

## The Importance of Reading the Bible

**Note:** The following is a compilation of notes from a sermon series. These notes relied heavily on a tract by J. C. Ryle. These are "*notes*"-- and thus are not written in "*proper English*". Our hope is that you may be able to decipher enough for it to be a blessing.

### THE IMPORTANCE OF READING THE BIBLE

"*Study the Scriptures*" (John 5:39)

"*How do you read it?*" (Luke 10:26)

#### **There is nothing more important than reading the Bible!**

God has mercifully given us a book which is "*able to make [us] wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus*" (2 Timothy 3:15).

By reading the Bible we may learn what to believe, what to be, and what to do; how to live with comfort; and how to die in peace.

Happy is that person who possesses a Bible! Happier still is the one who reads it! Happiest of all is the one who not only reads it, but obeys it, and makes it the rule of faith and practice!

Nevertheless, it is a sad fact that man has an ability to abuse God's gifts. His privileges, and power, and abilities, are all cleverly perverted to other ends than those for which they were bestowed. His speech, his imagination, his intellect, his strength, his time, his influence, his money — instead of being used as instruments for glorifying his Maker are generally wasted, or used for his own selfish ends.

And just as man naturally makes a bad use of his other mercies from God, so he does of the written Word. One sweeping charge may be brought against the whole of Christendom, and that charge is neglect and abuse of the Bible. To prove this charge we have no need to look elsewhere; the proof lies at our own doors.

I have no doubt that there are more Bibles in our country at this moment than there ever were since the world began. There is more Bible buying — Bible selling — Bible printing and Bible distributing than ever was since we were a nation. We see Bibles in every bookstore; Bibles of every size, price, and style — large Bibles, and small Bibles — Bibles for the rich, and Bibles for the poor. There are Bibles in almost every house in the land.

But all this time I fear we are in danger of forgetting that to "*have*" the Bible is one thing and to "*read*" it quite another.

Please your attention as we consider a few plain reasons why every one who cares for his/her soul ought to value the Bible highly, study it regularly, and make

himself/herself thoroughly acquainted with its contents.

## **I. THERE IS NO BOOK IN EXISTENCE WRITTEN IN SUCH A MANNER AS THE BIBLE.**

The Bible is "*God-breathed*" (2 Timothy 3:16). In this respect it is unlike all other writings. God put into men's minds thoughts and ideas. God guided their pens in writing down those thoughts and ideas.

When you read it, you are not reading the self-taught compositions of imperfect men like yourself, but the words of the eternal God. When you hear it, you are not listening to the errant opinions of mere mortals, but to the unchanging mind of the King of kings.

The men who were employed to write the Bible did not speak themselves -- they "*spoke from God as they were moved along by the Holy Spirit*" (2 Peter 1:21).

All other books in the world, however good and useful, are more or less defective. The more you look at them the more you see their defects and blemishes.

The Bible alone is absolutely perfect. From beginning to end it is "*the Word of God.*"

I will not waste time by attempting any long and labored proof of this. I say boldly, that the Book itself is the best witness of its own inspiration. It is the greatest standing miracle in the world.

Those that dare to say the Bible is not inspired must give an explanation why they believe this, if they can. Let them explain the peculiar nature and character of the Book in a way that will satisfy any person of common sense. The burden of proof, to my mind, is on them.

If only those who are troubled with doubts and thoughts about inspiration would calmly examine the Bible for themselves! If only they would take the advice of Augustine in the long ago: "*Pick it up and read it! Pick it up and read it!*"

How many difficulties and objections would vanish away at once! How many would soon confess, "*The finger of God is here! God is in this Book and I did not know it.*"

Surely it is no small matter what we are doing with this Book. It is no light thing that God has caused this Book to be "*written to teach us,*" and that we have before us "*the very words of God*" (Romans 3:2; 15:4). I ask you: What are you doing with the Bible? Do you read it? How do you read it?

## **II. THERE IS NO KNOWLEDGE ABSOLUTELY NEEDFUL TO A MAN'S SALVATION EXCEPT KNOWLEDGE OF THE THINGS WHICH ARE FOUND IN THE BIBLE.**

Schools are multiplying every where you look. New colleges are set up. Old Universities are reformed and supposedly improved. New books are continually coming out. More is being taught -- more is being learned -- more is being read than any time since the world began.

It is all good. I rejoice at it. An ignorant population is a perilous and expensive burden to any nation.

But I say this: We must never forget that all the learning we can receive will not save our soul from hell, unless we know the truths of the Bible.

A person may have immense learning and yet never be saved. They may be master of all the languages spoken around the globe.

They may be acquainted with the highest and deepest things in heaven and earth. They may have read books till they are like a walking encyclopedia.

And yet, if they die ignorant of Bible truths, they die a destitute person!

