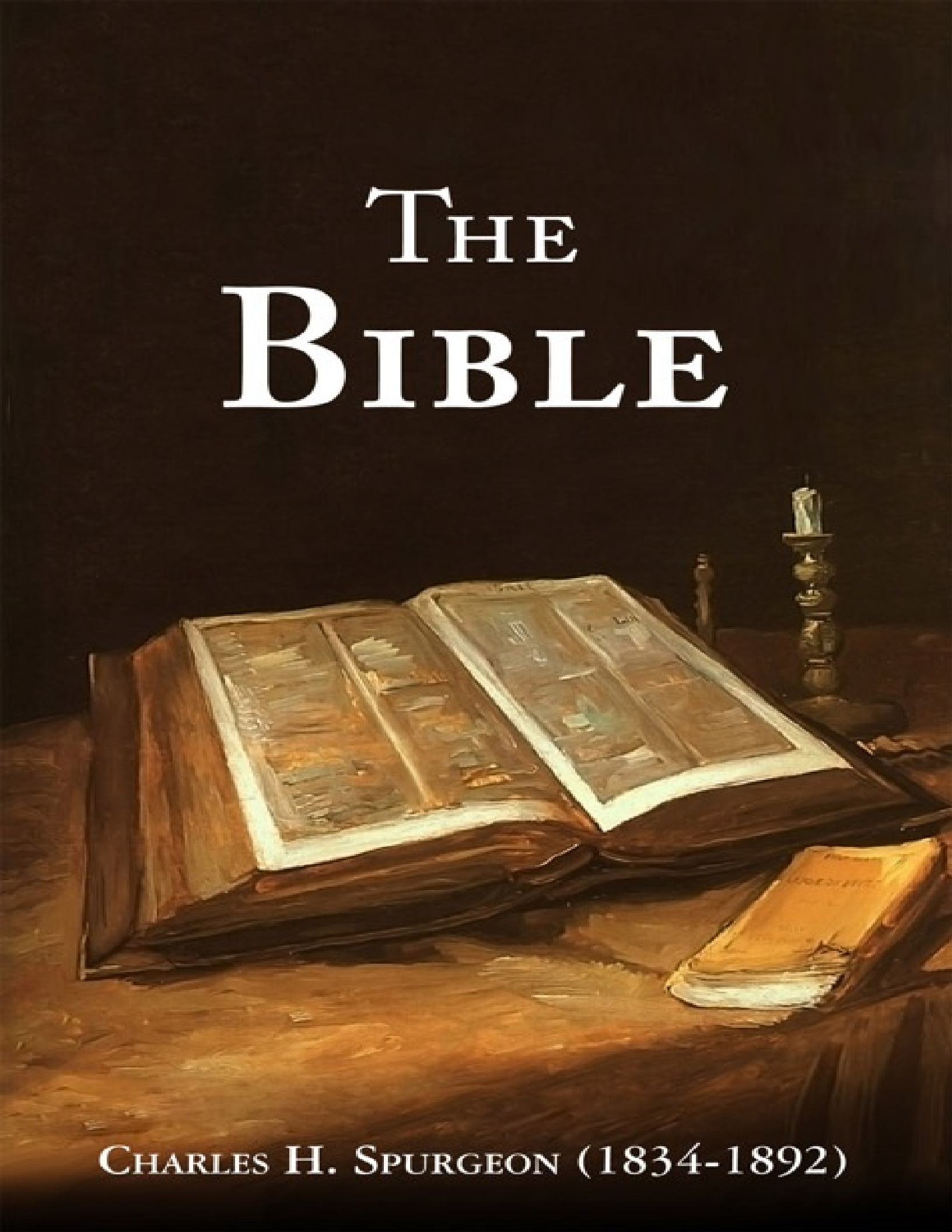
The Bible



Charles H. Spurgeon (1834-1892)

The Bible

Three Sermons from the "Prince of Preachers" on the Bible as the Word of God

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The Bible

"I have written to him the great things of my law, but they were counted as a strange thing."—Hosea 8:12

THIS is God's complaint against Ephraim. It is no mean proof of His goodness, that He stoops to rebuke His erring creatures; it is a great argument of His gracious disposition that He bows His head to notice terrestial affairs. He might, if He pleased, wrap Himself with night as with a garment; He might put the stars around His wrist for bracelets, and bind the suns around His brow for a coronet. He might dwell alone, far, far above this world, up in the seventh heaven, and look down with calm and silent indifference upon all the doings of His creatures. He might do as the heathens supposed their Jove did: sit in perpetual silence, sometimes nodding his awful head to make the Fates move as he pleased, but never taking thought of the little things of earth, disposing of them as beneath his notice, engrossed within his own being, swallowed up within himself, living alone and retired. And I, as one of His creatures might stand by night upon a mountain-top, and look upon the silent stars and say, "Ye are the eyes of God, but ye look not down on me; your light is the gift of His omnipotence, but your rays are not smiles of love to me. God, the mighty Creator, has forgotten me, I am a despicable drop in the ocean of creation, a sear leaf in the forest of beings, an atom in the mountain of existence. He knows me not; I am alone, alone, alone."

But it is not so, beloved. Our God is of another order. He notices every one of us. There is not a sparrow or a worm, but is found in His decrees. There is not a person upon whom His eye is not fixed. Our most secret acts are known to Him. Whatsoever we do, or bear, or suffer, the eye of God still rests upon us—and we are beneath His smile, for we are His people; or beneath His frown, for we have erred from Him.

Oh! how ten-thousand-fold merciful is God, that, looking down upon the race of man, He does not smile it out of existence. We see from our text that God looks upon man, for He says of Ephraim, "I have written to him the great things of my law, but they were counted as a strange thing." But see how when He

observes the sin of man He does not dash him away and spurn him with His foot; He does not shake him by the neck over the gulf of hell, until his brain doth reel, and then drop him for ever; but rather, He comes down from heaven to plead with His creatures; He argues with them; He puts Himself, as it were, upon a level with the sinner, states His grievances, and pleads His claim. “O Ephraim, I have written unto thee the great things of my law, but they have been unto thee as a strange thing!”

I come here to night in God’s stead, my friends, to plead with you as God’s ambassador, to charge many of you with a sin; to lay it to your hearts by the power of the Spirit, so that you may be convinced of sin, of righteousness, and of a judgment to come (Joh 16:8). The crime I charge you with is the sin of the text. God has written to you the great things of His Law, but they have been unto you as a strange thing. It is concerning this blessed book, the Bible, that I mean to speak tonight. Here lies my text—this Word of God. Here is the theme of my discourse, a theme which demands more eloquence than I possess; a subject upon which a thousand orators might speak at once; a mighty, vast, incomprehensive theme, which might engross all eloquence throughout eternity, and still it would remain unexhausted.

Concerning the Bible, I have three things to say tonight and they are all in my text. First, its author, “I have written”; secondly, its subjects, the great things of God’s Law; and thirdly, its common treatment, it has been accounted by most men a strange thing.

I. Who Is the Author?

First, then, concerning this book, Who is the author? The text says that it is God. “I have written to him the great things of my law.” Here lies my Bible—who wrote it? I open it, and I find it consists of a series of tracts. The first five tracts were written by a man called Moses. I turn on and I find other. Sometimes I see David is the penman, at other times, Solomon. Here I read Micah, then Amos, then Hosea. As I turn further on, to the more luminous pages of the New Testament, I see Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John; Paul, Peter, James and others. But when I shut up the book, I ask myself who is the author of it? Do these men jointly claim the authorship? Are they the compositors of this massive volume? Do they between themselves divide the honor? Our holy religion answers, No!

This volume is the writing of the living God: each letter was penned with an Almighty finger; each word in it dropped from the everlasting lips; each sentence was dictated by the Holy Spirit. Albeit that Moses was employed to write his histories with his fiery pen, God guided that pen. It may be that David touched his harp and let sweet psalms of melody drop from his fingers, but God moved his hands over the living strings of his golden harp. It may be that Solomon sang canticles of love, or gave forth words of consummate wisdom, but God directed his lips and made the preacher eloquent. If I follow the thundering Nahum when his horses plough the waters, or Habbakuk when he sees the tents of Cushan in affliction; if I read Malachi, when the earth is burning like an oven; if I turn to the smooth page of John, who tells of love, or the rugged, fiery chapters of Peter, who speaks of the fire devouring God’s enemies; if I turn to Jude, who launches forth anathemas upon the foes of God—everywhere I find God speaking. It is God’s voice, not man’s; the words are God’s words, the words of the Eternal, the Invisible, the Almighty, the Jehovah of this earth. This Bible is God’s Bible; and when I see it, I seem to hear a voice springing up from it, saying, “I am the book of God; man, read me. I am God’s writing; open my leaf, for I was penned by God; read it, for He is my author, and you will see Him visible and manifest everywhere.” “*I have written* to him the great things of my law.”

How do you know that God wrote the book? That is just what I shall not try to prove to you. I could, if I pleased to a demonstration, for there are arguments enough, there are reasons enough, did I care to occupy your time tonight in bringing them before you. But I shall do no such thing. I might tell you, if I

pleased, that the grandeur of the style is above that of any mortal writing; and that all the poets who have ever existed could not, with all their works united, give us such sublime poetry and such mighty language as is to be found in the Scriptures. I might insist upon it that the subjects of which it treats are beyond the human intellect, that man could never have invented the grand doctrines of a Trinity in the Godhead, man could not have told us anything of the creation of the universe, he could never have been the author of the majestic idea of Providence; that all things are ordered according to the will of one great Supreme Being and work together for good. I might enlarge upon its honesty, since it tells the faults of its writers; its unity, since it never belies itself; its master simplicity, that he who runs may read it; and I might mention a hundred more things, which would all prove to a demonstration that the book is of God.

But I come not here to prove it. I am a Christian minister, and you are Christians, or profess to be so, and there is never any necessity for Christian ministers to make a point of bringing forth infidel arguments in order to answer them—it is the greatest folly in the world. Infidels, poor creatures, do not know their own arguments till we tell them, and then they glean their blunted shafts to shoot them at the shield of truth again. It is folly to bring forward these firebrands of hell, even if we are well prepared to quench them. Let men of the world learn error of themselves; do not let us be propagators of their falsehoods. True, there are some preachers who are short of stock, and want them to fill up! But God's own chosen men need not do that; they are taught of God, and God supplies them with matter, with language, and with power.

There may be some one here tonight who has come without faith, a man of reason, a free-thinker. With him I have no argument at all. I profess not to stand here as a controversialist, but as a preacher of things that I know and feel. But I too have been like him. There was an evil hour when once I slipped the anchor of my faith; I cut the cable of my belief; I no longer moored myself hard by the coasts of revelation; I allowed my vessel to drift before the wind. I said to reason, "Be thou my captain"; I said to my own brain, "Be thou my rudder"; and I started on my mad voyage. Thank God it is all over now; but I will tell you its brief history. It was one hurried sailing over the tempestuous ocean of free thought. I went on, and as I went the skies began to darken; but to make up for that deficiency, the waters were brilliant with coruscations of brilliancy. I saw sparks flying upwards that pleased me, and I thought, 'If this be free thought, it is a happy thing.' My thoughts seemed gems, and I scattered stars with both my hands; but anon, instead of these coruscations of glory, I saw grim fiends, fierce

and horrible, start up from the waters, and as I dashed on they gnashed their teeth and grinned upon me. They seized the prow of my ship and dragged me on, while I, in part, gloried at the rapidity of my motion, but yet shuddered at the terrific rate with which I passed the old land marks of my faith.

