

Title

The Blessed Life

By F.B. Meyer

Edited into digital media and released in 1997 (reformatted contact info updated Feb.2003) by Clyde C. PRICE, Jr. for Parakletos Ministries Inc. and The Christian Digital Library Foundation .

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THE BLESSED LIFE

There is a Christian life which, on comparison with that experienced by the majority of Christians, is as summer to winter, or, as the mature fruitfulness of a golden autumn to the struggling promise of a cold and late spring.

And the blessedness of this blessed life lies in this: that we trust the Lord to do in us and for us what we could not do. And we find that He does not belie His Word, but that, according to our faith, so it is done to us. The weary spirit, which has vainly sought to realize its ideal by its own strivings and efforts, now gives itself over to the strong and tender hands of the Lord Jesus, and He accepts the task, and at once begins to work in it to will and to do of His own good pleasure, delivering it from the tyranny of besetting sin, and fulfilling in it His own perfect ideal.

The BLESSED LIFE should be the normal life of every Christian -- in work and rest, in the building up of the inner life, and in the working out of the life-plan. It is God's thought not for a few, but for all His children. The youngest and weakest may lay claim to it equally with the strongest and oldest. We should step into it at the moment of conversion without wandering with blistered feet for forty years in the desert, or lying for thirty-eight years, with disappointed hopes, in the porch of the House of Mercy.

THE NEW BIRTH

The first chamber in the King's holy palace is the Chamber of the New Birth.

By nature we are destitute of life -- dead in trespasses and sins. We need, therefore, not a new creed, but a new life. The prophet's staff is well enough where there is life, but it is useless on the face of a dead babe. The first requisite is LIFE. This is what the Holy Spirit gives us at the moment of conversion.

We may remember the day and place of our new birth, or we may be as ignorant of them as of the circumstances of our natural birth. But what does it matter that a man cannot recall his birthday, so long as he knows that he is alive?

As an outstretched hand has two sides -- the upper, called the back, the under, called the palm -- so there are two sides and names for the act of entrance into the Chamber of the New Birth. Angels, looking at it from the heaven side, call it BEING BORN AGAIN. Man, looking at it from the earth side, calls it TRUSTING JESUS. Those that believe in His name are born again; those that receive Him have the right to become the sons of God (John 1:12,13). If you are born again, you will trust. And if you are trusting Jesus, however many your doubts and fears, you are certainly born again and have entered the palace. If you go no further, you will be saved, but you will miss untold blessedness.

Jesus Christ has bought us with His blood, but, alas, He has not had His

money's worth! He paid for all, and He has had but a fragment of our energy, time and earnings. By an act of consecration, let us ask Him to forgive the robbery of the past, and let us profess our desire to be henceforth utterly and only for Him -- His slaves, His chattels, owning no master other than Himself.

As soon as we say this He will test our sincerity, as He did the young ruler's, by asking something of us. He will lay His finger on something within us which He wants us to alter, obeying some command, or abstaining from some indulgence. If we instantly give up our will and way to Him, we pass the narrow doorway into the Chamber of Surrender, which has a southern aspect and is ever warm and radiant with His presence because obedience is the condition of manifested love (John 14:23).

This doorway is very narrow, and entrance is only possible for those who will lay aside weights as well as sins. A weight is anything which, without being essentially wrong or hurtful to others, is yet a hindrance to ourselves. We may always know a weight by three signs: first, we are uneasy about it; second, we argue for it against our conscience; third, we go about asking people's advice whether we may not keep it without harm. All these things must be laid aside in the strength which Jesus waits to give. Ask Him to deal with them for you, that you may be set in joint in every good work to do His will (Hebrews 13:21).

That consecration is the stepping stone to blessedness is clearly established in the experience of God's children. For instance, Frances Ridley Havergal has left us this record: "It was on Advent Sunday, December, 1873, that I first saw clearly the blessedness of true consecration. I saw it as a flash of electric light, and what you see you can never unsee. There must be full surrender before there can be full blessedness. God admits you by the one into the other. First, I was shown that the blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanseth from all sin; and then it was made plain to me that He who had thus cleansed me had power to keep me clean; so I utterly yielded myself to Him and utterly trusted Him to keep me."

CONSECRATION

The act of consecration is recognizing Christ's ownership and accepting it, saying to Him, with the whole heart, "Lord, I am Thine by RIGHT, and I wish to be Thine by choice." Of old the mighty men of Israel were willing to swim the flooded rivers to come to David, their uncrowned, but God-appointed king. And when they met him, they cried, "Thine are we, David, and on thy side, thou son of Jesse." They were his because God had given them to him, but they could not rest content till they were his also by their glad choice. Why then should we not say the same to Jesus Christ? "Lord Jesus, I am Thine by right; forgive me that I have lived so long as if I were my own. And now I gladly recognize that Thou hast a rightful claim on all I have and am. I want to live as Thine from henceforth, and I do solemnly at this hour give myself to Thee to be Thine in life and death, Thine absolutely and forever."

