THE SECRET OF BLESSEDNESS IN HEART, BEAUTY IN CHARACTER, FRUITFULNESS IN SERVICE, AND PROSPERITY IN EVERYTHING

By R. A. Torrey

"Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the Lord; and in his law doth he meditate day and night. And 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." Ps. 1:1-3.

IN these verses, God speaking through the Psalmist sets before us the secret of blessedness in heart, beauty in character, fruitfulness in service, and prosperity in everything. Are not these the four things that we all desire for ourselves? These verses tell us in the plainest sort of way how we may obtain them. They tell us that if we will not do three things and will do two things, we shall have blessedness in our hearts, beauty in our characters, fruitfulness in our service, and prosperity in whatsoever we do.

I. THE THREE THINGS WE MUST NOT DO.

The three things that we must not do are, First, Walk in the counsel of the ungodly; second, Stand in the way of sinners; third, Sit in the seat of the scornful, i.e., we must come out from the world and be separate in our walk, in our standing and in our sitting. As to our walk, we must not walk in the counsel of the ungodly; we must get our directions as to our walk from God and not from the world. We must not ask what the world does or advises, we must ask what God tells us to do. As to our standing, it must not be in the way of sinners; as to

our sitting, or continuous fellowship, it must not be in the seat of the scornful. We will not dwell on these three things that we must not do for the words are so plain as to need no comment; what they need is not so much to be expounded as to be obeyed, and furthermore, if we do the two things which we must do we will be sure not to do the three things which we must not do.

II. THE TWO THINGS WHICH WE MUST DO.

The first of the two things which we must do is "Delight in the law of the Lord." The Law of the Lord is God's will as revealed in His Word and these words tell us that it is not enough merely to read God's Word; indeed, that it is not enough even to earnestly study God's Word, we must delight in God's Word. We must have greater joy in the Word of God than in any other book, or in all other books put together. Now doubtless many of us will have to admit that we do not delight in the law of the Lord. Probably we read it, quite likely we study it diligently, but we read it and study it simply because we think it is our duty. As to delighting in it, we do not. If many of you were to reveal the exact facts about yourself, you would have to say, "I would rather read the newspaper than the Word of God. I would rather read the latest novel than the Word of God." When I was thirteen years of age, I was told that if I read three chapters in the Bible every week-day and five every Sunday, I would read the Bible in a year, and I started out to do it, and I have read the Bible every day of my life from that time to this, but for years I did not delight in it. I read it simply because I thought I ought to, or because I was uneasy if I did not, but as for delighting in it, it was the dullest, stupidest book in the world to me. I would rather have read last year's almanac than the Bible. And what was true of me then, and remained true for years, is true of many a professed Christian to-day. They may study the Bible every day but simply do it from a sense of duty or because their conscience is uneasy if they do not.

What shall one do if he does not delight in the law of the Lord? The answer is very simple.

(1) First of all, he must be born again. The one who is truly born again will love the Word of God. The Lord Jesus says in John 8:47, "He that is of God heareth God's words: Ye therefore hear them not, because ye are not of God." The little Greek word which is translated "of" in this passage is a very significant word. It really means and should be translated "out of," i.e., in this connection "born of"; and what Jesus said was that the one that was born of God would have an ear for God's word, and that the reason that the Jews did not really have an ear for God's Word was because they were not born of God. One of the clearest proofs that a man is born of God is that he loves, delights in God's Word. I have seen men and women pass in a moment from an utter distaste for God's Word to an abounding delight in God's Word by simply being born again.

"But," some one will say, "how may I be born again?" God Himself answers the question in a very simple way in John 1:12. "But as many as RECEIVED HIM, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name." According to these words the way to be born again is by simply receiving Him, receiving the Lord Jesus. The moment any man, woman, or child really receives Jesus to be to themselves all that He offers Himself to be to anyone, to be their Saviour from the guilt of sin by His death upon the cross, to be their Saviour from the power of sin, by His resurrection power (Heb. 7:25) and to be their Lord and Master, to whom they surrender the entire control of their lives (Acts 2:36), that moment that man, woman or child is born again and with the new life thus obtained they will get a new love, a love for God and a delight in His Word.

