes flies into a rage and throws a tantrum in order to force its will upon its parents, if they are foolish enough to surrender to its whims. Children ordinarily do not like to go to school. Left to themselves they would never go, but would spend their time playing. They only go, and that most reluctantly, because their wise parents realize that necessity compels them to send them. It is only afterwards that they realize the superior wisdom of their parents, and are grateful for the discipline. A good illustration of this is found in an entry in a diary which Blake, a noted English writer, wrote as a schoolboy. Here are his words:

"I cannot pretend to like this school, however much I try. The head is a beast, and not one of the under masters is

a decent chap. I hate being kept in after hours when the other fellows are going out to games; yet, whenever I haven't done a lesson right, they make me do it until I know it thoroughly. This is constantly the case with my Latin. Also, I loathe the food they give us; we have to eat fat and lean together, and fat is beastly. Also, however cold it is, we have to take long runs when it would be much nicer to sit by the fire and be comfortable. Also, I can't understand my father and mother, who say they love me and all that, sending me to such a place." So much for Blake as a school boy. It is amusing to read what he wrote 50 years later, when he had matured: "Of my many advantages in early life, I place easily first my parents, whose particular method of training me was beyond all praise... In looking back on my first school, I can think of it only with affection, for the manner in which the masters treated my inert tendency of character was entirely admirable. To their insistence at that period, I owe one of the keenest delights of my maturer years, a love for the Latin authors... In the matter of physical soundness, also, I am much indebted to the school runs, which were compulsory, and to the wholesome and sensible diet on which we were fed, without which I should not possess today the virility which has kept me free from disease to a quite unusual extent." No wonder an educator once wrote: "Every pupil hates his teacher, either now or later. I want my pupils to hate me now!"

(4) Discipline is needed because of our natural waywardness. The flesh, that corrupt nature within each child of God, is unimproved and unimprovable. Left to ourselves, without God's discipline in the life, there is no knowing how far we could stray into the bypaths of sin,

and thus bring disgrace to ourselves and to the name of Christ. One has only to think back over the years to recall many believers, who were once happy in the Lord and useful in His service, who have made a miserable mess of their lives and brought discredit to Christianity because of a failure to heed the warnings of God's Word, and submit to the discipline of God in their lives.

The solemn warnings of the Word of God have not been recorded there for nothing. Our Lord knew full well the nature of the flesh and declared: "The flesh profiteth nothing" (John 6:63). His words need to be carefully laid to heart when He said: "Without Me ye can do nothing" (John 15:5). The essence of the flesh is the fatal tendency to pride of heart, which expresses itself in self-confidence, self-esteem and self-assertion, and these are always the precursor of a sad fall. It is only as a Christian proposes, seconds and carries unanimously a vote of no confidence in himself, and a hearty vote of confidence in the Lord, and maintains that attitude, that he can be kept going on, growing on and glowing on for his Lord.

It was said of Uzziah, the King of Israel: "As long as he sought the Lord, God made him to prosper" (2 Chron. 26:5). It was when he became proud and self-confident that disaster followed (See 2 Chron. 26:16-21). The warning of Hebrews 3:12 should not be allowed to remain unheeded: "Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God." The nation of Israel serves as a tragic example of this fact. See 1 Corinthians 10:1-12. No wonder David prayed: "For Thou art my Rock and my Fortress; therefore for Thy name's sake lead me and guide me" (Psa. 31:3). He also prayed, as he realized the

value of divine discipline: "Be not silent to me: lest, if Thou be silent to me, I become like them that go down to the pit" (Psa. 28:1). Paul could write: "We are the circumcision, which worship God in the Spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh" (Phil. 3:3). May this be true of each of us!

Profitable Things --Part 20

Profitable Things

Part 20

Alfred P. Gibbs

2. The Purpose Of Discipline

We are left in no doubt as to the underlying purpose in all God's discipline for we are plainly told that it is "for our profit, that we might be partakers of His holiness" (Heb. 12:10). God's discipline, whatever form it may take, whether preventative, punitive, or educative, exists for the same purpose: our spiritual profit. This is the grand aim, and the one end that God has in view in all His dealings with His people. Let us note at least seven purposes of God's profitable discipline.

