

# The Condition of Men Without the Bible.

by Edward Payson

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*The Bible is essential for understanding the origin of the world, the existence of God, the nature of right and wrong, and the hope of happiness after death.*

**Scripture:** Psalm 14:1, Proverbs 3:5, John 14:6, Romans 1:20, 1 Corinthians 15:16, 2 Timothy 3:16

**Topics:** "Biblical Authority", "Spiritual Guidance"

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## Description

Edward Payson preaches about the vital importance of the Bible, emphasizing that without it, humanity would be left in total ignorance about the origin of the world, the knowledge of God, the existence of a future state, the distinction between right and wrong, and the hope of immortality. He warns against the consequences of rejecting the Bible, highlighting the despair, darkness, and lack of consolation that would prevail without its guidance and promises. Payson urges believers to value and study the Bible diligently, recognizing it as an invaluable gift from God that provides light, peace, hope, and eternal truths.

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## Transcript

"If the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised: and if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins. Then they also, which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished."

1 Corinthians 15:16-18

is often pretended, by those who receive not the truth as it is in Jesus, that all the religious errors and mistakes, which prevail among Christian nations, are occasioned by the want of some infallible living teacher, to whom men might apply for instruction, in all doubtful cases; and from whose decisions there should be no appeal. But to suppose that errors and differences of opinion respecting religion are occasioned by this, is a mistake. This is evident from the fact, that while the apostles, who were inspired and infallible teachers, remained on earth, errors and mistakes prevailed among professing Christians no less than they do now.

Some, for instance, were found in the Corinthian church who denied the resurrection of the dead. With a view to convince them that this opinion was erroneous, St. Paul here mentions some of the fatal consequences which would result from its being true. If the dead rise not, says he, then is not Christ raised; and if Christ be not raised, our preaching is vain, your faith is also vain, ye are yet in your sins. Then also they that have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. My friends, the mode of reasoning, which St.

Paul here adopts with respect to one important doctrine of revelation, I wish to adopt with respect to the whole of revelation. I wish to show you what would be our situation without the Bible; what would be the consequence, if it could be proved that the Bible is not a revelation from God. This, I suspect, is a subject to which you have not sufficiently attended. I suspect that some of you, who secretly hope, or at least wish, that the Bible may prove false, are not aware what would be the consequences, could your wishes be gratified.

I suspect that others, who feel convinced of its truth, are not sufficiently sensible of the worth of such a revelation, and, of course, are not sufficiently grateful for it. Favor me then with your attention, while I attempt to show what would be our situation without the Bible; what the consequences of its being proved to be false. I. If we had no Bible, or if the Bible could be proved to be false, we should be entirely ignorant of the origin of our race, and of the world which we inhabit.

I need not remind you, that this is the only book which even pretends to give us any authentic or satisfactory information on this subject. Indeed it is evident from the nature of things, that nothing can be known by us respecting the formation of the world, except it be communicated by revelation; since no human being could then be alive to witness that event, or to transmit to us any information respecting it. Nor could the first individuals of our race know anything of the cause to which they were indebted for their existence, unless a knowledge of it were communicated to them by immediate revelation.

Nay more, not only all the knowledge we have of the origin of the world, but all the information which we possess respecting the history of mankind for many ages, is contained in the Bible. No uninspired history, on which the smallest reliance can be placed, pretends to relate any event which occurred more than three thousand years ago, unless we except the history of Josephus, a Jewish writer, whose information was evidently derived from the Scriptures. If then we renounce the Scriptures, we must be content to remain in total ignorance of the origin of the world, of its inhabitants, and of everything respecting them which occurred more than three thousand years ago.

If it be said, that reason, unenlightened by revelation, might have inferred that the world and its inhabitants must have had a Creator, --I answer, it is true that, if the minds of men had not been blinded by sin, they might have discovered this truth; but it is certain that they never did discover it. On the contrary, whenever they have attempted, as they often have done, to account for the existence of the world and its inhabitants, they have run into the grossest and most ridiculous absurdities.

For instance, one of the most acute philosophical authors of antiquity, writing on this subject, informs us, that an infinite number of atoms had existed from all eternity; that, some how or other these atoms were put in motion, and that while moving about they happened to come together and form a world, out of which plants, animals and men spontaneously sprung up. But perhaps some will say, these were the sentiments of men in the early and ignorant ages of the world. Since reason has been more cultivated, and learning has increased, men know better than to believe such absurdities.