As I hurried forward with an awful speed, I began to doubt my very existence. I doubted if there were a world; I doubted if there were such a thing as myself. I went to the very verge of the dreary realms of unbelief. I went to the very bottom of the sea of infidelity. I doubted everything. But here the devil foiled himself, for the very extravagance of the doubt proved its absurdity. Just when I saw the bottom of that sea, there came a voice which said, "And can this doubt be true?" At this very thought I awoke. I started from that death-dream, which, God knows, might have damned my soul and ruined this my body if I had not awoke. When I arose faith took the helm; from that moment I doubted not. Faith steered me back; faith cried, "Away, away!" I cast my anchor on Calvary; I lifted my eye to God; and here I am alive and out of hell.

Therefore, I speak what I do know. I have sailed that perilous voyage; I have come safe to land. Ask me again to be an infidel! No, I have tried it; it was sweet at first, but bitter afterwards. Now, lashed to God's Gospel more firmly than ever, standing as on a rock of adamant, I defy the arguments of hell to move me, for "I know in whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him" (2Ti 1:12). But I shall neither plead nor argue this night. You profess to be Christian men or else you would not be here. Your profession may be lies; what you say you are may be the very contrary to what you really are—but still I suppose you all admit that this is the Word of God. A thought or two then upon it.

"I have written to him the great things of my law."

Its Authority

First, my friends, stand over this volume, and admire its *authority*. This is no common book. It is not the sayings of the sages of Greece; here are not the utterances of philosophers of past ages. If these words were written by man, we might reject them, but oh, let me think the solemn thought—that this book is God's handwriting, that these words are God's. Let me look at its date: it is dated from the hills of heaven. Let me look at its letters: they flash glory on my eye. Let me read the chapters: they are big with meaning and mysteries unknown. Let me turn over the prophecies: they are pregnant with unthought-of wonders.

Oh, book of books! And wast thou written by my God? Then will I bow before thee. Thou book of vast authority, thou art a proclamation from the Emperor of Heaven; far be it from me to exercise my reason in contradicting thee. Reason! thy place is to stand and find out what this volume means, not to tell what this book ought to say. Come thou my reason, my intellect, sit thou down and listen, for these words are the words of God. I do not know how to enlarge on this thought. Oh! if you could ever remember that this Bible was actually and really written by God! Oh! if ye had been let into the secret chambers of heaven, if ye had beheld God grasping his pen and writing down these letters, then surely ye would respect them. But they *are* just as much God's hand-writing as if you had seen God write them. This Bible is a book of *authority*, it is an authorized book, for God has written it. Oh, tremble, tremble, lest any of you despise it; mark its authority, for it is the Word of God.

Its Truthfulness

Then, since God wrote it, mark its *truthfulness*. If I had written it, there would be worms of critics who would at once swarm on it, and would cover it with their evil spawn. Had I written it, there would be men who would pull it to pieces at once, and perhaps quite right too. But this is the Word of God; come, search ye critics, and find a flaw; examine it from its Genesis to its Revelations, and find an error. This is a vein of pure gold, unalloyed by quartz or any earthy substance. This is a star without a speck, a sun without a blot, a light without darkness, a moon without its paleness, a glory without a dimness.

O Bible! it cannot be said of any other book that it is perfect and pure, but of thee we can declare all wisdom is gathered up in thee without a particle of folly. This is the judge that ends the strife where wit and reason fail. This is the book untainted by any error; but is pure, unalloyed, perfect truth. Why? because God wrote it! Ah, charge God with error if ye please; tell Him that His book is not what it ought to be. I have heard men with prudish and mock-modesty, who would like to alter the Bible; and (I almost blush to say it) I have heard minister's alter God's Bible, because they were afraid of it. Have you never heard a man say, "He that believeth and is baptized, shall be saved; but he that believeth not"—what does the Bible say?—"shall be damned" (Mar 16:16). But that does not happen to be polite enough, so they say, "shall be condemned." Gentlemen! pull the velvet out of your mouths; speak God's word; we want none of your alterations. I have heard men in prayer, instead of saying, "Make your

calling and election sure" (2Pe 1:10), say, "Make your calling and salvation sure." Pity they were not born when God lived, far, far back, that they might have taught God how to write!

Oh, impudence beyond all bounds! Oh! full-blown self-conceit! To attempt to dictate to the All-wise—to teach the Omniscient and instruct the Eternal! Strange that there should be men so vile as to use the penknife of Jehoiakim, to cut passages of the Word, because they are unpalatable (Jer 36:23). Oh ye who dislike certain portions of the Holy Writ, rest assured that your taste is corrupt, and that God will not stay for your little opinion. Your dislike is the very reason why God wrote it, because you ought not to be suited; you have no right to be pleased. God wrote what you do not like: He wrote the truth! Oh, let us bend in reverence before it, for God inspired it! It is pure truth. Here from this fountain gushes *aqua vitae*—"the water of life," without a single particle of earth. Here from this sun there cometh forth rays of radiance, without the mixture of darkness. Blessed Bible; thou art all truth!

Its Nature

Yet once more, before we leave this point, let us stop and consider the merciful nature of God, in having written us a Bible at all. Ah! He might have left us without it, to grope our dark way as blind men seek the wall; He might have suffered us to wander on with the star of reason as our only guide. I recollect a story of Mr. Hume, who so constantly affirmed that the light of reason is abundantly sufficient. Being at a good minister's house one evening, he had been discussing the question, and declaring his firm belief in the sufficiency of the light of nature. On leaving, the minister offered to hold him a candle, to light him down the steps. He said, "No, the light of nature would be enough, the moon would do." It so happened that the moon was covered with a cloud, and he fell down the steps. "Ah," said the minister, "you had better have had a little light from above after all, Mr. Hume." So, supposing the light of nature to be sufficient, we had better have a little light from above too, and then we shall be sure to be right. Better have two lights than only one. The light of creation is a bright light. God may be seen in the stars; His name is written in gilt letters on the brow of night; you may discover His glory in the ocean waves, yea, in the trees of the field—but it is better to read it in two books than in one. You will find it here more clearly revealed, for He has written this book Himself, and He has given you the key to understand it, if you have the Holy Spirit. Ah, beloved,

let us thank God for this Bible; let us love it; let us count it more precious than much fine gold (Psa 119:127).

But let me say one thing before I pass on to the second point. If this be the Word of God, what will become of some of you who have not read it for the last month? “Month! Sir, I have not read it for this year.”—Ay, there are some of you who have not read it at all. Most people treat the Bible very politely. They have a small pocket volume, neatly bound; they put a white pocket-handkerchief around it, and carry it to their places of worship. When they get home, they lay it up in a drawer till next Sunday morning. Then it comes out again for a little bit of a treat and goes to chapel. That is all the poor Bible gets in the way of an airing; that is your style of entertaining this heavenly messenger. There is dust enough on some of your Bibles to write “damnation” with your fingers. There are some of you who have not turned over your Bibles for a long, long, long while, and what think you? I tell you blunt words, but true words. What will God say at last? When you shall come before Him, He shall say, “Did you read My Bible?” “No.” “I wrote you a letter of mercy; did you read it?” “No.” “Rebel! I have sent thee a letter inviting thee to Me: didst thou ever read it?” “Lord I never broke the seal; I kept it shut up.” “Wretch!” says God, “then thou deservest hell, if I sent thee a loving epistle and thou wouldst not even break the seal. What shall I do unto thee?” Oh! let it not be so with you. Be Bible readers; be Bible searchers!

II. The Subjects of the Bible

Our second point is, the subjects on which the Bible treats. The words of the text are these: “I have written to him *the great things* of my law.” The Bible treats of great things, and of great things only. There is nothing in this Bible that is unimportant. Every verse in it has a solemn meaning, and if we have not found it out yet, we hope yet to do it. You have seen mummies wrapped round and round with folds of linen. Well, God’s Bible is like that; it is a vast roll of white linen, woven in the loom of truth. So you will have to continue unwinding it, roll after roll, before you get the real meaning of it from the very depth; and when you have found, as you think, a part of the meaning, you will still need to keep on unwinding, unwinding, and all eternity you will be unwinding the words of this wondrous volume (Rev 14:4). Yet there is nothing in the Bible but great things. Let me divide, so as to be more brief. First, all things in this Bible are great; but secondly, some things are the greatest of all.

All things in the Bible are great.

Some people think it does not matter what doctrines you believe, that it is immaterial what church you attend, that all denominations are alike. Well, I dislike Mrs. Bigotry above almost all people in the world, and I never give her any compliment or praise. But there is another woman I hate equally as much, and that is Mrs. Latitudinarianism, a well-known character, who has made the discovery that all of us are alike. Now, I believe that a man may be saved in any church. Some have been saved in the church of Rome—a few blessed men, whose names I could mention here. I know, blessed be God, that multitudes are saved in the Church of England; she has a host of pious, praying men in her midst. I think that all sections of Protestant Christians have a remnant according to the election of grace, and they had need to have, some of them, a little salt, for otherwise they would go to corruption.

But when I say that, do you imagine that I think them all on a level? Are they all alike truthful? One sect says infant baptism is right, another says it is wrong, yet you say they are both right. I cannot see that. One teaches we are saved by free grace, another says that we are not, but are saved by free will; and yet you believe they are both right. I do not understand that. One says that God loves His people and never leaves off loving them; another says that He did not love His people before they loved Him; that He often loves them, and then ceases to love

them, and turns them away. They may be both right in the main, but can they be both right when one says “Yes,” and the other says “No.” I must have a pair of spectacles to enable me to look backwards and forwards at the same time, before I can see that. It cannot be, sirs, that they are both right.

But some say they differ upon non-essentials. This text says, “I have written to him the great things of my law.” There is nothing in God’s Bible which is not great. Did ever any of you sit down to see which was the purest religion? “Oh,” say you, “we never took the trouble. We went just where our father and mother went.” Ah! that is a profound reason indeed. You went where your father and mother did. I thought you were sensible people; I didn’t think you went where other people pulled you, but went of your ownselves. I love my parents above all that breathe, and the very thought that they believed a thing to be true, helps me to think it is correct; but I have not followed them. I belong to a different denomination, and I thank God I do. I can receive them as Christian brethren and sisters, but I never thought that because they happened to be one thing I was to be the same. No such thing. God gave me brains, and I will use them; and if you have any intellect, use it too.

Never say it doesn’t matter. It does matter! Whatever God has put here is of eminent importance; He would not have written a thing that was indifferent. Whatever is here is of some value; therefore, search all questions, try all by the Word of God. I am not afraid to have what I preach tried by this book. Only give me a fair field and no favor, and this book, if I say anything contrary to it, I will withdraw it the next Sabbath-day. By this I stand, by this I fall. Search and see; but don’t say, “It does not matter.” If God says a thing, it must always be of importance.

Some things in the Bible are greatest of all.

But while all things in God’s Word are important, all are not equally important. There are certain fundamental and vital truths that must be believed, or otherwise no man would be saved. If you want to know what you must believe if ye would be saved, you will find the great things of God’s Law between these two covers; they are all contained here. As a sort of digest or summary of the great things of the Law, I remember an old friend of mine once saying, “Ah! you preach the three R’s, and God will always bless you.” I said, “What are the three R’s?” And he answered, “Ruin, redemption, and regeneration.” They contain the sum and substance of divinity.

“R” for *ruin*. We were all ruined in the fall; we were all lost when Adam sinned, and we are all ruined by our own transgressions; we are all ruined by our own evil hearts and our own wicked wills; and we all shall be ruined unless grace saves us. Then there is a second “R” for *redemption*. We are ransomed by the blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish and without spot; we are rescued by His power; we are ransomed by His merits; we are redeemed by His strength. Then there is “R” for *regeneration*. If we would be pardoned, we must also be regenerated, for no man can partake of redemption unless he is regenerate. Let him be as good as he pleases; let him serve God, as he imagines, as much as he likes; unless he is regenerate and has a new heart, a new birth, he will still be in the first R, that is, ruin.

