

The Preciousness of God's Word

by Octavius Winslow

Octavius Winslow emphasizes the unparalleled value of God's Word as the ultimate revelation of His character and the source of salvation for believers.

Scripture: Exodus 34:6-7, 1 Samuel 3:1, Psalm 119:105, John 1:1, John 3:16, John 5:39, Romans 10:17, 2 Timothy 3:16-17, Hebrews 4:12, 1 Peter 1:23

Topics: "The Value of Scripture", "Hope in God's Word"

Description

Octavius Winslow emphasizes the unparalleled preciousness of God's Word, asserting that it is the only source of true hope and salvation for humanity. He argues that while nature reveals God's power, it cannot provide answers to the soul's deepest questions about redemption and forgiveness. Winslow highlights the Bible as a divine revelation that not only reveals God's character and love but also serves as a source of comfort and guidance for believers. He urges Christians to hold fast to the truth of Scripture, recognizing its vital role in their spiritual lives and the necessity of approaching it with reverence and a desire to know Jesus. Ultimately, Winslow calls for a deep appreciation of the Word of God as the foundation of faith and the key to eternal life.

Transcript

"The word of the Lord was precious in those days." 1 Samuel 3:1.

Among the precious things of God the saints of the Most High will ever regard as transcendently precious His revealed Word. But for this revelation we had known nothing of those precious things upon which this volume is designed to engage the reader's thoughts. The works of creation, varied and rich in their forms of beauty, while they testify to " His power and Godhead," -thus leaving man inexcusable for his atheism, -nowhere supply an answer to the momentous question, "What must I do to be saved?"

They bear a palpable and solemn witness to man's apostasy, but they testify nothing to his recovery. They tell of a fallen, but not of a restored humanity. They speak not of a Savior of a salvation of hope of heaven. I may wander in sad and pensive thought upon the sunny banks of its flowing rivers, I may tread its carpeted vales, or climb its cloud-capped mountains, reveling amid its beauty, its grandeur, and sublimity, and yet find no repose for this restless mind, no peace for this troubled heart, no hope for this sinful and lost soul.

Not a flower below, not a star above, tells me of JESUS, a Savior! I turn to the "GLORIOUS GOSPEL of the blessed God," and my case as a ruined, self-destroyed, condemned sinner, is met by that single, but comprehensive and sublime announcement- "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." Beloved reader, the kingdom of nature, replete as it is with the wisdom, power, and benevolence of Jehovah, every spire of grass, every lowly flower, every towering mountain, every glimmering star, rebuking the "fool's" denial of a God, can never disclose how you may be pardoned, justified, and saved.

No solution can it supply to the great moral problem of the universe how God can be just, and yet the justifier of the ungodly. The "gospel of the grace of God," which these pages propose to unfold, meets to the utmost your case as a sinner, bringing life and immortality to light, and thus revealing to you a hope, resplendent and eternal, beyond the gloom and corruption of the grave. In the prosecution of our subject, let it be premised that there are points which it is not our province to discuss.

The reasonableness of a revelation from God, the necessity of a revelation, the fact that such a revelation is given to us in the Bible, are questions we must assume as established. It is rather to the worth and preciousness of God's Word, than to any line of argument in proof of its divinity, that we must bend our thoughts. And yet, let it not be supposed that we slight or undervalue evidence as substantiating the truth of the Bible. Everything that is solemn and precious to us as believers is bound up in the fact, that the BOOK upon which we ground our hope of the future is, what it declares itself to be, the WORD OF THE LORD.

The moment our faith in the divinity of the Holy Scriptures is shaken, everything else trembles with it. Life, in all its moral relations, wears another and a totally different aspect. Its foliage is withered, its flowers are blighted, its springs are embittered, and the entire landscape of the present and the future is enshrouded in, gloom and despair. No marvel, then, that error should plant its strong and stern battery in front of this the most precious doctrine of our faith -the Divine inspiration of the Scriptures.

How truly has the apostle described the unbelieving mind -"The god of this world has blinded the minds of those who believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them." We hold it, then, of infinite moment that our faith in the divinity of the Bible. in the plenary inspiration of the Scriptures, should grow stronger and stronger; and that whatever tends to instruct and confirm us in this doctrine of our faith, be it a fact in history, a discovery in science, or a page in the volume of our personal history, should be welcomed by us with eagerness, and be acknowledged with devout thanksgiving and praise.

The Lord keep you, my reader, from the low views of divine inspiration prevalent in this day! If this foundation be destroyed, or even apparently shaken, what else has your immortal soul to build upon but quicksand, every step, passing to eternity, over which sinks your soul deeper and deeper in doubt, darkness, and despair ? As the Word of the Lord, then, it is most precious. It could possess no real intrinsic worth apart from this fact. The Bible claims to be nothing less than the WORD OF GOD.

