

The Bible Above All Price

by Edward Payson

The Bible is a valuable and important volume that contains more sublimity, purer morality, more important history, and finer strains of eloquence than any other book, and its divine origin makes it a revelation of infinite consequence.

Scripture: Psalm 19:7, Psalm 119:105, Proverbs 30:5, Isaiah 55:11, Matthew 24:35, John 5:39, Romans 15:4, 2 Timothy 3:16, Hebrews 4:12

Topics: "Bible Appreciation", "Scripture Distribution"

Description

Edward Payson preaches about the importance of valuing and distributing the Sacred Scriptures, emphasizing the connection between treasuring the Bible personally and sharing it with others. He highlights the immense value of the Bible as a revelation from heaven and as a human composition, citing testimonies from eminent individuals like Sir William Jones. Payson underscores the historical, moral, and intellectual significance of the Bible, urging listeners to recognize its unrivaled eloquence, sublimity, and impact on various aspects of life. He stresses the intrinsic excellencies of the Bible, its great antiquity, the opposition it has faced, the veneration it has received, and the benefits derived from it by the wise and good throughout history.

Transcript

There are two objects which a speaker who addresses his fellow-beings on an occasion like the present, ought ever to keep in view. Of these objects, the first, and with respect to his hearers, the most important is, to induce them to prize as it deserves a volume, which, notwithstanding its unrivalled claims to attention, is too generally neglected. The second is, to procure their assistance in gratuitously distributing this volume among their destitute fellow creatures. These objects, though distinct, are intimately connected; for if we can be induced suitably to prize the Sacred Scriptures ourselves, there will be little difficulty in persuading us to aid in communicating them to others; and there is but too much reason for presuming that he, who is not desirous to impart this treasure to all around him, knows nothing of its real value, nor of the temper which it is designed to produce.

With respect to a part, and we trust a very considerable part, of the present assembly, the objects which we have mentioned may be considered as already attained. There are, we doubt not, many before us, who entertain a profound veneration for the Bible; and in whose breasts it has an advocate, who pleads its cause, and that of the destitute, far more powerfully and successfully than we can do. To such persons nothing need be said in favor of a book, which not only affords them support and consolation under the

troubles of life, but enables them to contemplate death with pleasure, and, to borrow its own language, makes them "wise unto salvation."

If all present are of this description, our object is obtained, and farther remarks are needless. But it is presumable that, in every assembly, many are to be found, who, through inattention to the subject, or from some other cause, have formed very inadequate conceptions of the worth of this volume, and who consequently do not feel the infinite importance of putting it into the hands of others. It is also notorious, that even among such as profess to venerate the scriptures, there are not a few who seem to regard them as deficient in those qualities which excite interest and attention.

It may not be improper therefore, on an occasion like the present, to make a few remarks with a design to show, that while the scriptures are incalculably valuable and important, viewed as a revelation from heaven, they are also in a very high degree interesting and deserving of attention, considered merely as a human composition. As the whole volume of scripture will form the subject of these remarks, it was thought unnecessary to select any particular part of it as a text.

Were we permitted to adduce the testimony of the scriptures in their own favor, as a proof that their contents are highly interesting, our task would be short, and easily accomplished. But it is possible that, to this testimony, some might think it a sufficient reply, to apostrophize the sacred volume in the language of the captious Jews to our Savior; -- "Thou bearest record of thyself; thy record is not true." No similar objection can be urged however, against our availing ourselves of the testimony which eminent uninspired men have borne in favor of the scriptures.

From the almost innumerable testimonies of this nature, which might easily be adduced, we shall select only that of Sir William Jones, a Judge of the supreme court of judicature in Bengal--a man, says his learned biographer, who, by the exertion of rare intellectual talents, acquired a knowledge of arts, sciences, and languages, which has seldom been equaled, and scarcely, if ever, surpassed. "I have carefully and regularly perused the scriptures," says this truly great man, "and am of opinion, that this volume, independent of its divine origin, contains more sublimity, purer morality, more important history, and finer strains of eloquence--than can be collected from all other books, in what ever language they may have been written."

How well he was qualified to make this remark, and how much it implied in his lips, may be inferred from the fact that he was acquainted with twenty-eight different languages, and with the best works which had been published in most of them. That a volume, which in the opinion of such a man, is thus superior to all other books united, cannot be so insipid and uninteresting a composition as many seem to imagine, it must be needless to remark. That his praises, though great and unqualified, are in no respect unmerited, it would be easy, were it necessary, to prove by appropriate quotations from the book which he so highly extols.

But its morality will be more properly considered in a subsequent part of this discourse; and its unrivalled eloquence and sublimity are too obvious, and too generally acknowledged, to require illustration. If any imagine that he has estimated too highly, the historical information which this volume contains, we would only request them to peruse it with attention, and particularly to consider the assistance which it affords in accounting for many otherwise inexplicable phenomena, in the natural, political, and moral world.