These things contain an epitome[1] of the Gospel. I believe there is a better epitome in the five points of Calvinism:[2] Election according to the foreknowledge of God; the natural depravity and sinfulness of man; particular redemption by the blood of Christ; effectual calling by the power of the Spirit; and ultimate perseverance by the efforts of God’s might. I think all those need to be believed in order to salvation; but I should not like to write a creed like the Athanasian,[3] beginning with “Whosoever should be saved, before all things it is necessary that he should hold the Catholic[4] faith, which faith is this”—when I got so far, I should stop, because I should not know what to write. I hold the Catholic faith of the Bible, the whole Bible and nothing but the Bible. It is not for me to draw up creeds; but I ask you to search the Scriptures, for this is the word of life.

God says, “I have written to him the great things of my law.” Do you doubt their greatness? Do ye think they are not worth your attention? Reflect a moment, man. Where art thou standing now?

“Lo, on a narrow neck of land
‘Twixt two unbounded seas I stand;
An inch of time, a moment’s space,
May lodge me in yon heavenly place,
Or shut me up in hell.”

I recollect standing on a sea-shore once, upon a narrow neck of land, thoughtless that the tide might come up. The tide kept continually washing up on either side, and wrapped in thoughts I still stood there, until at last there was the greatest difficulty in getting on shore; the waves had washed between me and the shore. You and I stand each day on a narrow neck, and there is one wave coming

up there see; how near it is to your foot; and lo, another follows at every tick of the clock: “our hearts, like muffled drums, are beating funeral marches to the tomb.” We are always tending downwards to the grave each moment that we live. This Book tells me that if I am converted, when I die there is a heaven of joy and love to receive me; it tells me that angels’ pinions shall be stretched, and I, borne by strong cherubic wings, shall out-soar the lightning, and mount beyond the stars, up to the throne of God, to dwell for ever,

“Far from a world of grief and sin
With God eternally shut in.”

Oh! it makes the hot tear start from my eye; it makes my heart too big for this my body; and my brain whines at the thought of

“Jerusalem, my happy home,
Name ever dear to me.”

Oh! that sweet scene beyond the clouds; sweet fields arrayed in living green, and rivers of delight. Are not these great things?

But then, poor unregenerate soul, the Bible says if thou art lost, thou art lost for ever; it tells thee that if thou diest without Christ, without God, there is no hope for thee; that there is a place without a gleam of hope where thou shalt read in burning letters, “Ye knew your duty, but ye did it not.” It tells you that ye shall be driven from His presence with a “depart from me, ye cursed” (Mat 25:41). Are not these great things? Yes, sirs, as heaven is desirable, as hell is terrible, as time is short, as eternity is infinite, as the soul is precious, as pains are to be shunned, as heaven is to be sought, as God is eternal, and as His words are sure —these are great things, things ye ought to listen to!

III. The Treatment the Bible Receives

Our last point is the treatment which the poor Bible receives in this world. It is accounted a strange thing! What does that mean—the Bible accounted a strange thing? In the first place, it means that it is very strange to some people, because they never read it. I remember reading on one occasion the sacred story of David and Goliath; and there was a person present, positively grown up to years of maturity, who said to me, “Dear me! what an interesting story; what book is that in?” And I recollect a person once coming to me in private; I spoke to her about her soul, she told me how deeply she felt, how she had a desire to serve God, but she found another law in her members. I turned to a passage in Romans, and read to her, “The good that I would I do not; and the evil which I would not that I do!” (Rom 7:19). She said, “Is that in the Bible? I did not know it.” I did not blame her because she had no interest in the Bible till then, but I did wonder that there could be found persons who knew nothing about such a passage. Ah, you know more about your ledgers than your Bible; you know more about your day-books than what God has written! Many of you will read a novel from beginning to end, and what have you got?—a mouthful of froth when you have done. But you cannot read the Bible—that solid, lasting, substantial, and satisfying food goes uneaten, locked up in the cupboard of neglect; while anything that man writes, a catch of the day, is greedily devoured. “I have written unto him the great things of my law, but they were counted as a strange thing.”

Ye have *never read it*. I bring the broad charge against you. Perhaps ye say, I ought not to charge you with any such thing. I always think it better to have a worse opinion of you than too good an one. I charge you with this: you do not read your Bibles. Some of you never have read it through. I know I speak what your heart must say, is honest truth. You are not Bible readers. You say you have the Bible in your houses; do I think you are such heathens as not to have a Bible? But when did you read it last? How do you know that your spectacles, which you have lost, have not been there for the last three years? Many people have not turned over its pages for a long time, and God might say unto them, “I have written unto you the great things of my law, but they have been accounted unto you a strange thing”!

Others there be who read the Bible, but when they read it, they say it is so *horribly dry*. That young man over there says it is a “bore”; that is the word he

uses. He says, “My mother said to me, when you go up to town, read a chapter every day. Well, I thought I would please her, and I said I would. I am sure I wish I had not. I did not read a chapter yesterday or the day before. We were so busy. I could not help it.” You do not love the Bible, do you? “No, there is nothing in it which is interesting.” Ah, I thought so! But a little while ago I could not see anything in it. Do you know why? Blind men cannot see, can they? But when the Spirit touches the scales of the eyes, they fall off; and when he puts eye-salve on, then the Bible becomes precious.

I remember a minister who went to see an old lady, and he thought he would give her some precious promises out of the Word of God. Turning to one he saw written in the margin, “P,” and he asked, “What does this mean?” “That means precious, sir.” Further down he saw “T. and P.,” and he asked what the letters meant. “That,” she said, “means tried and proved, for I have tried and proved it.” If you have tried God’s Word and proved it, if it is precious to your souls, then you are Christians; but those persons who despise the Bible, have “neither part nor lot in the matter.” If it is dry to you, you will be dry at last in hell. If you do not esteem it as better than your necessary food (Job 23:12), there is no hope for you, for you lack the greatest evidence of your Christianity.

Alas! alas! the worst case is to come. There are some people who *hate* the Bible, as well as despise it. Is there such an one stepped in here? Some of you said, “Let us go and hear what the young preacher has to say to us.” This is what he hath to say to you: “Behold ye despisers, and wonder and perish” (Act 13:41). This is what he hath to say to you: “The wicked shall be turned into hell,” and all that forget God (Psa 9:17). And this, again he has to say to you: Behold there shall come in the last days, mockers like yourselves, “walking after their own lusts” (Jude 1:16) But more: he tells you tonight that if you are [to be] saved, you must find salvation here.

Therefore, despise not the Bible, but search it, read it, and come unto it. Rest thee well assured, Oh scorner, that thy laughs cannot alter truth, thy jests cannot avert thine inevitable doom. Though in thy hardihood thou shouldst make a league with death and sign a covenant with hell—yet swift justice shall o’ertake thee, and strong vengeance strike thee low. In vain dost thou jeer and mock, for eternal verities are mightier than thy sophistries: nor can thy smart sayings alter the diving truth of a single word of this volume of revelation. Oh! why dost thou quarrel with thy best friend, and ill-treat thy only refuge? There yet remains hope even for the scorner. Hope in a Savior’s veins. Hope in the Father’s mercy. Hope in the Holy Spirit’s omnipotent agency!

I have done when I have said one word. My friend, *the philosopher*, says it may be very well for me to urge people to read the Bible, but he thinks there are a great many sciences far more interesting and useful than theology. Extremely obliged to you for your opinion, sir. What science do you mean?—the science of dissecting beetles, and arranging butterflies?; No," you say, "certainly not." The science, then, of arranging stones and telling us of the strata of the earth? "No, not exactly that." Which science then? "Oh, all sciences," say you, "are better than the science of the Bible." Ah! sir, that is your opinion, and it is because you are far from God that you say so. But the science of Jesus Christ is the most excellent of sciences. Let no one turn away from the Bible because it is not a book of learning and wisdom. It *is*! Would ye know astronomy? It is here: it tells you of the Sun of Righteousness and the Star of Bethlehem. Would you know botany? It is here: it tells you of the plant of renown—the Lily of the Valley and the Rose of Sharon. Would you know geology and mineralogy? You shall learn it here: for you may read of the Rock of Ages, and the White Stone with a name graven thereon which no man knoweth, saving he that receiveth it. Would ye study history? Here is the most ancient of all the records of the history of the human race.

Whatever your science is, come and bend o'er this book; your science is here. Come and drink out of this fair fount of knowledge and wisdom, and ye shall find yourselves made wise unto salvation. Wise and foolish, babes and men, gray-headed sires, youths and maidens—I speak to you, I plead with you, I beg of you—respect your Bibles and search them out, for in them ye think ye have eternal life, and these are they which testify of Christ (Joh 5:39).

I have done. Let us go home and practice what we have heard. I have heard of a woman who, when she was asked what she remembered of the minister's sermon, said, "I don't recollect anything of it. It was about short weights and bad measures, and I didn't recollect anything but to go home and burn the bushel." So if you will remember to go home and burn the bushel—if you will recollect to go home and read your Bibles—I shall have said enough. And may God, in His infinite mercy, when you read your Bibles, pour into your soul the illuminating rays of the Sun of Righteousness, by the agency of the ever-adorable Spirit; then you will read to your profit and to your soul's salvation. We may say of the Bible:

"God's cabinet of revealed counsel 'tis!
Where weal and woe, are ordered so
That every man may know which shall be his;

Unless his own mistake, false application make.

“It is the index to eternity.
He cannot miss of endless bliss
That takes this chart to steer by
Nor can he be mistook, that speaketh by this book.

“It is the book of God. what if I should
Say, God of books, let him that looks
Angry at that expression, as too bold,
His thoughts in silence smother, till he find such another.”

Sermon No. 15, The New Park Street Pulpit Vol. 1

2
The Word: A Sword

"For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart."—Hebrews 4:12

THOSE who are fond of a labyrinth of exposition will find a maze perplexing to the last degree, if they will read the various commentators and expositors upon this verse. This is the question: By *the Word of God* are we here to understand the Incarnate Word, the divine Logos, who was in the beginning with God; or does the passage relate to this inspired Book, and to the Gospel, which is the kernel of it, as it is set forth in the preaching of the truth in the power of the Holy Ghost? You shall find Dr. John Owen (1616-1683), with a very large number of eminent servants of God, defending the first theory, that the Son of God is doubtless here spoken of; and I confess that they seem to me to defend it with arguments that I should not like to controvert. Much more is to be said on this side of the question than I can here bring before you. On the other side, we find John Calvin, with an equally grand array of divines, all declaring that it must be the Book that is meant, the Gospel, the revelation of God in the Book. Their interpretation of the passage is not to be set aside, and I feel convinced that they all give us good reasons for their interpretation as those who come to the other conclusion.

Where such Doctors differ, I am not inclined to present any interpretation of my own that can be set in competition with theirs, though I may venture to propound one that comprehends them all, and so comes into conflict with none. It is a happy circumstance if we can see a way to agree with all those who did not themselves agree. But I have been greatly instructed by the mere fact that it should be difficult to know whether in this passage the Holy Ghost is speaking of the Christ of God or the Book of God. This shows us a great truth, which we might not otherwise have so clearly noted. How much that can be said of the Lord Jesus may be also said of the inspired volume! How closely are these two allied! How certainly do those who despise the one reject the other! How intimately are the Word made flesh, and the Word uttered by inspired men, joined together!

It may be most accurate to interpret this passage as relating both to the Word of God incarnate, and the Word of God inspired. Weave the two into one thought, for God hath joined them together, and you will then see fresh lights and new meanings in the text. The Word of God, namely, this revelation of Himself in Holy Scripture, is all it is here described to be, because Jesus, the incarnate Word of God, is in it. He doth, as it were, incarnate Himself as the divine truth in this visible and manifest revelation—and thus it becomes living and powerful, dividing and discerning. As the Christ reveals God, so this Book reveals Christ, and therefore it partakes, as the Word of God, in all the attributes of the Incarnate Word. And we may say many of the same things of the written Word as of the embodied Word; in fact, they are now so linked together that it would be impossible to divide them.