" All scripture is given by inspiration from God," and "holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit." We part the lids of this sacred volume, and we listen to God's voice sometimes in terrific thunder, at others in entrancing music now in sublime majesty, then gentle as an infant's whisper, in mercy and in judgment God's Word speaks. That infidelity should wish to disbelieve and stifle this divine voice speaking from the Bible, is no marvel, since, if the Bible is true, infidels have no hope.

An illustration of this may be cited. The late William Wilberforce, when passing through a town in which a noted infidel was imprisoned for blasphemy, called to see him. He endeavored to engage the unhappy sceptic in a conversation upon the Scriptures, but he declined, saying, that he had made up his mind, and did not wish his conclusions disturbed. Pointing to the Bible in the hands of his visitor, he remarked, in a manner which betrayed deep malignity of heart, blended with mental despair, " How, sir, do you suppose that I can like that Book, since, if it be true, I am undone forever?"

"No," replied the illustrious philanthropist and Christian, " this is not a necessary consequence, and need not be. This Book excludes none from hope who will seek salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep we may live together with Him." Thus infidelity rejects the Bible for fear it is true! We recur to the thought that God's Word is precious because it is truly and emphatically His Word, the Word of JEHOVAH. And when the believer opens the Bible, it is with the profound and solemn conviction that he is about to listen to the voice of God!

But not only is the Word of God precious as a revelation of His being and perfections, but to the child of God it is peculiarly so as revealing the mind and will of God. What the thoughts and purposes of God were could be but dimly gathered from the external works and operations of nature. If these divine thoughts were ever made known to man, GOD himself must reveal them. "Can you by searching find out God? can you find out the Almighty unto perfection?" We cannot fully fathom even the finite mind; how much less the Infinite!

If at all acquainted with the science of physiognomy, we may trace some faint glimmer in the human countenance of the mental emotions, but this is all the index we have of the hidden thoughts and feelings of the soul. Now, by a similar process, we may learn something of God. The face of nature the natural countenance of God is replete with his power, wisdom, and beauty. There is enough of His Godhead to confound and silence the deepest and loudest atheism of man. But nature can go no further.

It leads me to the vestibule, but cannot conduct me into the glory within. It tells me there is a God, but it reveals not His nature and character as a Father and a sin-forgiving God. But where nature leaves me, revelation comes to my aid. Hence the high estimate in which God is represented as regarding His own Word. "You have magnified Your Word above all Your name." That is, God has magnified His Word above every other manifestation of His name, there being no such revelation and illustration of the Deity as is found in His revealed Word.

Do the heavens and the earth declare the glory of God? Does providence testify to His divine government? How much more His revealed truth! Truly, "You have magnified Your Word above all Your name." As a revelation of His character, the Word of God is precious. What we gather of God's moral character from the kingdom of nature is more inferential than positive. From its creation, we infer the being of God; from its loveliness, we infer that God is beautiful; from its wonders, we infer that God is great; from the admirable unity and fitness of all its parts, we infer that God is wise; from the merciful blessings so richly and profusely scattered over its surface, we infer that God is good; and from the judgments which follow sin, and land upon the sinner, we infer that God is holy and just.

But for the clear, positive, and complete revelation of God's character as a righteous, holy, wise, merciful, and sin-pardoning God, we must repair to His written Word. God has unfolded more of His moral character, perfections, and glory in the following words, spoken to Moses on Mount Sinai, amid the awful emblems of His majesty, than in all the beauties, wonders, and sublimities of His created work: "And the

LORD descended in the cloud, and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the LORD.

And the LORD passed by before him, and proclaimed. The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation." (Exod. xxxiv. 5-7.)
What a glorious unfolding of God! What a foreshadowing of the yet richer unfolding of the gospel!

If God was so glorious on Mount Sinai, what must be His glory as revealed on Mount Calvary! As a revelation of the love of God, His Word is inexpressibly precious. We want to know more than the mind of God. We are sinners, and we want to read His heart--His loving, gracious, sin-forgiving heart. We want to know, not only what His thoughts and purposes are, but what are His feelings towards us. Does He love us? Does His justice smile on us? Does His heart expand with mercy, and glow with affection towards us?

The Bible alone supplies the answer to these momentous questions. There we read--as we read it tableted in no part of this vast and beautiful universe-- "GOD is LOVE." And when we approach the subject yet closer, penetrate more deeply into the heart of God, what a transcendent, marvellous unfolding of His love is presented in the gift of His beloved Son! Read the declaration, often read before, yet to read again and again with deepening wonder, gratitude, and praise-- "God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

"In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins." How precious ought that Word to be to our hearts which contains such declarations and reveals such truths as these! Well may the apostle exclaim, "Here in is love!" as if he had said, and he might have added, "and nowhere else but here!"

