

Bible Reading - Part 1

by J.C. Ryle

The Bible is a unique book, written by God through human authors, and is the only book that is absolutely perfect and free from defects.

Scripture: 1 Kings 4:33, Psalm 23:4, Psalm 119:9, Proverbs 2:3-5, Matthew 15:6, Luke 10:26, John 5:39, 2 Timothy 3:15-17, Hebrews 4:12

Topics: "Importance of Bible Reading", "Transformation through Scripture"

Description

J.C. Ryle emphasizes the critical importance of Bible reading in the life of a believer, asserting that it is essential for understanding salvation and living a life aligned with God's will. He warns against the neglect and abuse of the Scriptures, highlighting that mere possession of the Bible is insufficient without active engagement and obedience to its teachings. Ryle encourages readers to recognize the Bible as the unique, inspired Word of God, which provides the necessary knowledge for salvation and moral guidance. He stresses that the Bible has the power to transform lives and societies, urging believers to read it with an open heart and a humble spirit. Ultimately, Ryle calls for a serious reflection on how individuals are interacting with the Bible, challenging them to consider its profound impact on their spiritual journey.

Transcript

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

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

Next to praying there is nothing so important in practical religion as Bible-reading. God has mercifully given us a book which is "able to make [us] wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus" (2 Timothy 3:15). By reading that book we may learn what to believe, what to be, and what to do; how to live with comfort, and how to die in peace. Happy is that man who possesses a Bible! Happier still is he who reads it! Happiest of all is he who not only reads it, but obeys it, and makes it the rule of his faith and practice!

Nevertheless it is a sorrowful fact that man has a sad ability to abuse God's gifts. His privileges, and power, and abilities, are all ingeniously perverted to other ends than those for which they were bestowed. His speech, his imagination, his intellect, his strength, his time, his influence, his money--instead of being used as instruments for glorifying his Maker--are generally wasted, or employed for his own selfish ends. And just as man naturally makes a bad use of his other mercies from God, so he does of the written Word. One sweeping charge may be brought against the whole of Christendom, and that charge is neglect and

abuse of the Bible.

To prove this charge we have no need to look elsewhere: the proof lies at our own doors. I have no doubt that there are more Bibles in our country at this moment than there ever were since the world began. There is more Bible buying--and Bible selling--more Bible printing and Bible distributing--than ever was since we were a nation. We see Bibles in every bookstore, Bibles of every size, price, and style--large Bibles, and small Bibles--Bibles for the rich, and Bibles for the poor. There are Bibles in almost every house in the land. But all this time I fear we are in danger of forgetting, that to "have" the Bible is one thing and to "read" it quite another.

This neglected Book is the subject about which I address the readers of this paper today. Surely it is no small thing what you are doing with the Bible. Surely, when the plague is spreading in other lands, you should search and see whether the plague-spot is on you. Give me your attention while I supply you with a few plain reasons why every one who cares for his soul ought to value the Bible highly, to study it regularly, and to make himself thoroughly acquainted with its contents.

I. In the first place, "there is no book in existence written in such a manner as the Bible."

The Bible is "God-breathed" (2 Timothy 3:16). In this respect it is utterly unlike all other writings. God taught the writers of it what to say. God put into their minds thoughts and ideas. God guided their pens in writing down those thoughts and ideas. When you read it, you are not reading the self-taught compositions of poor imperfect men like yourself, but the words of the eternal God. When you hear it, you are not listening to the erring opinions of short-lived mortals, but to the unchanging mind of the King of kings. The men who were employed to write the Bible did not speak themselves. They "spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:21). All other books in the world, however good and useful in their way, are more or less defective. The more you look at them the more you see their defects and blemishes. The Bible alone is absolutely perfect. From beginning to end it is "the Word of God."

I will not waste time by attempting any long and labored proof of this. I say boldly, that the Book itself is the best witness of its own inspiration. It is the greatest standing miracle in the world. He that dares to say the Bible is not inspired must give an explanation why he believes this, if he can. Let him explain the peculiar nature and character of the Book in a way that will satisfy any man of common sense. The burden of proof seems to my mind to lie on him.

