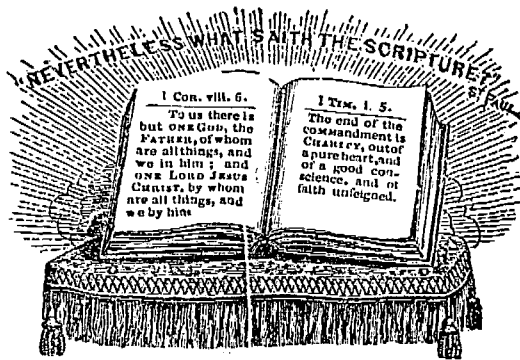


THE BIBLE



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TRUTH, HOLINESS,

LIBERTY, LOVE.

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PAUL BEFORE FELIX.

Observe also the power of the gospel over men; and observe, too, in what class of truths this power lies. The gospel of the despised Nazarene, — who had been crucified with scoffing and disgrace before the eyes of a whole world, — uttered by the mouth of a Jew in chains, overwhelms an infidel and vicious ruler of the mighty Roman empire! and this solely by the force and authority with which it exhibits the simple doctrines of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come. It is these doctrines, lying at the bottom of human accountableness, and coming near to every man's heart, teaching him that nothing is of so great consequence to him as his own character, his regard or disregard to the divine will, — it is this that constitutes the power of the gospel over human conscience. These truths we may wink out of sight; we may veil them by ingenious sophistry; we may drive them from us by a crowd of business and the intoxication of pleasure; we may bury them in a mass of doctrines and ceremonies; but they still stand firm, and constitute the power with which religion grasps the soul of man: and when, by the energy of preaching or the call of Providence, man's conscience is roused to think of them, and to compare with them his own life, then the stoutest and hardest sinner trembles. So it was here. Felix sent for Paul to hear "concerning the faith in Christ." He was curious to know the principles of this new sect, the doctrine of this new philosophy. He probably ranked it with the old philosophical systems of the world, and would like to compare it with other opinions. If Paul had discoursed to him of abstract dogmas, and gone over the list of intricate and metaphysical speculations, which some have preached to the world as the faith of Christ, Felix would have been entertained, and dismissed the preacher satisfied; but he never would have trembled. But Paul knew the gospel better; and the astonished magistrate, instead of what was curious and intellectual, found the new doctrine to be a doctrine of godliness; and, unprepared for reasoning that should affect his heart or touch his life, was made to feel himself accountable, and to tremble at his sins. And so with other men. It is vain to be profound in argument, and eloquent in illustration of abstract theories, and metaphysical speculations, and philosophical niceties, and dark doctrines; an angel might preach thus forever, and yet lead no man to holiness and salvation. These are matters which "play around the head, but do not reach the heart." But when you come to the plain practical lessons of holy writ; when, by strong and urgent reasonings, you prove that God, who made and governs, requires righteousness toward all men, and temperance, i. e., self-government and purity, toward ourselves, and that this requirement he will enforce in a judgment to come, — when he shall judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he has chosen. — then men feel that righteousness is something which concerns themselves; not a pleasant speculation, something to read about, to be amused with, but something which concerns their lasting personal well-being; then the soul starts, and looks around, inquires concerning its preparation for judgment, breaks off its sins, flees to God by the holy Mediator, and lays hold in earnest, of the truths and consolations of religion. These are the powerful truths which break the stubborn sinfulness of man, and educate him for heaven. Every thing else the conscience can sleep under; every thing else a man may believe, or disbelieve, and still remain easy; and so it has always happened that sinners have been found hardened beneath every form of mere belief. But when man is made to believe that he is accountable, that his life must be searched into and judged

at the last dread day, then he can sleep no longer. The couch of down becomes a bed of thorns; and, though invested with all the power and state that earth can give, he trembles on the very seat of office.—*H. Ware.*

RELIGIOUS DECISION.