Nowhere in the heavens above, or in the earth beneath, or in the waters under the earth; no star, no flower, no creature, so reveals, expresses, and embodies the love of God as the gift of His dear Son to die for our sins. Oh, what love is this! "God so loved the world!" So loved, that He gave Jesus! Jesus is the most precious exponent of God's love; Jesus descends from the bosom of His love; Jesus draws aside the veil of His love; Jesus is God's love expressed, God's love incarnate, God's love speaking, laboring, dying, redeeming!

Beyond this it would seem impossible that love could go. Oh, let every affection of our heart, every faculty of our soul, every power of our mind, every action of our life, embody as its grateful response the words of the adoring apostle, "Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable Gift!" We are conducted to another view in the progress of our subject, illustrating the preciousness of God's Word. We refer to its gospel announcements. In this light, we cannot conceive of a more costly, precious blessing than the Word of God.

The Gospel is the most valuable treasure the believer possesses. Everything else is shadowy, chimerical, transitory, passing away. Nothing is real, nothing substantial, nothing satisfying and abiding, except the "glorious gospel of the blessed God." It is the glorious gospel, because it is replete with real glory in reveals a glorious God, it makes known a glorious Savior, it proclaims a glorious salvation, and it unveils the hope of a glorious immortality. And all other glory in comparison of the "glorious gospel of the blessed God" is as visionary and fleeting as a midnight dream.

Nowhere does Jehovah appear so glorious as in the gospel of His grace. There He is revealed as a sin-forgiving God; there He is mirrored forth as a "just God and a Savior," there He is portrayed as a reconciled God in Christ; and there He is represented as standing in the relation, and exercising the love, of a FATHER. O glorious gospel that presents such a view of God to the sinner's believing eye! "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself. What declaration can more clearly indicate the love of God to us, as the moving, originating cause of our salvation, than this?"

There is a marked, and we think, essential defect in the theology of many Christians touching this subject, which tends much to obscure the Divine glory, and to lessen in our view the greatness of God's love in man's salvation. We refer to the statements which represent God as angry, incensed, and vindictive, and as appeased, pacified, and reconciled by the death of Christ. Is not this an essential misapprehension of God's everlasting love to His people? Would it not appear from this representation of God that the Atonement of Christ was the originating cause of His love, rather than that His love was the originating cause of the Atonement?

We think so. We look upon this notion of God as enshrouding the glory of redemption, by the palpably false view it presents of the Divine character. But the correct statement is the converse of this. God loved us- and as a result, Christ died for us. The Atonement of the Son of God was not the procuring cause, but the consequence, of the Father's love. Christ did not inspire God with love to man, but expressed it. He did not die to originate the Divine affection, but to expound and exhibit it.

The love of God to His people was as eternal as the eternity of His being, as everlasting as His uncreated nature. "I have loved you with an everlasting love." It panted, it yearned for an outlet. It sought and found it in Christ. The Atonement of Jesus, uniting and harmonizing all the perfections of the Deity, supplied the channel through which the ocean of Divine love washed the shores of this earth, its soul-healing waves spreading like a sea of life over our sin-tainted, curse-blighted, sorrow-stricken humanity.

When, therefore, the Scriptures speak of Divine reconciliation, as in the passage just quoted, we are to understand the full expiatory satisfaction given to God's moral government through the Atonement of Christ, by which His law is honored. His justice is satisfied. His holiness is secured, His truth is maintained, and He appeared upon earth walking among men, "reconciling the world unto Himself." But the experience of the believer supplies, perhaps, the most powerful and conclusive testimony to the preciousness of God's Word.

We have not been advancing a vain thing, but a well-attested fact, in affirming the divinity and value of revelation. We are now about to cite the child of God- yes, the whole Church of Christ as testifying to the preciousness of the Word of the Lord. How many a truth-experienced, gospel-believing, Christ-loving heart will respond to the words of David, "How sweet are Your words unto my taste! yes, sweeter than honey to my mouth." What says Jeremiah? "Your words were found, and I did eat them; and Your word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of my heart."

Corresponding with this is the experience of the universal Church, find it where we may, whatever may be the dissonance of opinion prevailing upon less essential and important questions of polity and worship. It is precious to the believer, first, because it is divine, attested, experienced Truth. Is it not so that, to you who believe in God's Word, every other word in comparison seems a fiction and a fable? And that, as you grow in grace, as your acquaintance with, and experience of, the Word of God deepens, as you near eternity, your hold upon everything else grows fainter and fainter, and your grasp upon it grows firmer and

firmer?

Now, God's Word is truth. He who is emphatically "the Truth," because He is essential truth, and the substance of revealed truth, has affirmed this in His sublime and memorable prayer--properly the Lord's Prayer--"Your Word is truth." Pursue this thought for a moment. There would seem to exist a necessity that it should be so, since it is the Word of the God of truth, partaking of the nature of that God whose truth it is. All that emanates from God must be a transcript, in some degree, of what He is.