A person who has never attended to the subject, will, on recollection, be surprised to find for how large a proportion of his knowledge he is indebted to this neglected book. It is the only book which satisfactorily

accounts, or even professes to account, for the introduction of natural and moral evil into the world, and for the consequent present situation of mankind. To this book we are also indebted for all our knowledge of the progenitors of our race, and of the early ages of the world; --for our acquaintance with the manners and customs of those ages; --for the origin and explanation of many remarkable traditions, which have extensively prevailed, and for almost every thing which is known, of many once flourishing nations; especially of the Jews, the most singular and interesting people perhaps, that ever existed.

It is the Bible alone, which by informing us of the deluge, enables us to account satisfactorily, for many surprising appearances in the internal structure of the earth, as well as for the existence of marine exuvise on the summits of mountains, and in other places far distant from the sea. By the same volume we are assisted in accounting for the multiplicity of languages which exist in the world; for the degraded condition of the Africans; for the origin and universal prevalence of sacrifices; and many other facts of an equally interesting nature.

We shall only add, that while the scriptures throw light on the facts here alluded to, the existence of these facts powerfully tends, on the other hand, to establish the truth and authenticity of the scriptures. In addition to these intrinsic excellencies of the Bible, which give it, considered merely as a human production, powerful claims to the attention of persons of taste and learning, there are various circumstances, of an adventitious nature, which render it peculiarly interesting to a reflecting mind.

Among these circumstances we may, perhaps not improperly, mention its great antiquity. Whatever may be said of its inspiration, some of the books which compose it are unquestionably the most ancient literary compositions extant, and perhaps the most ancient that ever were written; nor is it very improbable that letters were first employed in recording some parts of them, and that they were written in the language first spoken by man. It is also not only the most ancient book, but the most ancient monument of human exertion, the eldest offspring of human intellect, now in existence.

Unlike the other works of man, it inherits not his frailty. All the contemporaries of its infancy have long since perished and are forgotten. Yet this wonderful volume still survives. Like the fabled pillars of Seth, which are said to have bid defiance to the deluge, it has stood, for ages, unmoved in the midst of that flood which sweeps away men, with their labors into oblivion. That these circumstances render it an interesting object of contemplation, it is needless to remark.

Were there now in existence a tree which was planted; an edifice which was erected; or any monument of human ingenuity which was formed, at that early period, in which some parts of the Bible were written, would it not be contemplated with the keenest interest, carefully preserved as a precious relic, and considered as something little less than sacred? With what emotions then, will a thoughtful mind often open the Bible; and what a train of interesting reflections is it, in this view, calculated to excite?

While we contemplate its antiquity, exceeding that of every object around us, except the works of God, and view it, in anticipation, as continuing to exist unaltered until the end of time, must we not feel almost irresistibly impelled to venerate it, as proceeding originally from him, who is yesterday, today, and forever the same, and whose works, like his years, fail not? The interest which this volume excites by its antiquity will be greatly increased, if we consider the violent and persevering opposition it has encountered, and the almost innumerable enemies it has resisted and overcome.

We contemplate, with no ordinary degree of interest, a rock which has braved for centuries the ocean's rage, practically saying, "Hitherto shalt thou come, but no farther; and here shall thy proud waves be

stayed." With still greater interest, though of a somewhat different kind, should we contemplate a fortress which, during thousands of years, had been constantly assaulted by successive generations of enemies; around whose walls millions had perished; and to overthrow which, the utmost efforts of human force and ingenuity had been excited in vain.

Such a rock, such a fortress, we contemplate in the Bible. For thousands of years this volume has withstood, not only the iron tooth of time, which devours men and their works together, but all the physical and intellectual strength of man. Pretended friends have endeavored to corrupt and betray it; kings and princes have perseveringly sought to banish it from the world; the civil and military powers of the greatest empires have been leagued for its destruction; the fires of persecution have often been lighted to consume it, and its friends together; and at many seasons, death, in some horrid form, has been the almost certain consequence of affording it an asylum from the cry of its enemies.

It has also been almost incessantly assailed by weapons of a different kind, which, to any other book would be far more dangerous than fire or sword. In these assaults, wit and ridicule have wasted all their shafts; misguided reason has been compelled, though reluctantly, to lend her aid, and after repeated defeats, has again been dragged to the field; the arsenals of learning have been emptied to arm her for the contest; and in search of means to prosecute it with success, recourse has been had, not only to remote ages and distant lands, but even to the bowels of the earth, and the region of the stars.

Yet still the object of all these attacks remains uninjured, while one army of its assailants after another has melted away. Though it has been ridiculed more bitterly, misrepresented more grossly, opposed more rancorously, and burnt more frequently, than any other book, and perhaps than all other books united, it is so far from sinking under the efforts of its enemies, that the probability of its surviving until the final consummation of all things is now evidently much greater than ever.

The rain has descended; the floods have come; the storm has arisen, and beat upon it; but it falls not, for it is founded upon a rock. Like the burning bush., it has ever been in the flames, yet is still unconsumed; a sufficient proof, were there no other, that He who dwelt in the bush preserves the Bible. If the opposition which this volume has successfully encountered renders it an interesting object of contemplation; the veneration which has been paid to it, the use which has been made of it, and the benefits which have been derived from it by the wise and good, in all ages, make it still more so.