Do not try to make a covenant with God, lest you should break it and be discouraged. But quietly fall into your right attitude as one who belongs to Christ. Take as your motto the noble confession, "Whose I am and Whom I serve." Breathe the grand old simple lines:

Just as I am, Thy love unknown Has broken every barrier down, Now to be Thine, yea, Thine alone, O Lamb of God, I come.

AN ACT OF THE WILL

Consecration is not the act of our feelings but of our WILL. Do not try to feel anything; do not try to make yourself fit or good or earnest enough for Christ. God is working in you to will, whether you feel it or not. He is giving you power, at this moment, to will and do His good pleasure. Believe this, act upon it at once, and say, "Lord Jesus, I am willing to be Thine"; or, if you cannot say as much as that, say, "Lord Jesus, I am willing to be made willing to be Thine forevermore."

Consecration is only possible when we give up our will about EVERYTHING. As soon as we come to the point of giving ourselves to God, we are almost certain to become aware of the presence of one thing, if not of more, out of harmony with His will. And while we feel able to surrender ourselves in all other points, here we exercise reserve. Every room and cupboard in the house, with the exception of this, is thrown open to the new Occupant; every limb in the body, but one, submitted to the practised hand of the Good Physician. But that small reserve spoils the whole. To give ninety-nine parts and to withhold the hundredth undoes the whole transaction. Jesus will have all or none. And He is wise. Who would live in a fever-stricken house, so long as one room was not exposed to disinfectants, air and sun? Who would undertake a case so long as the patient refused to submit one part of his body to examination? Who would become responsible for a bankruptcy so long as one ledger was kept back? The reason that so many fail to attain the BLESSED LIFE is that there is some one point in which they hold back from God, and concerning which they prefer to have their own way and will rather than His. In this one thing they will not yield their will and accept God's; and this one little thing mars the whole, robs them of peace, and compels them to wander in the desert.

If you cannot GIVE all, ask the Lord Jesus to TAKE all, and especially that which seems so hard to give. Many have been helped by hearing it put thus. Tell them to GIVE, and they shake their heads despondently. They are like the little child who told her mother that she had been trying to give Jesus her heart, BUT IT WOULDN'T GO. But ask them if they are willing for Him to come into their hearts and TAKE all, and they will joyfully assent.

Tennyson says, "Our wills are ours to make them Thine." But sometimes it seems impossible to shape them out so as to match every corner and angle of the will of God. What a relief it is at such a moment to hand the will over to Christ, telling Him that we are willing to be made willing to have His will in all things, and asking Him to melt our stubborn waywardness, to fashion our

wills upon His anvil, and to bring us into perfect accord with Himself.

AN ACT OF FAITH

When we are willing that the Lord Jesus should take all, we must believe that He does take all. He does not wait for us to free ourselves from evil habits, or to make ourselves good, or to feel glad and happy. His one desire is that we should put our will on His side in everything. When this is done, He instantly enters the surrendered heart and begins His blessed work of renovation and renewal. From the very moment of consecration, though it be done in much feebleness and with slender appreciation of its entire meaning. The spirit may begin to say with new emphasis, "I am His, Glory to God, I am His!" As soon as the gift is laid on the altar, the fire falls.

IT IS WELL to make the act of consecration a definite one in our spiritual history. George Whitefield did it in the ordination service. "I can call heaven and earth to witness that when the Bishop laid his hand upon me, I gave myself up to be a martyr for Him who hung upon the cross for me. Known unto Him are all the future events and contingencies. I have thrown myself blind-folded and without reserve into His almighty hands."

Christmas Evans did it as he was climbing a lonely and mountainous road toward Cader Idris. "I was weary of a cold heart toward Christ, and began to pray, and soon felt the fetters loosening. Tears fell copiously, and I was constrained to cry out for the gracious visits of God. Then I resigned myself to Christ, body and soul, gifts and labors, all my life, every day and every hour that remained to me; and all my cares I committed to Christ."

The visit of Messrs. Stanley Smith and Studd to Melbourne Hall will always mark an epoch in my own life. Before then my Christian life had been spasmodic and fitful, now flaming up with enthusiasm, and then pacing wearily over leagues of gray ashes and cold cinders. I saw that these young men had something which I had not, but which was within them a constant source of rest and strength and joy. At seven a.m. on that gray November morning, daylight flickered into the bedroom, paling the guttered candles which from a very early hour had been lighting up the page of Scripture, and revealed the figures of the devoted Bible students who wore the old cricketing or boating costume of earlier days to render them less sensible of the raw, damp climate. The talk we held then was one of the formative influences of my life. Why should I not yield my whole nature to God, working out day by day that which He would will and work within? Why should not I be a vessel, though only of earthenware, meet for the Master's use, because purged and sanctified?