It proves nothing against inspiration, as some have asserted, that the writers of the Bible have each different style. Isaiah does not write like Jeremiah, and Paul does not write like John. This is perfectly true, and yet the works of these men are not a bit less equally inspired. The waters of the sea have many different shades. In one place they look blue, and in another green. And yet the difference is due to the depth or shallowness of the part we see, or to the nature of the bottom. The water in every case is the same salt sea. The breath of a man may produce different sounds according to the character of the instrument on which he plays. The flute, the bagpipe, and the trumpet, have each their peculiar note. And yet the breath that calls forth the notes is in each case one and the same. The light of the planets we see in heaven is extremely various. Mars, and Saturn, and Jupiter, each have a individual color. And yet we know that the light of the sun, which each planet reflects, is in each case one and the same. Just in the same way the books of the Old and New Testaments are all inspired truth, and yet the aspect of that truth varies according to the mind through which the Holy Spirit makes it flow. The handwriting and style of the writers differ enough to prove that each had a distinct individual being; but the Divine Guide who dictates

and directs the whole is always one. All are inspired. Every chapter, and verse, and word, is from God.

Oh, that men who are troubled with doubts, and thoughts about inspiration, would calmly examine the Bible for themselves! Oh, that they would take the advice which was the first step to Augustine's conversion, "Pick it up and read it! Pick it up and read it!" How many difficulties and objections would vanish away at once like mist before the rising sun! How many would soon confess, "The finger of God is here! God is in this Book, and I did not know it."

This is the Book about which I address the readers of this paper. Surely it is no light matter "what you are doing with this Book." It is no light thing that God should have caused this Book to be "written to teach us," and that you should have before you "the very words of God" (Romans 3:2; 15:4). I charge you, I summon you to give an honest answer to my questions. What are you doing with the Bible? Do you read it at all? How do you read it?

II. In the second place, "there is no knowledge absolutely needful to a man's salvation, except a knowledge of the things which are to be found in the Bible."

We live in days when the words of Daniel are fulfilled before our eyes: "Many will go here and there to increase knowledge" (Daniel 12:4). Schools are multiplying every where you look. New colleges are set up. Old Universities are reformed and improved. New books are continually coming out. More is being taught--more is being learned--more is being read than there ever was since the world began. It is all good. I rejoice at it. An ignorant population is a perilous and expensive burden to any nation. It is a ready prey to the first who may arise to entice it to do evil. But this I say--we must never forget that all education a man's head can receive will not save his soul from hell, unless he knows the truths of the Bible.

A man "may have immense learning and yet never be saved." He may be master of half the languages spoken around the globe. He may be acquainted with the highest and deepest things in heaven and earth. He may have read books till he is like a walking encyclopedia. He may be familiar with the stars of heaven--the birds of the air--the beasts of the earth, and the fishes of the sea. He may be able, like Solomon, to "describe plant life, from the cedar of Lebanon to the hyssop that grows out of walls, and also teach about animals and birds, reptiles and fish" (1 Kings 4:33). He may be able to lecture on all the secrets of fire, air, earth, and water. And yet, if he dies ignorant of Bible truths, he dies a destitute man! Chemistry never silenced a guilty conscience. Mathematics never healed a broken heart. All the sciences in the world never soothed a dying man. No earthly philosophy ever supplied hope in death. No natural theology ever gave peace in the prospect of meeting a holy God. All these things are of the earth and can never raise a man above the earth's level. They may enable a man to strut and fret his little time here on earth with a more dignified manner of walking than his fellow-mortals, but they can never give him wings, and enable him to soar towards heaven. He that has the largest share of them, will find in time that without Bible knowledge he has no lasting possession. Death will make an end of all his attainments, and after death they will do him no good at all.

A man "may be a very ignorant man, and yet be saved." He may be unable to read a word, or write a letter. He may know nothing of geography beyond the bounds of his own city or county, and be utterly unable to say which is nearest to England, Paris or New York. He may know nothing of arithmetic, and not see any difference between a million and a thousand. He may know nothing of history, not even of his own land, and be quite ignorant whether his country is headed up by a Tribal Chief or by Queen Elizabeth. He may know nothing of science and its discoveries--and whether Julius Caesar won his victories with

gunpowder, or the apostles had a printing press, or the sun orbits around the earth--may be matters about which he has not an idea. And yet, if that very man has heard Bible truth with his ears and believed it with his heart, he knows enough to save his soul. He will be found in the end with Lazarus in heaven, while his scientific fellow-creature, who has died unconverted, is lost forever.