Chemistry never silenced a guilty conscience. Mathematics never healed a broken heart. All the sciences in the world never soothed a dying man. No earthly philosophy ever supplied hope in death.

No natural theology ever gave peace in the prospect of meeting a holy God.

All these things are of the earth and can never lift us above the earth's level. We may strut and fret our little time here on earth with a more dignified manner of walking than our fellow-mortals, but these things can never give us wings, and enable us to soar towards heaven.

We may be very ignorant, and yet be saved. One may be unable to read a word or write a letter. One may know nothing of geography beyond the bounds of their own city or county. One may know nothing of arithmetic, and not see any difference between a million and a thousand.

And yet, if that person has heard Bible truth with their ears and believed it with their heart, they know enough to save their soul. They will be found in the end in heaven, while their scientific fellow-men, who have died unconverted, are lost forever.

There is much talk in these days about science and "*useful knowledge*." But knowledge of the Bible is the one knowledge that is needful and eternally useful.

One may get to heaven without money, learning, health, or friends -- but without Bible knowledge they will never get there at all.

One may have the greatest of minds, and a memory stored with all that a strong mind can grasp -- and yet, if they do not know the things of the Bible, their soul is damned forever.

Woe! Woe! Woe! to the one who dies in ignorance of the Bible!

It is no light matter what you do with such a book. It concerns the life of your soul. I encourage you to give an honest answer to the question: What are you doing with the Bible? Do you read it? How do you read it?

### **III. NO BOOK IN EXISTENCE CONTAINS SUCH IMPORTANT MATTERS AS THE BIBLE.**

How glorious and soul-satisfying is the description it gives us of God's plan of salvation. The coming into the world of Jesus Christ -- the God-man -- to save sinners. The redemption He has accomplished for man by His suffering in our place, the just for the unjust -- the complete payment He has made for our sins by His own blood -- the justification of every sinner who believes and obeys the Gospel. It reveals to us the readiness of the Father to pardon and save to the uttermost. We would know nothing of these things without the Bible.

#### **How encouraging are the examples the Bible gives us of good people!**

It tells us of many who were of like passions as ourselves -- men and women who had cares, crosses, families, temptations, afflictions, and diseases like ourselves. And yet *"through faith and patience they inherited what was promised"* (Hebrews 6:12).

The Bible keeps back nothing in the history of these people. Their mistakes, their weaknesses, their conflicts, their experiences, their prayers, their praises, their useful lives, their happy deaths -- all are fully recorded.

And it tells us that the God and Savior of these men and women is still the same today as yesterday, and that He still waits to be gracious (Hebrews 13:8).

#### **How instructive are the examples the Bible gives us of bad people!**

It tells us of men and women who had light and knowledge and opportunities like ourselves, and yet they hardened their hearts, loved the world, clung to their sins, despised reproof, and ruined their own souls forever.

And it warns us that the God who punished Pharaoh, and Saul, and Ahab, and Jezebel, and Judas, is a God who never changes -- and that there is a real hell.

#### **How precious are the promises the Bible contains for those who love God!**

There is hardly any possible emergency or condition for which it does not have a word of hope and encouragement.

And it tells men that God loves to be put in remembrance of these promises, and that

if He has said He will do something, His promise will certainly be fulfilled.

### **How blessed are the hopes the Bible holds out to the believer in Christ Jesus!**

Peace in the hour of death -- a glorious body in the morning of the resurrection -- a full and triumphant acquittal in the Day of Judgment -- an everlasting reward in the kingdom of Christ. These are the future prospects of every true Christian.

They are all written in the book -- in the book which is all true.

### **How conspicuous is the light the Bible shines on the character of man!**

It teaches us what men may be expected to be and do in every position and occupation of life.

It gives us the deepest insight into the secret motives of human actions. It is the true *"judge of the thoughts and attitudes of the heart"* (Hebrews 4:12).

### **How deep is the wisdom contained in the books of Psalms, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastics!**

I can understand an old Christian saying: *"Give me a candle and a Bible and shut me up in a dark dungeon, and I will tell you everything that the whole world is doing."*

All these are things men could find nowhere except in the Bible

Most probably many do not have the least idea how little we would know about these things if we did not have the Bible. We hardly know the value of the air we breathe and the sun which shines on us, because we have never known what it is to be without them.

Many do not value the truths on which we have just been dwelling, because they do not realize the darkness of men to whom these truths have not been revealed.

Surely no speech can fully tell the value of the treasures this one volume contains! Surely it is no light matter what we are doing with the Bible.

It is no light matter in what way we are using this treasure. What are you doing with the Bible? Do you read it? How do you read it?

## **IV. NO BOOK IN EXISTENCE HAS PRODUCED SUCH WONDERFUL EFFECTS ON MANKIND AS THE BIBLE.**

**This is the Book whose doctrines turned the world upside down in the days of the Apostles.**

Many centuries have now passed since God sent forth a few Jews from a remote

corner of the earth to do a work which, according to man's judgment, must have seemed impossible.