(1) To Produce Humility of Spirit. We may learn much to our spiritual profit from God's dealings with Israel. In fact, we are told that "these things happened unto them for ensamples, (or types of illustrations) and they are written for our admonition" (1 Cor. 10:11). With this fact in mind, we can learn from Deuteronomy 8:2 that the experiences through which Israel passed in the wilderness were all part of a testing process by God. In his speech to the people of Israel, Moses said: "Thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, and to know what was in thine heart" (Deut. 8:2).

The children of Israel started on their journey to the promised land with a high opinion of their own ability. They had proudly stated at Sinai before the law was given, "All that the Lord hath spoken we will do!" (Ex. 19:8). God's response to this was to give them the holy and righteous law consisting of ten commandments, which revealed His absolute holiness, and His insistence on perfect obedience to His demands. This demand was accompanied by a demonstration of physical phenomena in the form of lightnings, thunderings, the noise of a trumpet and a smoking mount, so that the people were terror-stricken and said to Moses, "Speak thou with us, and we will hear, but let not God speak with us, lest we die!" (Ex. 20:18-19). Thus this revelation of God's majesty, holiness and power humbled them to the dust.

Likewise pride ill becomes a child of God who has been redeemed by the blood of Christ and saved by the grace of God. Pilgrimage demands humility of spirit. As surely as a Christian's heart is lifted up with pride, either of face, race, place or grace, he becomes the subject of God's discipline and will be humbled. We are told that: "Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall" (Prov. 16:18). Peter's word to believers is very much in order at this point: "God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble. Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time" (1 Pet. 5:5-6). He who would be a disciple of the Lord Jesus must follow the example of the One who "Made Himself of no reputation... and humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death" (Phil. 2:7-8). Pride, therefore, is a prolific cause of God's hand in discipline.

(2) To Produce A Knowledge of Oneself. Again we refer to Deuteronomy 8:2 where we read, "To prove thee, and to know what was in thine heart." This self-revelation is anything but pleasant to the flesh, but is essential if we are to accept God's estimation of the utter unprofitableness of the flesh and, as a consequence, walk humbly before Him, and look alone to Him for needed wisdom, grace and power. Paul was made to learn this lesson and said: "I know that in me, that is in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing" (Rom. 7:18).

There are many things which every Christian should learn regarding this evil nature called "the flesh," which is still in every believer, and will continue to remain within him until he gets to Heaven. First, he must learn he is under no obligation to it (Rom. 8:12; 8:8; Gal. 6:8; Rom. 8:6-7; 7:25). Second, he must not make it his companion and walk with it (Rom. 8:4; Eph. 4:19; Phil. 3:19). Third, he must not make any provision or allowance for it (Rom. 13:14). Fourth, he must not give it an opportunity to display itself (Gal. 5:13). Fifth, he must not trust it under any circumstances (Phil. 3:3). Sixth, he must not expect any good from it (Rom. 7:18; 8:1; Gal. 5:19; 2 Cor. 5:11). Seventh, he must look upon it as a dead thing and as having been crucified with Christ (Gal. 6:12; 5:24; Rom. 7:24, 6:11).

In spite of these explicit instructions from God's Word as to the uselessness of relying on the flesh for wisdom and strength, yet the Christian often does so and, as a result, comes under the discipline of his Father in Heaven and learns the hard way its utterly unprofitable character.

(3) To Assure Us We Are Genuine Children Of God. "If ye be without chastisement, then are ye illegitimates and

not sons" (Heb. 12:3). Thus discipline becomes a proof of spiritual legitimacy. An earthly father does not correct other people's children, but only his own. A professing Christian if he is not disciplined as a result of known waywardness in thought, word and deed, may well question whether he is a true child of God, "For what son is he whom the Father chasteneth not?" (Heb. 12:7). God said to Israel, "You only have I known of all the families of the earth, therefore will I punish you for all your iniquities" (Amos. 3:2).