There is much talk in these days about science and "useful knowledge." But a knowledge of the Bible is the one knowledge that is needful and eternally useful. A man may get to heaven without money, learning, health, or friends, but without Bible knowledge he will never get there at all. A man may have the mightiest of minds, and a memory stored with all that strong mind can grasp--and yet, if he does not know the things of the Bible, his soul is damned forever. Woe! woe! woe to the man who dies in ignorance of the Bible!

This is the Book about which I am addressing the readers of these pages today. It is no light matter "what you do with such a book." It concerns the life of your soul. I summon you, I charge you to give an honest answer to my question. What are you doing with the Bible? Do you read it? How do you read it?

III. In the third place, "no book in existence contains such important matter as the Bible."

Time would fail me if I were to enter fully into all the great things which are to be found in the Bible, and only in the Bible. It is not by any sketch or outline that the treasures of the Bible can be displayed. It would be easy to fill a volume with a list of the exceptional truths it reveals, and yet the half of its riches would be left untold.

How glorious and soul-satisfying is the description it gives us of God's plan of salvation, and the way by which our sins can be forgiven! The coming into the world of Jesus Christ, the God-man, to save sinners--the redemption He has accomplished for man by His suffering, in our place, the just for the unjust--the complete payment He has made for our sins by His own blood--the justification of every sinner who simply believes on Jesus--the readiness of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, to receive, pardon, and save to the uttermost--how unspeakably grand and comforting are all these truths! We would know nothing of them without the Bible.

How comforting is the account it gives us of the great Mediator of the New Testament--the man Christ Jesus! Four times over His picture is graciously drawn before our eyes. Four separate witnesses tell us of His miracles and His ministry--His sayings and His actions--His life and His death--His power and His love--His kindness and His patience--His ways, His words, His works, His thoughts, His heart. Blessed be God, there is one thing in the Bible which the most prejudiced reader can hardly fail to understand, and that is the character of Jesus Christ!

How encouraging are the examples the Bible gives us of good people! It tells us of many who were of like passions with ourselves--men and women who had cares, crosses, families, temptations, afflictions, diseases, like ourselves--and yet "through faith and patience inherited what has been promised," and got safely home (Hebrews 6:12). It keeps back nothing in the history of these people. Their mistakes, their weaknesses, their conflicts, their experience, their prayers, their praises, their useful lives, their happy deaths--all are fully recorded. And it tells us the God and Savior of these men and women is still the same today as yesterday, and still waits to be gracious.

How instructive are the examples the Bible gives us of bad people! It tells us of men and women who had light and knowledge and opportunities like ourselves, and yet hardened their hearts, loved the world, clung to their sins, would have their own way, despised reproof, and ruined their own souls forever. And it warns

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

How precious are the promises which the Bible contains for the use of those who love God! There is hardly any possible emergency or condition for which it does not have a word of hope and encouragement. And it tells men that God loves to be put in remembrance of these promises, and that if He has said He will do something, His promise will certainly be fulfilled.

How blessed are the hopes which the Bible holds out to the believer in Christ Jesus! Peace in the hour of death--rest and happiness on the other side of the grave--a glorious body in the morning of the resurrection--a full and triumphant acquittal in the day of judgment--an everlasting reward in the kingdom of Christ--a joyful meeting with the Lord's people in the day of gathering together--these, these are the future prospects of every true Christian. They are all written in the book--in the book which is all true.

How striking is the light which the Bible throws on the character of man! It teaches us what men may be expected to be and do in every position and occupation of life. It gives us the deepest insight into the secret springs and motives of human actions, and the ordinary course of events under the control of human agents. It is the true "judge of the thoughts and attitudes of the heart" (Hebrews 4:12). How deep is the wisdom contained in the books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastics! I can correctly understand an old Christian saying, "Give me a candle and a Bible and shut me up in a dark dungeon, and I will tell you everything that the whole world is doing."

All these are things which men could find nowhere except in the Bible. We probably do not have the least idea how little we would know about these things if we did not have the Bible. We hardly know the value of the air we breathe, and the sun which shines on us, because we have never known what it is to be without them. We do not value the truths on which I have been just now dwelling, because we do not realize the darkness of men to whom these truths have not been revealed. Surely no tongue can fully tell the value of the treasures this one volume contains. Well might old John Newton say that some books were copper books in his estimation, some were silver, and a few were gold but the Bible alone was like a book all made up of bank-notes.