There was nothing new in what they told me. They said that a man must not only believe in Christ for final salvation, but must trust Him for victory over every sin and for deliverance from every care. They said that the Lord Jesus was willing to abide in the heart which was wholly yielded up to Him. They said that if there were some things in our lives that made it difficult for us to surrender our whole nature to Christ, yet if we were willing to be made

willing to surrender them, He would make us not only willing but glad. They said that as soon as we give or attempt to give ourselves to Him, He takes us. All this was simple enough; I could have said it myself. But they urged me to take the definite step and I shall be forever thankful that they did.

Very memorable was the night when I came to close quarters with God. The Angel that wrestled with Jacob had found me, eager to make me a prince. There were things in my heart and life which I felt were questionable, if not worse. I knew that God had a controversy with respect to them. I saw that my very dislike to probe or touch them was a clear indication that there was mischief lurking beneath. It is the diseased joint that shrinks from the touch, the tender eye that shudders at the light. At the same time, I did not feel willing to give these things up. It was a long struggle. At last I said feebly, "Lord, I am willing to be made willing. I am desirous that Thy will should be done in me and through me as thoroughly as it is done in heaven. Come and take me and break me and make me."

That was the hour of crisis; and when it had passed, I felt able at once to add, "And now I give myself to Thee: body, soul and spirit; in sorrow or in joy; in the dark or in the light; in life or in death; to be Thine only, wholly, and forever. Make the most of me that can be made for Thy glory."

No rapture or rush of joy came to assure me that the gift was accepted. I left the place with almost a heavy heart. I simply assured myself that He must have taken that which I had given, and at the moment of my giving it. And to that belief I clung in all the days that followed, constantly repeating to myself the words, "I am His." And thus at last the joy and rest, victory and freedom from burdening care, entered my heart, and I found that He was molding my will and making it easy to do what I thought impossible. I felt that He was leading me into the paths of righteousness for His name's sake, but so gently as to be almost imperceptible to my weak sight.

OUT of my own experience, I would suggest these seven rules to fellow Christians.

1. Make a definite consecration of yourselves to God.

Dr. Doddridge has left in his diary a very beautiful form of self- consecration. But you need not wait for anything so elaborate or minute as that. With most it would be sufficient to write out Miss Havergal's hymn, "Take my life, and let it be," and to sign your name at the foot. But in any case it is well to write down some record of the act to keep for future reference. Of course, when we have really given ourselves once, we cannot give ourselves a second time. We may renew the consecration vows; we may review the deed or gift; we may insert any new clauses we like. And if we have gone astray, we may ask the Lord to forgive the foul wrong and robbery which we have done Him, and to restore our souls into the position from which we have fallen. Oh, how sweet the promise, "He restoreth my soul"! Dear Christian reader, seek some quiet spot, some still hour, and yield yourself to God.

2. Tell God that you are willing to be made willing about all.

A lady was once in great difficulties about certain things which she felt eager to keep under her own control. Her friend, wishful to press her into the better life of consecration, placed before her a blank sheet of paper, and pressed her to write her name at the foot and then to lay it before God in prayer. Are you willing to do this? Are you prepared to sign your name to a blank sheet of paper and then hand it over to God for Him to fill in as He pleases? If not, ask Him to make you willing and able to do this and all things else. You never will be happy until you let the Lord Jesus keep the house of your nature, closely scrutinizing every visitor and admitting only His friends. He must reign. He must have all or none. He must have the key of every closet, of every cupboard, and of every room. Do not try to make them fit for Him. Simply give Him the key, and He will cleanse and renovate and make beautiful.

3. Reckon on Christ to do His part perfectly.

As you give, He takes. As you open the door, He enters. As you roll back the floodgates, He pours in a glorious tide of fullness -- fullness of wealth, of power, of joy. The clay has only to be plastic in the hand of a Palissy; the marble has only to be pliant to the chisel of a Michelangelo; the organ has only to be responsive to the slightest touch of a Handel; and there will be no failure in results. Oh, to be equally susceptible to the molding influences of Christ! We shall not fail in realizing the highest ideal of which we are capable if only we will let Him do His work unhindered.

4. Confess sin instantly.

If you allow acid to drop and remain on your steel fenders, it will corrode them; and if you allow sin to remain on your heart unconfessed, it will eat out all peace and rest. Do not wait for the evening to come, or until you can get alone, but THERE in the midst of the crowd, in the very rush of life, with the footprints of sin still fresh, lift up your heart to your merciful and ever-present Savior, and say, "Lord Jesus, wash me now from that sin, in Thy precious blood, and I shall be whiter than snow." The blood of Jesus is ever at work, cleansing us from unconscious sin; but it is our part to apply for it to cleanse from conscious and known sins as soon as we are aware of their presence in our lives.