It is good to know that while God disciplines His children, He never disowns them. Once the family relationship has been established, it is never terminated. Relationship depends on birth, but fellowship (or the enjoyment of that relationship) depends on behavior. "God dealeth with you as with sons" (Heb. 12:7). That unsaved person living a life of open sin feels no chastening hand of God upon him, and why? Because God is not his Father. But a child of God is made to feel the rod of discipline as soon as he strays away from the path of obedience to his Father's will. The reason for this is surely obvious. Each Christian can then be truly thankful for every evidence of God's discipline for it is the assurance he is under his Father's care.

(4) To Make Us Partakers Of His Holiness (Heb. 12:10). In other words, to reproduce in us some moral likeness to Himself. Just as an earthly father's facial likeness is often reproduced in his children, to the extent they can be recognized by this resemblance, so Christians should reproduce by their godly lives some likeness to their Father in Heaven. The exhortation to holiness of life is plain, "As He that hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in

all manner of conversation because it is written: Be ye holy, for I am holy" (1 Pet. 1:15-16).

Holiness is spiritual health and is evidenced in a believer's life by a hatred for sin, a love of righteousness, a clean moral life, truthfulness in word, honesty in his business dealings, and obedience to the laws of the land. When a believer fails in any of these things, he must be prepared to feel the hand of his Father in discipline upon him. By this means he is led to repentance and thus again adjusted to God's will, and enabled to walk in ways pleasing to Him and thus becomes a partaker of His holiness.

Profitable Things --Part 21

Profitable Things

Part 21

Alfred P. Gibbs (5) To develop reverence for God as Father. The argument of Hebrews 12 is: as we revered our fathers who corrected us: "Shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits and live?" Just as well trained children love, honour and appreciate the training of their parents, and speak of them with affection and reverence; so the children of God should, much more, love, honour, praise and adore their loving Father for all His gracious dealings, His providing hand, His protecting care and His sustaining grace and His wise and loving discipline. No wonder the child of God sings:

"How good is the God we adore!

Our faithful unchangeable friend:

Whose love is as great as His power,

That knows neither measure nor end!"

It is as "the Father" that God seeks worshippers to "worship Him in Spirit and in truth" (John 4). Thus His discipline over us produces within us the necessary reverence for Him that is essential to true spiritual worship. This, in turn, is the Christian's highest occupation for which he has been divinely fitted by God's saving grace and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and thus constituted a priest unto God (1 Pet. 2:4-9). Careless parents who have neglected the essential training of their children, thereby lose the respect and

reverence that would have been theirs had they fulfilled their responsibility to them. This can never be true of our Father in Heaven. He loves us too much to let us go on our own way, unrebuked, for this would cause us to lose our reverence for Him and bring loss and shame to us.

(6) To produce from those exercised, the peaceable fruits of righteousness. “No chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruits of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby” (Heb. 12:11). Three things are here affirmed regarding this discipline of the Lord.

(a) The painful character of it. It is described as being “not joyous, but grievous.” It is anything but a pleasant thing to the flesh to be under the disciplining hand of God. The child whose disobedience has merited chastisement from its parents finds the experience very grievous, if its loud cries and many tears are any indication of this fact! Though the punishment was deserved it was anything but delightful, as many of us can recall, who were fortunate enough to have parents who believed and practised the scriptural mode of training children: “Chasten thy son while there is hope, and let not thy soul spare for his crying” (Prov. 19:18).