It is faintly so in the works of nature; yet more clearly so in the kingdom of providence: perfectly so in the empire of grace. The great truth, then, to which these three witnesses testify is this, "He is the Rock, His work is perfect: for all His ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is He." (Deut. xxxii. 4.) It follows then, as clearly as any conclusion can from premise, that His Word is true--eternally, essentially, immortally true. True in the Savior it reveals--in the salvation it declares--in the doctrines it expounds--in the precepts it enforces-- in the promises it speaks--in the hopes it unveils --and in the threatenings it denounces.

"YOUR WORD IS TRUTH." As divine truth, then, it is most precious to the believer who has staked his all of future and eternal happiness upon its veracity. Let your faith, beloved reader, have more close dealing with the truth of God's Word. Whatever gloomy and untoward providences may gather their shadows around your path, hold fast your confidence in the truth of God's Word. You shall find mutability in everything but this. God will vary His providences, but cannot alter His Word.

"Forever, O Lord, Your Word is settled in heaven." Heaven, with its resplendent glory and surpassing wonder--earth, with its countless myriads of beings, its beauty, and its history, shall be a thing of yesterday, not a vestige remaining to tell of its existence, its grandeur, and its greatness; but "the Word of the Lord shall endure forever." All that God has Whispered in mercy, or has thundered in judgment--the promise of love, the threatening of wrath--all the precious words upon which He has caused our souls to hope the succourings pledged, the sure mercies covenanted, the assurances given, the consolations engaged, the oath sworn, shall all be fulfilled.

Then, amid the fluctuations and the vicissitudes of all sublunary things, the home of childhood changed, the place of hallowed memories and sacred associations changed, the friends and companions of our choicest, sunniest years changed, adversity and death flinging their deep shadows upon life's landscape, we will approach the closer and cling the firmer to the eternal, unchangeable TRUTH of our God. Your faith, beloved, in God's word of promise may be severely tried by God's dealings with you in providence the one may appear to oppose and contradict the other but ever remember that God cannot deny Himself, nor alter the word that has gone out of His mouth.

If the sentence of death seems pronounced upon the promise of God by His strange and mysterious procedure, forget not that there is yet life in the Word of the Lord; and that when the stone that sealed the tomb of all your mercy is rolled away, the Word upon which your soul has reposed, upon which your heart has lived, to which your faith has clung, and which has kept alive the spark of hope within your breast, shall come to life again, every sentence, word, and syllable fulfilled to the letter by Him of whom it is said, "It is impossible that God should lie."

Oh, cling then to Christ's Word, as the mariner to the plank, as the mother to her infant, yes, as a humble believer in that divine and gracious Savior who has said, "Him that comes unto me I will in no wise" literally, "I will never, no, never, cast out." As testifying of Jesus and His salvation, the Word of God must

ever be transcendently precious to the believer. The Bible is, from its commencement to its close, a record of the Lord Jesus. Around Him the divine and glorious Center -all its wondrous types, prophecies, and facts gather.

His Promise and Foreshadowing, His holy Incarnation, Nativity, and Baptism, His Obedience and Passion, His Death, Burial, and Resurrection, His Ascension to heaven, His Second Coming to judge the world, and to set up His glorious kingdom, are the grand and touching, the sublime and tender, the priceless and precious truths interwoven with the whole texture of the Bible, to which the Two Witnesses of Revelation the Old and the New Testaments bear their harmonious and solemn testimony.

Beloved, let this be the one and chief object in your study of the Bible the knowledge of Jesus. The Bible is not a history, a book of science, a poem, it is a record of Christ. Study it to know more of Him, His nature, His love, His work. With the magnanimous Paul, "count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus your Lord." Then will God's Word become increasingly precious to your soul, and its truths unfold. You will trace the history of Jesus, see the glory of Jesus, admire the work of Jesus, learn the love of Jesus, and hear the voice of Jesus, in every page.

The whole volume will be redolent of His name, and luminous with His beauty. Oh, what were the Bible to us apart from its revelation of a Savior! Is there not great danger of studying it merely intellectually and scientifically, of reveling among its literary beauties and its grandeur, blind to its true value, and without any desire to know that precious Savior who died for sinners, that Divine Redeemer who purchased the ransom of His Church with His own blood; that Friend who loves us, that Brother who sympathizes with us, that enthroned High Priest who intercedes for us within the veil?

May we not resort to it as mere controversialists, polemics, and partisans, searching it but for weapons of attack upon a Christian brother's system or creed, or quoting it but to give countenance and complexion to a favorite dogma? But do we study the "Word of Christ" spiritually and honestly, as those whose souls hunger and thirst for this the bread and water of life? Do we search it diligently and earnestly as for hid treasure--treasure beyond all price? Can we say with David, "O how love I your law ! it is my meditation all the day?"

