

first to be thorny and bitter, yet of this thorn a Christian gathers grapes. All which considerations may open a vein of godly sorrow in our souls, that we may both weep for sin, and turn from sin, if ever God restores comfort, it is to his mourners, Isa. lvi. 18. And when we have wept, let us look up to Christ's blood for pardon: say, as that holy man, *lava Domine lacrymas meas.*—"Lord, wash my tears in thy blood." We drop sin with our tears, and need Christ's blood to wash them: and this repentance must not be only for a few days, like the mourning for a friend, which is soon over; but it must be the work of our lives: the issue of godly sorrow must not be stopt till death. After sin is pardoned, we must repent. We run afresh upon the score, "we sin daily, therefore must repent daily." Some shed a few tears for sin; and, when their tears, like the widow's oil, have run a while they cease. Many, if the plaister of repentance begin to smart a little, pluck it off; whereas this plaister of repentance must still lie on, and not be plucked off till death, when as all other tears, so these of godly sorrow, shall be wiped away.

Qu. *What shall we do to obtain a penitential frame of heart?*

Ans. Seek to God for it: It is his promise to give an 'heart of flesh,' Ezek. xxxvi. and to 'pour on us a spirit of mourning,' Zech. xii. 10. Beg God's 'holy Spirit,' Pf. cxlvii. 18. 'He causeth his wind to blow, and the waters flow.' When the wind of God's Spirit blows upon us, then the waters of repentant tears will flow from us.

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## THE WORD READ AND PREACHED, HOW EFFECTUAL?

III. THE third way to escape the wrath and curse of God and obtain the benefit of redemption by Christ, is, 'The diligent use of ordinances:' in particular the "word, sacraments and prayer."

1. I begin with the first of these ordinances,

I. The 'word,' 1 Thess. ii. 13.—'which effectually worketh in you that believe.'

Qu. *What is meant by the words working effectual?*

Ans. The word of God is said to work effectually, when it hath good effect upon us for which it was appointed of God; namely, when the word works powerful illumination, and thorough reformation, Acts xxvi. 18. 'To open their eyes, and turn them from the power of Satan to God.' The 'opening their eyes,' denotes illumination; and, 'turning them from Satan to God,' denotes reformation.

Qu. 2. *How is the word to be read and heard that it may become effectual to salvation?*

This question consists of two branches.

1. *How may the word be read effectually?*

*First*, I shall begin with the first branch of the question, 'How is the word to be read that it may be effectual to salvation?'

*Ans.* That we may so read the word, that it may conduce effectually to our salvation:

1. Let us have a reverend esteem of every part of canonical scripture, Pl. cxix. 10. 'More are they to be desired than gold.' Value this book of God above all other books; it is a golden epistle, emitted by the Holy Ghost, sent us from heaven. More particularly, to raise our esteem, (1.) The scripture is a spiritual glass, to dress our souls by; it shews us more than we can see by the light of a natural conscience: that may discover gross sins; but the glass of the word shews us heart-sins, vain thoughts unbelief, &c. And it not only shews us our spots, but washeth them away. (2.) The scripture is a magazine, out of which we may fetch our spiritual artillery to fight against Satan. When the devil tempted our Saviour, he fetched armour and weapons from scripture, 'it is written,' Matth. iv. 4, 7. (3.) The holy scripture is a *panacea*, or universal medicine for the soul; it gives a receipt to cure deadness of heart, Psal. cxix. 50. Pride, 1 Pet. v. 5. Infidelity, John iii. 36. It is a physic garden, where we may gather an herb or antidote to expel the poison of sin. The leaves of scripture like the leaves of the tree of life, are for the 'healing of the nations,' Rev. xxii. 2. And may not this cause a reverend esteem of the word?