5. Hand over to Christ every temptation and care.

When you feel temptation approaching you, as a bird by some quick instinct is aware that the hawk is hovering near, then instantly lift your heart to Christ for deliverance. He cannot rebuff or fail you. He will gather you under His feathers, and under His wings shall you trust. And when any petty annoyance or heavier worry threatens to mar your peace, in the flash of a moment, hand it over to Jesus, saying, "Lord, I am oppressed; undertake

this for me." "Ah," you sigh, "I wish indeed I could live like this, but in the moment of need I forget to look." Then do this. Trust in Christ to keep you trusting. Look to Him so to abide in you as to keep your abiding. In the early morning entrust to Him the keeping of your soul, and then, as hour succeeds hour, expect Him to keep that which you have committed unto Him.

6. Keep in touch with Christ.

Avoid the spirit of fault-finding, criticism, uncharitableness, and anything inconsistent with His perfect love. Go where He is most likely to be found, either where two or three of His children are gathered, or where the lost sheep is straying. Ask Him to wake you morning by morning for communion and Bible study. Make other times in the day, especially in the still hour of evening twilight, between the work of the day and the avocations of the evening, when you shall get alone with Him, telling Him all things, and reviewing the past under the gentle light which streams from His eyes.

7. Expect the Holy Ghost to work in, with, and for you.

When a man is right with God, God will freely use him. There will rise up within him impulses, inspirations, strong strivings, strange resolves. These must be tested by Scripture and prayer; and if evidently of God, they must be obeyed. But there is this perennial source of comfort: God's commands are His enablings. He will never give us a work to do without showing exactly how and when to do it, or without giving us the precise strength and wisdom we need. Do not dread to enter this life because you fear that God will ask you to do something you cannot do. He will never do that. If He lays anything on your heart, He will do so irresistibly; and as you pray about it, the impression will continue to grow, so that presently, as you look up to know what He wills you to say or do, the way will suddenly open, and you will probably have said the word or done the deed almost unconsciously. Rely on the Holy Ghost to go before you, to make the crooked places straight and the rough places smooth. Do not bring the legal spirit of "must" into God's free service. "Consider the lilies of the field, how they GROW." Let your life be as effortless as theirs, because your faith shall constantly hand over all difficulties and responsibilities to your ever-present Lord. There is no effort to the branch in putting forth the swelling clusters of grapes; the effort would be to keep them back.

SOMEONE says, "I have tried to live a consistent Christian life, and yet I am not what I wish."

Perhaps you live too much in your feelings, too little in your will. We have no direct control over our feelings, but we have over our will. God does not hold us responsible for what we feel, but for what we will. Let us, therefore, not live in the summer house of emotion, but in the central citadel of the will, wholly yielded and devoted to the will of God.

At the table of the Lord the soul is often suffused with holy emotion; the tides rise high; the tumultuous torrents of joy knock loudly against the

floodgates as if to beat them down, and every element in the nature joins in the choral hymn of rapturous praise. But the morrow comes and life has to be faced in the grim office, the dingy shop, the noisy factory, the godless workroom; and as the soul compares the joy of yesterday with the difficulty experienced in walking humbly with the Lord, it is inclined to question whether it is quite so devoted and consecrated as it was. But at such a time, how fair a thing it is to remark that the will has not altered its position by a hair's breadth, and to look up and say, "My God, the springtide of emotion has passed away like a summer brook; but in my heart of hearts, in my will, Thou knowest I am as devoted, as loyal, as desirous to be only for Thee as in the blessed moment of unbroken retirement at Thy feet." This is an offering with which God is well pleased. And thus we may live a calm, peaceful life.

DISOBEDIENCE

Perhaps you have disobeyed some clear command. Sometimes a soul comes to its spiritual adviser, speaking thus:

"I have no conscious joy, and have had but little for years."

"Did you once have it?"

"Yes, for some time after my conversion to God."

"Are you conscious of having refused obedience to some distinct command which came into your life, but from which you shrank?"

Then the face is cast down, and the eyes film with tears, and the answer comes with difficulty.

"Yes, years ago I used to think that God required a certain thing of me; but I felt I could not do what He wished. I was uneasy for some time about it, but after a while it seemed to fade from my mind, and now it does not often trouble me."

"Ah, soul, that is where you have gone wrong, and you will never get right till you go right back through the weary years to the point where you dropped the thread of obedience, and perform that one thing which God demanded of you so long ago, but on account of which you did leave the narrow track of implicit obedience."

Is not this the cause of depression to thousands of Christian people? They are God's children, but they are disobedient children. The Bible rings with one long demand for obedience. The keyword of the book of Deuteronomy is OBSERVE AND DO. The burden of the Farewell Discourse is, IF YE LOVE ME, KEEP MY COMMANDMENTS. We must not question or reply or excuse ourselves. We must not pick and choose our way. We must not take some commands and reject others. We must not think that obedience in other directions will compensate for disobedience in some one particular. God gives one command at a time, borne in upon us, not in one way only, but in many. By this He tests us. If we obey in this, He will flood our souls with blessing and lead us forward into new paths and pastures. But if we refuse in this, we

shall remain stagnant and waterlogged, we shall make no progress in Christian experience, and we shall lack both power and joy.

