

## FEEDING ON THE WORDS OF GOD

"Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." – Matt. 4:4.

WE READ that these words were a part of our Lord's answer to Satan when the Adversary exhorted Him to command the stones to be turned into bread, in order to satisfy His hunger, after fasting forty days in the wilderness. The Lord knew, however, that it would be unlawful for Him thus to use the superhuman power which came to Him as a result of His consecration to the Father's service. That power was not to be used for His flesh. Hence our Lord refused to use His superhuman powers for the gratification of the flesh, even though He hungered. Then Satan suggested, How do you expect to live if you do not exercise your power to live? Our Lord's answer, as we see, was that man shall not live by bread, merely, but by every word, every promise that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.

Our hope of eternal life, therefore, rests upon that obedience to God which would entitle us to eternal life, according to His arrangement. If our Lord had gratified the flesh He might have satisfied His hunger, but He would have violated His covenant of obedience to God. Whoever would have eternal life must seek to be obedient to God, to all that God has commanded, all to which He has directed the individual. Of course, He might have one command for the angels, another for man, and a third for the Church. But since we find that we are not able to obey perfectly every command of God, we cannot hope for eternal life by perfect obedience to the letter of the Word of God. Even though God has accepted us as His children, we can hope for life only by having the *spirit* of obedience to His Word.

One of the lessons to be learned in the School of Christ is that a "man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth" – food and raiment, etc. – but that his life, in the fullest,

highest, grandest sense, is dependent upon his complete submission to the Divine will. Careful attention to every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God, to every admonition, every encouragement, every promise, is necessary to the development of those whom God is now calling to eternal life as joint-heirs with His Son in the Kingdom. Let us, then, more and more, as the disciples of the Lord Jesus, keep in memory the words of the text, and act upon them.

### **LIVE BY EVERY WORD FROM THE MOUTH OF GOD**

But how is it possible for us to live by the words that proceed out of the mouth of God? What did Jesus mean? How can God's words give life?

He meant that all hope of attaining eternal life depends upon God – upon the Divine Plan and its promises. Looking into these promises we can see distinctly that the Divine Plan, dating from before the foundation of the world, is that all of God's creatures, created in His likeness and abiding in faith, love and obedience in harmony with Him, shall have life everlasting. This is God's Word upon the subject, namely, that *obedience* is the condition of life everlasting. This is, undoubtedly, what our Lord had in mind in the words of our text. He may also have had the thought that He had come into the world upon a special mission, to do the Father's will, and that His understanding from the beginning was that His perfect obedience to the Divine will would insure Him glory, honor and immortality with the Father, eventually; but that any disobedience would mean the forfeiture of Divine favor and would involve the sentence of disobedience – *death*.

Our Lord's prompt decision, therefore, was that to disobey the Father's will and thus to secure bread for the sustenance of His body, would be a great mistake; that food [R4897 : page 387] thus secured could sustain life for but a little while; that His better plan would be to trust in the Word of God, the Divine *promise*, that those who love and serve and obey Him shall ultimately come off conquerors and more, and have eternal life with God. And this, our Master's conclusion, is

full of instruction for us who are His disciples, seeking to walk in His footsteps.

## **DISCIPLINE AN EVIDENCE OF SONSHIP**

One "word of God" which is very comforting to His children is His assurance of Parental care and discipline. "If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the Father chasteneth not?" (Heb. 12:7.) In this statement the word "chastening" should not be understood as meaning disapproval on the part of our Father, and sin on the part of the individual, but rather instruction. We are guided in the matter by remembering that although our Lord was a Son in whom there was no sin, yet He received, in the Father's providence, as a part of the "cup" poured for Him, various trials, disciplines. All of these experiences were very profitable, showing that the Father loved Him; that the Father had something which He was desirous that our Lord should do that He would not have been qualified to perform without some of these educational instructions and experiences.

Some disciplines, some chastisements, come as a result of our own mistakes and the natural consequences flowing [R4897 : page 388] from those mistakes and the apologies and heartaches which may necessarily follow them. God could save us from these experiences and so seclude and shelter our lives that we would not have anything to tempt us. But such is not His proposition. He wishes us to have these experiences that we may be guided in the right way and learn of our own weaknesses.

If we did not come into contact with various testing experiences we should not know where we are weak. Thus we learn where we can strengthen our characters and how we can be thoroughly developed as New Creatures. The Scriptures speak of our Lord Jesus as "enduring such contradiction of sinners against Himself." (Heb. 12:3.) Our trials, or disciplines, in meeting every opposition that can come to us, should bring more or less of correction in righteousness. Even if this would

not mean outward stripes, we, in any event, would have our mental regrets as New Creatures, and thus we would get a form of correction, or discipline. Additionally, the Lord causes His children to come into peculiar trials as an example either to the brethren or to the world. In many of these, whatever the cause, we may understand them to be also corrections or instructions in righteousness.