2. If we would have the word written effectual to our souls, let us peruse it with "intenseness of mind," John v. 39. 'Search the scriptures.' The Greek word [*erynate*] signifies to search as for a "vein of silver." The Bereans, Acts xvii. 'searched the scriptures daily.' The word [*anakrimontes*] "signifies to make a curious and critical search." And Apollos was mighty in the scriptures, Acts xviii. 24. Some gallop over a chapter in haste and get no good by it: if we would have the word effectual and saving, we must mind and observe every passage of scripture. And that we may be diligent in the perusal of scripture, consider,

*First*, The word written is *norma cultus*, the rule and platform by which we are to square our lives; it contains in it all things needful to salvation, Pl. xix. 7. what duties we are to do, what sins we are to avoid. God gave Moses a pattern how he would have the tabernacle made, and he was to go exactly according to the pattern, Exod. xxv. 9. The word is the pat-

tern God hath given us in writing, for modelling our lives; therefore, how careful should we be in the perusing and looking over this pattern?

*Secondly*, The written word, as it is our pattern, so it will be our judge, John xii. 48. 'The word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him at the last day.' We read of the 'opening of the books,' Rev. xx. 12. 'This is one book God will open, the book of the scripture and will judge men out of it; he will say, have you lived according to the rule of this word? The word hath a double work, to teach, and to judge.

3. If we would have the word written effectual, we must bring faith to the reading of it: believe it to be the word of the eternal Jehovah. The word written comes with authority, it shews its commission from heaven, 'Thus saith the Lord.'—It is of divine inspiration, 2 Tim. iii. 16. The oracles of scripture must be surer to us than a voice from heaven, 1 Pet. i. 18. Unbelief enervates the virtue of scripture, and renders it ineffectual. First, men question the truth of the scripture and then fall away from it.

4. If we would have the word written effectual to salvation, we must delight in it as our spiritual cordial, Jer. xv. 16. 'Thy words were found, and I did eat them, and they were the joy and rejoicing of my heart.' All true solid comfort is fetched out of the word. The word (as Chrysostom saith) is a spiritual garden: and the promises are the fragrant flowers or spices in this garden. How should we delight to walk upon these beds of spices? is it not a comfort in all dubious perplexed cases, to have a counsellor to advise us? Pl. cxix. 24. 'Thy testimonies are my counsellors.' Is it not a comfort to find our evidences for heaven? and where should we find them but in the word? 1 Thess. i. 4, 5. The word written is a sovereign elixir or comfort in an hour of distress, Pl. cxix. 50. 'This is my comfort in my affliction, for thy word hath quickened me.' It can turn all our 'water into wine.' How should we take a great complacency and delight in the word! They only who come to the word with delight, go from it with success.

5. If we would have the scripture effectual and saving, we must be sure, when we have read the word, to hide it in our hearts, Pl. cxix. 11. 'Thy word have I hid in my heart.' The word, locked up in the heart, is a preservative against sin. Why did David hide the word in his heart? In the next words, 'That I might not sin against thee.' As one would carry an antidote about him when he comes near a place infected; so David carried the word in his heart, as a sacred antidote to preserve him from the infection of sin. When the sap is hid in the root, it makes the branches fruitful, when the seed is hid in the

ground, then the corn springs up, so, when the word is hid in the heart then it brings forth good fruit.

6. If we would have the word written effectual, let us labour not only to have the light of the word in our heads, but the power of the word in our hearts. Let us endeavour to have the word copied out, and written a second time in our hearts. Pf. xxxvii. 32. 'The law of God is in his heart.' The word saith, 'Be clothed with humility,' 1 Pet. v. 5. Let us be low and humble in our own eyes. The word calls for sanctity; 'Let us labour to partake of the divine nature, and to have something conceived in us which is of the holy Ghost,' 2 Pet. i. 4. When the word is thus copied out in our hearts, and we are changed into the similitude of it, now the word written is made effectual to us, and becomes a savour of life.

7. *§ ult.* When we read the holy scriptures let us look up to God for a blessing: beg the spirit of wisdom and revelation, that we may see the 'deep things of God,' Eph. i. 17. Pray to God that the same Spirit that wrote the scripture would enable us to understand it: Pray that God will give us that 'favour of knowledge,' 2 Cor. ii. 14. that we may relish a sweetness in the word we read. David tasted it 'sweeter than the honey-comb,' Pf. xix. 10. Let us pray that God will not only give us his word as a rule of holiness, but his grace as a principle of holiness.