"The entrance of your Word gives light; it gives understanding unto the simple. I opened my mouth, and panted: for I longed for your commandments,"--"Your Word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path." Do we read it with a child-like mind, receive it with a believing heart, bow to its teaching with reverence of soul, and receive its decisions in all questions of faith and practice as decisive and ultimate? In a word, do we search the Scriptures humbly, prayerfully, depending upon the guidance of the Spirit, to find Jesus in them?

Of these Scriptures He is the Alpha and the Omega--the substance, the sweetness, the glory--the one, precious, absorbing THEME. Listen to His own words, "Search the Scriptures, for these are they which testify of me." Moses wrote of Me--David sang of Me--seers prophesied of Me--evangelists recorded My life --apostles expounded My doctrine--and martyrs have died for My name. "THESE ARE THEY WHICH TESTIFY OF ME." Yes, Lord! Your word is precious to our souls, because it reveals to us Your glory, and tells us of Your love!

Precious, too, is the Word of God, as containing doctrine, precept, and promise. The doctrines are precious, as affording instruction to the mind, and establishment to the faith of the child of God. There can be no real, stable building up in God's truth when the great doctrines of grace are faintly believed and

loosely held. These doctrines, then, which exalt the Lamb of God, which lay the glory and power and boasting of the creature in the dust, and which exhibit the electing love and sovereign grace of God in his salvation, are most precious to the truth-experienced heart of the believer in Jesus.

Not less precious to him is the preceptive teaching of God's Word. When there is a real experience of the power of the doctrines, there will be a love of the precept. You will desire to be sanctified, as well as justified--to have your heart purified, and your life molded by the holiness of the truth. The precept that enjoins separation from the world--that teaches us to deny all ungodliness, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present evil world--that bids us take up our daily cross and follow a crucified Savior, and realizing our resurrection life in Him, thus to seek those things that are above, where Christ sits at the right hand of God--must be precious, inconceivably precious, to a Christ-loving heart.

The rebukes, too, of God's Word, humbling though they are, yet are welcome to the believer. The Word that gently chides your backslidings, unveils your follies, checks your inconsistencies, lays your pride, self-seeking, and self-boasting in the dust, is precious to your soul. The Christian feels, that "all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works," and therefore he welcomes all.

Beloved, count not less dear to your heart, or as less the tender unfolding of God's love, those parts of His truth which reprove humble, empty, and lay you low. The rebukes and reproofs of God's Word are as valuable and precious in themselves as the promises, since both equally seek the sanctification of the believer, and both emanate from the same Divine mind, and flow from the same loving heart. As a source of Divine consolation how many will testify to the preciousness of God's Word!

The Bible, while it is a proclamation of mercy to the vilest sinner, is equally the book of the afflicted. As a system of consolation Christianity has no equal. No other religion in the wide world touches the hidden springs of the soul, or reaches the lowest depths of human sorrow, but the religion of Christ. Saints of the living God! suffering members of a suffering Head! we cite you as witnesses to this truth. When your hearts have been overwhelmed, when adversity has wrapped you within its gloomy pall, when the broken billows of grief have swollen and surged around your soul, how have you fled to the Scriptures of truth for succor and support, for guidance and comfort!

Nor have you repaired to them in vain. "The God of all comfort" is He who speaks in this Word, and there is no word of comfort like that which He speaks. The adaptation of His truth to the varied, the peculiar and personal trials and sorrows of His Church, is one of the strongest proofs of its divinity. Take to the Word of God whatever sorrow you may, go with whatever mental beclouding, with whatever spirit-sadness, with whatever heart-grief; whatever be its character, its complexion, its depth unsurpassed in the history of human sorrow, there is consolation and support in the Word of God for your mind.

There is in these sacred pages a voice of sympathy and soothing chiming with your grief; and thus "by the comfort of the Scriptures you have hope" that God will not leave you in trouble, but will sustain you in it, will bring you out of, and sanctify you by it, to the endless glory and praise of His great and precious name. O you sons of God whose faith has been strengthened by the histories of the Old Testament saints whose minds have been instructed by the dealings of God with His Church in the wilderness whose hearts have been comforted by the rich experience of David in the Psalms -whose views of God's kingdom prophets have enlarged -whose knowledge of Christ's history evangelists have deepened -whose souls apostles

have established in the faith, we cite you as witnesses to the divinity and preciousness of God's Word.

"You are my witnesses, says the Lord." Testify to an infidel world what the Bible is, and to the saints what you have experienced it to be. Tell how its revealed truths have established you, how its illustrious examples of piety, faith, and love have animated you, how its exceeding great and precious promises have comforted you, and how the glorious hope of heaven which the gospel unveils has inspired you to run with patience the race set before you, looking unto Jesus. Tell how this precious Word of God has made clear many a perplexity, has illumined many a dark road, has cheered many a lonesome way, has soothed many a deep sorrow, has guided and upheld many a faltering step, and has crowned with victory many a feat of arms in the great battle with Satan, the world, and sin.