He sent them out at a time when the whole world was full of superstition, cruelty, lust, and sin. He sent them out to proclaim that the established religions of the earth were false and useless, and must be forsaken. He sent them out to persuade men to give up old habits and customs, and to live different lives.

He sent them out to do battle with the most perverted idolatry; with the vilest and most disgusting immorality; with a bigoted priesthood; with sneering philosophers; with an ignorant population; with bloody-minded emperors; with the whole influence of Rome.

For all appearances, never was there an enterprise more unrealistic and less likely to succeed!

And how did He arm them for this battle? He gave them no worldly weapons. He gave them no worldly power to compel agreement, and no worldly riches to bribe belief. He simply put the Holy Spirit into their hearts, and the Scriptures into their hands. He simply commanded them to expound and explain, to require compliance, and to publish the doctrines of the Bible.

The "*proclaimer*" of Christianity in the first century was not someone with a sword and an army to frighten people, or someone with a license to be sensual to allure people. No, they were nothing more than holy people with one holy book.

In a few generations they entirely changed the face of society by the doctrines of the Bible. They emptied the temples of the heathen gods. They starved out idolatry and left it high and dry like a stranded ship. They brought into the world a higher condition of morality between man and man. They raised the character and position of women. They altered the standard of purity and decency. They put an end to man's cruel and bloody customs, such as the gladiatorial fights.

There was no stopping the change. Persecution and opposition were useless. One victory after another was won. One bad thing after another melted away. Whether men liked it or not, they were slowly affected by the movement of the new religion and drawn into the whirlpool of its power. And all this was done by the doctrines of the Bible!

Talk about great victories! What are the victories of Alexander and Caesar and Napoleon compared with those I have just mentioned? For MAGNITUDE, for COMPLETENESS, for RESULTS, for PERMANENCE -- there are no victories like the victories of the Bible!

**This is the Book that turned Europe upside down in the days of the Reformation.**

No one can read the history of Christendom as it was six hundred years ago and not see that darkness covered the whole professing church of Christ.

So great was the change which had come over Christianity that if an apostle had risen from the dead he would not have recognized it, and would have thought that heathenism had revived again.

The doctrines of the Gospel lay buried under a dense mass of human traditions. Penances and pilgrimages; indulgences; relic-worship, image-worship, saint-worship, and worship of the Virgin Mary formed the sum and substance of most people's religion. The church was made an idol. The priests and ministers of the church usurped the place of Christ.

And by what means was all this darkness cleared away? By simply bringing forth once more the Bible.

It was not merely the preaching of Luther and his friends which established reformation in Germany.

The great weapon which overthrew the Roman Church's power in that country was Luther's translation of the Bible into the German tongue.

It was not merely the writings of English Reformers which threw down Romanism in England. The seeds of the work carried forward were first sown by Wycliffe's translation of the Bible many years before. It was not merely the quarrel of Henry VIII and the Pope of Rome which loosened the Pope's hold on English minds.

It was the royal permission to have the Bible translated and set up in churches, so that every one who wanted might read it.

Yes! It was the reading and circulation of the Scripture which mainly brought about great change in England, in Germany, and in Switzerland. All of this eventually led to the Restoration Movement.

Without the Bible people would probably have returned to their former bondage when the first reformers died. But by the reading of the Bible the public mind became gradually leavened with the principles of true religion.

Men's eyes began to open. Their spiritual understandings began to enlarge. The excellence of the Word of God became a rooted idea in their hearts.

It was then in vain for councils to thunder forth excommunications. It was useless for Kings and Queens to attempt to stop the course by fire and sword.

It was all too late. The people knew too much. They had seen the light. They had heard the joyful sound. They had tasted the truth. The sun had risen on their minds. The scales had fallen from their eyes.

The Bible had done its appointed work within them, and that work was not to be overthrown. A mental and moral revolution had been effected, and mainly effected by God's Word.

Those are the true revolutions which the Bible effects. What are all the revolutions which France and England and the United States have gone through compared to these? No revolutions are so satisfactory, none so rich in lasting results, as the revolutions accomplished by the Bible!

**This is the book upon which the well-being of nations has always hinged, and with which the best interests of everyone in Christendom at this moment are inseparably tied.**

By the same proportion that the Bible is honored or not -- light or darkness; morality or immorality; true religion or superstition; liberty or tyranny; good laws or bad will be found in a nation.

Read it in the history of Israel under the Kings. How great was the wickedness that then prevailed! But who can wonder? The law of the Lord had been completely lost sight of, and was found in the days of Josiah thrown aside in a corner of the temple (2 Kings 22:8).