The first step for one who would be a Christian is to take his stand decidedly and unreservedly on Christian principle, resolved, with God's grace, by that to abide in heart and conduct, through evil and through good report. What is needed is a dedication of himself to God in Christ, — a dedication which will cause him, in all cases, first of all to ask, What would God hear and now approve of my doing? The question should be constantly in your mind, — Situated as I am, "what wouldst thou have me to do?" Your appeal will be, not to what will be for your advantage, nor to the opinion of society, but to Christ's words and to God's approval. Your life may in many things have been in harmony with the Christian law. It has been so, however, chiefly from accident and not from purpose, — because of early tastes implanted by others, from education and the general requirements of society. The obedience, limited and imperfect as it has been, has resulted from favoring circumstances, from the influence and demands of the society in which you live, rather than from your own deliberate choice. It has not been a matter of fixed and settled principle. What we urge is, the personal choice of God's law for your law, — a self-consecration to Christ and to God, — a consecration entire and unreserved.

It is not necessary to dwell on the reasons for taking this stand. We will only present one or two considerations.

1. Till you take this stand, you will not and ought not to be satisfied with yourself. It is the ground which one's own heart tells him he ought to take.

What is the highest conceivable privilege for a creature ignorant and frail as man? There can be none greater than to have the guidance of the Divine hand through the mazes of life. Perplexed with uncertainties and anxieties, what a privilege is mine, if God will condescend to teach me what to believe and what to do! And if he has thus condescended, what creature of the dust will say, — "I decline the guidance of the Almighty, and choose to take care of myself"? If there be a God such as we believe in, how can we think to have any permanent peace of mind except it be founded on his approval? What are we, when we defy the moral order of the universe? But let me as a trusting and obedient child, seek the approval of God, let it be my faithful endeavour to walk in the way which he approves, and the thought of God will be the most blessed one which can visit me. My soul will be at peace with him. It will be in harmony with all that is good on earth and in heaven. Life will be illuminated with light from above, and death, which takes us into the nearer presence of God and of Christ, may fill us with a trembling and reverential awe, but not with terror.

2. Till you take this stand, however correct your life may be in the main, you will find that there are parts of your character and conduct which are habitually at variance with the Divine requirements. You need to take this stand deliberately, in order that you may bring the whole of life under the Christian law. Till it is taken, though in many things you pay deference to this law, in other things you will obey a very different one. You will try to serve both God and Mammon. In some things you will ask what Christ teaches, and in other cases what public opinion or your worldly advantage requires. But God does not allow us to thrust into his throne, with authority equal to himself, our earthly passions and interests.

3. This unreserved consecration of the soul and life is essential to any growth of Christian character.

Surprise is often expressed, that persons, who in general mean to lead Christian lives, exhibit no advance in Christian character. They are no better now than they were ten years ago. The difficulty would very often be found to originate in this half consecration. If it be but in part, the reservation will be made in favor of some dear worldly interest, or habit, or sin. If the man, on the whole, mean to lead a Christian life, and make such a reservation, however unconsciously, he will soon find that there is the test place of his character. It is there that he neglects, evades, or directly violates the Christian law. His seasons of keenest self-reproach and remorse will be associated with that sin. He will at length feel painfully that there the question is whether he will, or will not obey God. It is finally a question of spiritual life and death. He must conquer the sin, and bring it under the Divine law, or the sin will conquer him. If he yields here, and finally comes to acquiesce in the sin, he will feel that God's law with him is not supreme. However it may be in ordinary cases, there is one sacrifice he will not make to Christian duty. Others may not know it, but he knows that there is one thing which he loves more than he either loves or fears God. And this sin, of which he is conscious, will chill his whole moral being. By the laws of the mind, from the mere love of consistency even, this permitted sin will gradually draw down the whole character towards its own level. There is but one course for him, and that is to surrender himself unreservedly to the Divine law, and to say, — "Though it require me to cut off the right hand, or pluck out the right eye, with God's help, I will in this and all things else, try to follow Christ."

4. There is one other reason, not only for taking this stand on Christian ground, but for taking it *avowedly*, to which we will refer, arising out of the influence which it has on others. The moral influence of a man depends on the law to which he is seen to appeal. It is needful for the good of others, if you are on the Christian side, that you should be seen to be so. It is not less important now than it was in the days of the Apostles. Suppose that the first believers in Ephesus, or Corinth, had said, — "We are convinced of the truth of the Gospel. We believe and we will endeavour to obey it in our lives. But we are ignorant and obscure men. If we avow the side we are on, we shall have no influence, and shall subject ourselves to misjudgment and persecution. We will be Christians in reality, but will be silent." Had they done this, Christianity would have perished with the first generation. It would have disappeared as streams which sink into desert sands. It was not more necessary that the Apostles should preach, than that their obscure converts should avow what side they were on, — on what ground they stood. By taking a decided stand, openly and avowedly, they became a centre of influence. They kept before the world the fact that there was such a thing as Christianity. And their influence extending in ever enlarging circles, the few believers soon became a great multitude, and the faith they held was established in the world.