This is the Book about which I address the reader of this paper this day. Surely it is no light matter what you are doing with the Bible. It is no light matter in what way you are using this treasure. I charge you, I summon you to give an honest answer to my question--What are you doing with the

Bible? Do you read it? How do you read it?

IV. In the fourth place, "no book in existence has produced such wonderful effects on mankind at large as the Bible."

(a) This is the Book whose doctrines turned the world upside down in the days of the Apostles.

Many centuries have now passed away since God sent forth a few Jews from a remote corner of the earth to do a work which according to man's judgment, must have seemed impossible. He sent them out at a time when the whole world was full of superstition, cruelty, lust, and sin. He sent them out to proclaim that the established religions of the earth were false and useless, and must be forsaken. He sent them out to persuade men to give up old habits and customs, and to live different lives. He sent them out to do battle with the most perverted idolatry, with the vilest and most disgusting immorality, with a bigoted priesthood,

with sneering philosophers, with an ignorant population, with bloody-minded emperors, with the whole influence of Rome. Never was there an enterprise for all appearances more unrealistic and less likely to succeed!

And how did He arm them for this battle? He gave them no worldly weapons. He gave them no worldly power to compel agreement, and no worldly riches to bribe belief. He simply put the Holy Spirit into their hearts, and the Scriptures into their hands. He simply commanded them to expound and explain, to require compliance and to publish the doctrines of the Bible. The preacher of Christianity in the first century was not a man with a sword and an army to frighten people, or a man with a license to be sensual, to allure people, like the priests of the shameful idols of the Hindus. No, he was nothing more than one holy man with one holy book.

And how did these men of one book prosper? In a few generations they entirely changed the face of society by the doctrines of the Bible. They emptied the temples of the heathen gods. They starved out idolatry and left it high and dry like a stranded ship. They brought into the world a higher condition of morality between man and man. They raised the character and position of woman. They altered the standard of purity and decency. They put an end to man's cruel and bloody customs, such as the gladiatorial fights--there was no stopping the change. Persecution and opposition were useless. One victory after another was won. One bad thing after another melted away. Whether men liked it or not, they were slowly affected by the movement of the new religion and drawn within the whirlpool of its power.

The earth shook, and their rotten shelters fell to the ground. The flood rose, and they found themselves obliged to rise with it. The tree of Christianity swelled and grew, and the chains they had thrown around it to arrest its growth, snapped like string. And all this was done by the doctrines of the Bible! Talk about great victories! What are the victories of Alexander, and Caesar, and Napoleon, compared with those I have just mentioned? For magnitude, for completeness, for results, for permanence, there are no victories like the victories of the Bible.

(b) This is the Book which turned Europe upside down in the days of the glorious Protestant Reformation.

No man can read the history of Christendom as it was five hundred years ago, and not see that darkness covered the whole professing Church of Christ, even a darkness that could be felt. So great was the change which had come over Christianity, that if an apostle had risen from the dead he would not have recognized it, and would have thought that heathenism had revived again. The doctrines of the Gospel lay buried under a dense mass of human traditions. Penances, and pilgrimages, and indulgences, relic-worship, and image-worship, and saint-worship, and worship of the Virgin Mary, formed the sum and substance of most people's religion. The Church was made an idol. The priests and ministers of the Church usurped the place of Christ. And by what means was all this miserable darkness cleared away? By simply bringing forth once more the Bible.

It was not merely the preaching of Luther and his friends, which established Protestantism in Germany. The great weapon which overthrew the Roman Catholic Church's power in that country, was Luther's translation of the Bible into the German tongue. It was not merely the writings of English Reformers which threw down Roman Catholicism in England. The seeds of the work carried forward were first sown by Wycliffe's translation of the Bible many years before. It was not merely the quarrel of Henry VIII and the Pope of Rome, which loosened the Pope's hold on English minds. It was the royal permission to have the Bible translated and set up in churches, so that every one who wanted might read it. Yes! it was the