KNOWN EVIL

Perhaps you are permitting some known evil. When water is left to stand, the particles of silt betray themselves as they fall one by one to the bottom. So if you are quiet, you may become aware of the presence in your soul of permitted evil. Dare to consider it. Do not avoid the sight as the bankrupt man avoids his telltale ledgers, or as the consumptive patient the stethoscope. Compel yourself to consider quietly whatever evil the Spirit of God discovers in your soul. It may have lurked in the cupboards and cloisters of your being for years, suspected but unjudged. But whatever it be, whatever its history, be sure that it has brought the shadow over your life which is your daily sorrow.

Does your will refuse to relinquish a practice or habit which is alien to the will of God? Do you permit some secret sin to have its unhindered way in the house of your life? Do your affections roam unrestrained after forbidden objects? Do you cherish any resentment or hatred toward another, to whom you refuse to be reconciled? Is there some injustice which you refuse to forgive, some charge which you refuse to pay, some wrong which you refuse to confess? Are you allowing something in yourself which you would be the first to condemn in others, but which you argue may be permitted in your own case because of certain reasons with which you attempt to smother the remonstrances of conscience?

WEIGHTS

In some cases the hindrance to the conscious blessedness lies not in sins, but in weights which hang around the soul. Sin is that which is always and everywhere wrong, but a weight is anything which may hinder or impede the Christian life without being positively sin. And thus a thing may be a weight to one which is not so to another. Each must be fully persuaded in his own mind. And wherever the soul is aware of its life being hindered by the presence of any one thing, then, however harmless in itself, and however innocently permitted by others, there can be no alternative; it must be cast aside.

Perhaps you are unwilling to take some public step that may be necessary. It is not enough to confess to God; you must also confess to man, supposing that you have sinned against him. Leave your gift at the altar and go to be reconciled to your brother. If you have done him a wrong, go and tell him so. If you have defrauded him, whether he knows it or not, send him the amount you have taken or kept back and add to it something to compensate him for his loss. Under the Levitical law it was enacted that the delinquent should restore that which he took violently away, or that about which he had dealt falsely, and should add one-fifth part thereto, and only then might he come with his trespass offering to the priest and be forgiven. This principle holds

good today. You never will be happy till you have made restitution. Write the letter or make the call at once; and if the one whom you defrauded is no longer alive, then make the debt right with his heirs and representatives. You must roll away this stone from the grave, or the dead joy can never arise, however loudly you may call it to come forth. I do not believe in a repentance which is not noble enough to make amends for the past, so far as they may lie within your reach.

SELF-SCRUTINY

Perhaps you look too much inwards on self, instead of outwards on the Lord Jesus. The healthiest people do not think about their health; the weak induce disease by morbid introspection. If you begin to count your heartbeats, you will disturb the rhythmic action of the heart. If you continually imagine a pain anywhere, you will produce it. And there are some true children of God who induce their own darkness by morbid self-scrutiny. They are always going back on themselves, analyzing their motives, reconsidering past acts of consecration, comparing themselves with themselves. In one form or another self is the pivot of their life, albeit that is undoubtedly a religious life. What but darkness can result from such a course? There are certainly times in our lives when we must look within and judge ourselves, that we be not judged. But this is only done that we may turn with fuller purpose of heart to the Lord. And when once done, it needs not to be repeated. Leaving "those things which are behind" is the only safe motto. The question is, not whether we did as well as we might, but whether we did as well as we could at the time.

We must not spend all our lives in cleaning our windows or in considering whether they are clean, but in sunning ourselves in God's blessed light. That light will soon show us what still needs to be cleansed away, and will enable us to cleanse it with unerring accuracy. Our Lord Jesus is a perfect reservoir of everything the soul of man requires for a blessed and holy life. To make much of Him, to abide in Him, to draw from Him, to receive each moment from His fullness is therefore the only condition of soul health. But to be more concerned with self than with Him is like spending much time and thought over the senses of the body and never using them for the purpose of receiving impressions from the world outside. Look off unto Jesus. "Delight thyself also in the Lord." "My soul, wait thou only upon God."

LACK OF COMMUNION

Perhaps you spend too little time in communion with God through His Word. It is not necessary to make long prayers, but it is essential to be much alone with God, waiting at His door, hearkening for His voice, lingering in the garden of Scripture for the coming of the Lord God in the dawn or cool of the day. No number of meetings, no fellowship with Christian friends, no amount of Christian activity can compensate for the neglect of the still hour.

When you feel least inclined for it, there is most need to make for your closet

with the shut door. Do for duty's sake what you cannot do as a pleasure, and you will find it become delightful. You can better thrive without nourishment than become happy or strong in the Christian life without fellowship with God.