*2d Branch of the 2d. Question. How may we so hear the word, that it may be effectual and saving to our souls?*

*Ans.* 1. Give great attention to the word preached; let nothing pass without taking special notice of it, Luke xix. 48. 'All the people were very attentive to hear him, they hanged upon his lip. Acts xvi. 14. 'Lydia a seller of purple, which worshipped God, heard us, whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended to the things which were spoken of Paul.' Give attention to the word, as to a matter of life and death: and, to that purpose have a care, (1.) To banish vain impertinent thoughts, which will distract you, and take you off from the work in hand. These fowls will be coming to the sacrifice, Gen. xv. 11. therefore we must drive them away. An archer may take a right aim: but if one stand at his elbow, and jog him when he is going to shoot, he will not hit the mark: Christians may have good aims in hearing; but take heed of impertinent thoughts which will jog and hinder you in God's service. (2.) Banish dullness. The devil gives many hearers a sleepy sop, they cannot keep their eyes open at a sermon: they eat so much on a Lord's day, that they are fitter for the pillow and couch, than the temple. Frequent and customary sleeping at a sermon, shews high contempt and irreverence of the ordinance: it gives a bad example to others; it makes your sincerity to be

called in question; it is the devil's seed-time, Matth. xiii. 25. 'While men slept, the enemy came and sowed tares.' Oh shake off drowsiness, as Paul shook off the viper! Be serious and attentive in hearing the word, Deut. xxxii. 47. 'For it is not a vain thing for you, it is your life.' When people do not mind what God speaks to them in his word, God doth as little mind what they say to him in prayer.

2. If you would have the word preached effectual, come with an holy appetite to the word, 1 Pet. ii. 2. The thirsting soul is the thriving soul. In nature, one may have an appetite and no digestion; but it is not so in religion: where there is a great appetite to the word, there is for the most part digestion, the word doth concoct and nourish. Come with hungerings of soul after the word: and therefore desire the word, that it may not only please you, but profit you. Look not more at the garnishing of the dish than the meat, at eloquence and rhetoric more than solid matter. It argues both a wanton palate, and surfeited stomach, to feed on fallads and kickshaws, rather than wholesome food.

3. If you would have the preaching of the word effectual, come to it with a tenderness upon your heart, 2 Chron. xxxiv. 9. 'Because thy heart was tender.' If we preach to hard hearts, it is like shooting against a brazen wall, the word doth not enter: it is like setting a gold seal upon marble, which takes no impression. Oh come to the word preached with a melting frame of heart! it is the melting wax receives the stamp of the seal: when the heart is in a melting frame, it will better receive the stamp of the word preached: when Paul's heart was melted and broken for sin, then 'Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?' Acts ix. 6. Come not hither with hard hearts: who can expect a crop when the seed is sown upon stony ground?

4. If you would have the word effectual, receive it with meekness, James i. 21. 'Receive with meekness the ingrafted word.' Meekness is a submissive frame of heart to the word, a willingness to hear the counsels and reproofs of the word. Contrary to this meekness, is, (1.) Fierceness of spirit, whereby men are ready to rise up in rage against the word. Proud men, and guilty, cannot endure to hear of their faults. Proud Herod put John in prison, Mark xii. 12. The guilty Jews being told of their crucifying Christ, stoned Stephen, Acts ix. 59. To tell men of sin, is to hold a glass to one that is deformed, who cannot endure to see his own face. (2.) Contrary to meekness is stubbornness of heart, whereby men are resolved to hold fast their sins, let the word say what it will, Jer. xlv. 16. 'We will burn incense to the queen of heaven.' Oh take heed of this! if you would have the word preached work effectually, lay aside fierceness and stubbornness, receive the word with

meekness. By meekness the word preached comes to be ingrafted. As a good scion that is grafted in a bad stock, doth change the nature of the fruit, and make it taste sweet; so when the word comes to be ingrafted into the soul, it sanctifies it, and makes it bring forth the sweet fruit of righteousness.