This I like to think of, because there are some nowadays who deny every doctrine of revelation, and yet, forsooth, they praise the Christ. The Teacher is spoken of in the most flattering style, and then His teaching is rejected, except so far as it may coincide with the philosophy of the moment. They talk much about Jesus, while that which is the real Jesus, namely, His Gospel and His inspired Word, they cast away. I believe I do but correctly describe them when I say that, like Judas, they betray the Son of man with a kiss. They even go so far as to cry up the names of the doctrines, though they use them in a different sense that they may deceive. They talk of loyalty to Christ and reverence for the Sermon on the Mount, but they use vain words. I am charged with sowing suspicion. I do sow it, and desire to sow it. Too many Christian people are content to hear anything so long as it is put forth by a clever man, in a taking manner; I want them to try the spirits, whether they be of God, for many false prophets have gone forth into the world (1Jo 4:1). What God has joined together these modern thinkers willfully put asunder, and separate the Revealer from His own revelation. I believe the Saviour thinks their homage to be more insulting than their scorn would be. Well may He do so, for they bow before Him, and say, “Hail, Master!” while their foot is on the blood of His covenant, and their souls abhor the doctrine of His substitutionary sacrifice. They are crucifying the Lord afresh and putting Him to an open shame, by denying the Lord that bought them (2Pe 2:1), by daring to deride His purchase of His people as a “mercantile transaction,” and I know not what of blasphemy beside.

Christ and His Word must go together. What is true of the Christ is here predicated both of Him and of His Word. Behold, this day the everlasting Gospel has Christ within it. He rides in it as in a chariot. He rides in it as, of old,

Jehovah “did ride upon a cherub, and did fly: yea, he did fly upon the wings of the wind” (Psa 18:10), It is only because Jesus is not dead that the Word becomes living and effectual “and sharper than any two-edged sword”; for, if you leave Christ out of it, you have left out its vitality and power. As I have told you that we will not have Christ without the Word, so neither will we have the Word without Christ. If you leave Christ out of Scripture, you have left out the essential truth which it is written to declare. Ay, if you leave out of it Christ as a Substitute, Christ in His death, Christ in His garments dyed in blood, you have left out of it all that is living and powerful. How often have we reminded you that as concerning the Gospel, even as concerning every man, “the blood is the life thereof ”; a bloodless Gospel is a lifeless Gospel!

A famous picture has been lately produced that represents our Lord before Pilate. It has deservedly won great attention. A certain excellent newspaper, which brings out for a very cheap price a large number of engravings, has given an engraving of this picture; but, inasmuch as the painting was too large for the paper to give the whole, they have copied a portion of it. It is interesting to note that they have given us Pilate here, and Caiaphas there, but since there was no room for Jesus upon the sheet, they have left out that part of the design. When I saw the picture, I thought it was wonderfully characteristic of a great deal of modern preaching. See Pilate here, Caiaphas there, and the Jews yonder—but the Victim, bound and scourged for human sin, is omitted.

Possibly, in the case of the publication, the figure of the Christ will appear in the next number; but even if He should appear in the next sermon of our preachers of the new theology, it will be as a moral example, and not as the Substitute for the guilty, the Sin-bearer by whose death we are redeemed. When we hear a sermon with no Christ in it, we hope that He will come out next Sunday; at the same time, the preaching is so far spoilt, and the presentation of the Gospel is entirely ruined, so long as the principal figure is left out. Oh, it is a sad thing to have to stand in any house of prayer and listen to the preaching, and then have to cry, “They have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him” (Joh 20:13)! Rest assured that they have laid Him in a tomb; you may be quite certain of that. They have put Him away as a dead thing, and to them He is as good as dead. True believer, you may comfort your heart with this recollection, that He will rise again. He cannot be holden by the bonds of death in any sense; and, though His own church should bury Him, and lay the huge lid of the most enormous sarcophagus of heresy upon Him, the Redeemer will rise again, and truth with Him, and He and His Word will live and reign together

forever and ever.

Brethren, you will understand I am going to speak about the Word of God as being, like the Lord Jesus, the revelation of God. This inspired volume is that Gospel whereby you have received life, unless you have heard it in vain. It is this Gospel, with Jesus within it, Jesus working by it, which is said to be living and effectual, and "sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." I shall only talk with you in very simple style: first, concerning the qualities of the Word of God; and, secondly, concerning certain practical lessons which these qualities suggest to us.

I. The Qualities of the Word of God

First let me speak concerning the *qualities* of the Word of God. It is “quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword.”

It is quick.

The Word of God is said to be *quick*. I am sorry the translators have used that word, because it is apt to be mistaken as meaning speedy, and that is not the meaning at all; it means alive or living. “Quick” is the old English word for alive, and so we read of the “quick and dead.” The Word of God is alive. This is a living Book. This is a mystery that only living men, quickened by the Spirit of God, will fully comprehend. Take up any other book except the Bible, and there may be a measure of power in it, but there is not that indescribable vitality in it that breathes, and speaks, and pleads, and conquers [as] in the case of this sacred volume.

We have in the book-market many excellent selections of choice passages from great authors, and in a few instances the persons who have made the extracts have been at the pains to place under their quotations from Scripture the name “David,” or “Jesus,” but this is worse than needless. There is a style of majesty about God’s Word, and with this majesty a vividness never found elsewhere. No other writing has within it a heavenly life whereby it works miracles, and even imparts life to its reader. It is a *living* and incorruptible seed. It moves, it stirs itself, it lives, it communes with living men as a living Word.

Solomon saith concerning it, “When thou goest, it shall lead thee; when thou sleepest, it shall keep thee; and when thou awakest, it shall talk with thee” (Pro 6:22). Have you never known what that means? Why, the Book has wrestled with me; the Book has smitten me; the Book has comforted me; the Book has smiled on me; the Book has frowned on me; the Book has clasped my hand; the Book has warmed my heart. The Book weeps with me, and sings with me; it whispers to me, and it preaches to me; it maps my way, and holds up my goings; it was to me the Young Man’s Best Companion, and it is still by Morning and Evening Chaplain. It is a live Book, all over alive—from its first chapter to its last word full of strange, mystic vitality, which makes it have pre-eminence over every other writing for every living child of God.

See, my brothers, our words, our books, our spoken or our printed words by-and-by die out. How many books there are which nobody will ever read now

because they are out of date! There are many books that I could read profitably when I was a youth, but they would teach me nothing now. There are also certain religious works which I could read with pleasure during the first ten years of my spiritual life; but I should never think of reading them now, any more that I should think of reading the “a-b ab,” and the “b-a ba,” of my childhood. Christian experience causes us to outgrow the works that were the class-books of our youth.

We may outgrow teachers and pastors, but not apostles and prophets. That human system which was once vigorous and influential may grow old, and at length lose all vitality; but the Word of God is always fresh, and new, and full of force. No wrinkle mars its brow; no trembling is in its foot. Here, in the Old and New Testaments, we have at once the oldest and the newest of books. Homer and Hesiod are infants to the more ancient parts of this venerable volume, and yet the Gospel that it contains is as truly new as this morning’s newspaper. I say again that our words come and go; as the trees of the forest multiply their leaves only to cast them off as withered things, so the thoughts and theories of men are but for the season, and then they fade and rot into nothingness. “The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away: but the word of the Lord endureth for ever” (1Pe 1:24).

Its vitality is such as it can impart to its readers. Hence, you will often find, when you converse with revelation, that if you yourself are dead when you begin to read, it does not matter—you will be quickened as you peruse it. You need not bring life to the Scripture; you shall draw life from the Scripture. Oftentimes a single verse has made us start up, as Lazarus came forth at the call of the Lord Jesus. When our soul has been faint, and ready to die, a single word applied to the heart by the Spirit of God, has aroused us; for it is a *quickening* as well as a *living* Word. I am so glad of this, because at times I feel altogether dead; but the Word of God is not dead; and coming to it we are like the dead man, who, when he was put into the grave of the prophet, rose again as soon as he touched his bones. Even these bones of the prophets, these words of theirs spoken and written thousands of years ago, will impart life to those who come into contact with them. The Word of God is thus overflowingly alive.

Hence, I may add, it is so alive that you need never be afraid that it will become extinct. They dream—they dream that they have put us among the antiquities, those of us who preach the old Gospel that our fathers loved! They sneer at the doctrines of the apostles and of the reformers, and declare that believers in them are left high and dry, the relics of an age that has long since

ebbed away. Yes, so they say! But what they say may not after all be true; for the Gospel is such a living Gospel that, if it were cut into a thousand shreds, every particle of it would live and grow. If it were buried beneath a thousand avalanches of error, it would shake off the incubus and rise from its grave. If it were cast into the midst of the fire, it would walk through the flame as it has done many a time, as though it were in its natural element.

The Reformation was largely due to a copy of the Scriptures left in the seclusion of a monastery, and there hidden till Luther came under its influence, and his heart furnished soil for the living seed to grow in. Leave but a single New Testament in a Popish community, and the evangelical faith may at any moment come to the front, even though no preacher of it may ever have come that way. Plants unknown in certain regions have suddenly sprung from the soil; the seeds have been wafted on the winds, carried by birds, or washed ashore by the waves of the sea. So vital are seeds that they live and grow wherever they are borne; and even after lying deep in the soil for centuries, when the upturning spade has brought them to the surface, they have germinated at once. Thus is it with the Word of God; it liveth and abideth for ever, and in every soil and under all circumstances it is prepared to prove its own life by the energy with which it grows and produces fruit to the glory of God.

How vain, as well as wicked, are all attempts to kill the Gospel. Those who attempt the crime, in any fashion, will be forever still beginning, and never coming near their end. They will be disappointed in all cases, whether they would slay it with persecution, smother it with worldliness, crush it with error, starve it with neglect, poison it with misrepresentation, or drown it with infidelity. While God liveth His Word shall live. Let us praise God for that. We have an immortal Gospel, incapable of being destroyed, which shall live and shine when yon lamp of the sun has consumed its scant supply of oil.

It is powerful.

In our text the Word is said to be *powerful* or “active.” Perhaps “energetic” is the best rendering, or almost as well, “effectual.” Holy Scripture is full of power and energy. Oh, the majesty of the Word of God! They charge us with *Bibliolatry*; it is a crime of their own inventing, of which few are guilty. If there be such things as venial[5] sins, surely an undue reverence of Holy Scripture is one of them. To me the Bible is not God, but it is God’s voice, and I do not hear it without awe. What an honour to have it as one’s calling, to study, to expound,

and to publish this sacred Word! I cannot help feeling that the man who preaches the Word of God is standing, not upon a mere platform, but upon a throne. You may study your sermon, my brother, and you may be a great rhetorician, and be able to deliver it with wonderful fluency and force; but the only power that is effectual for the highest design of preaching is the power which does not lie in your word, nor in my word, but in the Word of God. Have you never noticed, when persons are converted, that they almost always attribute it to some text that was quoted in the sermon? It is God's Word, not our comment on God's Word, which saves souls. The Word of God is powerful for all sacred ends. How powerful it is to convince men of sin! We have seen the self-righteous turned inside out by the revealed truth of God. Nothing else could have brought home to them such unpleasant truth, and compelled them to see themselves as in a clear mirror, but the searching Word of God.

How powerful it is for conversion! It comes on board a man, and without asking any leave from him, it just puts its hand on the helm, and turns him round in the opposite direction from that in which he was going before; and the man gladly yields to the irresistible force which influences his understanding and rules his will. The Word of God is that by which sin is slain, and grace is born in the heart. It is the light which brings life with it.