Read it in the history of the Jews in Jesus' time. How awful the picture of Scribes and Pharisees and their religion! But who can wonder? The Scripture was "*nullified for the sake of man's tradition*" (Matthew 15:6).

Read it in the history of the church in the Middle Ages. What can be worse than the accounts we have of its ignorance and superstition? But who can wonder? The times were very dark, when men did not have the light of the Bible.

**This is the Book to which the civilized world is indebted for many of its best and most praiseworthy institutions.**

Few probably are aware how many good things men have adopted for the public benefit, of which the origin may be clearly traced to the Bible. It has left lasting marks wherever it has been received.

From the Bible are drawn many of the best laws by which society is kept in order. From the Bible has been obtained the standard of morality, truth, honesty, and the relations of man and wife, which prevails among Christian nations, and which -- however feebly respected in many cases -- makes so great a difference between believers and non-believers.

**To the influence of the Bible we owe nearly every humane and charitable institution in existence.**



The sick, the poor, the aged, the orphan, the insane, the retarded, the blind -- were seldom or never thought of before the Bible influenced the world. You may search in vain for any record of institutions for their aid in the histories of Athens or Rome.

Yes! There are many who sneer at the Bible and say the world would get on well enough without it – but they do not realize how great they are in debt to the Bible.

Little do unbelievers think, as they lie sick in some of our great hospitals, that they owe all their present comforts to the very book they despise. Had it not been for the Bible they might have died in misery, uncared for, unnoticed and alone.

Truly, the world in which we live is filled with people who are unconscious of their indebtedness to the Bible.

The Day of Judgment, I believe, will reveal the full amount of benefit bestowed upon mankind by the Bible.

Surely it is no light matter what we are doing with the Bible. Surely it is no light matter whether we are paying it the attention it deserves.

I charge you; I summon you to give an honest answer: What are you doing with the Bible? Do you read it? How do you read it?

## **V. NO BOOK IN EXISTENCE CAN DO SO MUCH FOR EVERY ONE WHO READS IT WITH AN OPEN HEART.**

The Bible does not profess to teach the wisdom of this world. It was not written to explain geology or astronomy. It will not instruct you in mathematics, nor in natural philosophy. It will not make you a doctor, or a lawyer, or an engineer.

But there is another world to be thought of besides the world in which man now lives. There are other ends for which we were created besides making money and working.

There are other interests that we are meant to attend to, besides those of our body -- and those interests are the interests of our soul. It is the interests of the immortal soul that the Bible is especially able to promote.

If you want to know law, you may study Blackstone and others. If you would know astronomy or geology, you may study Herschel and Lyell and others. But if you would know how to save your soul, you must study the written Word of God.

The Bible is "*able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus*" (2 Timothy 3:15). It can show you the way which leads to heaven. It can teach you everything you need to know, point out everything you need to believe, and explain everything

you need to do. It can show you what you are -- a sinner. It can show you what God is -- perfectly holy. It can show you the great giver of pardon, peace, and grace -- Jesus Christ.

The Bible applied to the heart is the instrument by which souls are converted to God. That great change is generally begun by some text or doctrine of the Word brought home to a person's conscience. In this way the Bible has worked moral miracles by the thousands.

It has made drunkards become sober -- immoral people become pure -- thieves become honest, and violent-tempered people become meek.

It has wholly altered the course of people's lives. It has caused their old things to pass away, and made all their ways new.

It has taught worldly people to seek first the kingdom of God.

It has taught lovers of pleasure to become lovers of God.

It has caused men's affections to run upwards instead of running downwards. It has made men think of heaven, instead of always thinking of earth; and to live by faith, instead of living by sight.

It has done all this in every part of the world. And it is still all being accomplished.

The Bible applied to the heart is *"the chief means by which men are built up and strengthened in the faith"* after their conversion.

It is able to make them pure; to sanctify them; to train them in righteousness; and to thoroughly equip them for every good work. Psalm 119:9: *"How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to Your word."* John 17:17: *"Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth."* 2 Timothy 3:16-17: *"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work."*

The Spirit does these things by the written Word -- sometimes by the Word read, and sometimes by the Word preached -- but never without the Word.

The Bible can show a believer how to walk in this world so as to please God. It can teach them how to glorify Christ in all the relationships of life; and can make them a good leader, employee, subordinate, husband, father, wife, mother, daughter or son. It can enable them to bear misfortunes and loss without murmuring, and say, "It is well with my soul." It can enable them to look down into the grave, and say, *"I will fear no evil -- not even death -- for you are with me"* (Psalm 23:4).

It can enable them to think about judgment and eternity, and not feel afraid. It can enable them to bear persecution without flinching and to give up liberty and life rather than deny Christ's truth.

Are they weary in soul? It can awaken them.

Are they mourning? It can comfort them.

Are they erring? It can restore them.

Are they weak? It can make them strong.