(2) In the second place, in order to delight in the law of the Lord we must feed upon it. Jeremiah says in Jer. 15:16, "Thy words were found, and I did eat them ; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart." The reason why many do not delight in the Word of God is because they do not eat it. They read it ; they skim over it, they smell of it, but they do not eat it, and yet they wonder why they do not delight in God's Word. What would you think if some day some friend came to visit you who had never eaten strawberries, and you should get for him a dish of our wonderful California strawberries. You tell him how delicious they are and set them before him you are called away but in an hour or two you come back and you say to your friend, "How did you like those strawberries?" He replies, "I did not care for them. I have seen many things that I have enjoyed more." In surprise you say, "What, did not care for them?" "No, they seemed very ordinary to me." For a moment you are puzzled, and then you say to him, "Did you eat the berries?" "No," he answers, "I did not eat them. I smelled of them and I have smelled many things that smell better." Well, that is the way that many, even of professing Christians treat the Word of God. They just smell of it, they skim over a few verses, or many verses, or many chapters, but they do not stop to eat a single verse. They do not chew the words, swallow them and assimilate them. Oh, how different the Word of God becomes when we really eat it. Take for example, the most familiar passage in the Bible, the verse that most of us learned first of all, Ps. 23:1, "The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want." It sounds beautiful even when we merely read it, but how sweet it becomes when we stop and ponder it, weigh the meaning of the words, chew each word in it. When we ask ourselves first of all, "Who is my shepherd?" And then stop for a while to meditate upon the fact that it is JEHOVAH who is our Shepherd. Then ask ourselves, "What is Jehovah?" "My Shepherd." And then stop and think what is involved in being a shepherd and what it means to have Jehovah as our SHEPHERD. Then ask ourselves "Whose shepherd is Jehovah? My Shepherd." Not merely the Shepherd of men in general but my own Shepherd. A stranger entered a Presbyterian Church one day and was shown to

a pew. The congregation rose to read the 23rd Psalm. A young lady sitting next to him, handed him one corner of her Bible as they read. As they read the first verse, he took a pencil out of his pocket and drew a line under the word "My." When the service was over, the young lady said to him, "Do you mind telling me why you drew the line under the word My?" "Well," he replied, "The Lord is my Shepherd. I was wondering if He were yours." Next dwell on the word, "I," then on the word "shall" with all the certainty that there is in the word then on the word "not" then on the word "want" and ask yourself all that is implied in the statement, "I shall not want." Ah, the old familiar verse becomes so much sweeter as we eat it, chew and chew it and swallow it and digest it and assimilate it. If we thus eat different portions of the Bible day by day we would soon find a joy in it that we find in no other book. The only word that would express our relation to the book would be "DELIGHT." The second of the two things that we must do is "meditate in the law of the Lord day and night." These words tell us how to study the Word and when to study it.