A man who attained to a high position in life was asked the secret of his greatness. He replied: “I owe it to two great factors: first, I was brought up at the knees of a devoted mother, and second, across the knees of a determined father!” It has been well said that a child’s character can be improved by a pat on the back; particularly if that pat is administered often enough,

hard enough and low enough! A Christian mother, left a widow with a large family of boys, so reared them that each boy not only became a Christian but also a preacher of the Word. When asked the secret of her success she replied, "I attribute it to much prayer and the use of a thick hickory stick which hung on the wall underneath the motto: 'I need thee every hour!' "

Job found that the discipline through which he passed was indeed a grievous experience. He did not know the cause for which these calamities had been allowed to come upon him: the loss of his property, family and health. But in the midst of his sore trial he cried: "He knoweth the way that I take: when He hath tried me I shall come forth as gold" (Job 23:10). Joseph also was allowed to pass through a painful experience of suffering. He was sold by his brethren into slavery, falsely accused by a wicked woman and sentenced to a term of imprisonment. Truly, it was not a joyous but a most grievous experience for him. Nor could he see, at the time, the purpose for which these things had been allowed to take place.

The trial of a Christian's faith, love and obedience is not a welcome one, but he may rest assured it is a necessary one, or it would not have been allowed. Paul, by the Spirit assures the believer, "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose" (Rom. 8:28). Happy indeed is that child whose parents love him too much to let him have his own way!

(b) The peaceable fruits from it. This is only realized "afterward." It was the peaceable fruits of the "afterward" that God had in mind when He permitted

the discipline, for “Known unto God are all His works from the beginning of the world” (Acts 15:18). We are told that “God blessed the latter end of Job more than his beginning” (Job 42:12). He emerged from his grievous experience to bless the hand that guided and bless the heart that planned. Joseph came forth from his training as a slave and a prisoner to take his place as second only to the king in Egypt, and to enjoy for many long years, “the peaceable fruits of righteousness.” David confessed: “It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn Thy statutes” (Ps. 119:71). It is in the golden light of the “afterward” of the peaceable fruits that we can appreciate the necessity for the grievous chastening. We can learn more by our hindsight than our foresight. J. Southey, commenting on Matthew 7:9, once remarked: “The Lord’s answers to prayer are infinitely perfect. Eternity will show that often when we were asking for a stone that looked like bread, He was giving us bread that, in our short-sightedness, looked like a stone.”

All God’s dealings with His people are for their ultimate good for we are told: “Though He cause grief, yet will He have compassion according to the multitude of His mercies. For He doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men” (Lam.

3:32-33). The Christian learns far more from his bumps than from his books. William Cowper, the Christian poet of a century ago, expressed it concisely when he wrote:

“Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take;

The clouds you so much dread,

Are big with mercy, and shall break

In blessings on your head.
His purposes will ripen fast,
Unfolding every hour;
The bud may have a bitter taste,
But sweet will be the flower.
Blind unbelief is sure to err,
And scan His work in vain,
God is His own Interpreter,
And He will make it plain!"

(c) The necessary condition with it. "To those who are exercised thereby." Many a Christian when passing through a period of chastening cries, "How can I get out of this?" How much better it would have been if he had asked, "What can I get out of this?" Spiritual exercise, on the part of the believer, is therefore an essential condition if he is to appreciate the good which God had in mind when permitting the experience.

Therefore the need for the exhortation: "Despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of Him" (Heb. 12:5).

"Not 'till the loom is silent,
And the shuttles cease to fly,
Shall God unroll the canvas,
And explain the reason why.
The dark threads were as needful,
In the Weaver's skillful hand.
As the threads of gold and silver

In the pattern He has planned.”

There is always the danger that a Christian instead of being exercised before God, becomes resentful and embittered as he experiences the chastening hand of his Father. This results in a loss of communion with its consequent joy and fruitlessness. There are many Christians today whom God has had to put on the shelf, as being of no further use to Him because of this very thing. Perhaps some financial reverses, or the sorrow which comes from the loss of a loved one, or the loss of his own health has caused him to rebel against the will of God.

Profitable Things --Part 22

Profitable Things

Part 22

Alf. P. Gibbs (concluded from last month)

(7) To restore us to communion with God if the cause of the chastening was departure from God.