reading, and circulation of the Scripture which mainly established the cause of Protestantism in England, in Germany, and Switzerland. Without it the people would probably have returned to their former bondage when the first reformers died. But by the reading of the Bible the public mind became gradually leavened with the principles of true religion. Men's eyes became thoroughly open. Their spiritual understandings became thoroughly enlarged. The abominations of Roman Catholicism became distinctly visible. The excellence of the pure Gospel became a rooted idea in their hearts. It was then in vain for Popes to thunder forth excommunications. It was useless for Kings and Queens to attempt to stop the course of Protestantism by fire and sword. It was all too late. The people knew too much. They had seen the light. They had heard the joyful sound. They had tasted the truth. The sun had risen on their minds. The scales had fallen from their eyes. The Bible had done its appointed work within them, and that work was not to be overthrown. The people would not return to Egypt. The clock could not be pushed back again. A mental and moral revolution had been effected, and mainly effected by God's Word. Those are the true revolutions which the Bible effects. What are all the revolutions which France and England have gone through, compared to these? No revolutions are so bloodless, none so satisfactory, none so rich in lasting results, as the revolutions accomplished by the Bible!

This is the book upon which the well-being of nations has always hinged, and with which the best interests of everyone in Christendom at this moment are inseparably tied. By the same proportion that the Bible is honored or not, light or darkness, morality or immorality, true religion or superstition, liberty or tyranny, good laws or bad, will be found in a nation. Come with me and open the pages of history, and you will read the proofs in times past.

Read it in the history of Israel under the Kings. How great was the wickedness that then prevailed! But who can wonder? The law of the Lord had been completely lost sight of, and was found in the days of Josiah thrown aside in a corner of the temple. (2 Kings 22:8). Read it in the history of the Jews in our Lord Jesus Christ's time. How awful the picture of Scribes and Pharisees, and their religion! But who can wonder? The Scripture was "nullified for the sake of man's tradition" (Matthew 15:6). Read it in the history of the Church of Christ in the middle ages. What can be worse than the accounts we have of its ignorance and superstition? But who can wonder? The times were very dark, when men did not have the light of the Bible.

This is the Book to which the civilized world is indebted for many of its best and most praiseworthy institutions. Few probably are aware how many good things that men have adopted for the public benefit, of which the origin may be clearly traced to the Bible. It has left lasting marks wherever it has been received. From the Bible are drawn many of the best laws by which society is kept in order. From the Bible has been obtained the standard of morality about truth, honesty, and the relations of man and wife, which prevails among Christian nations, and which--however feebly respected in many cases--makes so great a difference between Christians and heathen. To the Bible we are indebted for that most merciful provision for the poor working man, the Lord's Day of rest--Sunday. To the influence of the Bible we owe nearly every humane and charitable institution in existence. The sick, the poor, the aged, the orphan, the insane, the retarded, the blind, were seldom or never thought of before the Bible influenced the world. You may search in vain for any record of institutions for their aid in the histories of Athens or of Rome. Yes! there are many who sneer at the Bible, and say the world would get on well enough without it, who don't think how great are their own obligations to the Bible. Little does the unbeliever think, as he lies sick in some of our great hospitals, that he owes all his present comforts to the very book he despises. Had it not been for the Bible, he might have died in misery, uncared for, unnoticed and alone. Truly the world we live in is

unconscious of its debts. The day of judgment, I believe, will reveal the full amount of benefit conferred upon mankind by the Bible.

This wonderful book is the subject about which I address the reader of this paper this day. Surely it is no light matter what you are doing with the Bible. The swords of conquering Generals--the ship in which Nelson led the fleets of England to victory--the hydraulic press which raised the tubular bridge at the Menai; each and every of these are objects of interest as instruments of great power. The Book I speak of this day is an instrument a thousand-fold mightier still. Surely it is no light matter whether you are paying it the attention it deserves. I charge you, I summon you to give me an honest answer this day--What are you doing with the Bible? Do you read it? How do you read it?

V. In the fifth place, "no book in existence can do so much for every one who reads it with an open heart, as the Bible."

The Bible does not profess to teach the wisdom of this world. It was not written to explain geology or astronomy. It will neither instruct you in mathematics, nor in natural philosophy. It will not make you a doctor, or a lawyer, or an engineer.