How active and energetic it is, when the soul is convinced of sin, in bringing it forth into Gospel liberty! We have seen men shut up as in the devil's own dungeon, and we have tried to get them free. We have shaken the bars of iron, but we could not tear them out so as to set the captives at liberty. But the Word of the Lord is a great breaker of bolts and bars. It not only casts down the strongholds of doubt, but it cuts off the head of Giant Despair.[6] No cell or cellar in Doubting Castle can hold a soul in bondage when the Word of God, which is the master-key, is once put to its true use, and made to throw back bolts of despondency. It is living and energetic for encouragement and enlargement. O beloved, what a wonderful power the Gospel has to bring us comfort! It brought us to Christ at the first, and it still leads us to look to Christ till we grow like Him. God's children are not sanctified by legal methods, but by gracious ones. The Word of God, the Gospel of Christ, is exceedingly powerful in promoting sanctification, and bringing about that whole-hearted consecration which is both our duty and our privilege. May the Lord cause His Word to prove its power in us by its making us fruitful unto every good work to do His will! Through the "washing of water by the Word" (Eph 5:26)—that is, through the washing by the Word—may we be cleansed every day, and made to walk in white before the

Lord, adorning the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things!

The Word of God, then, is quick and powerful in our own personal experience, and we shall find it to be so if we use it in labouring to bless our fellowmen. Dear brethren, if you seek to do good in this sad world, and want a powerful weapon to work with, stick to the Gospel, the living Gospel, the old, old Gospel. There is a power in it sufficient to meet the sin and death of human nature. All the thoughts of men, use them as earnestly as you may, will be like tickling Leviathan with a straw. Nothing can get through the scales of this monster but the Word of God. This is a weapon made of sterner stuff than steel, and it will cut through coats of mail. Nothing can resist it. “Where the word of a king is, there is power.” About the Gospel, when spoken with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven, there is the same omnipotence as there was in the Word of God when in the beginning He spoke to the primeval darkness saying, “Let there be light,” and there was light (Gen 1:3). Oh how we ought to prize and love the revelation of God; not only because it is full of life, but because that life is exceedingly energetic and effectual, and operates so powerfully upon the lives and hearts of men!

It is cutting.

Next, the apostle tells us that this Word is *cutting*. “Cutting” would be as correct a translation as that of our own version: it is “more cutting than any two-edged sword.” I suppose the apostle means by the description “two-edged” that it is all edge. A sword with two edges has no blunt side: it cuts both this way and that. The revelation of God given us in Holy Scripture is edge all over. It is alive in every part, and in every part keen to cut the conscience and wound the heart. Depend upon it: there is not a superfluous verse in the Bible, nor a chapter that is useless. Doctors say of certain drugs that they are inert: they have no effect upon the system one way or the other. Now, there is not an inert passage in the Scriptures; every line has its virtues. Have you never heard of one who heard read, as the lesson for the Sabbath-day, that long chapter of names, wherein it is written that each patriarch lived so many hundred years, “…and he died”? Thus it ends the notice of the long life of Methusalah with “and he died.” The repetition of the words “and he died,” woke the thoughtless hearer to a sense of his mortality, and led to his coming to the Saviour. I should not wonder that, away there in the Chronicles, among those tough Hebrew names, there have been conversions wrought in cases unknown to us as yet.

Anyhow, any bit of Holy Writ is very dangerous to play with, and many a man has been wounded by the Scriptures when he has been idly or even profanely reading them. Doubters have meant to break the Word to pieces, and it has broken them. Yea, fools have taken up portions and studied them on purpose to ridicule them, and they have been sobered and vanquished by that which they repeated in sport. There was one who went to hear Mr. Whitefield—a member of the "Hell-fire Club," a desperate fellow. He stood up at the next meeting of his abominable associates, and he delivered Mr. Whitefield's sermon with wonderful accuracy, imitating his very tone and manner. In the middle of his exhortation he converted himself, and came to a sudden pause, sat down broken-hearted, and confessed the power of the Gospel. That club was dissolved. That remarkable convert was Mr. Thorpe of Bristol, whom God so greatly used afterwards in the salvation of others. I would rather have you read the Bible to mock at it than not read it at all. I would rather that you came to hear the Word of God out of hatred to it than that you never came at all.

The Word of God is so sharp a thing, so full of cutting power, that you may be bleeding under its wounds before you have seriously suspected the possibility of such a thing. You cannot come near the Gospel without its having a measure of influence over you; and, God blessing you, it may cut down and kill your sins when you have no idea that such a work is being done. Dear friends, have you not found the Word of God to be very cutting, more cutting than a two-edged sword, so that your heart has bled inwardly, and you have been unable to resist the heavenly stroke? I trust you and I may go on to know more and more of its edge till it has killed us outright, so far as the life of sin is concerned. Oh, to be sacrificed unto God, and His Word to be the sacrificial knife! Oh, that His Word were put to the throat of every sinful tendency, every sinful habit, and every sinful thought! There is no sin-killer like the Word of God. Wherever it comes, it comes as a sword, and inflicts death upon evil.

Sometimes when we are praying that we may feel the power of the Word we hardly know what we are praying for. I saw a venerable brother the other day, and he said to me, "I remember speaking with you when you were nineteen or twenty years of age, and I never forgot what you said to me. I had been praying with you in the prayer-meeting that God would give us the Holy Ghost to the full, and you said to me afterwards, 'My dear brother, do you know what you asked God for?' I answered 'Yes.' But you very solemnly said to me, 'The Holy Ghost is the Spirit of judgment and the Spirit of burning, and few are prepared for the inward conflict which is meant by these two words.'" My good old friend

told me that at the time he did not understand what I meant, but thought me a singular youth. “Ah!” said he, “I see it now, but it is only by a painful experience that I have come to the full comprehension of it.” Yes, when Christ comes, He comes not to send peace on the earth, but a sword (Mat 10:34); and that sword begins at home, in our own souls, killing, cutting, hacking, breaking in pieces. Blessed is that man who knows the Word of the Lord by its exceeding sharpness, for it kills nothing but that which ought to be killed. It quickens and gives new life to all that is of God; but the old depraved life that ought to die, it hews in pieces, as Samuel destroyed Agag before the Lord (1Sa 15:33). “For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword.”

It is piercing.

But I want you to notice next, that it has a further quality: it is *piercing*. While it has an edge like a sword, it has also a point like a rapier, “Piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit.” The difficulty with some men’s hearts is to get at them. In fact, there is no spiritually penetrating the heart of any natural man except by this piercing instrument, the Word of God. But the rapier of revelation will go through anything. Even when the “heart is as fat as grease,” as the Psalmist says, yet this Word will pierce it. Into the very marrow of the man the sacred truth will pass, and find him out in a way in which he cannot even find himself out. As it is with our own hearts, so it is with the hearts of other men. Dear friends, the Gospel can find its way anywhere. Men may wrap themselves up in prejudice, but this rapier can find out the joints of their harness; they may resolve not to believe and may feel content in their self-righteousness, but this piercing weapon will find its way. The arrows of the Word of God are sharp in the hearts of the King’s enemies, whereby the people fall under Him. Let us not be afraid to trust this weapon whenever we are called up to face the adversaries of the Lord Jesus. We can pin them, and pierce them, and finish them with this!

It is discriminating.

And next, the Word of God is said to be *discriminating*. It divides “asunder soul and spirit.” Nothing else could do that, for the division is difficult. In a great many ways writers have tried to describe the difference between soul and spirit, but I question whether they have succeeded. No doubt it is a very admirable definition to say, “The soul is the life of the natural man, and the spirit the life of

the regenerate or spiritual man." But it is one thing to *define* and quite another thing to *divide*.

We will not attempt to solve this metaphysical problem. God's Word comes in, and it shows man the difference between that which is of the soul, and that which is of the spirit; that which is of man, and that which is of God; that which is of grace, and that which is of nature. The Word of God is wonderfully decisive about this. Oh, how much there is of our religion that is—to quote a spiritual poet—"The child of nature finely-dressed, but not the living child": it is of the soul and not of the spirit! The Word of God lays down very straight lines, and separates between the natural and the spiritual, the carnal and the divine. You would think sometimes, from the public prayers and preaching of clergymen, that we were all Christian people; but Holy Scripture does not sanction this flattering estimate of our condition. When we are gathered together, [these false] prayers are for us *all*, and the preaching is for us all, as being all God's people—all born so, or made so by baptism, no question about that! Yet the way the Word of God takes is of quite another sort. It talks about the dead and the living; about the repentant and the impenitent; about the believing and the unbelieving; about the blind and the seeing; about those called of God and those who still lie in the arms of the wicked one. It speaks with keen discrimination, and separates the precious from the vile. I believe there is nothing in the world that divides congregations, as they ought to be divided, like the plain preaching of the Word of God.

This it is that makes our places of worship to be solemn spots, even as Dr. Watts (1674-1748) sings—

"Up to her courts with joys unknown
The holy tribes repair;
The Son of David holds his throne,
And sits in judgment there.

"He hears our praises and complaints;
And, while his awful voice
Divides the sinners from the saints,
We tremble and rejoice."

The Word of God is *discriminating.*

It is revealing.

Once more, the Word of God is marvelously revealing to the inner self. It pierces between the joints and marrow, and marrow is a thing not to be got at very readily. The Word of God gets at the very marrow of our manhood; it lays bare the secret thoughts of the soul. It is “a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.” Have you not often, in hearing the Word, wondered how the preacher could so unveil that which you had concealed? He says the very things in the pulpit that you had uttered in your bed-chamber. Yes, that is one of the marks of the Word of God: that it lays bare a man’s inmost secrets; yea, it discovers to him that which he had not even himself perceived. The Christ that is in the Word sees everything. Read the next verse: “All things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do” (Heb 4:13).

The Word not only lets you see what your thoughts are, but it criticizes your thoughts. The Word of God says of this thought, “it is vain,” and of that thought, “it is acceptable”; of this thought, “it is selfish,” and of that thought, “it is Christ-like.” It is a judge of the thoughts of men. And the Word of God is such a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart that when men twist about, and wind and wander, yet it tracks them. There is nothing so difficult to get at as a man. You may hunt a badger and run down a fox, but you cannot get at a man—he has so many doublings and hiding-places; yet the Word of God will dig him out, and seize on him. When the Spirit of God works with the Gospel, the man may dodge and twist, but the preaching goes to his heart and conscience, and he is made to feel it, and to yield to its force.

Many times, I do not doubt, dear brothers, you have found comfort in the discerning power of the Word. Unkind lips have found great fault with you; you have been trying to do what you could for the Lord, and an enemy has slandered you, and then it has been a delight to remember that the Master discerns your motive. Holy Scripture has made you sure of this by the way in which it understood and commended you. He discerns the true object of your heart and never misinterprets you, and this has inspired you with a firm resolve to be the faithful servant of so just a Lord. No slander will survive the judgment-seat of Christ. We are not to be tried by the opinions of men, but by the impartial Word of the Lord; and therefore we rest in peace!

II. Lessons from the Qualities of the Word

I have been all this while over the first part of the discourse. I have only a minute or two just to show one or two lessons we ought to gather from the qualities of the Word of God that I have described. The first is this: Brothers and sisters, let us *greatly reverence the Word of God*. If it be all this, let us read it, study it, prize it, and make it the man of our right hand. And you that are not converted, I do pray you treat the Bible with a holy love and reverence, and read it with the view of finding Christ and His salvation in it. Augustine (AD 354-430) used to say that the Scriptures are the swaddling-bands of the child Christ Jesus; while you are unrolling the bands I trust you will meet with Him.