When you cannot pray for yourself, begin to pray for others. when your desires wane, take the Bible in hand and begin to turn each text into petition; or take up the tale of your mercies and begin to translate each of them into praise. When the Bible itself becomes irksome, inquire if you have not been spoiling your appetite by sweetmeats, and renounce them; and believe that the Word of God is the wire along which the voice of God will certainly come to you if the heart is hushed and the attention fixed. I will hear what God the Lord shall speak.

More Christians than we can count are suffering from a lack of prayer and Bible study, and no revival is more to be desired than that of systematic private Bible study. There is no short and easy method of godliness which can dispense with this.

LACK OF YIELDEDNESS

Perhaps you have never given yourself over entirely to the Mastership of the Lord Jesus. We are His by many ties and rights. But too few of us recognize His lordship. We are willing enough to take Him as Savior; we hesitate to make Him King. We forget that God has exalted Him to be Prince as well as Savior. And the divine order is irreversible. Those who ignore the Lordship of Jesus cannot build up a strong or happy life.

Put the sun in its central throne, and all the motions of the planets assume a beautiful order. Put Jesus on the throne of life, and all things fall into harmony and peace. Seek first the kingdom of God, and all things are yours. Consecration is the indispensable condition of blessedness.

So shall light break on thy path such as has not shone there for many days. Yea, "thy sun shall no more go down; neither shall thy moon withdraw itself; for the Lord shall be thine everlasting light, and the days of thy mourning shall be ended."

THE WHOLE of Christian living, in my opinion, hinges on the way in which Christian people read the Bible for themselves. All sermons and addresses, all Bible readings and classes, all religious magazines and books, can never take the place of our own quiet study of God's precious Word. We may measure our growth in grace by the growth of our love for private Bible study. And we may be sure there is something seriously wrong when we lose our appetite for the Bread of Life. Perhaps we have been eating too many sweets, or taking too little exercise, or breathing too briefly in the bracing air, which sweeps over the uplands of spiritual communion with God.

There are a few simple rules which may help many more to acquire this holy art, and I venture to note them down. May the Holy Spirit Himself own and use them!

1. Make time for Bible study.

The Divine Teacher must have fixed and uninterrupted hours for meeting His scholars. His Word must have our freshest and brightest thoughts. We must give Him our best, the first fruits of our days. Hence there is no time for Bible study like the early morning, for we cannot give such undivided attention to the holy thoughts that glisten like diamonds on its pages after we have opened our letters, glanced through the paper, and joined in the prattle of the breakfast table. The manna had to be gathered before the dew was off and the sun up; otherwise it melted.

We ought, therefore, to aim at securing at least half an hour before breakfast for the leisurely and loving study of the Bible. To some this may seem a long time in comparison with what they now give. But it will soon seem all too short. The more you read the Bible, the more you will want to read it. It is an appetite which grows as it is fed. And you will be well repaid. The Bible seldom speaks, and certainly never its deepest, sweetest words, to those who always read in a hurry.

2. Look up for the teaching of the Holy Spirit.

No one can so well explain the meaning of his words as he who wrote them. If, then, you want to read the Bible as you should, make much of the Holy Ghost, Who inspired it through holy men. As you open the Book, lift up your heart and say, "Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law." "Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth."

3. Read the Bible methodically.

On the whole, there is probably no better way than to read the Bible through once every year.

4. Read your Bible with your pen in your hand.

Writing of Frances R. Havergal, her sister says: "She read her Bible by the study table by seven o'clock in the summer, and eight o'clock in winter. Sometimes, on bitterly cold mornings, I begged that she would read with her feet comfortably to the fire, and received the reply: 'But then, Marie, I can't rule my lines neatly; just see what a find I've got!' If only one searches, there are such extraordinary things in the Bible. She resolutely refrained from late hours and frittering talks at night in place of Bible searchings and holy communings. Early rising and early studying were her rule through life."

None, in my judgment, have learned the secret of enjoying the Bible until they have commenced to mark it, neatly -- underlining and dating special verses which have cast a light upon their path on special days, drawing railway connections across the page between verses which repeat the same message or ring with the same note, jotting down new references of the catchwords of helpful thoughts. All these methods find plenty of employment

for the pen, and fix our treasures for us permanently. Our Bible, then, becomes the precious memento of bygone hours, and records the history of our inner life.

5. Seek eagerly your personal profit.

Do not read the Bible for others, for class or congregation, but for yourself. Bring all its rays to a focus on your own heart. While you are reading, often ask that some verse or verses may start out from the printed page as God's message to yourself. And never close the Book until you feel that you are carrying away your portion of meat from that Hand which satisfies the desire of every living thing. It is well, sometimes, to stop reading, and seriously ask, What does the Holy Spirit mean ME to learn by this? What bearing should this have on MY life? How can I work this into the fabric of MY character?