But there is another world to be thought of besides that world in which man now lives. There are other ends for which man was created, besides making money and working. There are other interests which he is meant to attend to, besides those of his body, and those interests are the interests of his soul. It is the interests of the immortal soul which the Bible is especially able to promote. If you want to know law, you may study Blackstone or Sugden. If you would know astronomy or geology, you may study Herschel and Lyell. But if you would know how to have your soul saved, you must study the written Word of God.

The Bible is "able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus" (2 Timothy 3:15). It can show you the way which leads to heaven. It can teach you everything you need to know, point out everything you need to believe, and explain everything you need to do. It can show you what you are--a sinner. It can show you what God is--perfectly holy. It can show you the great giver of pardon, peace, and grace--Jesus Christ. I have read of an Englishman who visited Scotland in the days of Blair, Rutherford, and Dickson, three famous preachers, and heard all three in succession. He said that the first showed him the majesty of God--the second showed him the beauty of Christ--and the third showed him everything in his heart. It is the glory and beauty of the Bible that it is always teaching these three things more or less, from the first chapter of it to the last.

The Bible applied to the heart by the Holy Spirit, "is the grand instrument by which souls are first converted to God." That mighty change is generally begun by some text or doctrine of the Word, brought home to a man's conscience. In this way the Bible has worked moral miracles by the thousands. It has made drunkards become sober--immoral people become pure--thieves become honest and violent-tempered people become meek. It has wholly altered the course of men's lives. It has caused their old things to pass away, and made all their ways new. It has taught worldly people to seek first the kingdom of God. It has taught lovers of pleasure to become lovers of God. It has taught the stream of men's affections to run upwards instead of running downwards. It has made men think of heaven, instead of always thinking of earth, and live by faith, instead of living by sight. It has done all this in every part of the world. It is still all being accomplished. What are the Roman Catholic miracles which weak men believe, compared to all this, even if they were true? Those are the truly great miracles which are constantly being worked by the Word.

The Bible applied to the heart by the Holy Spirit, is "the chief means by which men are built up and strengthened in the faith," after their conversion. It is able to make them pure, to sanctify them, to train them in righteousness, and to thoroughly equip them for every good work. (Psalm 119:9; John 17:17; 2 Timothy 3:16-17). The Spirit ordinarily does these things by the written Word; sometimes by the Word read, and sometimes by the Word preached, but seldom, if ever, without the Word. The Bible can show a believer how to walk in this world so as to please God. It can teach him how to glorify Christ in all the relationships of life, and can make him a good leader, employee, subordinate, husband, father, or son. It can enable him to bear misfortunes and loss without murmuring, and say, "It is well." It can enable him to look down into the grave, and say, "I will fear no evil" (Psalm 23:4). It can enable him to think about judgment and eternity, and not feel afraid. It can enable him to bear persecution without flinching and to give up liberty and life rather than deny Christ's truth.

Is he weary in soul? It can awaken him.

Is he mourning? It can comfort him.

Is he erring? It can restore him.

Is he weak? It can make him strong.

Is he in the company of the unbeliever? It can keep him from evil.

Is he alone? It can talk with him. (Psalm 6:22).

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

The man who has the Bible, and the Holy Spirit in his heart, has everything which is absolutely necessary to make him spiritually wise. He needs no priest to break the bread of life for him. He needs no ancient traditions, no writings of the Fathers, no voice of the Church, to guide him into all truth. He has the well of truth open before him, and what more can he want? Yes! though he be shut up alone in a prison, or cast on a desert island--though he never sees a church, or minister again--if he only has the Bible, he has got the infallible guide, and needs no other. If he only has the will to read that Bible properly, it will certainly teach him the road that leads to heaven. It is here alone that infallibility resides. It is not in the Church. It is not in the Councils. It is not in ministers. It is only in the written Word.

(a) I know well that many say they have found no saving power in the Bible.

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

I answer, that the Bible no doubt contains some difficult things, or else it would not be the book of God. It contains things hard to comprehend, but only hard because we do not have the understanding of mind to comprehend them. It contains things above our reasoning powers, but nothing that might not be explained if the eyes of our understanding were not feeble and dim. But is not an acknowledgment of our own ignorance the very cornerstone and foundation of all knowledge? Must not many things be taken for granted in the beginning of every science, before we can proceed one step towards acquaintance with it? Do we not require our children to learn many things of which they cannot see the meaning at first? And ought we not then to expect to find "deep things" when we begin studying the Word of God, and yet to

believe that if we persevere in reading it the meaning of many of them will one day be made clear? No doubt we ought so to expect, and so to believe. We must read with humility. We must take much on trust. We must believe that what we don't know now, we will know later, some part in this world, and all in the world to come.

