

OUR ONLY RULE OF FAITH AND PRACTICE

"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" (II Timothy 3:16-17).

There must be some standard of authority in religion, even though the tendency of many in this age is to disregard all authority. There are three sources of authority for the religious beliefs of people: human reason, a church, and the Bible. Baptists accept the Bible instead of any other authority. Real Baptists have always believed and still believe that the Bible is the inspired Word of God, the only authoritative rule of faith and practice, is used as a means to the salvation of men, is an open book to be read, interpreted, believed and obeyed by all alike, should have the widest possible circulation in the native language of all people, should be preached in all the world, and that any departure from its teachings is fraught with untold evil.

The Bible, which is the inspired word of God, is the greatest book in the world. We have great reverence for it because it is God-breathed. Men of God recorded God's revelation to men under the direct leadership of the Holy Spirit.

The Bible is unique and incomparable. In all the world there is no other book like it, and there never will be. The fact that the Holy Spirit is its author makes it stand alone. It contains all that God wants us to know about Him and the way to approach Him.

Baptists do not have any creed except the Bible. We believe that the Bible was written by men who were supernaturally inspired; that it has truth without any admixture of error for its matter; and therefore is, and shall remain to the end of the age, the only complete and final revelation of the will of God to men; and that it is supreme as a standard by which all human opinions and conduct should be tried. We believe that the Holy Scriptures are a sufficient rule of faith and practice in all matters of the Christian life. They are to determine both the creed and the conduct of the child of God. "Thus saith the Lord" should settle all questions of faith and practice for God's children.

The Bible expresses the infinite purpose of God. Its theme is the broadest, its purpose the noblest, its scope the vastest, its congregation the largest, its stream of influence the most inexhaustible, its light the most illuminating, its song the most musical, its ideal the most heavenly, and its voice the most vibrant.

The Bible stands alone in its sublime appeal to seekers of truth, lovers of truth, and lovers of truth. It contains the mind of God, the state of man, the way of salvation, the doom of sinners, and the happiness of believers. Its doctrines are holy, its precepts are binding, its histories are true, and its decisions are immutable. It contains light to direct you, food to support you, and comfort to cheer you. It supplies us with a chart for life's voyage, a guide-book for life's journey, and a text-book for life's school. It affords us an inexhaustible source-book for right thinking, holy feeling and noble living. It has a vital and all-sufficient message for every nation, every class and every individual.

Efforts to destroy the Bible have been as persistent as they have been relentless. Jehoiakim set the example when he cut the prophecy of Jeremiah from the sacred record. But, God put it back, with a terrible anathema upon the name of the sacrilegious king. In the gloom of the Dark Ages, in their vain imagination, they gathered all the Bibles of the world together, put them in a vast heap in the streets of Rome, and made them a pile of ashes. Voltaire prophesied that within one hundred years the Bible would be extinct. Today the very house in which that prophecy was written is a place where the Bible is being published. Printed in more than twelve hundred tongues, there are over a billion copies of this Book read by men around the world. Despite all that has been done to discredit it and to destroy it, this book stands as the best loved of all literature, more trusted than any and all the books of time.

There are many would-be destroyers of the divinely inspired and inerrant Word of God today. Knifing the Bible is no longer a pastime with them, but it has become their chief task. Any man who arrogates to himself the right and the privilege of criticising and improving on God's Word assumes that he is wiser than God, the Author of the Book. While he refuses to believe in the inspiration and infallibility of the Bible, he does not have any trouble in believing in his own inspiration and infallibility. It would be difficult to find anybody with any more audacity than the critics who are attempting to cut the Bible into shreds and undermine the faith of people in it. All of these will die and undergo the pulverizing process of the grave, but the inspired, infallible, unchangeable and eternal Word of God will go on blessing the lives of millions. The poet expressed this idea in the following words:

"Last eve I paused before a blacksmith's door
And heard the anvil ring the vesper chime;
Then, looking in, I saw upon the floor
Old hammers worn by beating years of time.

'How many anvils have you had? said I,
'To wear and batter all these hammers so?'
'Just one,' said he: then with twinkling eye,
'The anvil wears the hammers out, you know.'

And so, I thought, the anvil of God's Word
For ages skeptic blows have beat upon;
Yet, though the noise of falling blows was heard
The anvil is unharmed -- the hammers gone."

"The Bible has its chief conflict with the mediocre intelligence. The child mind instinctively grasps its golden precepts; the most profound scholarship bows before its unsearchable wisdom. Only those puffed up with a little knowledge fail to accept the benediction of its saving truth."

Satan initiated his assault on the human race with an attack upon the Word of God. First, he cast doubt on it by asking, "Hath God said?" Then, he openly denied the Word of God, saying, "Thou shalt not surely die." From that time until the present Satan's emissaries have done the same things, doubted God's Word and denied God's

Word. A study of the character and lives of those who accept the teachings of the Bible, as compared with the character and lives of those who reject it, will be striking and startling. In the first group you will find the noblest and the best, and in the second group will be the vilest and the worst. Exercising the freedom of choice each selects his own company.

