

HOW TO STUDY THE BIBLE.

How should we study the Bible? With the highest exercise of our own powers, and the best use of all possible facilities.

The truths which are indispensable to salvation are so plain upon the sacred page, that he who runs may read them; but that comprehensive grasp of the redemptive system which flows from a minute acquaintance with all parts of the Bible, and a careful generalization of them by the synthetic process, cannot be acquired without deep thinking and a wise application of every auxiliary.

Nor is this surprising. The Bible is a collection of sixty-six books, written by about thirty persons, inspired successively through a period of more than fifteen centuries. It embraces a vast variety of matter, presented in great diversity of form, and clothed with every variation of style. It includes doctrines, precepts, promises, and examples to regulate the faith and conduct of men, in all the relations of life. Its utterances are in prose or poetry, history and prophecy, simple narrative or formal discourse, comprehensive summary or elaborate treatise, convincing argument or persuasive appeal, as occasion required. Inspiration was not inconsistent with the fullest exercise of inspired powers. Hence, while the Scriptures are animated through and through by the Eternal Spirit breathing one mighty subject for one grand purpose, they nevertheless abound in differences of style growing out of the dissimilar constitutions, educations, occupations, and positions of their respective authors.

These difficulties would have existed had the inspired writers been our own ancestors, speaking our own language. But they were not Englishmen, nor even Orientals. They were Hebrews, and in the highest sense Orientals. The race comprises two great classes, very unlike in their habits of mind and modes of life. The Hebrews belonged to one of these classes; we are members of the other. Hence, when we undertake the study of the Bible, we are called upon to divest ourselves of the peculiarities of Occidentalism, and to put on the characteristics of Orientalism. We are to forget our ways of thinking, feeling, and acting, our laws, customs, and manners, and imagine ourselves Hebrews of ancient Palestine, living and moving in the very midst of the stirring events of the Bible.

Now, to overcome the obstacles which would characterize the Bible were it an English production, would require mental training and general information; but to conquer the difficulties of the real case demands further qualification. It involves all that would enable us to view the Scriptures from the standpoint of the Hebrew people. It therefore requires a knowledge of their political, ecclesiastical, and natural history, their opinions, institutions, and usages, their chronology and geography, their mineralogy and botany. Master minds have delved in all these departments. Their treasures are stored in books. Every one should provide himself with such books, and study them, too, until he is as familiar with Oriental life as he had been born and reared by the side of Abraham, and David, and Jesus. Then, when he studies the Bible, much of what is now obscure will be illuminated, and that which now seems strange and unpertinent, will then appear natural and appropriate.

When this Eastern knowledge has been acquired, the Bible is scarcely more difficult than if its thoughts had flowed in Western channels. To imagine ourselves Hebrews is in effect to make the Bible English. Having accomplished this transfer, we are to ascertain the meaning of the Bible, as we would learn the sense of any other collection of such diversity in matter, form, and style. Each of the sixty-six books should be studied by itself. Every circumstance of its origin and object should be vividly before the mind. It should then be studied analytically and synthetically. If this study be vigorous and patient, it will show the bearings of the various parts and the force of the entire book. This process of studying one book of the Bible should be applied to all the books of that collection, both in their chronological order and in their usual arrangement.

If such a study of the Bible as I have suggested be accompanied by a lively sense of liability to error, and faithful prayer to the Spirit for "guidance into all truth," there will be in hand the elements of truth, out of which will rise the law of God in awful majesty and the atonement of his Son in melting splendor, and around these firm pillars will the other doctrines of the Bible fall into order, the precepts, promises, and examples of the same take their respective places, and then the wonderful completeness, the imperishable glory, and the infinite energy of the Bible system overwhelm the mind, impassion the heart, and sway the life.—*Christian Advocate.*

THE IRREMIEDIABLE ELEMENT IN SIN.

There is something that repentance cannot do. There is something that it could not do for Paul or Zacchaeus or the penitent thief. There is something that it cannot do for you or me: it cannot alter our disloyal record, our past as sinful men.

Now, then, what can it do? It seems to me that a man who has opened his eyes to this fact has come face to face with the reality of things, and this very fact may set in motion in his heart the emancipating power of God. If he sees that the past sin is permanent as a record, that it goes on for a long time exercising its influence upon him, he will come to a better estimate of the sinfulness of the act and of his own folly in identifying his good with any such action; and this sense of his terrible act and of his folly in doing it will generate a repugnance to it which is the very power of God in emancipating the soul from its record and its habit. When Esau came to look upon his rash act, when he thought that he could not undo it by turning his past over and shedding a few tears in his presence, then the result of his impetuosity became more serious, and led him to think more deeply of acts, which, though inadvertently done, are fixed, and send their influence over the whole of a man's life in this world. Would he not also feel more and more his own folly in identifying the good of his rational spirit with the satisfaction of appetite! And would not this sentiment, the very fact that the past was persistent, that it had rained down judgment upon him,—would not that fact generate a new power of self-protection, vigilance, and freedom in his heart?

Much more with Paul. We know that the recoil of his soul from the past, the recoil of his soul from his guilt and folly, was the power of God that developed in his heart all his zeal and effectiveness as an apostle of Christ. We know that it was this same recoil from a fixed abhorrent past which made Zacchaeus say, "The half of my goods I give to the poor; and, if I have taken anything from any man by false accusation I restore it fourfold." He allowed his whole past to excite in him a proper thought and a proper emotion, and these brought into his heart the delivering power of God.