We will reply to this remark, by giving you a modern theory respecting the formation of the world; a theory, which has been invented, published and defended within a few years, by some of the most learned philosophers of the age. According to this theory, the sun had either existed from all eternity, or was formed, nobody knows how, and a comet made and put in motion in a similar way, passing by the sun, struck off a large piece of it by a blow of its tail, and by the same blow communicated to the piece thus struck off, a rotary motion, which caused it to revolve till it acquired a globular form.

All this happened many millions of years ago, and during this period, the new-made world, being made to revolve round the sun, collected all the particles of dust which came in its way, till it had acquired soil sufficient to support plants, animals and men, which sprung up upon it, one after the other. In a similar way, all other planets were formed. As to the moon, that was once a part of this world, and was blown out of it by a tremendous volcano, whose fires are now quenched.

Indeed, others suppose that this world and all the planets were, in a similar manner, blown out of the sun. Such, my hearers, are the theories of those whom the world styles philosophers; such the absurdities into which grave and learned men are left to fall, when they renounce the Scriptures. And if we renounce the Scriptures, what can we do better than adopt some of these theories. Human reason unenlightened by revelation, can invent no better, no more plausible way of accounting for the creation of the world and its inhabitants.

If you ask, why can not men without the Bible allow that there is a God, who created all things? I answer, --I am not obliged to show why they cannot. It is sufficient for me to show, that, without a revelation, they do not, and never have done this. This it is easy to show. It is easy to prove, by appealing to history and to facts, that no nation under heaven, either in the first ages, or the present day, has been able to form a rational, or even a plausible conjecture, respecting the origin of the world; much less to arrive at anything that could be called knowledge on this subject.

Perhaps, however, the reason of this will appear from the next remark, to which I propose to call your attention, which is this: II. If we had no Bible, or if the Bible could be proved to be false, we should have no knowledge of God, not even of his existence. What strange, absurd and contradictory opinions have in all ages been entertained, on this subject, by those who were destitute of revelation, we endeavored to show you on the last Lord's day. Without a revelation, no man, nor body of men has ever been able to ascertain even the existence of one supreme, self-existent God; much less have they been able to discover his moral character, perfections and designs.

Even if it should be allowed that a few individuals have formed conjectures on this subject, which had borne some faint resemblance to the truth, yet it would be highly improper to dignify those conjectures with the name of knowledge. It is true that the existence, and some of the natural perfections of God might have been inferred from the works of creation, had not mankind been blinded by sinful prejudice and ignorance; for the apostle informs us, that the invisible things of God are clearly to be seen from the foundation of the world, being understood by the things that are made; and hence he concludes that the heathen are without excuse.

But though the invisible things of God might have been seen and understood in the contemplation of his works, it is certain they never were seen or understood in any degree by those who are destitute of the Bible; for they have all been either atheists or polytheists; have either denied the existence of God; or believed in many gods. And even if men had discovered the existence and natural perfections of God, without a revelation, they must still have been entirely ignorant of his moral character, and of his design in creating the world; for, as we lately observed, no creature could have penetrated into his mind or into his heart, to discover what is there.

To say all in a word; God alone knows himself, his designs, his will, or what will please him. He alone, therefore, can communicate a knowledge of these things to us; and this knowledge can be communicated only by a revelation, or, in other words, only by the Bible, since we have no other book that even pretends

to be a revelation from him. Take away the Bible then, and you take away all knowledge of God, and leave us nothing but errors, dreams, and fables. And would this be a small evil?

Surely, if any knowledge can be of importance to mankind, it must be a knowledge of the being who created them, and on whom they are of course entirely dependent. This will appear still more evident, if we consider that, without a knowledge of God, we cannot know what will please, or what will displease him; how he is to be worshipped, or whether he is to be worshipped at all. All these subjects, indeed every subject connected with God, is at once wrapped up in impenetrable darkness, if the Scriptures be false.

III. If we had not the Bible, or if the Bible should be proved to be false, we could not rationally, or even plausibly account for the existence and prevalence of natural and moral evil in the world. We see that there is, and for many ages has been, much of both. We know that, from the remotest period to which history extends, the world has been full of discord, wars, confusion and misery. And that whenever men have not been restrained by human laws, they have harassed and destroyed each other like wild beasts.

