

The Study of the Word

Elnathan Parr

ELNATHAN PARR (died c. 1630) was an eminent divine during the reign of James I. Whilst not a Puritan in the strict, ecclesiastical sense of the word, his writings breathe the saintly scholarship of the puritan era. In construction his works are somewhat awkward, but his illustrations and applications far outweigh any deficiencies of the writings of that "faithfull and painefull preacher". He wrote on Romans 1-2:2, 8-16 and also on "Grounds of Divinity expounded and applied" as well as some other brief works; these being published collectively in several folio editions. This extract is taken from his "Short and Plain Exhortation to the Study of the Word" from the 3rd edition of his works, printed in 1632. He was a minister in Palgrave, Suffolk.

There are two principal reasons among many which ought to provoke a diligent study of the Word of God. These are: the *difficulty*, and the *utility* of the Scriptures. The Scriptures are difficult and hard but firstly, not to all, but to them which perish and to them which are natural and have not the Spirit: to them which have received the enlightening Spirit, it is otherwise. God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness has shined into their hearts and given them the light and the knowledge of God in the face of Jesus Christ. Secondly, they are difficult but not always, for the Lord more and more scatters the darkness of the minds of His elect children by His Holy Spirit. Thirdly, they are difficult but not all, for in the foundation of the doctrine of salvation and of faith and practice they are easy and plain. But some places indeed are astonishingly hard. There is milk for babes, that is easy; and meat for strong men, that is difficult. The ancient writers concerning this have spoken well: one said, the Scriptures are like a mighty river, in which a lamb may walk safely yet an elephant be drowned. And another: the writers of Holy Scripture are in some things as angels, descending to the capacity of the simplest; and in some things as angels, transcending the capacity of the most learned. And again in the Holy Scriptures some things are open, and some things obscure: those open are for our nourishment, the latter for our exercise: the former stays our hunger, the latter our pride. And indeed this variety adds to the excellency of the Scriptures as in the globe of the earth there is some land and some sea which makes the both more appreciated; and in the land there are some hills and some valleys which make the both more delightful; and as the summer is so much more welcome after a hard and stormy winter, even so this mixture in the Word makes both the more pleasing and continues the sharpening of our desires to study: which if it were all alike would soon be dulled.

DIFFICULT? WHY?

These reasons may be given why the Lord would have some things in His Word be enclosed in clouds of obscurity, making, as it were, darkness their pavilion. *Firstly*, that we might know and acknowledge the understanding of the Word to be the gift of God. *Secondly*, to tame the pride and arrogance of our nature which would soon appear if all things were obvious and easy at first sight. *Thirdly*, that we should not reject and make of light account the Word, for this is our corruption which does not esteem or appreciate offered kindness or grace. *Fourthly*, that impure dogs and swine be kept from holy things. *Fifthly*, that we should make of high account the ministry of the Word, ordained for the opening and interpreting of the same. *Sixthly*, to stir us up to prayer, and to continue with diligence and care in the hearing and reading of it, as matters of great difficulty are not surmounted with ordinary effort.

Many because of the difficulty of the Divine Oracles give away the study of them like a sluggard or idle person who says, "A lion is in the way". But as ambitious and noble spirits are not daunted or dismayed by the dangers of great enterprises, but rather are more inflamed with courage to tempt them, even so the difficulty of Holy Scripture should not dampen our efforts but rather it should all the more whet our diligence without which not only no excellent, but no ordinary comfortable measure of knowledge can be achieved. Is the Word difficult? Then it requires of thee so much the more industry in reading, hearing, conference, meditation, prayer, in which things if we did exercise ourselves in a diligent manner, we should soon become men of ripe age with these hidden mysteries.

THE SECOND REASON

The second reason to excite our diligence is the utility and profit that comes by the Word. For among men, whose heart is so hard that profit and gain cannot persuade him? But the Scriptures are profitable: by them we believe, by them we are converted and made wise, by them we are regenerated, by the preaching of them we receive the Holy Ghost. By them we are saved, therefore they are called the words of eternal life and of salvation. The Word is compared to *light* to enlighten us; to *rain, snow* and *dew* to make us fruitful in good works to a *sword* to defend us. It is a *key* to direct us to Christ the treasury of all happiness. It is a sincere *milk* to feed us and to make us grow; as *flagons of wine* and *apples of paradise* to comfort us; as *salt* to season, purge, cleanse and preserve us. It is preferred before *honey* for sweetness, before tried *silver* and *gold* for price an inestimable value. What shall I say? The praise and excellency of the Scriptures exceeds all the praise and commendation that can be given unto them. If I had the tongue of angels I could not express it, but must be compelled to say as the apostle in another place "O the deepness of the riches of the Wisdom of God and of His Word." Is there anything so profitable as this? O what a base slavish and

foolish nature we have which runs and hunts after the feathers of the world, neglecting the true and certain treasures of the Word. “You have a sure word of the prophets, to the which you do well if you take heed.” Yea, if we study in the Word, we have the angels as fellow-students, searching, enquiring, and desiring to behold the things that are revealed to us by the preaching of the gospel.

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