There is scarcely any part of the Bible that some critic has not declared to be false, but God's Word remains the same. All of its critics will return to the dust, but the Bible will never be destroyed. Our Lord said, "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away" (Matthew 24:35). God is able to take care of His book. He has always done so, and He will continue to do it. Thinking about those who deny various parts of God's Word, I am reminded of the Irishman who built his house three feet high and four feet wide. When asked why he did it that way, he answered: "So that if anyone kicks it over, it will be higher than it was in the first place." The Bible has been kicked about, but this has resulted in it rising higher and higher in the estimation of others, and in its having a wider influence.

I would call your attention to the poem which is entitled, "Believe The Bible," by the saintly Dr. A. B. Simpson. It is as follows:

"There are some who believe the Bible,
And some who believe in part,
And some who trust with a reservation,
And some with all their heart.
But I know that its every promise
Is firm and true always;
It is tried as the precious silver,
And it means just what it says.
It is strange we trust each other,
And only doubt our Lord;
We will take the word of mortals,
And yet distrust His Word.
But, oh, what light and glory
Would shine o'er all our days
If we always would remember
That He means just what He says."

The divinely inspired Bible inspires men. It has inspired men in the face of bitter opposition, appalling indifference, glaring human weaknesses, moral degeneracy, bloody wars, and floods of cynicism. It has inspired Christians to brave fiery furnaces, to face lions' dens, to face death councils, and to suffer martyrdom. All that is good and great in America can be traced to the influence of the Bible. Of this matchless book Andrew Jackson said: "It is the rock on which our Republic rests." In testifying to the importance and supremacy of the Bible, Woodrow Wilson said: "When you read the Bible you will know that it is the Word of God, because you will have found it the key to your own heart, your own happiness, and your own duty."

John Wanamaker, who made vast purchases for the United States Government and for himself, ranging into the millions, said the purchase of a little red-letter Bible, about eight inches long and six inches wide, at a cost of \$2.75, which he paid for in installments, was the biggest purchase he ever made. That Bible was the foundation on which his life was built, and it made possible all the vast service that he rendered during his life. He said: "Every other investment of my life seemed to me, after mature years, only secondary."

For Baptists there is only one authoritative source of religious truth and knowledge, and that is the Bible. It is a sufficient rule of faith and practice in all matters of religion. God's Word contains all that He would have us to believe, all that He would have us to be, and all that He would have us to do. In the time of conviction for sin it points to the Saviour from sin, in the home it points the way to happiness, in suffering it brings peace and patience, in sorrow it brings comfort, and in the hour of death it points Christians to the glory land. The Bible meets every condition and need of men. For man it points the way out and up, it dispels his darkness, dissolves his doubts, drives away his fear, and gives him the deepest sense of security.

Since the Bible is our sole authority in faith and practice, we ought to know what it teaches. There is no justifiable excuse for ignorance of the teachings of the Scriptures. Its rules of conduct are not ancient, but modern. Its precepts are for our day, as well as for the days that have passed. It is ageless and contemporary. It is always up-to-date. It reveals God, uncovers sin, proclaims the way of salvation from sin, presents the highest standard of life, and points to another and better world. Its riches can never be exhausted. Well may we study its contents, practice its precepts and examples, proclaim its message, glory in its triumphs, and magnify its Christ. It tells us how to live and how to die. Its truths are never out of date, but are as fresh as each new day.

No one can read the Bible with an open mind without being made aware of the fact that there has never been a book like it. No other book has influenced people as has the Bible. It has changed more lives than all other books. We ought to read it, study it, believe it, obey it, preach it, and teach it. To encourage us to do this God has said: "So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it" (Isaiah 55:11).

Do not dispute what the Bible says, or attempt to alter it. The New Testament is our only book of doctrine and practice. No additions are to be made to it; no subtractions are to be made from it; no alterations are to be made in it; and there is no substitute for it. It is amply sufficient for the many needs of all the peoples of the world. Its message is the hope of the world.

MY MOTHER'S BIBLE

"There's a dear and precious Book, Tho' it's worn and faded now,
Which recalls those happy days of long ago;
When I stood at Mother's knee, with her hand upon my brow,
And I heard her voice in gentle tones and low.

As she read the stories o'er, of those mighty men of old,
Of Joseph, and of Daniel and their trials;
Of little David bold, who became a king at last;
Of Satan with his many wicked wiles.

Then she read of Jesus' love, as He blest the children dear,
How He suffered, bled and died upon the tree;
Of His heavy load of care, Then she dried my flowing tears
With her kisses as she said it was for me.

Well those days are past and gone, but their mem'ry lingers still,
And the dear old Book each day has been my guide;
And I seek to do His will, as my mother taught me then,
And ever in my heart His words abide.

Blessed Book, precious Book,
On thy dear old tear-stained leaves I love to look,
Thou art sweeter day by day,
As I walk the narrow way that leads at last to that bright home above."