The classic example of this is David, whose double sin of adultery and murder brought upon him the chastening hand of God. His experiences, while being chastised, are recorded in Psalm 32 and 51. Let us mark his word:

“When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long. For day and night Thy hand was heavy upon me: my moisture is turned into the drought of summer” (Psalm 32:3-4). What a graphic description this is of deep conviction of sin! His awakened conscience screamed out its accusations and lashed him unmercifully. Well might he thank God for it, for it brought him to the place where, in deep contrition, he honestly confessed his guilt and found forgiveness. Notice what he said: “I acknowledged my sin unto Thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said ‘I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord’ and Thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin” (Psalm 32:5). “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou will not despise” (Psalm 51:17).

This has been the experience of many a child of God. The committal of some sin has resulted in God’s chastening, which led to a conviction of the sin. This was followed by contrition for the sin, which issued in confession of the sin and restored communion with God.

There can be no enjoyment of communion with God while one allows unjudged and unconfessed sin in his life. How thankful we should be for God's discipline in this regard, which brings us to our senses so that, in repentance for it and confession of it, we find restoration to the joy of salvation, communion with the Lord and fruitfulness in His service.

3. The effect of discipline.

In one word, it is for our good. Discipline may take many forms.

1. It may be illuminative. That is, to discover to us, our many faults, failings and weaknesses, which otherwise we might have never known (Deut. 11:2).
2. It may be preventative. That is, to keep us from doing something we might otherwise have done. Joseph's experiences illustrate this form of discipline (Psalm 119:71).
3. It may be instructive. That is, to teach us to know His way, and to appreciate the good pleasure of His will. See Psalm 32:8-9.
4. It may be corrective. That is, it is brought upon us because of some wrong we have done. Proverbs 22:15 puts it well: "Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child, but the rod of correction shall drive it far from him."
5. It may be curative. That is, through some discipline on the part of God, we are cured of a certain tendency to some particular course of behaviour.
6. It may be illustrative. That is, it enables the believer to see the wisdom of God's gracious dealings with us, even as Job was made to see and acknowledge.

7. It is always purgative. That is, its purpose is to cleanse and restore. Malachi 3:3 sums it up: “He shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver: and He shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness.”

May we, as Christians, lay to heart the profitableness of God’s discipline over His children, and learn to value every form that this discipline may take and, through it, learn to grow in grace, knowledge, strength, righteousness and usefulness to the One into whose family we have been brought, and who, as the Father, “chastens us ... for our profit” (Heb. 12:10).

The last profitable thing we shall consider is:

7. A Faithful Servant of the Lord

Our Scripture is taken from 2 Timothy 4:11, where Paul, in his letter to Timothy penned a few weeks before his martyrdom, wrote: “Take Mark, and bring him with thee, for he is profitable to me for the ministry.” Surely no one could wish for a greater commendation than this, and from such a one as the great Apostle Paul! It will be recalled that Mark began his service for the Lord in a very unprofitable manner. After starting out with Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey, he had deserted them at Pamphylia and returned to his home in Jerusalem. See Acts 13:1-3. We are not told the cause of Mark’s failure to continue with them as their servant. It may have been fear produced by the opposition to the gospel, or reluctance to face the hardships of constant travelling. Whatever it was, it caused Mark to desert his companions and return to the comfort and security of his home in Jerusalem. On their return from the first

missionary tour, when Paul and Barnabas would have set out on a second journey, Barnabas determined he would again take Mark, his nephew, with them. Paul, however, strenuously refused to do this because of his previous failure. The result was there was “a sharp contention between them” and these old companions parted company. Barnabas then took Mark with him and went to Cyprus while Paul chose a brother named Silas as his new companion, and started out on his second missionary tour (Acts 15:36-41).

Many years have passed since that first missionary journey, and “Paul the aged” is now being held in close confinement in a Roman dungeon and the day of his martyrdom is near at hand. Tradition affirms that six weeks after he wrote this second letter to Timothy, he was taken out and executed. But in the years that have elapsed since that first missionary journey, there has been a welcome change in Mark. From a timid and reluctant servant he has by the grace of God developed into a gifted, reliable and profitable servant of Christ. Paul, to his credit, is glad to acknowledge this fact and now desires the profitable companionship of Mark in the work of the Lord.