May we not say of the Bible, as David said of Saul's sword, "There is none like it." Christian mourner, let me once more direct your eye too dimmed perhaps by tears to behold this divine source of true, unfailling comfort. God's Word is the book of the afflicted. Written to unfold the wondrous history of the "Man of Sorrows," it would seem to have been equally written for you, O child of grief! God speaks to your sad and sorrowing heart from every page of this sacred volume, with words of comfort, loving, gentle, and persuasive as a mother's.

"As one whom his mother comforts, so will I comfort you." The Bible is the opening of the heart of God. It is God's heart unveiled, each throb inviting the mourner, the poor in spirit, the widow, the fatherless, the bereaved, the persecuted, the sufferer, yes, every form and child of affliction and grief to the asylum and sympathy, the protection and soothing of His heart. Oh, thank God for the comfort and consolation of the Scripture! Open it with what sorrow and burden and perplexity you may, be it the guilt of sin, the pressure of trial, or the corrodings of sorrow, it speaks to the heart such words of comfort as God only could speak.

Have you ever borne your grief to God's Word, especially to the experimental Psalms of David, and not felt that it was written for that particular sorrow? You have found your grief more accurately portrayed, your state of mind more truly described, and your case more exactly and fully met, probably in a single history, chapter, or verse, than in all the human treatises that the pen of man ever wrote. What a proof that the Bible is the Word of God! We verily believe that no Christian is thoroughly versed in the evidences of the truth of the Bible, or is in a right position to understand its divine contents, until he is afflicted.

Luther remarks that he never understood the Psalms until God afflicted him. Fly to the Word of God, then, in every sorrow. You will know more of the mind and heart of God than you, perhaps, ever learned in all the schools before. We must be experimental Christians, if Christians at all. A bare notionalist, a mere theorist, an empty professor of religion, is a fearful deception. Study to know God's Word from a heartfelt experience of its quickening, sanctifying, comforting power.

Sit not at the feet of men, but at the feet of Jesus. His Word can alone instruct you in these sacred and precious truths. You must learn in Christ's school, and be taught by the Holy Spirit. And if you are truly converted, spiritually regenerated, a real believer in the Lord Jesus, think not that some strange thing has happened to you when the Lord causes you to pass under the rod of discipline, brings you into trial, and makes you to partake of what may seem to you a soul-diet that is anything but healthful and nutritious, "the bread of adversity, and the water of affliction." (Isa.

Xxx.20) But affliction is one of the Lord's moulds for shaping you into an experimental Christian. And to be an experimental Christian His Word must be inwrought into our soul. What can we know of the promises, the succourings, the sympathy of God's Word, its perfect adaptation to the crushed and sorrowful

condition of our humanity, but for trial? Thus, more than one-half of the Bible is a "garden inclosed, a spring shut up, a fountain sealed," until the Lord lays sorrow upon our hearts, and brings us into circumstances of adversity.

Then this garden unveils its beauty, and this spring pours forth its refreshment, and this fountain overflows with its rich and varied supply. Oh, with what power, depth, and sweetness does the Word of God unfold to us then! It is as though a new book had been composed, another constellation in the spiritual hemisphere had burst upon the telescope of faith, another Arcadia had floated into view, a new world had been discovered! "Blessed is the man whom You chasten, O Lord, and teach him out of Your law."

"Unless Your law had been my delight, I should then have perished in my affliction." Draw, then, O child of sorrow, your consolation from God's Word. Put it not away as if it were for others, and not for you. There is not a promise in the Bible, of pardon, of grace, of help, of sympathy, but it is yours, because you are Christ's, "in whom are all the promises of God, and in Him are Yes and Amen to the glory of God the Father." Oh, clasp this precious Word of comfort to your sorrowful heart, and exclaim, "It is mine!

The Jesus of whom it speaks is mine, the salvation it reveals is mine, the promises it contains are mine, the heaven it unveils is mine, and all the consolation, comfort, and sympathy which wells up from these hidden springs, is MINE." The Word of God is equally valuable and precious to the believer, because of its quickening power. There is a divine vitality in the Word, which, like Ezekiel's vision of the waters, conveys life wherever it comes in "the power and demonstration of the Spirit."

As the instrument of regeneration and of sanctification, the Bible is beyond all price. The statements touching these two points are many and conclusive. We quote but a few: "The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul, making wise the simple, rejoicing the heart, enlightening the eyes." (Ps. xix. 7, 8.) See how David extols its quickening power: "This is my comfort in my affliction: for Your word has quickened me." "I will never forget Your precepts: for with them You have quickened me.

"As the instrument of the new birth, thus does the Holy Spirit speak of it: "Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the Word of God, which lives and abides forever." (I Peter i. 23.) "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 discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart." (Heb. iv. 12.) And alluding to it equally as the appointed instrument of holiness, our Lord prays to His Father, "Sanctify them through Your truth."