6. Above all, turn from the printed page to prayer.

If a cluster of heavenly fruit hangs within reach, gather it. If a promise lies upon the page as a blank check, cash it. If a prayer is recorded, appropriate it, launch it as a feathered arrow from the bow of your desire. If an example of holiness gleams before you, ask God to do as much for you. If a truth is revealed in all its intrinsic splendor, entreat that its brilliance may ever irradiate the hemisphere of your life like a star. Entwine the climbing creepers of holy desire about the lattice work of Scripture. So shall you come to say with the Psalmist: "O how I love thy law! it is my meditation all the day."

The longer I live and learn the experience of most Christian people, the more I long to help them and unfold glimpses of this life of peace and power and victory over sin which our heavenly Father has made possible for us. There are blessed secrets in the Bible, hidden from the wise and prudent, but revealed to babes; things which eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, or the heart of man conceived, but which God reveals by His Spirit to them that love Him; and if these were once understood and accepted, they would wipe away many a tear and shed sunshine on many a darkened pathway.

The bitterest experience with most believers is the presence and power of sin. They long to walk through this grimy world with pure hearts and stainless garments. But when they would do good, evil is present with them. They consent to God's law that it is good; they approve it; they even delight in it after the inner man; they endeavor to keep it; but, notwithstanding all, they seem as helpless to perform it as a man whose brain has been smitten with paralysis to walk straight. What rivers of briny tears have fallen upon the open pages of the Penitent's Psalm (51), shed by those who could repeat it every word from the heart! And what regiments of weary feet have trodden the Bridge of Sighs, if we may so call Romans seven, which sets forth, in vivid force, the experience of a man who has not learned God's secret.

Surely our God must have provided for all this. It would not have been like

Him to fill us with hatred to sin and longings for holiness if there were no escape from the tyranny of the one and no possibility of attaining the other. It would be a small matter to save us from sinning on the other side of the pearly gate; we want to be saved from sinning now, and in this dark world. We want it for the sake of the world, that it may be attracted and convinced. We want it for our own peace, which cannot be perfected while we groan under a worse than Egyptian bondage. We want it for the glory of God, which would be then reflected from us with undimmed brightness, as sunshine from burnished metal.

WE MUST NOT EXPECT TO BE FREE FROM TEMPTATION.

Our adversary, the devil, is always going about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. He tempted our Lord, and he will tempt us. He will entice us to do wrong by every avenue of sense, and will pour his evil suggestions through eye, ear, touch, mouth, and mind. If he does not attack us himself, he can set on us any one of his myriad agents, who will get behind us and whisperingly suggest many grievous blasphemies, which we shall think have proceeded from our own mind.

But temptation is not sin. A man may ask me to share with him the spoils of a burglary, but no one can accuse me of receiving stolen property if I indignantly refuse and keep my doors tightly shut against him. Our Lord was tempted in all points as we are, yet without sin. You might go through Hell itself, teeming with all manner of awful suggestions, and yet not sin. God would not allow Satan to tempt us if temptation necessarily led to sin. But temptation does not do so. There is no sin so long as the will refuses to consent to the solicitation or catch at the bait.

Temptation may even be a blessing to a man when it reveals to him his weakness and drives him to the almighty Savior. Do not be surprised, then, dear child of God, if you are tempted at every step of your earthly journey, and almost beyond endurance; but you will not be tempted beyond what you are able to bear, and with every temptation there will be a way of escape.

WE MUST NOT EXPECT TO LOSE OUR SINFUL NATURE.

When we are born again, a new life -- the life of God -- is put into us by the Holy Spirit. But the old self-life, which is called in Scripture THE FLESH, is not taken away. The two may co-exist in the same heart. "The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh." (Galatians 5:17) The presence of this old self-life within our heart may be detected by its risings, rufflings, chafings, and movings towards sin when temptation calls to it from without. It may be still as death before the increasing power of the new life, but it will still be present in the depths of our nature, as a Samson in the dark dungeons of Philistia, and there will always be a possibility and a fear of

its strength growing again to our shame and our hurt.

WE MUST NOT EXPECT TO BE FREE FROM LIABILITY TO SIN.

What is sin? It is the Yes of the will to temptation. It is very difficult to express the delicate workings of our hearts, but does not something like this happen to us when we are tempted? A temptation is suddenly presented to us and makes a strong appeal. Immediately there may be a tremulous movement of the old nature, as the strings of a violin or piano vibrate in answer to any sounds that may be thrilling the air around. Some do not feel this tremulous response; others do, though I believe it will get fainter and fainter as they treat it with continued respect, so that at last, in the matured saint, it will become almost inaudible. This response indicates the presence of the evil nature within, which is in itself hateful in the sight of our Holy God, and should be bemoaned and confessed, and ever needs the presence of the Blood of Jesus to counteract and atone. But that tremulous movement has not, as yet, developed into a natural overt sin, for which we are responsible, and of which we need to repent.