(1) First, How to study it. "MEDITATE" therein. We live in a day in which meditation is largely a lost art. It is largely a lost art in all our study. We send our children to school, they are not allowed to think; they are simply crammed and crammed we cram them with physiology, biology, psychology and all the rest of the ologies ; until they themselves become mere ape-ologies for real thinkers. We try to see how many branches we can cover in a few years and how much of each branch we can cram in. A child in the Grammar School grade has twelve studies; a child of thirteen will be set to writing a criticism on Tennyson's "In Memoriam." This is a good way to develop conceited fools, but it is no way to develop thinkers. Set a child of thirteen to criticizing Tennyson's "In Memoriam" and by the time she is eighteen she will be criticizing the Word of God itself. But cram, cram, cram, is the word of the hour in modern education. If our children studied fewer subjects and really studied and mastered those they did study, they would know more and be of more use in the world. But it is in Bible study especially that meditation is a lost art. We try to see how many chapters we can study in a single day. We get up a chart that covers the whole plan of the ages and all of God's dealing with men, angels and devils, from the eternity back of us to the eternity before us and expect to master it in thirty minutes or an hour. This is an excellent plan for making ourselves think that we are very wise; it is a miserable plan for getting the real nourishment out of the Word and the real honey out of the rock. We should not so much say, "I will read so many chapters in a day," as "I will spend so much time each day in really studying and feeding upon the Book." Sometimes we will give to a single verse, or a single word, that will arrest our attention, all the time we put into Bible study that day. There is no greater enemy to successful study than hurry, and this is especially true of Bible study. One night I was teaching a Bible class in Minneapolis. A travelling man from New York, a very active member of St. George's Episcopal Church, dropped into my class. He had to take the train for the Far West soon after the class and

I walked down to the station with him. As we walked he said to me, "Tell me in a word how to study my Bible." That is a pretty large contract to put into a single word, How to study the Bible, and I replied, "If I must put it into one word, that one word would be Thoughtfully. Think on what you study; look right at it, weigh it, weigh every word, turn it over and over and over meditate upon it."

But the words of the Psalmist tell us not merely how to study the Word but when to study it, "DAY AND NIGHT." Many people are asking, "Must I study the Bible fifteen minutes every day, or a half hour a day or two hours a day?" "Day and night," replies the Psalmist. This, of course, does not mean that we should be sitting with an open Bible before us every moment of the day and night. But it does mean that having had some regular time for Bible study, that after that time for Bible study is over we should carry away in our mind and heart what we have studied and meditate upon it as we go about our business, our household duties, or whatsoever we have to do. Oh, how much lighter and pleasanter the drudgery of life becomes if we go about it with the Word of God in mind and heart, meditating thereon in the midst of our wearing toil. I know of nothing else that will keep one in such perfect peace and abounding joy in these days of war and gloom and agony as meditating on the Word of God day and night.

III. THE RESULT.

And now what will be the result of our separating from the world in our walk, in our standing, in our sitting and of our delighting in the law of the Lord and meditating thereon day and night?

1. First of all, we will have blessedness in heart. "Blessed is the man," says our text that "walketh not/etc. The Hebrew word translated "blessed" is a very peculiar word in the Hebrew. It is not a participle at all, but a noun and a noun in the plural. Literally translated it would be "blessednesses of the man," i. e., how manifold and varied is the blessedness and happiness of the man that does not do these three things and does do these two things. This world knows no joy so varied, so full, so manifold, so wonderful as the joy that comes to the one who is separated from the world and who meditates on the Word. I know all about the joy that comes from reading good literature; I have been a passionate devourer of books from early childhood. When I was a boy. I would get a book and hide away in some corner and devour it until my mother would come and say, "Oh, Archie, why don't you take your gun and go out hunting?"

But all the joy that I have found in the study of the best literature, in the study of science, in the study of philosophy, can never for a moment compare to the joy that I have found in meditating on the Word of God. So sweet has that joy become that oftentimes I am tempted to say that I will read no book but the

Bible. I remember one night the first winter I was in Chicago. I had been very busy that day, answering my correspondence, and teaching in the Bible Institute in the morning, studying in the afternoon, and preaching that night. I got to my house late, after 11 o'clock, pretty thoroughly tired. I sat down for a little while to find rest in Bible study before I went to bed. I was reading the Bible through in course and had reached the last book in the Bible. In those days I did not care as much for that book as for other books sometimes I had even been tempted to wish that the book was not in the Bible, but as that was where I was in my reading the Bible in course, I began reading the 11th chapter of the book. When I reached the 15th verse, The kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever, such joy swept into my soul as I took in the meaning of the words that I do you know what I did? Of course you do. I shouted aloud. I was not brought up to shout in meeting. I was brought up in the Presbyterian and Episcopal churches. I never heard anyone say "Amen" except where it came in the regular place in the service until after I was in the ministry, and the first time a man said "Amen" when I was preaching it so upset me that I nearly lost the thread of my discourse. I cannot shout to this day in public, but, oh, when alone with God and His Book sometimes such a joy sweeps into the soul that nothing but a shout will give relief.