If we face our bad acts and our bad deeds as permanent things—things that no tears can wash out, no repentance can undo, nothing can change from what it is,—there will be a recoil in us from the past, there will be a sense of guilt in us, a sense of folly in us, for having identified the eternal good of the human spirit with such gratifications. And the recoil will be the power of the eternal spirit delivering us from our past and from our habit into the future which God has willed for us, and into the habit that Christ wears, and which we may share.—*Rev. George A. Gordon.*

THE SIMPLICITY OF PROPORTIONATE GIVING.

Consider how simply the thing could be done. The greater number of God's people receive weekly wages. Were they to exercise forethought and economy in order to give to God, what an important influence it would have on their characters and habits! Others have fixed salaries and are paid half yearly or quarterly. They might put aside at once out of the sum received what they purpose giving to God; but even in their case, would not the habit of regularly storing for God, from week to week, be of immense service? We lately heard a young minister say that he never felt as much of the love of Christ in his heart except, perhaps, at a communion table, as when on the Lord's morning, without any human eye to see him, he took the previously allotted portion of his salary, and solemnly dedicated it to the service of his Lord and Master; and those who have no fixed salaries could easily take an average say for three years, as they are obliged to do for income purposes, and weekly dedicate to their profits to God. How such "storing" would tend to counteract worldliness, and bring men to realize their responsibility in the use of money! How easy it would be then for "everyone" to give "as God hath prospered!" "The servant ten shillings, perhaps, and if so, her master, in many instances, ten pounds at least.—*Dr. Berkeley.*

Governor Taylor, of Tennessee, recently told of a colored clergyman who preached a sermon on the text:—"And the multitudes came to him, and he healed them of divers diseases." Said he:—"My dying congregation, this is a terrible text. Disease is in the world. The smallpox slays its hundreds, the cholera its thousands and the yellow fever its tens of thousands, but, in the language of the text, if you take the divers, you are gone. These earthly doctors can cure the smallpox, cholera and yellow fever if they get there in time, but nobody but the good Lord can cure the divers."

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A CONVINCING ARGUMENT.

Dr. Vincent says that he never denounces people for playing at cards, dancing and theatre-going, because they are not absolute, but relative wrong. But he leaves the adoption of these amusements to the judgment of the young people in this way: "I draw a picture of Rev. Dr. John Hall, Bishop Matthew Simpson, and D. L. Moody sitting down together and shuffling cards for an evening, dancing themselves red with half-dressed women, or going to the theatre. They always seem shocked at the mere mention of such conduct by such Christians. But I ask them if they don't want as good a place in heaven as a bishop shall have. And then I tell them that, if they can approve these amusements in church leaders, then of course they may ask the leaders to approve the same in them; otherwise, not." It is a good putting of the issue.

PRESIDENT HOPKINS' TESTIMONY TO CHRIST.

The late President Hopkins in making his will, which has just been admitted to probate, begins with an acknowledgment of the goodness of God, and the expression of his faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, in these words:—"In making my will I wish first to express my sense of the great goodness of God to me during a long life, the blessings of which have far exceeded my expectations. Second, I wish to express my unshaken faith in the glorious Gospel of that blessed God as it is revealed by and in Jesus Christ, and my personal acceptance of him as my only ground of hope in passing into the future world; and my prayer is that all my children may accept this Saviour in their hearts, and obey Him in their lives."

The Hindus themselves feel and know that the downfall of their faith is inevitable. Hence the growing unrest that is taking hold of the masses. Keshub Chunder Sen was obliged to acknowledge years ago, "that the spirit of Christianity has already prevailed the whole atmosphere of Indian society; and we breathe, think, feel, and move in a Christian atmosphere. Native society is being aroused, enlightened and reformed under the influence of Christianity." And the same half-heathen, half-Christian rhetorician recently crowned this, his testimony, in a public speech at Calcutta with the confession: "Our hearts are touched, conquered, overcome by a higher power; and this power is Christ. Christ, not the British government, rules India! No one but Christ has deserved the precious diadem of the Indian crown, and he will have it."—*Christian Advocate.*

And this leads us to say that our prayers should also be inspired by a large benevolence. Paul taught Christian soldiers to pray not only for success in their own battles, but to engage in "supplication for all saints, and for me." Often, when our prayers are dull and half frozen by selfishness, the heart would thaw out in the sunbeams of benevolence—the spirit would glow with a new interest if the petitioner would reach out in behalf of others and seek for them a blessing. Our prayers are frequently too circumscribed, and partake more of selfishness than of philanthropy and brotherly love.—*Christian Standard.*

Charles Kingsley has said, "If a tree is not growing, it is sure in the long run to be dying." And so are our souls. If they are not growing they are dying; if they are not getting better they are getting worse. This is why the Bible compares our souls to trees; not out of a mere pretty fancy of poetry, but for a great, deep world-wide lesson, that every tree in the field may be a pattern, a warning to us thoughtless men, that as that tree is meant to grow, so our souls are meant to grow. As that tree dies unless it grows, so the soul's spiritual life must die unless it grows.—*J. J. Huley in Guide.*



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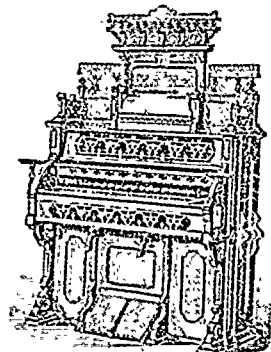


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