### **TRIAL – DISCIPLINE – NECESSARY TO THE PERFECTING OF OUR CHARACTERS**

Character cannot be developed wholly without trial. It is like a plant. At first it is very tender; it needs an abundance of the sunshine of God's love, frequent watering with the showers of His grace, much cultivating with the applied knowledge of His character as a good foundation for faith and inspiration to obedience. Then, when thus far developed under these favorable conditions, it is ready for the pruning hand of discipline, and is also able to endure some hardness. Little by little, as strength of character is developed, the tests applied to it serve only to develop more strength, beauty and grace, until it is finally developed, perfected, fixed, established, through suffering.

This great work of developing and training character is necessarily a slow and tedious one, and not infrequently it is a painful process. But the Apostle plainly tells us that such things are necessary for the development of steadfast and enduring character. Consider how your own experience has verified this, you who have been for some time under the Lord's special care and leading. How much richer you are for all the lessons of experience, and for the patience and other spirit-fruits that experiences have developed in you!

Although, like the Apostle, you can say that "No chastening for the present seemeth joyous, but grievous; nevertheless, afterward, it yieldeth the peaceable fruits of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby." (Heb. 12:11.) The lessons of experience and discipline have made you stronger. They have increased your faith and drawn you into closer communion and fellowship with the Lord. They

have made you feel better acquainted with Him and enabled you to realize more and more His personal interest in you and His love and care for you. And this in turn has awakened a deeper sense of gratitude and an increasing zeal to manifest that gratitude to Him. This also deepens the sense of fellowship with God, and gives confidence to the hope of final and full acceptance with Him as a son and heir, made worthy through Christ.

### **OBEDIENCE THE TEST**

Another helpful "word of God" is found in I John 2:5: "Whoso keepeth His Word, in him verily is the love of God perfected." Here we have a test by which to determine our development as a New Creature. Only those who have *received* the Word of God can *keep* it, can retain it and comply with its requirements. The text suggests that it is a difficult matter to keep the Word of God. On all sides we hear various reasons why we should retain, hold fast the world, the flesh, rather than that which the Lord's Word holds out to us. There are many allurements to entice us from the "narrow way." Hence these who hold fast to the Word of God are "overcomers."

The Scriptures intimate that to live righteously and godly in this present time will cost us our very lives. "Whosoever will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." (2 Tim. 3:12.) Under present conditions faithfulness means *faithfulness even unto death*. The intimation is that unless we have the love of God we will not undertake to be obedient to His Word; that otherwise we can neither retain the Word of God nor be in accord with it, serving it even unto death.

Our Lord Jesus illustrated the perfection of obedience to the Word of God when He said, "I come to do Thy will, O God!" Everything written in the Book; everything that was God's will, He was glad to do at any cost. Our Lord Jesus could not have reached this degree of submission to the Divine will unless He had had love for the Father. And so with us. Unless we have love for God and the principles of righteousness we cannot continue in this way.

Consequently, only those who so love God that they would surrender life to do His will, are properly keeping His Word. We may say that this condition is reached when we first make consecration, for the heart has given up its will and surrendered itself fully to the Lord – "Not my will, but Thine, be done." All those who are complying with the conditions of self-sacrifice have reached the mark of perfect love. Of course, there is another sense of perfecting which we shall attain in the resurrection. But only those who will keep God's Word by faithfulness even unto death will secure the prize and become partakers of the divine nature.

The *test* is OBEDIENCE. In proportion as we keep the Lord's Word, in like proportion the love of God is perfected in us; for if we have received the mind of Christ, the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God, the effect will be to cause us both to will and to do His good pleasure to the extent of our ability. And this ability should be continually on the increase year by year. Although we may not hope to be perfected until we shall be "*changed*" and be granted our new resurrection bodies, nevertheless, we may keep so closely in touch with the Lord in the spirit of our minds that we may have continual fellowship with Him; and by confessing our faults daily and seeking his forgiveness we may continue to the end of our journey clean from sin, even though we must still acknowledge the infirmities of the flesh, that in our flesh dwelleth no perfection.

## **THE WORK OF RESURRECTION**

A further word from the mouth of God assures us that He knoweth our frame, He remembereth that we are *dust* – weak, imperfect, dying; and that it is not His purpose that we shall continue always to be in conflict with ourselves – perfect will against imperfect body; but that He has provided that, in the resurrection, we shall have new, perfect bodies, in full accord with our new minds.

He assures us that He is able and willing to do all this and that He purposes to give to His *elect*, bodies of a **[R4897 : page 389]** much

higher order than the human – that He will give us spirit bodies – and that of the *highest rank*. We shall have part in the First Resurrection, and will thenceforth be able to do the Father's will perfectly in every respect, as we now show ourselves desirous of doing His will so far as we are able. O gracious provisions! O wonderful words of compassion, inspiring us to wondrous hopes of eternal life and glory! It will be to such as thus overcome in spirit, in faith (I John 5:4), that the Lord will give the final Word of His mouth – "Well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joys of thy Lord!"

"A little while; now He has come;  
The hour draws on apace –  
The blessed hour, the glorious morn,  
When we shall see His face.  
How light our trials then will seem!  
How short our pilgrim way!  
The life of earth a fitful dream,  
Dispelled by dawning day!"

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