Are they in the company of the unbeliever? It can keep them from evil.

All this the Bible can do for all believers -- for the least as well as the greatest -- for the richest as well as the poorest. It has done it for millions already, and is doing it for millions every day.

The person who has the Bible and the Holy Spirit in their heart has everything that is absolutely necessary to make them spiritually wise.

They need no priest to break the bread of life for them. They need no ancient traditions, no writings of the Fathers, no voice of the Church, to guide them into all truth. They have the well of truth open before them, and what more can they want?

If one only has the will to read the Bible properly, it will teach them that the road leads to heaven. It is here alone that infallibility resides. It is not in the church. It is not in the councils. It is not in ministers. It is only in the written Word.

**I am aware that some say they have found no saving power in the Bible.**

They say they have tried to read it, and have learned nothing from it. They can see in it nothing but burdensome and abstract things. They ask us what we mean when we talk of its power.

I answer that the Bible no doubt contains some difficult things, or else it would not be the Book of God. It contains some things hard to comprehend, but only hard because we do not have the understanding of mind to comprehend them. It contains things above our reasoning powers, but nothing that might not be explained if the eyes of our understanding were not feeble and dim.

But is not an acknowledgment of our own ignorance the very cornerstone and foundation of all knowledge?

Must not many things be taken for granted in the beginning of every science before we can advance one step towards acquaintance with it? Do we not require our children to learn many things of which they cannot see the meaning at first?

And ought we not then expect to find and understand "*deep things*" when we begin studying the Word of God -- believing that if we persevere in reading it the meaning

will be made clear?

No doubt we ought to so expect and believe. We must read with humility. We must take some things on trust. We must believe that what we don't know now, we will know later; some in this world, and all in the world to come.

But I ask that person who has given up reading the Bible because it contains hard things whether there are not many things in it easy and plain? I ask them whether the things needful to salvation did not stand out clearly before their eyes, like lighthouses.

What should we to say to the person who gives up reading the Bible because it contains hard things, when their own state, and the path to heaven, and the way to serve God, are all written down clearly and unmistakably?

Surely we ought to tell that person that their objections are no better than lazy excuses, and do not deserve to be heard.

**I am aware that some raise the objection that thousands read the Bible and are not any better for their reading.**

And they ask us, when this is the case, what becomes of the Bible's boasted power?

I answer that the reason why so many read the Bible without any benefit is plain and simple -- they do not read it in the right way. There is generally a right way and a wrong way of doing everything in the world; and just as it is with other things, so it is in the matter of reading the Bible. The Bible is not as different from all other books as to make it of no importance in what spirit and manner you read it.

It does not do any good, as a matter of course, to merely run our eyes over the print. It does not ordinarily do any good, unless it is read with humility and earnest prayer.

The best engine that was ever built is useless if a man does not know how to operate it. Just as it is with that engine, so it is with the Bible. When men read it without benefit, *"the fault is not in the Book, but in themselves."*

I tell the person who doubts the power of the Bible, because many read it and are no better for the reading, that the abuse of a thing is no argument against the use of it.

I tell them that never did man or woman read that book in a childlike, persevering spirit -- like the Ethiopian eunuch and the Bereans (Acts 8:28; 17:11) -- and miss the way to heaven.

Yes, many will be exposed to shame in the Day of Judgment; but there will not rise up one soul who will be able to say that they went thirsting to the Bible and found in it no living water -- that they searched for truth in the Scriptures, and searching did

not find it.

The words which are spoken of Wisdom in the Proverbs are strictly true of the Bible: *"If you call out for insight and cry aloud for understanding, and if you look for it as for silver and search for it as for hidden treasure, then you will understand the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of God"* (Proverbs 2:3-5).

Surely it is no light matter what you are doing with the Bible. What should you think of the person who in time of serious illness despised a sure prescription for preserving the health of their body? What must be thought of you if you despise the only sure prescription for the everlasting health of your soul?

I entreat you to give an honest answer: What do you do with the Bible? Do you read it? How do you read it?

## **VI. THE BIBLE IS THE ONLY STANDARD BY WHICH ALL QUESTIONS OF DOCTRINE OR OF DUTY CAN BE TESTED.**

The Lord God knows the weakness and infirmities of our poor, fallen understandings. He knows that, even after conversion, our perceptions of right and wrong are extremely vague. He knows how artfully Satan can overlay error with an appearance of truth, and can dress up wrong with plausible arguments until it looks right.

Knowing all this, He has mercifully provided us with an unerring standard of truth and error -- right and wrong -- and has taken care to make that standard a written book -- the Bible.

No one can look around the world and not see the wisdom of such a provision. No one can live long and not discover that they are constantly in need of a counselor and adviser -- of a rule of faith and practice -- on which they can depend.