Let us concentrate on that expression: “Profitable for the ministry,” and see what elements should go up to the making of a profitable servant of the Lord. This surely should be the ambition of every believer, so that like Mark and Timothy, his “profiting may appear to all” (1 Tim. 4:15).

Profitable Things --Part 23

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Alfred J. Gibbs

Conclusion

1. His service should be a Christ-exalting one.

It should be one in which the Lord Jesus shall “in all things have the pre-eminence” (Col. 1:18). Like John the Baptist each Christian should be able to say of his Lord: “He must increase, but I must decrease” (John 3:30). Only as Christ is magnified in our body, whether by life or by death, is our service really worth while and spiritually profitable to God. (Phil. 1:20). Christ must have the pre-eminence in every department of the believer’s life. He must have first place in the family, school, business, social and ecclesiastical circles in which the Christian moves.

Whatever the character of the ministry may be which we render, whether it is the word spoken, the kindly deed done, or the life lived, the words of Paul should be kept in mind: “Whatsoever ye do, in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by Him” (Col. 3:17). Our Lord Himself declared: “Without Me ye can do nothing” (John 15:5) It is Christ alone that gives any virtue or value to our service. It has been well expressed by the couplet.

“Only one life, ‘twill soon be past;

Only what’s done for Christ will last!”

The Christian has but one Lord to honor, one Master to serve, and one Example to follow. The measure in which he succeeds in honoring, serving and following Christ will determine the profitableness of his ministry, both for the Lord and those to whom he ministers.

2. His service must be Spirit-led and divinely empowered.

God has declared: “Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit saith the Lord of Hosts” (Zech. 4:6). Only as the believer is responsive to the leading of the indwelling Holy Spirit, as He seeks to guide through the Word of God, shall the ministry he renders be of real profit. Our Lord well knew how essential was this empowering by the Spirit. Ere He left this world to return to His Father, He said to His disciples: “Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you, and ye shall be witnesses unto Me” (Acts 1:8). At Pentecost the Holy Spirit came, and from that time on every person on believing in the Son of God was indwelt by Him (Eph. 1:13; 1 Cor. 6:19-20). His indwelling presence and imparted power alone makes possible the living of the Christian life and the performing of any effective service for the Lord Jesus.

While it is true that the Holy Spirit indwells each believer, yet the Bible clearly teaches that He may be hindered in His work through the believer. We are told that the Spirit may be grieved by the believer’s misconduct, as Ephesians 4:25-32 clearly indicates. Again, the Spirit may be quenched by the Christian’s disobedience to His leading as we find in 1 Thessalonians 5:19-20. Still further, the Holy Spirit may be limited by our unbelief (Ps. 78:41). In such a case,

until the believer is restored to the Lord the service rendered will neither be profitable to God nor man.

3. His service must be done in a scriptural manner.

God has not only indicated in His Word the various forms of service in which the believer may engage; but He has also laid down certain scriptural principles which should govern their performance. To put it in another way: the work of the Lord must ever be guided by the Word of the Lord if it is to be profitable in the true sense of the term. This lesson was impressed on King Saul when he sought to accomplish in his self-will what the Word of God forbid him to do. Samuel's rebuke has a voice to us in this day and age. Listen to his words: "Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams" (1 Sam. 15:22).

The work of the Lord must not only be done at the right time and in the right spirit but also in the right way. There is much that passes for Christian work today which, when examined in the light of those unchanging principles laid down in the Word of God, will be seen to lack scriptural support for their existence. Much of the wild fanaticism and confusion seen in religious circles in Christendom today, is due to a failure to learn and practise these scriptural principles of gathering which should characterize the coming together of the Lord's people in assembly fellowship, and also govern their carrying out of the work of the Lord. There is no substitute for obedience to the Word of God. We need to lay to heart the words: "To obey is better than sacrifice."