And to the disciples He employs similar language: "Now you are clean through the word which I "have spoken unto you." Employing the same argument, the apostle thus exhorts the saints: "Seeing you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that you love one another with a pure heart fervently." Clearly, then, is God's Word an instrument of spiritual life and of gospel holiness, and as such commends itself to the deepest reverence, the warmest love, and the most diligent study of the believer.

Allow, beloved reader, a few words of exhortation bearing upon this subject. Study the Scriptures of truth with a heart in prayerful uplifting for the accompanying power, light, and anointing of the Holy Spirit. The Word is but a dead letter, unattended by the Spirit. The Word of God is a "sword," but the sword is effectual only as it is wielded, by the power of the Spirit. "The sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God." Expect, then, this Word to be powerful in your own souls, as in the souls of those upon whom you bring it to bear, only as it is clothed with the divine and irresistible might and energy of the Holy Spirit.

Then it will quicken, enlighten, and convince; then it will convert, comfort, and sanctify. Ever remember that the Divine Author of the Bible is at your side--invisible and noiseless--when you sit down to read it. Graciously and kindheartedly He is bending over you, prepared to explain what is difficult, to harmonize what is contradictory, and to shed a flood of light upon each page, causing Heaven's glory to dart into your soul from the diamond spark of a single passage! Such, beloved, are the effects of the gospel, when clothed with the authority and power of God the Holy Spirit.

It was the folly of the Jews to think to find life in the Scriptures without Christ: life in the letter without the Original of life. (John v. 19,40.) 'Except the Lord build the house (that is, the temple), they labor in vain that build it.' Without God all endeavors to build a spiritual temple, are like the strivings to wash a blackamoor white. No believing in the Word, though preached a thousand times, without God's revealing arm. (Isaiah liii. 1.) It is not the tool that makes the watch, but the artist by it.

No instrument can act without the virtue of some superior agent. It is the altar that sanctifies the gold, and Christ that sanctifies the ordinance. Paul may plant by his doctrine and miracles, Apollos may water by his affectionate eloquence, but God alone can give the increase by His almighty breath. Man sows the seed, but God only can make it fructify. Then have your eyes fixed upon God. It is the Word of His lips, not of man's, whereby any are snatched out of the paths of the destroyer, as well as kept from them.

Man's teachings direct us to Christ; God's teachings bring us to Christ. Man brings the gospel at most to the heart; the Spirit only brings the gospel into the heart. Man puts the key to the lock; God only turns it, and opens the heart by it. It is God only can knock off the fetters of spiritual death, and open the gates that the King of Glory may enter with spiritual life. If any, therefore, will regard the Word more than as an instrument, or a partner with God in His operations.

He may justly leave you to the weakness of this, and deny the influx of His own strength. Cultivate a profound reverence for God's Word. Nothing is more grievous to the Holy Spirit than a trifling with revelation. The words of Scripture are divinely inspired. "Holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit." "Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom takes, but which the Holy Spirit takes." Stand in awe of this Holy Book! Beware of referring to it doubtfully, or of quoting it with levity.

To adopt the words of Scripture irreverently, to speak of any of its parts with suspicion, or to employ its phraseology flippantly, is to cast discredit upon inspiration, to press it into the service of the flesh, and to make the Word of God the jest-book of the profane. This is awful trifling with the thoughts and words of the Holy Spirit. God says, "I will look to him . . . who trembles at my Word." This was David's holy reverence, "My heart stands in awe of Your Word." And this his prayer, "Order my steps in Your Word, and let not any iniquity have dominion over me."

This profound conviction of the divinity and authority of God's Word will constrain you to bring the state of your soul, your doctrinal sentiments, and your daily life, to its unerring test. The only divine and sure standard is the Word. "To the law and to the testimony," should be our constant rule. Regard, in all matters of faith and practice, the Word of God as authoritative in its teaching, paramount in its voice, and final in its decision. Whatever doctrine or practice squares not with this standard, that will not stand the searching test of this divine touchstone, reject as unworthy your belief and adoption.

Let this be your daily practical acknowledgment. "Your Word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path." Taking into your hands this lamp, and guiding your steps by this light, your feet will never slide.

Cling to the Word of God the more firmly, as others attempt to sap the foundations of its divinity. Be "valiant for the truth on the earth," and "contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints." "Let the Word of Christ dwell richly in you in all wisdom," hiding it in your heart, that you sin not against Him.

Read it with prayer for the teaching of the Holy Spirit, comparing scripture with scripture, spiritual things with spiritual. Search it to know more of Christ, more of His atoning work, more of His mediatorial suitability to meet your every state of mind and heart. Study it to know the will of God, the love of your heavenly Father. Take every doubt, perplexity, and sorrow to the Word of God. And before you unfold its sacred leaves, lift your heart in prayer to the Eternal Spirit to guide your reading, to open your understanding, and to unveil your eye to this divine well-spring of life.