We see that the malignant passions, by which these evils are occasioned, begin to appear in children at a very early age. And we know that all men are subject to pain, disease and death. Now how shall we account for these things? The Scriptures account for them in a manner which, if it does not satisfy us, is at least plain and intelligible. They teach us that death is the consequence of sin, and that all our distresses are to be traced to the same source. But if we reject the account which they give, we cannot form even a plausible conjecture respecting this subject; but must be content to live in darkness, uncertainty, and perplexity.

If it be said, this is of little consequence; I answer, it is of the greatest consequence. A knowledge of the nature of moral evil, and of the causes of natural evil, is necessary to enable us to escape from either. This knowledge is therefore absolutely requisite to our happiness. But perhaps it will be said that the surest way, and indeed the only way to secure happiness, is to avoid what is wrong and do what is right, and that mankind might easily learn this without the Bible.

To this I reply, by observing, IV. That if we had no Bible, or if the Bible should be proved false, men could never know what is right or wrong, or even whether there is any such thing as right and wrong. The terms, right and wrong, always have reference to some rule. What agrees with this rule, is said to be right, and what disagrees with it, is said to be wrong. We must then have some rule, by which to judge, before we can decide whether any conduct is right or wrong. But if you take away the Bible, we have no rule by which to judge.

If any deny this, I ask them where any rule is to be found, except in the Bible? If you refer me to human laws, --I reply, these laws differ widely in different ages and parts of the world. What is required by the laws of one age or country, is forbidden by those of another. Since these human laws differ among themselves, and are continually changing, they can never be a safe, unerring rule by which to decide what is right or wrong. Will you then refer me to human reason, or to conscience, for a rule?

But the understandings and consciences of men differ as widely as do their laws. What seems reasonable to one, seems unreasonable to another. What one man's conscience approves, as a correct, praiseworthy action, another's conscience condemns as a heinous crime. But perhaps you will say, that is right which tends to produce happiness, while that which tends to occasion misery is wrong. But who can tell what does tend to produce happiness or misery? Every action draws after it a long train of consequences or effects.

Some of these consequences may be productive of happiness, and others of misery; and unless we could foresee all future events, we cannot tell whether any given action will produce happiness or misery on the whole. Besides, men are very far from being agreed in their opinions respecting happiness. One places it in one thing, another in something else very different. This rule is therefore insufficient in itself, and its application is impracticable. Will you then say, the will of God must be the only rule of right and wrong?

True: but remember, that without the Bible we know nothing of God, and, of course, nothing of his will. If then we renounce the Bible, we renounce the only rule by which we call distinguish right from wrong, or prove that there is any such thing as either. The universe is left without a moral governor, and right and wrong, virtue and vice, holiness and sin, are mere names; there is no reason to expect that the good will ever be rewarded, or the wicked punished. Every man is at liberty to do that which is right in his own eyes.

V. If we were without the Bible, or if the Bible could be proved to be false, we should know nothing of a future state, or of the immortality of the soul. Reason, my friends, call never prove that the soul is immortal, or that the body will be raised again. This is evident from the facts, that she never has been able to discover either of these truths, and that even at the present day, many learned men deny them both. It is not long since the representatives of a numerous civilized nation ordered the words, death is an eternal sleep, to be inserted over the portals of their graveyards.

Indeed, if there be a future state, an eternal world, into which the soul enters after death, no one but all inhabitant of that world call assure us of the fact; for it is not an object of our senses, nor can it be discovered by reasoning. All that men ever have done, all that they can do, without a revelation from God, is to conjecture, or at most to suppose it probable, that there is a future state, and that the soul is immortal. But these conjectures and surmises are of no use.

They are too weak to build upon. In fact, they only serve to produce uneasiness and anxiety in the prospect of death; for while they lead then to suspect that there possibly may be a future state, they can afford them no shadow of information respecting that state. They cannot tell us whether we shall be happy or miserable there. And if we reflect calmly on the subject, we shall find much more reason to fear misery, than to hope for happiness in a future state. We find this world full of evils.

We suffer much in passing through it; we find the causes of these evils and sufferings deeply rooted in our nature. We see most of those who die, appear to die in pain. Who then can assure us, or what reason have we to hope, that the other world will be less full of evil than this; that we shall not suffer there as much or more than we suffer here; that the seeds of sorrow and suffering, which are sown in our nature, will be eradicated; that those who die in pain will, after death, taste nothing but pleasure?