Next, dear friends, let us, whenever we feel ourselves dead, and especially in prayer, *get close to the Word*, for the Word of God is alive. I do not find that gracious men always pray alike. Who could? When you have nothing to say to your God, let Him say something to you. The best private devotion is made up, half of searching Scripture in which God speaks to us, and the other half of prayer and praise, in which we speak to God. When thou art dead, turn from thy death to that Word which still lives.

Next, *whenever we feel weak in our duties, let us go the Word of God*, and the Christ in the Word, for power; and this will be the best of power. The power of our natural abilities, the power of our acquired knowledge, the power of our gathered experience, all these may be vanity; but the power that is in the Word will prove effectual. Get thou up from the cistern of thy failing strength to the fountain of omnipotence; for they that drink here—while the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall—"shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint (Isa 40:31).

Next, if you need as a minister or a worker, anything that will *cut your hearers to the heart*, go to this Book for it. I say this because I have known preachers try to use very cutting words of their own. God save us from that! When our hearts grow hot and our words are apt to be sharp as a razor, let us remember that "the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God" (Jam 1:20). Let us not attempt to carry on Christ's war with the weapons of Satan. There is nothing so cutting as the Word of God. Keep to that! I believe also that one of the best ways of convincing men of error is not so much to denounce the error, as to proclaim the truth more clearly. If a stick is very crooked, and you wish to prove that it is so, get a straight one, and quietly lay it down by its side—

and when men look they will surely see the difference. The Word of God has a very keen edge about it, and all the cutting words you want you had better borrow therefrom.

And next, the Word of God is *very piercing*. When we cannot get at people by God's truth, we cannot get at them at all. I have heard of preachers who have thought they ought to adapt themselves a little to certain people, and leave out portions of the truth that might be disagreeable. Brothers, if the Word of God will not pierce, our words will not, you may depend upon that. The Word of God is like the sword of Goliath, which has been laid up in the sanctuary, of which David said "There is none like that, give it me" (1Sa 21:9). Why did he like it so well? I think he liked it all the better because it had been laid up in the Holy Place by the priests; that is one thing. But I think he liked it best of all because it had stains of blood upon it—the blood of Goliath.

I like my own sword because it is covered with blood right up to the hilt: the blood of slaughtered sins, errors, and prejudices has made it like the sword of Don Rodrigo,[7] "of a dark and purple tint." The slain of the Lord have been many by the old Gospel. We point to many vanquished by this true Jerusalem blade. They desire me to use a new one; I have not tried it. What have I to do with a weapon that has seen no service? I have proved the Sword of the Lord, and of Gideon (Jdg 7:14), and I mean to keep to it. My dear comrades in arms, gird this sword about you, and disdain the wooden weapons with which enemies would delude you! Let us use this blade of steel, well tempered in the fire, against the most obstinate, for they cannot stand against it. They may resist it for a time, but they will have to yield. They had better make preparations for surrender; for if the Lord comes out against them with his own Word, they will have to give in, and cry to him for mercy.

Next, if we want to discriminate at any time between the soul and the spirit, and the joints and marrow, let us *go to the Word of God for discrimination*. We need to use the Word of God just now upon several subjects. There is that matter of holiness, upon which one saith one thing, and another another. Never mind what they all say, go to the Book, for this is the umpire on all questions. Amidst the controversies of the day about a thousand subjects, keep to this infallible Book, and it will guide you unerringly.

And lastly, since this Book is meant to be a discerner or critic of the thoughts and intents of the heart, *let the Book criticize us*. When you have issued a new volume from the press—which you do every day, for every day is a new treatise from the press of life—take it to this great critic, and let the Word of God judge

it. If the Word of God approves you, you are approved; if the Word of God disapproves you, you are disapproved! Have friends praised you? They may be your enemies in so doing. Have other observers abused you? They may be wrong or right, let the Book decide. A man of one Book—if that Book is the Bible—is a *man*, for he is a man of God. Cling you to the living Word, and let the Gospel of your fathers, let the Gospel of the martyrs, let the Gospel of the Reformers, let the Gospel of the blood-washed multitude before the throne of God, the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ—be your Gospel, and none but that. It will save you and make you the means of saving others, to the praise of God.

Portion of Scripture read before sermon: Psalm 119:105-120;
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3
How to Read the Bible

"Have ye not read?...have ye not read?...if ye had known what this meaneth."—Matthew 12:3-7

THE scribes and Pharisees were great readers of the Law. They studied the sacred books continually, poring over each word and letter. They made notes of very little importance, but still very curious notes—as to which was the middle verse of the entire Old Testament, which verse was half-way to the middle, and how many times such a word occurred, and even how many times a letter occurred, and the size of the letter, and its peculiar position. They have left us a mass of wonderful notes upon the mere words of Holy Scripture. They might have done the same thing upon another book for that matter, and the information would have been about as important as the facts that they have so industriously collected concerning the letter of the Old Testament.

They were, however, intense readers of the Law. They picked a quarrel with the Saviour upon a matter touching this Law, for they carried it at their fingers' ends, and were ready to use it as a bird of prey does its talons to tear and rend. Our Lord's disciples had plucked some ears of corn, and rubbed them between their hands. According to Pharisaic interpretation, to rub an ear of corn is a kind of threshing, and, as it is very wrong to thresh on the Sabbath day, therefore it must be very wrong to rub out an ear or two of wheat when you are hungry on the Sabbath morning. That was their argument, and they came to the Saviour with it, and with their version of the Sabbath Law.

The Saviour generally carried the war into the enemy's camp, and He did so on this occasion. He met them on their own ground, and He said to them, "Have ye not read?"—a cutting question to the scribes and Pharisees though there is nothing apparently sharp about it. It was a very fair and proper question to put to them. But only think of putting it to them. "Have ye not read?" "Read!" they could have said, "Why, we have read the book through very many times. We are always reading it. No passage escapes our critical eyes." Yet our Lord proceeds to put the question a second time. "Have ye not read?"—as if they had not read after all, though they were the greatest readers of the Law then living. He insinuates that they have not read at all; and then He gives them incidentally the

reason why He had asked them whether they had read. He says, “If ye had known what this meaneth,” as much as to say, “Ye have not read, because ye have not understood.” Your eyes have gone over the words, and you have counted the letters, and you have marked the position of each verse and word, and you have said learned things about all the books—and yet you are not even readers of the sacred volume, for you have not acquired the true art of reading. You do not understand, and therefore you do not truly read it. You are mere skimmers and glancers at the Word; you have not read it, for you do not understand it.

I. There Must Be an Understanding of the Scriptures.

That is the subject of our present discourse, or, at least, the first point of it, that in order to the true reading of the Scriptures, *there must be an understanding of them*. I scarcely need to preface these remarks by saying that we must read the Scriptures. You know how necessary it is that we should be fed upon the truth of holy Scripture. Need I suggest the question as to whether you do read your Bibles or not? I am afraid that this is a magazine reading age—a newspaper reading age, a periodical reading age—but not so much a Bible reading age as it ought to be.

In the old Puritanic times men used to have a scant supply of other literature, but they found a library enough in the one Book, the Bible. And how they did read the Bible! How little of Scripture there is in modern sermons compared with the sermons of those masters of theology, the Puritanic divines! Almost every sentence of theirs seems to cast side lights upon a text of Scripture; not only the one they are preaching about, but many others as well are set in a new light as the discourse proceeds. They introduce blended lights from other passages that are parallel or semi-parallel thereunto, and thus they educate their readers to compare spiritual things with spiritual.

I would to God that we ministers kept more closely to the grand old Book. We should be instructive preachers if we did so, even if we were ignorant of "modern thought," and were not "abreast of the times." I warrant you we should be leagues ahead of our times if we kept closely to the Word of God. As for you, my brothers and sisters who have not to preach, the best food for you is the Word of God itself. Sermons and books are well enough, but streams that run for a long distance above ground gradually gather for themselves somewhat of the soil through which they flow, and they lose the cool freshness with which they started from the spring head. Truth is sweetest where it breaks from the smitten Rock, for at its first gush it has lost none of its heavenliness and vitality. It is always best to drink at the well and not from the tank. You shall find that reading the Word of God for yourselves, reading it rather than notes upon it, is the surest way of growing in grace. Drink of the unadulterated milk of the Word of God, and not of the skim milk, or the milk and water of man's word.

But, now, beloved, our point is that much apparent Bible reading is not Bible reading at all. The verses pass under the eye, and the sentences glide over the mind, but there is no true reading. An old preacher used to say, the Word has

mighty free course among many nowadays, for it goes in at one of their ears and out at the other. So it seems to be with some readers: they can read a very great deal because they do not read anything. The eye glances but the mind never rests. The soul does not light upon the truth and stay there. It flits over the landscape as a bird might do, but it builds no nest therein, and finds no rest for the sole of its foot. Such reading is not *reading*. Understanding the meaning is the essence of true reading. Reading has a kernel to it, and the mere shell is little worth. In prayer there is such a thing as praying in prayer—a praying that is the bowels of the prayer. So in praise there is a praising in song, an inward fire of intense devotion which is the life of the hallelujah. It is so in fasting: there is a fasting that is not fasting, and there is an inward fasting, a fasting of the soul, that is the soul of fasting.

It is even so with the reading of the Scriptures. There is an interior reading, a kernel reading—a true and living reading of the Word. This is the soul of reading; and, if it be not there, the reading is a mechanical exercise and profits nothing. Now, beloved, unless we understand what we read we have not read it; the heart of the reading is absent. We commonly condemn the Romanists for keeping the daily service in the Latin tongue; yet it might as well be in the Latin language as in any other tongue if it be not understood by the people. Some comfort themselves with the idea that they have done a good action when they have read a chapter, into the meaning of which they have not entered at all; but does not nature herself reject this as a mere superstition? If you had turned the book upside down, and spent the same time in looking at the characters in that direction, you would have gained as much good from it as you will in reading it in the regular way without understanding it.

If you had a New Testament in Greek, it would be very Greek to some of you, but it would do you as much good to look at that as it does to look at the English New Testament—unless you read with an understanding heart. It is not the letter that saves the soul; the letter killeth in many senses, and never can it give life. If you harp on the letter alone, you may be tempted to use it as a weapon against the truth, as the Pharisees did of old; and your knowledge of the letter may breed pride in you to your destruction. It is the spirit, the real inner meaning, that is sucked into the soul, by which we are blessed and sanctified. We become saturated with the Word of God, like Gideon’s fleece, which was wet with the dew of heaven (Jdg 6:37-38); and this can only come to pass by our receiving it into our minds and hearts, accepting it as God’s truth, and so far understanding it as to delight in it. We must understand it, then, or else we have

not read it aright.

Certainly, the benefit of reading must come to the soul by the way of the understanding. When the high priest went into the holy place, he always lit the golden candlestick *before* he kindled the incense upon the brazen altar, as if to show that the mind must have illumination before the affections can properly rise towards their divine object. There must be knowledge of God before there can be love to God. There must be a knowledge of divine things, as they are revealed, before there can be an enjoyment of them. We must try to make out, as far as our finite mind can grasp it, what God means by this and what He means by that; otherwise we may kiss the book and have no love to its contents, we may reverence the letter and yet really have no devotion towards the Lord who speaks to us in these words. Beloved, you will never get comfort to your soul out of what you do not understand, nor find guidance for your life out of what you do not comprehend; nor can any practical bearing upon your character come out of that which is not understood by you.