To do the work of the Lord in a scriptural manner necessitates that the Scriptures be read, marked and inwardly digested, and then carried out to the best of one's ability, without fear and favor. If this was done, a great deal of the spectacular, unwholesome excitement and confusion that characterizes the Lord's work would be eliminated, and replaced by the solid profit which accompanies the preaching and teaching of the Word of God. Paul's words to Timothy are in order at this point: "Preach the Word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and doctrine" (2 Tim. 4:2).

4. His service must be with true humility.

The Bible leaves us in no doubt that the work of the Lord should be done humbly and with a single eye to God's glory if it is to be profitable. Paul's farewell address to the elders of Ephesus lets us into the secret of His profitable ministry for God. Mark his words carefully: "Ye know, from the first day that I came into Asia, after what manner I have been with you at all seasons, serving the Lord with all humility of mind, and with many tears and temptations" (Acts 20:18-19). There was no loud fanfare of trumpets to announce Paul's arrival, no press agent to describe what a marvelous preacher he was. Paul followed the example set by his Lord and Master, and performed his service with true humility. Though possessed of a great intellect, and many outstanding gifts which set him far above his fellows, he did not parade his superior knowledge and ability, but walked humbly before those to whom he ministered, even to the extent of engaging in secular employment to

support himself when he thought this was necessary (Acts 20:34, 18:1-3; 1 Cor. 4:12).

Humility is thus a rare but essential requisite for the work of the Lord. It is still true that "God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble" (James 4:6). True humility is a peculiar virtue, for the moment a person thinks he has it, that moment he has lost it! There is a subtle form of pride which apes humility and becomes very proud because it is so humble. The way up in the Christian life is always down, and the less one thinks of his own superiority, or even his humility, the better. An old Christian's advice is good. He wrote: "Go forward. Stick to your work. Profit by the abundance of advice you are sure to get. Preach anywhere and everywhere with a good conscience. Be firm, without fault-finding. Be gracious with the weak. Do not as a rule defend your line of conduct or service. Pass on quietly and serve your generation, and be content with your Master's smile and approval. Therefore, be steadfast." (Walter Scott)

5. His service must be constrained by the love of Christ.

In that great description of the greatest of virtues, Paul by the Spirit declared: "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity (or love) I am become as sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not love, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not love, it profiteth me nothing" (1 Cor. 13:1-3).

Service which is not motivated by love is thus declared to be utterly profitless. Love for God, love for Christ and love for one's fellow-man is thus an essential requirement for the Lord's servant and effective service. Paul recognized this fact and declared: "For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if One died for all, then were all dead: and that He died for all, that they which live, should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them and rose again" (2 Cor. 5:14-15).

Apart from this constraining love for Christ, service for Christ will degenerate into a cold, perfunctory thing, or become an irksome duty, to be gotten over as soon and painlessly as possible, and with the least sacrificial cost to ourselves. Genuine love for Christ will transform duty from a drudgery into a delight, and make our service for Him a thing of beauty and a joy for ever. In view of this, we can understand the words of that hymn:

"More love to Thee, O Christ,

More love to Thee!

Hear Thou the prayer I make

On bended knee;

This is my earnest plea:

More love, O Christ, to Thee,

More love to Thee!"

(Elizabeth Prentiss)

May these Profitable Things of Scripture which we have been considering be used of God to "stir up our pure minds by way of remembrance" (2 Pet. 3:1). May we be led to a more profitable study of the holy Scriptures; to

know more of the profit of a godly life lived for God's glory; to so fit ourselves that we shall engage in a more profitable ministry of the Word; to be more diligent in good works so that we shall be more profitable both to God and our fellow-men; to value the profitable use of judicious physical exercise, so that our bodies may be kept at their best for Him; to appreciate increasingly God's discipline, so necessary for the profitable development of the Christian life: and to determine that by the grace of God our faithful service for Christ will be of such profit that it shall earn His commendation.

If this is the result of our meditations on the Profitable Things of Scripture, then our time will not have been spent in vain and our profiting will appear to all.