But I ask that man who has given up reading the Bible because it contains hard things, whether he did not find many things in it easy and plain? I put it to his conscience whether he did not see great landmarks and principles in it all the way through? I ask him whether the things needful to salvation did not stand out boldly before his eyes, like lighthouses. What should we think of the captain of a steamer who came, at night, into the entrance of the Channel, and claimed that he did not know every parish, and village, and creek, along the British coast? Should we not think him a lazy coward, when the lights on the Lizard, and Eddystone, and the Start, and Portland, and St. Catherine's, and Beachy Head, and Dungeness, and the Forelands, were shining forth like so many lamps, to guide him up to the river? Should we not say, Why did you not steer by the great leading lights? And what should we to say to the man who gives up reading the Bible because it contains hard things, when his own state, and the path to heaven, and the way to serve God, are all written down clearly and unmistakably, as with a sunbeam? Surely we ought to tell that man that his objections are no better than lazy excuses, and do not deserve to be heard.

(b) I know well that many raise the objection, that thousands read the Bible and are not a bit the better for their reading.

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

I answer, that the reason why so many read the Bible without any benefit is plain and simple--they do not read it in the right way. There is generally a right way and a wrong way of doing everything in the world; and just as it is with other things, so it is in the matter of reading the Bible. The Bible is not so entirely different from all other books as to make it of no importance in what spirit and manner you read it. It does not do any good, as a matter of course, by merely running our eyes over the print, any more than Baptism and the Lord's Supper do any good by the mere virtue of our receiving them. It does not ordinarily do any good, unless it is read with humility and earnest prayer. The best engine that was ever built is useless if a man does not know how to operate it. The best sundial that was ever constructed will not tell its owner the time of day if he is so ignorant as to put it in the shade. Just as it is with that engine, and that sundial, so it is with the Bible. When men read it without benefit, "the fault is not in the Book, but in themselves."

I tell the man who doubts the power of the Bible, because many read it, and are no better for the reading, that the abuse of a thing is no argument against the use of it. I tell him boldly, that never did man or woman read that book in a childlike persevering spirit--like the Ethiopian eunuch, and the Bereans (Acts 8:28; 17:11), and miss the way to heaven. Yes, many will be exposed to shame in the day of judgment; but there will not rise up one soul who will be able to say, that he went thirsting to the Bible, and found in it no living water--he searched for truth in the Scriptures, and searching did not find it. The words which are spoken of Wisdom in the Proverbs are strictly true of the Bible: "If you call out for insight and cry aloud for understanding, and if you look for it as for silver and search for it as for hidden treasure, then you will understand the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of God" (Proverbs 2:3-5).

This wonderful Book is the subject about which I address the readers of this paper this day. Surely it is no light matter "what you are doing with the Bible." What should you think of the man who in time of cholera despised a sure prescription for preserving the health of his body? What must be thought of you if you

despise the only sure prescription for the everlasting health of your soul? I charge you, I entreat you, to give an honest answer to my question. What do you do with the Bible? Do you read it? How do you read it?

VI. In the sixth place, "the Bible is the only standard by which all questions of doctrine or of duty can be tested."

The Lord God knows the weakness and infirmities of our poor fallen understandings. He knows that, even after conversion, our perceptions of right and wrong are extremely vague. He knows how artfully Satan can overlay error with an appearance of truth, and can dress up wrong with plausible arguments, till it looks like right. Knowing all this, He has mercifully provided us with an unerring standard of truth and error, right and wrong, and has taken care to make that standard a written book--the Scripture.

No one can look around the world, and not see the wisdom of such a provision. No one can live long, and not find out that he is constantly in need of a counselor and adviser--of a rule of faith and practice, on which he can depend. Unless he lives like a beast, without a soul and conscience, he will find himself constantly assailed by difficult and puzzling questions. He will be often asking himself, What must I believe? and what must I do?

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/jc-ryle/bible-reading-part-1/>

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