Unless they live like a beast, without a soul and conscience, they will find themselves constantly assailed by difficult and puzzling questions. They will often be asking themselves, *"What must I believe? What must I do?"*

The world is full of difficulties about points of doctrine. The house of error lies close alongside the house of truth. At times the door of one is so much like the door of the other that there is continual risk of mistakes.

If a person reads or travels much they will soon find the most opposite teachings prevailing among those who are called Christians. They will discover myriads of groups that claim they alone have ALL the truth. [Many of us make that same claim.]

All this is puzzling. What will a person do?

Do they go to preachers for a solution? When they do, they will find one minister

teaching one doctrine, and another just the opposite. All this is puzzling. What will a person do?

There is only one answer to this question. We must make the Bible alone our rule. We must receive nothing and believe nothing which is not according to the Word. We must try all religious teaching by one simple test: Does it square with the Bible? What does the Scripture say?

I pray to God that the eyes of the professing Christians of this country (and the world) were more open on this subject. I pray to God that they would learn to weigh sermons, books, opinions, and preachers, in the scales of the Bible, and to value all according to their conformity to the Word.

I pray to God that they would see that it matters little who says a thing. The question is -- is the thing said Scriptural? If it is, it ought to be received and believed. If it is not, it ought to be refused and cast aside.

I fear the consequences of that submissive acceptance of everything that "*the preacher says,*" which is so common among many professing Christians.

If only they would remember for what purpose the Bible was given to them! It is nonsense to say, as some do, that "*it is arrogant to judge a preacher's teaching by the Word.*"

When one doctrine is proclaimed in one church, and the opposite in another, people must read and judge for themselves. Both doctrines cannot be right, and both ought to be tried by the Word.

I charge them, above all things, never to suppose that any true minister of the Gospel will dislike the people measuring all he teaches by the Bible. On the contrary, the more they read the Bible and prove all he says by the Bible, the better he will be pleased.

A false minister may say, "*You have no right to use your private judgment -- leave the Bible to us who are ordained.*" A true minister will say "*Search the Scriptures, and if I do not teach you what is Scriptural, do not believe me.*"

A false minister may cry, "*Listen to the Church,*" and "*Listen to me.*" A true minister will say, "*Listen to the Word of God.*"

But the world is not only full of difficulties about points of doctrine -- it is equally full of difficulties about points of "*practice.*"

Every processing Christian, who wishes to act conscientiously, must know that this is so.

The most puzzling questions are continually arising. We are tried on every side by

doubts as to the line of duty, and can often hardly see what is the right thing to do

**We are tried by questions connected with the management of our "worldly calling," if we are in business or in trade.**

We sometimes see things going on that are of a very doubtful character -- things that can hardly be called fair, straightforward, truthful -- and things that you would not want done to you.

But then everybody in business does these things. They have always been done in the most respectable places. There would be no carrying on of a profitable business if they were not done.

They are not things distinctly named and prohibited by God.

All this is very puzzling. What is a person to do?

**We are tried by questions about worldly amusements: Gambling, R rated and X rated movies, and dozens of other things.**

But then we see numbers of "good" people taking part in them.

Are all these people wrong? Can there really be such great harm in these things?

All this is very puzzling. What is a person to do?

**We are tried by questions about the education of our children.**

We wish to train them up morally and religiously, and to remember their souls.

But we are told by many "sensible" people, that young people will be young -- that it is not right to check and restrain them too much, and that we ought to just let them live among others and learn for themselves.

We are informed that this "good" person always does so, and yet they are considered "religious people." Surely it cannot be wrong.

All this is very puzzling. What is a person to do?

There is only ONE answer to all these questions. We must make the Bible our rule of conduct. We must make its leading principles the compass by which we steer our course through life.

By the letter or spirit of the Bible we must test every difficult point and question. "To the law and to the testimony! What does the Scripture say?"

We ought to care nothing for what other people may think. We should not set our watch by the clock of our neighbor, but by the clock of the Word.

I charge you to earnestly act on the maxims I have just laid down, and to adhere to them firmly all the days of your lives. You will never be sorry.

Make it a leading principle never to act contrary to the Word. Do not listen to the common objection that the rule you have laid down is impossible, and cannot be observed in such a world as this.

Let those who make such an objection speak out plainly, and tell us for what purpose the Bible was given to man.

Let them remember that by the Bible we will all be judged at the last day; and let them learn to judge themselves by it here lest they be judged and condemned by it on Judgment Day.

Surely when danger is near, you should consider what you are doing with the safeguard which God has provided.

Give an honest answer: What are you doing with the Bible? Do you read it? How do you read it?

## **VII. THE BIBLE IS THE BOOK WHICH ALL TRUE SERVANTS OF GOD HAVE ALWAYS LIVED BY AND LOVED.**

Every living thing which God creates requires food. The life that God imparts needs sustaining and nourishing. It is true with animal and vegetable life – with birds, beasts, fishes, reptiles, insects, and plants.