My friends, without the Bible, we can have no reason to hope for happiness after death. The best we can rationally hope for, if the Bible be false, is to die like the brutes, to plunge into the gulf of annihilation. In fact, this is all which those, who reject the Bible, usually do hope for; and even their hope of this, if that may be called hope which seems more like despair, is not infrequently mingled with distressing fears of something worse. And as annihilation is the best fate we call rationally expect for ourselves, if the Bible be false, so it is the best which we can suppose to have happened to our departed friends.

Yes, if the Bible be not true, you play well sorrow over their remains, as those that have no hope. You will never see them again. Their minds, as well as their bodies, are dead. All that once pleased and delighted you, all that excited your admiration, or engaged your affections, is put out, like last night's lamp, quenched in everlasting night. This too, if the Bible be not true, is, for aught you can tell, the fate of all who

have gone before us. They who have fallen asleep in Christ are perished.

The good and the bad, they who while alive ravaged, and they who blessed the world; they who expired uttering the language of execration and despair, and they whose expiring lips poured forth the seraphic strains of that heaven which they saw opening to their view, have all sunk down alike into eternal darkness and insensibility. But why do I talk of heaven? If the Bible be not true, there is no heaven, --none for us, none of which we know anything. Life and immortality have never been brought to light.

He who professed to reveal them, and who called himself the Saviour of the world, was an imposter; the Gospel of salvation, the only real glad tidings which ever vibrated upon mortal man, is a cheat; the apostles who preached it, and the martyrs who sealed it with their blood, were deluded; and all the apparent holiness which it has produced in life, and all the joy and triumph which its disciples have expressed at death, were nothing but the effects of superstition and enthusiasm.

But this is not all; for, VI. If the Bible be not true, we are not only deprived of all hope of a future life, but of all consolation under the afflictions of the present. To support us under these afflictions, we have nothing that deserves the name of consolation, except what is drawn from the Bible. We are there taught, that the Lord reigns, that nothing happens by chance; that all creatures and works are under the superintendence of an infinitely wise, just, and good being, who will bring good out of evil, who will make all things work together for good to them that love him, and cause their light afflictions, which endure but for a moment, to work out for them a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.

We are taught, that as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him; that in the person of his Son, our Saviour, we have a friend who can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, and that he is our surety for the fulfillment of all those exceedingly great and precious promises, with which the Scriptures are filled. When we turn from our own personal sorrows to contemplate the miseries of our wretched race, we are consoled by assurances, that the world shall not always continue in its present wretched state; that the dawn of a glorious day is at hand; a day, in which the knowledge of God shall cover the earth, even as the waters cover the seas; in which the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of our Lord and Saviour, who shall reign forever; a day in which men shall beat their swords into plough-shares and their spears into pruning hooks, and learn war no more; a day in which righteousness and peace and holy joy shall universally prevail.

But if the Bible be not true, all these springs of consolation are dried up in a moment. Then all things are governed by chance, or by some agent of whom we know nothing, and who, for aught we can tell, may be feeble, unjust or cruel, and take delight in the misery of his creatures. Then we have no ground to hope, that good will ever be brought out of evil, or that any of our afflictions will be productive of the smallest advantage, either to ourselves or to others. Then we have no Father, no Saviour, no friend above to pity our sorrows, to hear our complaints, to support us by his power, or to guide us by his wisdom.

What is still more discouraging, we have no reason to hope that the situation of our wretched race will ever be ameliorated, or their miseries ever come to an end. Nothing can be rationally anticipated, but an endless succession of the same crimes, wars, revolutions and convulsions, which have so long filled the world with blood, and the hearts of its inhabitants with anguish; for there is not the smallest reason to suppose, that mankind are really wiser or better now, than they were thirty centuries ago.

If at present any appearances, which encourage us to hope for the prevalence of peace, are to be seen, they are occasioned solely by the influence of the Bible. But if this be false, its influence cannot long

continue to operate. Men will burst its bands, and go on as before. Despair then, you, who sorrow, for you never will be comforted. Despair ye, who weep for the miseries of man; for there is no hope that they will ever end. Despair ye, who are looking with anxious eyes for the dawn of a brighter day; for no day is ever to dawn on this wretched world.

There is no star of Bethlehem; no Sun of righteousness, to rise and shine upon it, with healing in his beams. No; it is destined to be shrouded for ever in seven-fold night; a night without a star, without a moon, without a morning. Rejoice then, ye wicked, for ye will never be punished. Despair ye good, for ye will never be rewarded. Thus, my friends, have I given you a sketch, a very imperfect sketch, of what would have been our situation without the Bible; of the consequences which would result from its being shown to be false.

