

THE BIBLE IN THE CLOSET.

We are continually reminded of the necessity of secret prayer. We are taught that we should both begin and end each busy day at the Master's feet. We hear many homilies on the duty of taking everything to God in prayer. This is all very well. Not a word too much can be said on the importance of prayer. We cannot live spiritual lives at all unless we draw the inspiration down from heaven. In our lives in this world of evil and struggle we are like divers working on board of a sunken ship beneath the waves of the sea; we can maintain our life and continue our work only by keeping unbroken communication with heaven and breathing heaven's atmosphere. "Prayer is the Christian's vital breath." Our souls will die unless we pray.

But it is a mistake to suppose that prayer alone is sufficient to nourish our spiritual life. Really it is only half of the communion with God through which we get the refreshing our souls need. A heathen convert said:—"When I pray I talk to God; when I read my Bible God talks to me." Now it is just as needful to have God talk to us as it is for us to talk to him. Yet we are not urged half so frequently or half so earnestly to read our Bibles, as part of our daily spiritual feeding, as we are to pray. There are many people who rarely ever carry the Bible with them into their closet. They drop on their knees a few moments in the morning and implore God's blessing on them for the day, and then they are up and away, carrying no word of God in their heart as they enter the day's strifes and toils. Really they have had only half a meal, and are not prepared as they might have been for duty. They should also have eaten some of the words of God, and then they would have been truly invigorated and made strong for their day's pilgrimage.

In all ordinary cases God gives spiritual help through his Word. He does not now talk to men as he talked to Moses on the mount; if we would hear what he has to say to us we must open his Word and read its pages for ourselves with listening ear. And he really has something to say to us every time we enter our closet. Perhaps the day is dark before us and we are going out not knowing which way to turn. We cry for light. What lamp will God put into our hands unless it be a precept or a promise? We shall not carry any light with us out of our closet if we pray only and do not open our Bible. The psalmist did not say, "Prayer is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path." Only God's word can be such a lamp and light.

Or we may be in sorrow, and in our quest-

for comfort we turn away from mocking human voices and empty earthly comforts to the closet of prayer. We ask God to comfort us. Now it is very sweet sometimes when the sorrow is bitter and the darkness intense just to lay our heads down upon our Master's bosom and say nothing at all, not even to pray. There is comfort in simply resting within the everlasting arms. But if we would get real, positive comfort from God it must come to us from his Word. To leave the Bible closed while we cry to heaven for comforting is really to shut our ears to the angel of consolation when he comes that we have asked God to send to us.

In all phases of experience the same is true. Prayer alone does not fit us for living sweetly and victoriously. We need the words of God, that we may use them as we have need. We have an illustration of this in our Lord's own experience. When he was tempted of the devil he answered every assault of the adversary with a word of Scripture. He did not rely on prayer alone, but in each case drew out an arrow from his well-filled quiver, and shot it at the enemy. It will be noticed, too, that he did not take out his Bible then and there on the field and look up a text to suit his need; but that he was so familiar with the words of his Father that he had but to recall from memory the particular one he required that moment. This shows us that our Lord had been in the habit of using his Bible in his closet all his early years. In the sudden temptations that come to each of us every day we need the same equipment. We need to carry always a quiver full of arrows from which we may draw at an instant's notice. If our closet devotion consists of prayer only we shall find ourselves defenceless many a time in the place of danger.

There is another phase of Christian life in which the same necessity is apparent. A great artist, when asked how he could paint such marvellous pictures, replied: "I dream dreams and I see visions, and then I paint my dreams and my visions." In our seasons of retirement with Christ we should catch glimpses of heavenly beauty which we may then work out in act and character as we live among our fellows; we should dream dreams and see visions in the closet which we may paint on the canvas of actual life, that others may behold them. It is only in the words of God that we can see these visions of heavenly beauty. These words show us God's thoughts and God's will, God's wishes for us, what he wants us to do and to be; what he himself is like; what we are to be in the life that is complete and full. We need then to look at these divine words in our silent times, to ponder them till they open and disclose the fragment of