It is equally true with spiritual life. When the Holy Spirit raises a man from the death of sin and makes him a new creature in Christ Jesus, the new principle in that man's heart requires food, and the only food which will sustain it is the Word of God.

I do not believe there was ever a man or woman truly converted, from one end of the world to the other, who did not love the Word of God. Just as a child born into the world naturally desires the milk provided for its nourishment, so does a soul "*born again*" desire the sincere milk of the Word. (1 Peter 2:2)

This is a common mark of all the children of God -- they "*delight in the law of the LORD*" (Psalm 1:2). Show me a person who despises Bible reading, or thinks little of Bible preaching, and I will show you a person who has not yet been "*born again*."

They may be zealous about forms and ceremonies. They may be diligent in attending church services and the taking of the Lord's Supper. But if the Word of God is not precious to them, I cannot believe that they are truly a converted person.



Tell me what the Bible is to a person and I will generally tell you what they are. This is the pulse to try -- this is the barometer to look at -- if we would know the state of the heart.

I have no concept of the Spirit dwelling in a person and not giving clear evidence of His presence. And I believe it to be clear evidence of the Spirit's presence when the Word is really precious to a man's soul.

### **Love of the Word is a characteristic of all great servants of God.**

Love of the Word is one of the characteristics we see in Job. Little as we know of this Patriarch and his age this, at least, stands out clearly. He says, "*I have treasured the words of His mouth more than my daily bread*" (Job 23:12).

Love of the Word is a shining feature in the character of David. Note how it appears all through that wonderful part of Scripture, the 119th Psalm. He said, in verse 97, "*Oh, how I love your law!*"

Love of the Word is a striking point in the character of Paul. What were he and his companions but men mighty in the Scriptures? What were his sermons but expositions and applications of the Word?

Love of the Word appears preeminently in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. He read it publicly. He quoted it continually. He expounded it frequently. He advised the Jews to "*search*" it. He used it as His weapon to resist the devil. He said repeatedly, "*The Scripture must be fulfilled.*" Almost the last thing He did was to "*open their minds [Disciples] so they could understand the Scriptures*" (Luke 24:45).

How can one be a true servant of Christ who has not something of his Master's mind and feeling towards the Scriptures? Love of the Word has been a prominent feature in the history of all the saints, of whom we know anything, since the days of the Apostles.

Oh, that believer's in this country would learn to cleave more closely to the written Word! Oh, that they would see that the Bible, and the Bible only, is the substance of men's religion.

It is a blessed thought that there will be "*many people*" in heaven in the end. Few as the Lord's people undoubtedly are at any one given time or place, yet all gathered together in the end, they will be "*a great multitude that no one could count*" (Revelation 7:9; 19:1).

They will be of one heart and mind. They will have passed through the same experience. They will all have believed, repented, obeyed the Gospel, and lived holy, prayerful, and humble lives. They will all have washed their robes and made them

white in the blood of the Lamb.

But one thing besides all this they will have in common: they will all have loved the texts and doctrines of the Bible. The Bible will have been their food and delight in the days of their pilgrimage on earth.

Surely it is no light matter what we are doing with the Bible. Surely it is matter for serious inquiry. You need to give an honest answer: What are you doing with the Bible? Do you read it? How do you read it?

### **VIII. THE BIBLE IS THE ONLY BOOK WHICH CAN COMFORT A PERSON IN THE LAST HOURS OF THEIR LIFE.**

Death is an event which is before us all. There is no avoiding it. It is the river which each of us must cross. We all have to die one day. It is good to remember this.

We are all apt to put away the subject from us. As the saying goes, "*Each man thinks each man is mortal but himself.*"

I want everyone to do his duty in life, but I also want everyone to think of death. I want everyone to know how to live but I also want everyone to know how to die.

Death is a solemn event to everyone. It is the winding up of all earthly plans and expectations. It is a separation from all we have loved and live with. It is often accompanied by much bodily pain and distress. It brings us to the grave and corruption. It opens the door to judgment and eternity — to heaven or to hell.

It is an event after which there is no change or space for repentance. Other mistakes may be corrected or retrieved, but not a mistake made in this life. As the tree falls, there it must lie. No conversion in the coffin! No new birth after we have ceased to breathe!

And death is before us all. It may be close at hand. The time of our departure is quite uncertain. But sooner or later we must each lie down alone and die.

All these are serious considerations. Death is a solemn event, even to the believer in Christ.

For believers, no doubt the "*sting of death*" is taken away. (1 Corinthians 15:55) Death has become one of their privileges, for they are Christ's, living or dying; they are the Lord's whether here or there.

If they live, Christ lives in them; and if they die, they go to live with Christ. To them, "*to live is Christ and to die is gain*"(Philippians 1:21).

