

The #1 Lesson From God We Need to Learn

The greatest lesson the soul has to learn is the fact that God, and God alone, is enough for all its needs. This is the lesson that all His dealings with us are meant to teach; and this is the crowning discovery of our whole Christian life. God is enough!

If God is what He would seem to be from our study of Him; if He is our Shepherd; if He is really and truly our Father; if, in short, all the many aspects of His character and His ways as laid out in Scripture are actually true, then we must, it seems to me, come to the positive conviction that He is, in Himself alone, enough for all our possible needs, and that we may safely rest in Him absolutely and forever.

But Christ has not been all we want. We have wanted a great many things besides Him.

We have wanted fervent feelings about Him, or realizations of His presence with us, or an interior revelation of His love; or else we have demanded satisfactory schemes of doctrine, or successful Christian work, or something of one sort or another, besides Himself, that will constitute a personal claim upon Him. Just Christ Himself, Christ alone, without the addition of any of our experiences concerning Him, has not been enough for us, and we do not even see how it is possible that He could be enough.

The psalmist said: "My soul, wait thou only upon God; for my expectation is from Him" (Ps. 62:5, KJV). But now the Christian says, "My soul, wait thou upon my sound doctrines, for my expectation is from them"; or, "My soul, wait thou upon my good disposition and feelings, or upon my righteous works, or upon my fervent prayers, or upon my earnest striving, for

my expectation is from these."

To wait upon God only seems one of the unsafest things we can do, and to have our expectation from Him alone is like building on the sand. We reach out on every side for something to depend on, and not until everything else fails will we put our trust in God alone.

George MacDonald says, "We look upon God as our last and feeblest resource. We only go to Him when we have nowhere else to go. And then we learn that the storms of life have driven us, not upon the rocks, but into the desired haven."

No soul can be really at rest until it has given up all dependence on everything else and has been forced to depend on the Lord alone. As long as our expectation is from other things, nothing but disappointment awaits us.

Feelings may change, and will change with our changing circumstances; doctrines and dogmas may be upset; Christian work may come to nought; prayers may seem to lose their fervency; promises may seem to fail; everything that we have believed in or depended upon may seem to be swept away, and only God is left, simply and only God.

We say sometimes, "If I could only find a promise to fit my case, I could then be at rest." But promises may be misunderstood or misapplied, and, at the moment when we are leaning all our weight upon them, they may seem utterly to fail us. But the Promiser, who is behind His promises, can never fail nor change.

The little child does not need to have any promises from its mother to make it content; it has its mother herself, and she is enough. Its mother is better than a thousand promises.

In our highest ideal of love or friendship, promises do not enter. One party may love to make promises, just as our Lord does, but the other party does not need them; the personality

of lover or friend is better than all their promises. And should every promise be wiped out of the Bible, we would still have God left, and God would be enough.

Only God, He Himself, just as He is, without the addition of anything on our part, whether it be disposition or feelings, or experiences, or good works, or sound doctrines, or any other thing either outward or inward. "[God] only is my rock and my salvation; he is my defence; I shall not be greatly moved" (Ps. 62:2).

I do not mean by this that we are not to have feelings, or experiences, or revelations, or good works, or sound doctrines. We may have all of these, but they must be the result of salvation and never the procuring cause; and they can never be depended upon as being any indication of our spiritual condition. They are all things that come and go, and are dependent often upon the state of our health or the condition of our surroundings.

And if we rely upon any of these things in the slightest degree as the groundwork for our confidence or our joy, we are sure to come to grief. We are to hold ourselves absolutely independent of them all, resting in only the grand, magnificent fact that God is, and that He is our Savior.

We are to find God, the fact of God, sufficient for all our spiritual needs, whether we feel ourselves to be in a desert or in a fertile valley. We are to say with the prophet: "Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the field shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation" (Hab. 3:17-18).

The soul is made for this and can never find rest short of it. All God's dealings with us, therefore, are shaped to this end;

and He is often obliged to deprive us of all joy in everything else in order that He may force us to find our joy only and altogether in Himself.

It is all very well to rejoice in His promises, or to rejoice in the revelations He may have granted us or the experiences we may have realized; but to rejoice in the Promiser Himself—Himself alone—without promises, or experiences, or revelations, this is the crowning point of Christian life; and this is the only place where we can know the peace that passes all understanding and that nothing can disturb.

We have so accustomed ourselves to consider all these accompaniments of the spiritual life as being the spiritual life itself that it is hard to detach ourselves from them. We cannot think that the Lord can be anything to us unless we find in ourselves something to assure us of His love and care.

When we talk about finding our all in Him, we generally mean that we find it in our feelings or our views about Him. If, for instance, we feel a glow of love toward Him, then we can say heartily that He is enough; but when this glow fails, as sooner or later it is almost sure to do, then we no longer feel that we have found our all in Him.

The truth is that what satisfies us is not the Lord, but our own feelings about the Lord. But we are not conscious of this, and consequently, when our feelings fail we think it is the Lord who has failed, and we are plunged into darkness.

Perhaps an illustration may help us to have clearer vision. Let us think of a man accused of a crime, standing before a judge.

Which would be the thing of moment for that man: his own feelings toward the judge, or the judge's feelings toward him?

Of course we will say at once that the man's feelings are not of the slightest account in the matter. The man might have all

the “experiences” conceivable, but upon the judge only would everything depend.

In the same way, the only really vital thing in our relations with the Lord is not what are our feelings toward Him, but what are His feelings toward us. The man who is being tried must find in the judge all he needs, if he is to find it at all. His sufficiency cannot be of himself, but it must be of the one upon whom his fate depends. And our sufficiency, the apostle says, is not of ourselves but of God.

This, then, is what I mean by God being enough. It is that we find in Him, in the fact of His existence, and of His character, all that we can possibly want for everything. “God is” must be our answer to every question and every cry of need. If there is any lack in the One who has undertaken to save us, nothing supplementary we can do will avail to make it up; and if there is no lack in Him, then He, of Himself and in Himself, is enough.

Read a companion devotional.

Hannah Whitall Smith (1832-1911) was an American evangelist, speaker and writer who is probably best known for her book *The Christian's Secret of a Happy Life* (Whitaker House). She was born and raised near Philadelphia, as a Quaker, but after her marriage to Robert P. Smith in 1851, the couple worshipped with the Plymouth Brethren for a time. Both ultimately returned to the Quakers after helping to establish the Keswick, or “higher life,” movement in England and becoming famous teachers of holiness and sanctification. Though Hannah has been criticized for some of her views, she remained a religious celebrity until her death, and her writing still impacts generations of believers today.