Now, if we are thus to understand what we read or otherwise we read in vain, this shows us that when we come to the study of Holy Scripture we should try to have our mind well awake to it. We are not always fit, it seems to me, to read the Bible. At times it were well for us to stop before we open the volume. “Put off thy shoe from thy foot, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground” (Exo 3:5). You have just come in from careful thought and anxiety about your worldly business, and you cannot immediately take that book and enter into its heavenly mysteries. As you ask a blessing over your meat before you fall to, so it would be a good rule for you to ask a blessing on the Word before you partake of its heavenly food. Pray the Lord to strengthen your eyes before you dare to look into the eternal light of Scripture. As the priests washed their feet at the laver before they went to their holy work, so it were well to wash the soul’s eyes with which you look upon God’s Word, to wash even the fingers, if I may so speak—the mental fingers with which you will turn from page to page—that with a holy book you may deal after a holy fashion.

Say to your soul, “Come, soul, wake up: thou art not now about to read the newspaper; thou art not now perusing the pages of a human poet to be dazzled by his flashing poetry; thou art coming very near to God, who sits in the Word like a crowned monarch in his halls. Wake up, my glory; wake up, all that is within me. Though just now I may not be praising and glorifying God, I am about to consider that which should lead me so to do, and therefore it is an act of devotion. So be on the stir, my soul; be on the stir, and bow not sleepily before

the awful throne of the Eternal." Scripture reading is our spiritual meal time. Sound the gong and call in every faculty to the Lord's own table to feast upon the precious meat that is now to be partaken of; or, rather, ring the church-bell as for worship, for the studying of the Holy Scripture ought to be as solemn a deed as when we lift the psalm upon the Sabbath day in the courts of the Lord's house.

If these things be so, you will see at once, dear friends, that, if you are to understand what you read, you will need to *meditate* upon it. Some passages of Scripture lie clear before us, blessed shallows in which the lambs may wade; but there are deeps in which our mind might rather drown herself than swim with pleasure, if she came there without caution. There are texts of Scripture that are made and constructed on purpose to make us think. By this means, among others, our heavenly Father would educate us for heaven, by making us think our way into divine mysteries. Hence He puts the Word in a somewhat involved form to compel us to meditate upon it before we reach the sweetness of it. He might, you know, have explained it to us so that we might catch the thought in a minute, but He does not please to do so in every case. Many of the veils that are cast over Scripture are not meant to hide the meaning from the diligent, but to compel the mind to be active—for oftentimes the diligence of the heart in seeking to know the divine mind does the heart more good than the knowledge itself. Meditation and careful thought exercise us and strengthen the soul for the reception of the yet more lofty truths.

I have heard that the mothers in the Balearic Isles, in the old times, who wanted to bring their boys up to be good slingers, would put their dinners up above them where they could not get at them until they threw a stone and fetched them down. Our Lord wishes us to be good slingers, and He puts up some precious truth in a lofty place where we cannot get it down except by slinging at it—at last we hit the mark and find food for our souls. Then have we the double benefit of learning the art of meditation and partaking of the sweet truth that it has brought within our reach. We must meditate, brothers. These grapes will yield no wine till we tread upon them. These olives must be put under the wheel, and pressed again and again, that the oil may flow therefrom.

In a dish of nuts, you may know which nut has been eaten because there is a little hole that the insect has punctured through the shell—just a little hole, and then inside there is the living thing eating up the kernel. Well, it is a grand thing to bore through the shell of the letter, and then to live inside feeding upon the kernel. I would wish to be such a little worm as that, living within and upon the

Word of God, having bored my way through the shell, and having reached the innermost mystery of the blessed Gospel. The Word of God is always most precious to the man who most lives upon it.

As I sat last year under a wide-spreading beech, I was pleased to mark with prying curiosity the singular habits of that most wonderful of trees, which seems to have an intelligence about it which other trees have not. I wondered and admired the beech; but I thought to myself, I do not think half as much of this beech tree as yonder squirrel does. I see him leap from bough to bough, and I feel sure that he dearly values the old beech tree, because he has his home somewhere inside it in a hollow place. These branches are his shelter, and those beech-nuts are his food. He lives upon the tree. It is his world, his playground, his granary, his home; indeed, it is everything to him. [But] it is not so to me, for I find my rest and food elsewhere. With God's Word it is well for us to be like squirrels, living in it and living on it. Let us exercise our minds by leaping from bough to bough of it, find our rest and food in it, and make it our all in all. We shall be the people that get the profit out of it if we make it to be our food, our medicine, our treasury, our armoury, our rest, our delight. May the Holy Ghost lead us to do this and make the Word thus precious to our souls.

Beloved, I would next remind you that for this end we shall be compelled to *pray*. It is a grand thing to be driven to think, it is a grander thing to be driven to pray through having been made to think. Am I not addressing some of you who do not read the Word of God, and am I not speaking to many more who do read it, but do not read it with the strong resolve that they will understand it? I know it must be so. Do you wish to begin to be true readers? Will you henceforth labour to understand? Then you must get to your knees. You must cry to God for direction.

Who understands a book best? The author of it! If I want to ascertain the real meaning of a rather twisted sentence, and the author lives near me and I can call upon him, I shall ring at his door and say, "Would you kindly tell me what you mean by that sentence? I have no doubt whatever that it is very clear, but I am such a simpleton that I cannot make it out. I have not the knowledge and grasp of the subject that you possess, and therefore your allusions and descriptions are beyond my range of knowledge. It is quite within your range and commonplace to you, but it is very difficult to me. Would you kindly explain your meaning to me?" A good man would be glad to be thus treated, and would think it no trouble to unravel his meaning to a candid enquirer. Thus I should be sure to get the correct meaning, for I should be going to the fountain head when I consulted the

author himself.

So, beloved, the Holy Spirit is with us, and when we take His book and begin to read, and want to know what it means, we must ask the Holy Spirit to reveal the meaning. He will not work a miracle, but He will elevate our minds, and He will suggest to us thoughts that will lead us on by their natural relation, the one to the other, till at last we come to the pith and marrow of His divine instruction. Seek then very earnestly the guidance of the Holy Spirit, for if the very soul of reading be the understanding of what we read, then we must in prayer call upon the Holy Ghost to unlock the secret mysteries of the inspired Word.

If we thus ask the guidance and teaching of the Holy Spirit, it will follow, dear friends, that we shall be ready to use *all means and helps* towards the understanding of the Scriptures. When Philip asked the Ethiopian eunuch whether he understood the prophecy of Isaiah, he replied, “How can I, unless some man should guide me?” (Act 8:31). Then Philip went up and opened to him the Word of the Lord. Some, under the pretence of being taught of the Spirit of God, refuse to be instructed by books or by living men. This is no honouring of the Spirit of God; it is a disrespect to Him, for if He gives to some of His servants more light than to others—and it is clear he does—then they are bound to give that light to others, and to use it for the good of the church. But if the other part of the church refuse to receive that light, to what end did the Spirit of God give it? This would imply that there is a mistake somewhere in the economy of gifts and graces, which is managed by the Holy Spirit. It cannot be so.

The Lord Jesus Christ pleases to give more knowledge of His Word and more insight into it to some of His servants than to others, and it is ours joyfully to accept the knowledge that He gives in such ways as He chooses to give it. It would be most wicked of us to say, “We will not have the heavenly treasure which exists in earthen vessels. If God will give us the heavenly treasure out of His own hand, but not through the earthen vessel, we will have it. But we think we are too wise, too heavenly minded, too spiritual altogether to care for jewels when they are placed in earthen pots. We will not hear anybody, and we will not read anything except the book itself, neither will we accept any light, except that which comes in through a crack in our own roof. We will not see by another man’s candle, we would sooner remain in the dark.” Brethren, do not let us fall into such folly. Let the light come from God, and though a child shall bring it, we will joyfully accept it. If any one of His servants, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas, shall have received light from him, behold, “all are yours, and ye are Christ’s, and Christ is God’s” (1Co 3:23), and therefore accept of the light that

God has kindled, and ask for grace that you may turn that light upon the Word, so that when you read it you may understand it.

I do not wish to say much more about this, but I should like to push it home upon some of you. You have Bibles at home, I know; you would not like to be without Bibles—you would think you were heathens if you had no Bibles. You have them very neatly bound, and they are very fine looking volumes, not much thumbed, not much worn, and not likely to be so, for they only come out on Sundays for an airing, and they lie in lavender with the clean pocket handkerchiefs all the rest of the week. You do not read the Word, you do not search it, and how can you expect to get the divine blessing? If the heavenly gold is not worth digging for, you are not likely to discover it.

Often and often have I told you that the searching of the Scriptures is not the way of salvation. The Lord hath said, “Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved” (Act 16:31). But still, the reading of the Word often leads, like the hearing of it, to faith, and faith bringeth salvation; for faith cometh by hearing (Rom 10:17), and reading is a sort of hearing. While you are seeking to know what the Gospel is, it may please God to bless your souls. But what poor reading some of you give to your Bibles! I do not want to say anything that is too severe because it is not strictly true—let your own consciences speak—but still, I make bold to enquire: Do not many of you read the Bible in a very hurried way, just a little bit, and off you go? Do you not soon forget what you have read, and lose what little effect it seemed to have? How few of you are resolved to get at its soul, its juice, its life, its essence, and to drink in its meaning. Well, if you do not do that, I tell you again your reading is miserable reading, dead reading, unprofitable reading; it is not reading at all, the name would be misapplied. May the blessed Spirit give you repentance touching this thing.

II. Seek Out the Spiritual Teaching of the Word.

But now, secondly, and very briefly, let us notice that in reading we ought to *seek out the spiritual teaching* of the Word. I think that is in my text, because our Lord says, “Have ye not read?” Then, again, “Have ye not read?” And then He says, “If ye had known what this meaneth”—and the meaning is something very spiritual. The text He quoted was, “I will have mercy, and not sacrifice”—a text out of the prophet Hosea (6:6). Now, the scribes and Pharisees were all for the letter: the sacrifice, the killing of the bullock, and so on. They overlooked the spiritual meaning of the passage, “I will have mercy, and not sacrifice”—namely, that God prefers that we should care for our fellow-creatures rather than that we should observe any ceremonial of His Law, so as to cause hunger or thirst, and thereby death, to any of the creatures that His hands have made. They ought to have passed beyond the outward into the spiritual, and all our readings ought to do the same.

Notice, that this should be the case when we read the *historical passages*. “Have ye not read what David did, when he was an hungered, and they that were with him; how he entered into the house of God, and did eat the shew-bread, which was not lawful for him to eat, neither for them which were with him, but only for the priests?” (Mat 12:4). This was a piece of history, and they ought so to have read it as to have found spiritual instruction in it. I have heard very stupid people say, “Well, I do not care to read the historical parts of Scripture.” Beloved friends, you do not know what you are talking about when you say so.

I say to you now by experience that I have sometimes found even a greater depth of spirituality in the histories than I have in the Psalms. You will say, “How is that?” I assert that when you reach the inner and spiritual meaning of a history you are often surprised at the wondrous clearness, the realistic force, with which the teaching comes home to your soul. Some of the most marvelous mysteries of revelation are better understood by being set before our eyes in the histories than they are by the verbal declaration of them. When we have the statement to explain the illustration, the illustration expands and vivifies the statement.

For instance, when our Lord himself would explain to us what faith was, He sent us to the history of the brazen serpent (Num 21:9). And who that has ever read the story of the brazen serpent has not felt that he has had a better idea of faith through the picture of the dying snake-bitten persons looking to the serpent

of brass and living, than from any description that even Paul has given us, [as] wondrously as he defines and describes. Never, I pray you, depreciate the historical portions of God's Word, but when you cannot get good out of them, say, "That is my foolish head and my slow heart. O Lord, be pleased to clear by brain and cleanse my soul." When He answers that prayer you will feel that every portion of God's Word is given by inspiration, and is and must be profitable to you. Cry, "Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law" (Psa 119:18).