Sin is the act of the will, and is only possible when the will assents to some unholy influence. The tempter, presenting his temptations through the sense and emotions, makes an appeal to the will, which is our real self. If that will instantly shudders, as chicks when the hawk is hovering in the sky above them, and cries, "How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" and looks at once to Jesus, there are, so far as I can understand, no sins. If, on the other hand, the will begins to falter with temptation, to dally with it and yield to it, then we have stepped out of the light into the dark; we have broken God's laws, splashed our white robes, and brought ourselves into condemnation. To this we are liable as long as we are in this world. We may live a godly, righteous, sober life for years; but if we look away from God for only a moment, our will may be suddenly mastered, and we may, like David, be hurried into a sin which will blast our peace and blacken our character for all coming time.

RECKON YOURSELF DEAD TO THE APPEALS OF SIN.

Sin has no power over a dead man. Dress it in its most bewitching guise, yet it stirs him not. Tears and smiles and words and blows alike fail to awaken a response from that cold corpse. No appeal will stir it now until it hears the voice of the Son of God. This is our position in respect to the appeals of sin. God looks on us as having been crucified with Christ and being dead with Him. In Him we have passed out of the world of sin and death into the world of resurrection glory. This is our position in the mind of God; it is for us to take it up and make it real by faith. We may not feel any great difference, but we must believe that there is; we must act as if there were. Our children sometimes play at make believe. We, too, are to make believe, and we shall soon come to feel as we believe. When, then, a temptation solicits you, say,

"I am dead to thee; spend not thine energies on one that is oblivious to thy spells and callous to thy charms. Thou hast no more power over me than over my Lord and Head." "Reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 6:11).

AS SOON AS YOU ARE AWARE OF TEMPTATION, LOOK INSTANTLY TO JESUS.

Flee to Him quicker than a chick runs beneath the shelter of its mother's wing when the falcon is in the air. In the morning, before you leave your room, put yourself definitely into His hands, persuaded that He is able to keep that which you commit unto Him. Go from your room with the assurance that He will cover you with His feathers, and under His wings shall you trust. And when the tempter comes, look instantly up and say, "Jesus, I am trusting Thee to keep me." This is what the apostle Paul calls using the shield of faith. The upward glance of faith puts Jesus as a Shield between the tempter and yourself. You may go through life, saying a hundred times a day, "Jesus saves me," and He will never let those that trust in Him be ashamed. He is able even to guard you from stumbling (Jude 24 RV).

There is something better even than that. It was first taught me by a grey-haired clergyman, in the study of the Deanery at Southampton. Once, when tempted to feel great irritation, he told us that he looked up and claimed the patience and gentleness of Christ, and since then it had become the practice of his life to claim from Him the virtue of which he felt the deficiency in himself. In hours of unrest, Thy peace, Lord. In hours of irritation, Thy patience, Lord. In hours of temptation, Thy purity, Lord. In hours of weakness, Thy strength, Lord. It was to me a message straight from the throne. Till then I had been content with ridding myself of burdens; now I began to reach forth to positive blessing, making each temptation the occasion for a new acquisition of gold leaf.

All that we have to do is to maintain this attitude of full surrender, by the grace of the Holy Spirit. Remember that Jesus Christ offered Himself to God, THROUGH THE ETERNAL SPIRIT, and He waits to do as much for you. Ask Him to maintain in you this attitude. Use regularly the means of meditation, private prayer, and Bible study. Seek forgiveness for any failure as soon as you are conscious of it, and ask to be restored. Practice the holy habit of the constant recollection of God. Do not be eager to work for God, but let God work through you. Accept everything that happens to you as being permitted, and therefore sent by the will of Him Who loves you infinitely. And there will roll in upon you wave on wave, tide on tide, ocean on ocean of an experience fitly called THE BLESSED LIFE, because it is full of the happiness of the ever-blessed God Himself.

Dear reader, will you not take this step? There will be no further difficulty about money, dress, amusements, or similar questions which perplex some. Your heart will be filled and satisfied with the true riches. As the willing slave of Jesus Christ, you will only seek to do the will of your great and gentle

Master -- to spend every coin as He directs, to act as His steward, to dress so as to give Him pleasure, to spend the time only as He may approve, to do His will on earth as it is in heaven. All this will become easy and delightful.

You are, perhaps, far from this at present. But it is all within your reach. Do not be afraid of Christ. He wants to take nothing from you except that which you would give up at once if you could see, as clearly as He does, the harm it is inflicting. He will ask of you nothing inconsistent with the most perfect fitness and tenderness. He will give you grace enough to perform every duty He may demand. His "yoke is easy," His "burden is light."

Blessed Spirit of God, by Whom alone human words can be made to speak to the heart, deign to use these, to point many a longing soul the first step into THE BLESSED LIFE, for the exceeding glory of the Lord Jesus, and for the sake of a dying world.