5. Mingle the word preached with faith, Heb. iv. 2. 'The word preached profited not, not being mixed with faith.' If you leave out the chief ingredient in a medicine, it hinders the operation; do not leave out this ingredient of faith. Believe the word, and so believe it as to apply it. When you hear Christ preached, apply him to yourselves; this is to put on the Lord Jesus, Rom. xiii. 14. when you hear a promise spoken of, apply it; this is to suck the flower of the promise, and turn it to honey.

6. Be not only attentive in hearing, but retentive after hearing, Heb. ii. 1. 'We ought to give the more diligent heed to the things we have heard, lest at any time we let them slip.' Lest we should let them run out, as water out of a sieve: if the ground doth not retain the seed sown into it, there can be no good crop. Some have memories like leaking vessels, the sermons they hear, are presently gone, and then there is no good done. If meat doth not stay and concoct on the stomach, it will not nourish. Satan labours to steal the word out of our mind, Mark iv. 15. 'When they have heard, Satan cometh immediately, and taketh away the word that was sown.' Our memories should be like the chest of the ark wherein the law was put.

7. Reduce your hearing to practice; live on the sermons you hear, Psal. cxix. 166. 'I have done thy commandments.' Rachel was not content that she was beautiful, but her desire was to be fruitful. What is a knowing head without a fruitful heart! Phil. i. 11. 'Filled with the fruits of righteousness.' It is obedience crowns hearing: that hearing will never save the soul, which doth not reform the life.

8. Beg of God that he will accompany his word with his presence and blessing. The Spirit must make all effectual: ministers may prescribe physic, but it is God's Spirit must make it work. "He hath his pulpit in heaven that converts souls," Austin. Acts x. 44. 'While Peter was speaking, the Holy Ghost fell on all them that heard. It is said, the alchymist can draw oil out of iron. God's spirit can produce grace in the most obdurate heart.

9. If you would have the word work effectually to your salvation, make it familiar to you, discourse of the word you have heard when you come home, Ps. cxix. 172. 'My tongue shall speak of thy word.' That may be one reason why some people get no more good by what they hear, because they never speak

one to another of what they have heard: as if sermons were such secrets, that they must not be spoken of again; or as if it were a shame to speak of matters of salvation, Mal. iii. 16. 'They that feared the Lord spake often one to another and a book of remembrance was written.'

*Use. Caution.* Take heed, as you love your souls, that the word become not ineffectual to you. There are some to whom the word preached is ineffectual. (1.) Such as censure the word; instead of judging themselves judge the word. (2.) Such as live in contradiction to the word, Isa. xxx. 8. (3.) Such as are more hardened by the word, Zech. vii. 11. 'They made their hearts as an adamant.' And when men harden their hearts wilfully, God hardens them judicially, Isa. vii. 8. 'Make their ears heavy.' The word to these is ineffectual: were it not sad, if a man's meat should not nourish; nay, if it should turn to poison? Oh! take heed that the word preached be not ineffectual and to no purpose. Consider three things.

(1.) If the word preached doth us no good there is no other way by which we can be saved. This is God's institution, and the main engine he useth to convert souls, Luke xvi. 31. 'If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded tho' one rose from the dead.' If an angel should come to you out of heaven, and preach of the excellency of the glorified estate, and the joys of heaven, and that in the most pathetic manner; if the word preached doth not persuade, neither would you be wrought upon by such an oration from heaven. If a damned spirit should come from hell, and preach to you in flames, and tell you what a place hell is, and roar out the torments of the damned, it might make you tremble, but it would not convert, if the preaching of the word would not do it.

(2.) To come to the word, and not be savingly wrought upon, is that which the devil is pleased with; he cares not though you hear frequently, if it be not effectually: he is not an enemy to hearing, but profiting. Though the minister holds out the breasts of the ordinances to you, he cares not as long as you do not suck the sincere milk of the word. The devil cares not how many sermon-pills you take, so long as they do not work upon your conscience.

(3.) If the word preached be not effectual to men's conversion, it will be effectual to their condemnation: the word will be effectual one way or other; if it doth not make your hearts better, it will make your chains heavier. We pity them who have not the word preached, but it will be worse with them who are not sanctified by it: dreadful is their case, who go laden to hell with sermons. But I will conclude with the apostle, Heb. vi. 9. 'I am persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation.'