Just the same thing is true with regard to all the *ceremonial precepts*, because the Saviour goes on to say, "Have ye not read in the law, how that on the Sabbath days the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath, and are blameless?" There is not a single precept in the old Law but has an inner sense and meaning. Therefore, do not turn away from Leviticus, or say, "I cannot read these chapters in the books of Exodus and Numbers. They are all about the tribes and their standards, the stations in the wilderness and the halts of the march, the tabernacle and furniture, or about golden knops and bowls, and boards, and sockets, and precious stones, and blue and scarlet and fine linen." No, but look for the inner meaning. Make thorough search; for as in a king's treasure that which is the most closely locked up and the hardest to come at, is the choicest jewel of the treasure, so is it with the Holy Scriptures.

Did you ever go to the British Museum Library? There are many books of reference there that the reader is allowed to take down when he pleases. There are other books for which he must write a ticket, and he cannot get them without the ticket. But they have certain choice books that you will not see without a special order, and then there is an unlocking of doors, and an opening of cases, and there is a watcher with you while you make your inspection. You are scarcely allowed to put your eye on the manuscript, for fear you should blot a letter out by glancing at it—it is such a precious treasure; there is not another copy of it in all the world, and so you cannot get at it easily. Just so, there are choice and precious doctrines of God's Word that are locked up in such cases as Leviticus or Solomon's Song, and you cannot get at them without a deal of unlocking of doors; and the Holy Spirit Himself must be with you, or else you will never come at the priceless treasure. The higher truths are as choicely hidden away as the precious regalia[8] of princes; therefore, search as well as read. Do not be satisfied with a ceremonial precept till you reach its spiritual meaning, for that is true reading. You have not read till you understand the spirit of the matter.

It is just the same with the *doctrinal statements* of God's Word. I have sorrowfully observed some persons who are very orthodox, and who can repeat their creed very glibly, and yet the principal use that they make of their orthodoxy is to sit and watch the preacher with the view of framing a charge against him. He has uttered a single sentence that is judged to be half a hair's breadth below the standard! "That man is not sound. He said some good things, but he is rotten at the core, I am certain. He used an expression that was not eighteen ounces to the pound." Sixteen ounces to the pound are not enough for these dear brethren of whom I speak, they must have something more and over and above the shekel of the sanctuary. Their knowledge is used as a microscope to magnify trifling differences.

I hesitate not to say that I have come across persons who "Could a hair divide betwixt the west and north-west side" in matters of divinity, but who know nothing about the things of God in their real meaning. They have never drank them into their souls, but only sucked them up into their mouths to spit them out on others. The doctrine of election is one thing, but to know that God has predestinated *you*, and to have the fruit of it in the good works to which you are ordained, is quite another thing. To talk about the love of Christ, to talk about the heaven that is provided for His people, and such things—all this is very well, but this may be done without any personal acquaintance with them. Therefore, beloved, never be satisfied with a sound creed, but desire to have it graven on the tablets of your heart. The doctrines of grace are good, but the grace of the doctrines is better still. See that you have it, and be not content with the idea that you are instructed, until you so understand the doctrine that you have felt its spiritual power.

This makes us feel that, in order to come to this, we shall need to feel *Jesus present with us* whenever we read the Word. Mark that fifth verse, which I would now bring before you as part of my text that I have hitherto left out. "Have ye not read in the law, how on the Sabbath days the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath, and are blameless? But I say unto you, That in this place is one greater than the temple." Ay, they thought much about the letter of the Word, but they did not know that He was there who is the Sabbath's Master—man's Lord and the Sabbath's Lord, and Lord of everything. Oh, when you have got hold of a creed, or of an ordinance, or anything that is outward in the letter, pray the Lord to make you feel that there is something greater than the printed book, and something better than the mere shell of the creed. There is one person greater than they all, and to Him we should cry that He may be ever with us. Oh living

Christ, make this a living word to me. Thy Word is life, but not without the Holy Spirit. I may know this book of thine from beginning to end, and repeat it all from Genesis to Revelation, and yet it may be a dead book, and I may be a dead soul. But, Lord, be present here, then will I look up from the book to the Lord—from the precept to Him who fulfilled it, from the Law to Him who honoured it, from the threatening to Him who has borne it for me, and from the promise to Him in whom it is "Yea and amen."

Ah, then we shall read the book so differently. He is here with me in this chamber of mine; I must not trifle. He leans over me; He puts His finger along the lines; I can see His pierced hand—I will read it as in His presence. I will read it knowing that He is the substance of it, that He is the proof of this book as well as the writer of it—the sum of this Scripture as well as the author of it. That is the way for true students to become wise! You will get at the soul of Scripture when you can keep Jesus with you while you are reading.

Did you never hear a sermon as to which you felt that if Jesus had come into that pulpit while the man was making his oration, He would have said, "Go down, go down; what business have you here? I sent you to preach about Me, and you preach about a dozen other things. Go home and learn of Me, and then come and talk." That sermon which does not lead to Christ, or of which Jesus Christ is not the top and the bottom, is a sort of sermon that will make the devils in hell to laugh, but might make the angels of God to weep, if they were capable of such emotion. You remember the story I told you of the Welshman who heard a young man preach a very fine sermon, a grand sermon, a highfaluting, spread-eagle sermon. And when he had done, he asked the Welshman what he thought of it. The man replied that he did not think anything of it. "And why not?" "Because there was no Jesus Christ in it." "Well," said he, "but my text did not seem to run that way." "Never mind," said the Welshman, "your sermon ought to run that way." "I do not see that, however," said the young man. "No," said the other, "you do not see how to preach yet. This is the way to preach. From every little village in England—it does not matter where it is—there is sure to be a road to London. Though there may not be a road to certain other places, there is certain to be a road to London. Now, from every text in the Bible there is a road to Jesus Christ, and the way to preach is just to say, 'How can I get from this text to Jesus Christ?' and then go preaching all the way along it." "Well, but," said the young man, "suppose I find a text that has not got a road to Jesus Christ." "I have preached for forty years," said the old man, "and I have never found such a Scripture, but if I ever do find one I will go over hedge and ditch but what I will

get to Him, for I will never finish without bringing in my Master."

Perhaps you will think that I have gone a little over hedge and ditch tonight, but I am persuaded that I have not, for the sixth verse comes in here. [It] brings our Lord in most sweetly, setting Him in the very forefront of you Bible readers, so that you must not think of reading without feeling that He is there who is Lord and Master of everything that you are reading, and who shall make these things precious to you if you realize Him in them. If you do not find Jesus in the Scriptures, they will be of small service to you, for what did our Lord Himself say? "Ye search the Scriptures, for in them ye think ye have eternal life, but ye will not come unto me that ye might have life" (Joh 5:39-40). And therefore your searching comes to nothing; you find no life, and remain dead in your sins. May it not be so with us!

III. Such a Reading of Scripture Is Profitable.

Lastly, such a reading of Scripture, as implies the understanding of and the entrance into its spiritual meaning, and the discovery of the divine Person who is the spiritual meaning, is profitable**,** for here our Lord says, “If ye had known what this meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice, ye would not have condemned the guiltless” (Mat 12:7). It will save us from making a great many mistakes if we get to understand the Word of God, and among other good things we shall not condemn the guiltless.

I have no time to enlarge upon these benefits, but I will just say, putting all together, that the diligent reading of the Word of God with the strong resolve to get at its meaning often *begets spiritual life*. We are begotten by the Word of God; it is the instrumental means of regeneration. Therefore, love your Bibles! Keep close to your Bibles. You seeking sinners, you who are seeking the Lord, your first business is to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ; but while you are yet in darkness and in gloom, oh, love your Bibles and search them! Take them to bed with you, and when you wake up in the morning, if it is too early to go downstairs and disturb the house, get half-an-hour of reading upstairs. Say, “Lord, guide me to that text that shall bless me. Help me to understand how I, a poor sinner, can be reconciled to Thee.”

I recollect how, when I was seeking the Lord, I went to my Bible and to Baxter’s *Call to the Unconverted*, and to Alleine’s (1634-1668) *Alarm*, and Doddridge’s (1702-1751) *Rise and Progress*, for I said in myself, “I am afraid that I shall be lost, but I will know the reason why. I am afraid I never shall find Christ, but it shall not be for want[9] of looking for Him.” That fear used to haunt me, but I said, “I will find Him if He is to be found. I will read. I will think.” There was never a soul that did sincerely seek for Jesus in the Word but, by-and-by, he stumbled on the precious truth that Christ was near at hand, and did not want any looking for; that He was really there—only they, poor blind creatures, were in such a maze that they could not just then see Him. Oh, cling you to Scripture. Scripture is not Christ, but it is the silken clue that will lead you to Him. Follow its leadings faithfully.

When you have received regeneration and a new life, keep on reading, because it will *comfort* you. You will see more of what the Lord has done for you. You will learn that you are redeemed, adopted, saved, sanctified. Half the errors in the world spring from people not reading their Bibles. Would anybody

think that the Lord would leave any one of His dear children to perish, if he read such a text as this—"I give unto my sheep eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand" (Joh 10:28)? When I read that, I am sure of the final perseverance of the saints. Read, then, the Word and it will be much for your comfort.

It will be for your *nourishment*, too. It is your food as well as your life. Search it, and you will grow strong in the Lord and in the power of His might (Eph 6:10).

It will be for your *guidance* also. I am sure those go rightest who keep closest to the book. Oftentimes when you do not know what to do, you will see a text leaping up out of the book, and saying, "Follow me." I have seen a promise sometimes blaze out before my eyes, just as when an illuminated device flames forth upon a public building. One touch of flame and a sentence or a design flashes out in gas. I have seen a text of Scripture flame forth in that way to my soul; I have known that it was God's Word to me, and I have gone on my way rejoicing.

And, oh, you will get a thousand helps out of that wondrous book if you do but read it; for, understanding the words more, you will prize it more, and as you get older, the book will grow with your growth—and turn out to be a grey-beard's manual of devotion just as it was aforetime a child's sweet story book. Yes, it will always be a new book, just as new a Bible as it was printed yesterday, and nobody had ever seen a word of it till now; and yet it will be a deal more precious for all the memories that cluster round it. As we turn over its pages, how sweetly do we recollect passages in our history that will never be forgotten to all eternity, but will stand for ever intertwined with gracious promises. Beloved, the Lord teach us to read His book of life that He has opened before us here below, so that we may read our titles clear in that other book of love that we have not seen as yet, but which will be opened at the last great day. The Lord be with you, and bless you.

Portion of Scripture read before sermon: Psalm 119:97-112
Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Vol. 25, No. 1503

[1] **epitome** – a brief summary of something containing its essential points.
[2] **Calvinism** – a term applied to the historic theology of the Reformation, upheld by Martin Luther, John Knox, the Westminster Assembly (1643-1649), and the founders of the Southern Baptist Convention in the USA.
[3] **Athanasius** (c. 295-373) – Bishop of Alexandria, Egypt; defender of the deity of Christ at the council of Niceae. He was the 20th bishop of Alexandria (c. 328 - 373). He was a renowned Christian theologian and the chief defender of Trinitarianism against Arianism, at the First Council of Nicaea in 325 (Arius denied that Jesus is deity). The creed attributed to his name was the first to identify and uphold the doctrine of the Trinity.
[4] **Catholic** – universal; applying to all men.
[5] **venial** – unimportant; excusable.
[6] **Giant Despair** – character from Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, who rules in Doubting Castle, where Christian found himself imprisoned after leaving the strait and narrow way commanded him.
[7] **Don Rodrigo** – in the 8th century, the last Visigothic king of Spain, based in Toledo.
[8] **regalia** – emblems and symbols of royalty, such as crown or scepter.
[9] **want** – lack.

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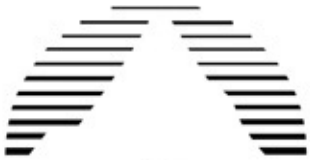
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