Death frees them from many trials -- from a weak body, a corrupt heart, a tempting

devil, and an ensnaring or persecuting world.  
Death admits them to the enjoyment of many blessings.

They rest from their labors -- the hope of a joyful resurrection is changed into a certainty -- they have the company of holy redeemed spirits -- they are "*with Christ.*"

All this is true, and yet, even to a believer, death is a solemn thing. Flesh and blood naturally shrink from it. To part from all we love is a strain and trial to the emotions. The world we go to is a world unknown, even though it is our home.

Friendly and harmless as death is to a believer, it is not an event to be treated lightly. It must always be a very solemn thing. It is good for every thoughtful and sensible person to consider calmly how they are going to meet death.

Be strong and look the subject in the face. Listen to me while I tell you a few things about the end to which we are coming.

The good things of the world cannot comfort a person when they draw near to death. All the gold in the world will not provide light for the dark valley of death. Money can buy the best medical advice and service for a person's body; but money cannot buy peace for their conscience, heart, and soul.

The pleasures of the world cannot comfort a person when they draw near to death. They cannot stop one gap in their heart, when the last enemy is coming in like a flood. They cannot make them calm in the prospect of meeting a holy God.

There is but ONE fountain of comfort for a person drawing near to their end -- and that is the BIBLE. Chapters out of the Bible -- texts out of the Bible -- statements of truth taken out of the Bible -- books containing matter drawn from the Bible -- these are a person's only chance of comfort when they come to the place of death.

I do not say that the Bible will do good -- as a matter of course -- to a dying person, if they have not valued it before. I do not say that it is probable that all those who have been unbelieving and neglectful of the Bible in life, will at once believe and get comfort from it in death.

But I do say positively, that no dying person will ever get real comfort except from the contents of the Word of God. All comfort from any other source is a house built upon sand.

I lay this down as a rule of universal application. I make no exception in favor of any class on earth. Rulers and poor men -- learned and unlearned -- all are equal in this matter. There is not a bit of real consolation for any dying person, unless they get it from the Bible. Chapters, passages, texts, promises, and doctrines of Scripture heard, received, believed, and rested on -- these are the only comforters I dare promise to

any one when they leave this world.

Although some may seem to get on comfortably without the Bible while they live, they may be sure that without the Bible they cannot comfortably die, unless they are totally depraved.

We might easily confirm all I have just said by examples and illustrations. I might show you the deathbeds of men who have despised the Bible. I might tell you how Voltaire and Paine, the famous atheists, died in misery, bitterness, rage, fear, and despair. I might show you the happy deathbeds of those who have loved the Bible and believed it, and the blessed effect the sight of their deathbeds had on others. I have read many such stories.

I might easily multiply illustrations of this kind. But I want to conclude this part of my subject by giving the result of my own observations as a preacher of the Gospel.

I have seen many dying persons in my 38 years of preaching. I have seen great varieties of character and behavior among them. I have seen some die bad-tempered, some silent, and some comfortless. I have seen others die ignorant, unconcerned, and apparently without much fear. I have seen some die so wearied out with a long illness that they were quite willing to depart, and yet they did not seem to me at all to be ready to go before God. I have seen others die with professions of hope and trust in God, without leaving satisfactory evidences that they were on the rock. I have seen others die who, I believe, were "*in Christ*," and safe, and yet they never seemed to enjoy much tangible comfort. I have seen some dying in the full assurance of hope, and like Bunyan's "Standfast," giving glorious testimony to Christ's faithfulness, even in the river.

But one thing I have never seen: I never saw anyone enjoy what I would call real, solid, calm, reasonable peace that did not draw their peace from God and the Bible.

And this I am bold to say -- that the person who thinks to go to their deathbed without having the Bible for their comforter, their companion, and their friend, is one of the greatest madmen in the world.

There are no comforts for the soul but Bible comforts, and those who do not have hold of these, do not have hold of anything at all -- unless it be a broken reed.

Surely it is no light matter whether we read that book or not. Surely a dying person, in a dying world, should seriously consider whether they have anything to comfort them when their turn comes to die.

Authority for the Christian is found in the Bible alone. But in what area of our living is the Scripture the normative and authoritative guide? How comprehensive is its authority over us as believers? Over what parts of our lives is this Word of God to regulate and control us?

The answer is -- over every part. The whole of our life as a Christian and as a human being lies under the enlightenment and dominion of the Word of God.

Give an honest answer to the question: What are you doing with the Bible? Do you read it? How do you read it?

**CONCLUSION:**

Let us resolve "*to live by the Bible more and more*" every year we live.

Let us measure everything by the Bible and resolve, by God's help, to conform to it.

With God's help, may we learn to increasingly "*keep our way pure*" by living according to the Word. (Psalm 119:9)