And so now, if you would do any thing to spread the authority of Christianity, let it be seen that you adopt it practically for your guide, and appeal to it as the highest law.

Take a decided stand on Christian principle. If you believe the momentous truths of the Gospel, rejoice to be able to obey them. Put such questions as these to yourself. Am I gaining and using property in obedience to the Christian law? Is the course I am taking in business, in politics, or in the pleasures of life, one which will stand the test of the Gospel? Am I ready to make the sacrifices of inclination, ambition, or profit, which Christ, were he here, would require of me? Is my most anxious thought in the business of life to conduct myself so as to secure the Divine approval? These questions try the secrets of the soul. Happy is that man who can say, — "There is nothing I desire so much as the approval of God." He has already entered into the spiritual kingdom of Christ, and in him the everlasting life is begun.

IMPORTANCE OF INVESTIGATION

BY MRS. DANNA.

If parents do not even allow their children to hear the opinions of those who differ from them; if, on the contrary, they anxiously and sedulously keep them in the dark; if, more especially, they ever let it be discovered that they *dread and fear* any freedom of inquiry — they may rest assured that they are likely to defeat the very ends at which they aim. They cannot always hold the veil before their children's eyes. The parent bird cannot always keep its offspring in the nest. The human mind loves freedom, and will not always consent to be fettered. The time may come when opinions, which are merely the result of education, which have been taken upon trust, *which have never stood the test of free inquiry, and comparison with other opinions*, — the time, I say, may come, when these opinions shall be shaken. Then, a strong and unyielding foundation may be absolutely necessary to keep the *whole fabric* of faith from falling like the house which was built upon the sand.

Oh, it will then be a great mercy if the entire structure do not crumble into absolute ruin, never to be built again. It will be a great mercy, if, amid the general wreck, enough of the pure, uncrumbled material can be saved for the erection of another, and a more enduring structure. Such a result would be happy indeed. The new edifice of faith would perhaps be less imposing, because more simple than the former one, but it would be not the less beautiful and valuable. On the contrary, no mind could estimate, no words could express its superior value. Its beautiful simplicity and unusual symmetry would never cease to delight its fortunate possessor. Built of solid stone, and founded upon a rock, the rains might descend, and the floods come, and the winds blow, and beat upon that house, and it would not fall, because founded on a rock.

You remark: "Yours is not the first, nor the second, nor even the third case in which I have been called to mourn the fulfilment of God's awful prophecy in the persons of my own friends. Some valued friends have already proved that they were 'given up to strong delusion, to believe a lie,' by professing that other form of Anti-Christ more suited to the constitution of their minds — called Popery. Widely as they seem to differ, they are, when sifted, varied developments of the same enmity to God's wonderful yet simple way. My own mode of accounting for it is, that it has not pleased God to enlighten them with his Holy Spirit."

To what "awful prophecy" do you allude in the first part of this extract? Is it that of being given over to strong delusion, to believe a lie? I suppose it must be. A little farther on you say, that "it has not pleased God to enlighten them," that is, those who do not think as you do, "with his Holy Spirit." This is quite a flattering unctious for a man to lay to his soul, I am willing to acknowledge. It would be a very convenient mode of settling differences of opinion, if we could only be certain who has the Spirit, and who has not. *But there is the rub.* If we could only decide upon some one living human being like ourselves, who, we were very sure, was under this special influence, whom we could consult to whom we could explain the minutest shade of difference in our opinions — who could patiently listen to all we have to say, and give us precise answers, *not to be mistaken* — our differences might all be speedily and satisfactorily adjusted. Not one of us would object to making him the umpire between us. We could appeal to this infallible guide upon every topic which has ever divided the Christian world, and he would settle the matter at once. None of us would then object to having a "Pope." How delightful it would be to have such a guide at every step of our progress! He would tell us exactly what our Lord meant when he said, "My Father is greater than I," and