This is the only rule we suggest for the spiritual and practical reading of God's Word. Human helps may aid you in the study of the sacred literature of the Bible; but to read it with a view to the feeding and nourishing of the divine life in your soul, that you may grow in knowledge, faith, and holiness, that you may be instructed, comforted, and armed for the holy war, you need but rely upon the teaching of the Holy Spirit, who is promised to guide you into all the truth as it is in Jesus.

Beware of studying the Bible as a lover of history, of science, of poetry. Study it as a sinner, anxious to know how you may be saved. Read it to ascertain how God can pardon, justify, and take you to heaven when you die. Lay aside your caviling, debating, and speculating, and approach the Bible as a little child, as a sincere inquirer, as a humble learner, desirous of knowing the Scriptures, that are able to make you wise unto eternal life. In a research so momentous, lay aside all other books, and be the student of this one the Book of God.

Salvation is its one, its grand and absorbing theme, and this is all you need to know as a sinner bound for the judgment-seat of Christ. A notional, speculative reception of the Bible prepares an uneasy pillow for a dying hour; and it is marvellous and solemn to reflect how every subject, every theme, every question growing out of the history, philology, or destiny of God's Word, gives place in that awful moment to the one momentous, sublime salvation therein revealed, by which the soul may escape from hell and soar to heaven.

Who then desires to listen to learned disquisitions upon the literature, the eloquence, the poetry, or the sublimity of the Bible? Who, when nature is dissolving, earth is receding, eternity is opening, is in a condition to weigh, examine, and sift the evidences of the divinity of the Scriptures? The earnest, imploring language of such a one, alive to a conviction of sin and danger, is, "Is there pardon, is there salvation, is there hope for such a sinner as I am? Does the Word of God tell me how I may be saved?"

Read to me of Christ. Tell me of the Savior. Point me to the Lamb of God. Direct my eye to the cross, and let me behold Him whose blood cleanses from all sin. Read to me, speak to me, tell me only of JESUS." Precious Book, that fully meets a crisis of our being, and an awakened, alarmed state of mind, so tremendously solemn as this! We close this chapter with an earnest appeal to your judgment, conscience, and heart in favor of the Word of God. Whatever you neglect, neglect not the Bible.

If a professed believer, beware how you blend in your reading the chaff of human fiction and story, with the wheat of God's Word. It is utterly impossible, reason as you may, that you can cultivate a spiritual and devout taste and desire for the truth of God and the fiction of man. The Bible and the novel can never stand side by side. As a Christian, guard against the light, frivolous, frothy literature of the day. It will lessen your conviction of what is true, it will depreciate the value of what is divine, it will impair your taste

for what is spiritual, and it will bring poverty, barrenness, and death into your soul.

God speaks to you from every paragraph and sentence of this Holy Book. It is His voice that we hear, His signature that we behold, His ineffable glory, which, the more it is viewed in this bright mirror, may the more powerfully command our wonder and praise. When we approach these divine oracles, and hear the voice of God sometimes speaking out of the midst of the fire, but more often from the blood of sprinkling which speaks better things than the blood of Abel, we may well bend our knee, and take the shoes from off our feet, for the ground on which we stand is holy.

Oh that power might come down upon us from the Spirit of truth and grace, and beams from the Sun of righteousness break in upon our minds as we contemplate the intrinsic glories of the Bible! Let the truth and weight of these revelations sink deep into your ears. As men of this world merely, as creatures of time, more especially as the proprietors of immortality, you have a thousand-fold deeper interest in the Bible than in any other, or all other books. It is just as important that you who have the opportunity should become acquainted with the Scriptures, and believe, and love, and obey them, as it is that you should be saved.

This Book offers to you that which most you need, that which is infinitely more to you than all other things, glory, honor, immortality, and eternal life. We cannot but look upon the prevailing indifference with which the Word of God is regarded, as one of the evils over which we are loudly called to mourn. You send the Bible to the ignorant and destitute, you carry it to every cottage and waft it to every country, and thanks to God that you do so. But to what extent is it studied in your churches, read in your families, taught to your children?

There is no surer evidence of living without God in the world than living without intimate communion with the Bible. Who that does not mean to remain in impenetrable obduracy, who that does not form the deliberate resolve to close every avenue to the divine influence, that is not prepared to plunge the dagger of the second death into his own bosom; can live in the neglect of these Scriptures of God? And if you believe them, and understand them, will you refuse them the submission of your heart and your everlasting obedience?

Do you accredit the stupendous truths contained in this volume, and shall they awaken no deep interest, and urge you to no solemn preparation for your last account? There is not one among those who will not prove a savor of life unto life, or of death unto death. What can we add more to this searching, solemn appeal to you who are living in a wilful neglect of that Book which tells you of life in this world, and out of which you will be judged in the world which is to come? Disbelieve, or neglect the Word of God, and you reject the only chart to eternity.

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