2. Second, we shall have beauty of character, "He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water." What is more beautiful than a well-watered tree in full leaf, the maples and the oaks and the beeches in the East, our palms and pepper trees and umbrella trees here in the West? Well, the one who refrains from doing the three things mentioned above and does the two things mentioned will be just like that tree in full leaf. His character will be full of beauty. If we had time, I could show you from the Word of God how every grace of character is the result of Bible study. The Psalmist says in Ps. 119:9, "Where withal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word." In the 11th verse he says, "Thy word have I hid in my heart, that I might not sin against thee." Nothing else has the power to keep a man from sinning and nothing else has the power to adorn a man with all possible graces of character that the study of the Word of God has.

3. Third, we shall have fruitfulness in service. "Bringeth forth his fruit in his season." Do we not all long to be fruitful Christians? So many of us are fruitless. The great secret of being fruitful is intelligent study of the Word of God. The Apostle Paul in writing to Timothy in 2 Tim. 3:16 says, "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, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." The Revised Version says, "complete, furnished completely unto every good work." How? Through what the Apostle has just said, through the study of the inspired Word of God. A man may study

everything else in the world, psychology, philosophy, pedagogy, and even theology, but if he does not study the Word of God he is not fitted for real work for God. He will have no measure of success in winning souls. But a man may be quite ignorant of other branches of knowledge but if he really studies and understands his Bible, he will have all the knowledge one needs to be a fruitful Christian and an efficient winner of souls.

4. Fourth. There will be one other result of not doing the three things and doing the two things, and that is prosperity in everything: "whatsoever he doeth shall prosper." Are we not all seeking for prosperity ? There is no other way to get it than the way laid down in our text, but this road to prosperity is safe and sure. No one ever walked it without becoming prosperous in whatsoever he did. This, of course, does not mean necessarily that he will have what the world calls prosperity. He may not become a rich man, but he will have real prosperity in everything he undertakes. Some years ago I preached in Chicago a sermon on "The Power of the Word of God," or "The Advantages of Bible Study." I had in my congregation that morning a young man who was leading a rather defeated life. He was a Christian, but not a very effective Christian. He was a married man with a small family of children and was getting $12.50 a week. His work required him to get up at two or three o clock in the morning to go on the market to buy for the house for which he worked. As he listened to the sermon that morning he made up his mind that instead of getting up at two o clock or three o clock in the morning, he would get up at one or two o clock in the morning in order that he might have a solid hour for Bible study before going to his work. He came on in his Christian experience by leaps and bounds and he came on in his business relations too. "Within a year he went into business for himself. The first year he made $5,000 in his business, the next year I have been told that he made $10,000, and some one has told me that the next year he made $15,000, and he has gone on advancing from that day until this; but that is not the best of it, he came on in his Christian character and in his efficiency in Christian service. He is to-day one of the most used laymen in Chicago, identified with and a leader in every aggressive movement that is taken up by the Christians of the city, a tower of strength in his own church, a generous giver to the work of Christ at home and abroad, with three sons and one daughter following in his steps. "Whatsoever he doeth prospers."

Now I am not saying that if anyone will begin to study the Bible an hour a day he will spring from $12.50 a week to $5,000 a year, but I am saying, and what is better, God's Word says it, he will have real prosperity in everything he undertakes. Do you want blessedness in your heart, beauty in your character, fruitfulness in your service, and prosperity in everything you do, then stop walking in the counsel of the ungodly, stop standing in the way of sinners, stop sitting in the seat of the scornful and begin to delight in the law of the Lord and meditate therein day and night.

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