And now permit me to ask those of you, who sometimes doubt for a moment whether the Bible is true; do you feel willing to encounter these consequences, to plunge into such a situation? Can you be content to sit down in total ignorance respecting the origin and end of our race and of the world we inhabit? Can you be willing, since it is possible there may be a God, to know nothing of his nature, his character, and his designs; nothing of what he requires, of what he does, or what he means to do with his creatures?

Can you cheerfully consent to remain ignorant, whether your souls are mortal, or immortal; whether there is or is not a future state; whether if there is such a state, happiness or misery awaits you there? In a word, are you willing to sign away all your right and title to the information which the Bible communicates, and to the promises which it contains, to the happiness, to the life and immortality which it reveals? That some men are willing to do this; I cannot, doubt: for many have done it.

Whether any of you would be willing to do it, whether any of you would secretly rejoice to be assured that the Bible is false, I shall not pretend to determine. If you would, how awfully depraved, how desperately wicked must be your hearts! Should you hear a man wish, that there were no such things as human law, you would not hesitate to pronounce him a desperate character. You would conclude, that since he was an enemy to the laws, the law was an enemy to him; that he wished to perpetrate those crimes which the law forbids; and that he was, of course, a dangerous man, and a foe to the peace of society.

So if any of you wish that the Bible were false, it is fair to conclude that you are enemies to the Bible, enemies to its author, enemies to his requirements, and enemies to the human race. You would deprive men of light, of peace, of hope, of immortality. You would reduce them and yourselves to the condition of the beasts that perish. If you would not do this; if you cannot consent to sign away all share in the contents of revelation, remember that the only alternative is to embrace it cordially, to believe and obey it sincerely and universally.

If you receive it at all, you must receive it as a whole; for nothing can be more unreasonable, more disingenuous, or more dangerous, than to receive some parts, and reject others. You must also receive it not as the word of man, but as the word of God, as a book which speaks with all his authority, and from whose decisions there is no appeal. Which of these courses then will you follow? In what light will you henceforth regard the Bible? It surely is time to come to some settled conclusion respecting a subject of so much importance.

And yet many of you are evidently undecided. You will neither cordially receive the Bible as the word of God, nor openly reject it as the mere words of men. You do not even know your own minds on this subject. Sometimes you seem disposed to allow that the Scriptures are from God. But no sooner do you find

yourselves pressed by its contents, than you begin to dispute, and to reason, and complain, as if you thought them a human fabrication. When I see you come, Sabbath after Sabbath, to hear the Bible explained and enforced, I cannot but hope that you regard it as divine.

But when I see how little deference you pay to its authority, how little influence it has upon your conduct through the week, I am compelled to suspect that you think it not better than a cunningly devised fable. My friends, it is this indecision which ruins you. While you are delaying and hesitating in what manner to treat the Bible, time is rapidly passing away, and death is hastening on. How long, then, halt ye between two opinions? If the Bible is God's word, then believe and obey it as such.

But if not, reject it at once, and no longer come here to listen to the superstitions and conjectures of men. Remember the awful doom of those, who are neither cold nor hot, neither open infidels, nor firm, constant believers. Remember that no character is more hateful in the sight of God, or more contemptible in the opinion of men, than a double-minded man, who is unstable in all his ways, and who does not know himself what he believes or what he denies. To conclude. From what has been said, you, my friends, who believe and know the Bible to be true, may learn how highly you ought to prize it, and how great should be your gratitude to Him who has bestowed on the world this inestimable gift; and who has cast your lot in a land, where it is known, and given you satisfactory and infallible evidence of its divine original.

Permit me to ask, whether you have not been, and whether you are not still, greatly deficient in this respect? Have you been duly sensible of the value of this gift, and of the blessings which it imparts, and of the dreadful situation in which we should be placed without it? Have you studied it, have you blessed God for it as you ought? If not, let what has been said prompt you to an immediate performance of these duties. Your Bible ought to be dearer to you than your daily bread, than the light of heaven, than the breath of life; for what would all these things, what would life itself be without it.

O, then, praise, unceasingly praise God for the Bible; and remember that the most suitable and acceptable way in which you can express your gratitude for the gift of it, is to believe its doctrines, and to obey its precepts; to trust its promises, to be what it requires you to be, and hide it in your hearts, that you may not sin against its Author.

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