Who would not esteem it a most delightful privilege to see and converse with a man who had lived through as many centuries as the Bible has existed; who had conversed with all the successive generations of men, and been intimately acquainted with their motives, characters, and conduct; who had been the chosen friend and companion of the wise and good in every age--the venerated monitor, to whose example and instructions the wise had ascribed their wisdom, and the virtuous their virtues.

What could be more interesting than the sight, what more pleasing and instructive than the society of such a man? Yet such society we may in effect enjoy, whenever we choose to open the Bible. In this volume, we see the chosen companion, the most intimate friend of the prophets, the apostles, the martyrs, and their pious contemporaries; the guide, whose directions they implicitly followed; the monitor, to whose faithful warnings and instructions they ascribed their wisdom, their virtues, and their happiness.

In this volume, we see the book in which the deliverer, the king, the sweet psalmist of Israel delighted to meditate, day and night; whose counsels made him wiser than all his teachers; and which he describes as sweeter than honey, and more precious than gold. This too is the book, for the sake of which our pious

ancestors forsook their native land and came to this then desolate wilderness; bringing it with them, as their most valuable treasure, and at death, bequeathing it to us, as the richest bequest in their power to make.

From this source, they, and millions more now in heaven, derived the strongest and purest consolation; and scarcely can we fix our attention on a single passage in this wonderful book, which has not afforded comfort or instruction to thousands, and been wet with tears of penitential sorrow or grateful joy, drawn from eyes that will weep no more. There is probably not an individual present, some of whose ancestors did not, while on earth, prize this volume more than life, and breathe many fervent prayers to heaven that all their descendants, to the latest generation, might be induced to prize it in a similar manner.

Thousands, too, have sealed their belief of its truth with their blood; rejoicing to shed it in defense of a book, which, while it led them to the stake, enabled them to triumph over its tortures. Nor have its effects been confined to individuals. Nations have participated largely in its benefits. Armed with this volume, which is at once sword and shield, the first heralds of Christianity went forth conquering and to conquer. No less powerful than the wonder working rod of Moses, its touch crumbled into dust the temples of paganism, and overthrew, as in a moment, the immense fabric of superstition and idolatry which had been for ages erecting.

To this volume alone it is owing that we are not now assembled in the temple of an idol; that stocks and stones are not our deities; that cruelty, intemperance and impurity do not constitute our religion; and that our children are not burnt as sacrifices at the shrine of Moloch. To this volume we are also indebted for the reformation in the days of Luther; for the consequent revival and progress of learning; and for our present freedom from papal tyranny. Nor are these benefits, great as they are, all which it has been the means of conferring on man.

Wherever it comes, blessings follow in its train. Like the stream which diffuses itself, and is apparently lost among the herbage, it betrays its course by its effects. Wherever its influence is felt, temperance, industry, and contentment prevail; natural and moral evils are banished, or mitigated; and churches, hospitals, and asylums for almost every species of wretchedness, arise to adorn the landscape, and cheer the eye of benevolence. Such are the temporal benefits which even infidelity itself, if it would for once be candid, must acknowledge that the Bible has bestowed on man.

Almost coeval with the sun, its fittest emblem, it has, like that luminary, from the commencement of its existence, shed an unceasing flood of light on a benighted and wretched world. Who then can doubt that He, who formed the sun, gave the Bible to be "a light to our feet, and a lamp to our path?" Who, that contemplates this fountain, still full and overflowing, notwithstanding the millions who have drank of its waters, can doubt that it has a real, though invisible connection with that river of life, which flows forever at the right hand of God?

Thus far we have considered the Bible as merely a human composition, though, as was unavoidable, some rays of divinity have from time to time burst through the cloud in which we vainly attempted to shroud it. But if it be in this view thus valuable and interesting, in what language shall we describe the importance it assumes, when viewed as a revelation from GOD; --as the book which has guided millions of immortal beings to heaven; as the book which must guide us there, if we ever reach those mansions of eternal day!

That it is so, we shall not at present attempt to prove. In addressing such an assembly, on such an occasion, we have a right to take it for granted--to proceed on the supposition, that you believe with the apostle that "all scripture is given by inspiration of God." Viewed in this light, what finite mind can estimate its worth, or describe the reverence and attention with which it ought to be regarded? The ancient Greeks had one sentence, which they believed, though without foundation, to have descended from heaven; and to evince their gratitude and veneration for this gift, they caused it to be engraved, in letters of gold, on the front of their most sacred and magnificent temple.

We, more favored, have not a sentence only, but a volume, which really descended from heaven; and which, whether we consider its contents, or its Author, ought to be indelibly engraven on the heart of every child of Adam. Its Author is the author of our being; and its contents afford us information of the most satisfactory and important kind, on subjects of infinite consequence; respecting which all other books are either silent, or speak only doubtfully and unauthoritatively.

It informs us, with the greatest clearness and precision, of every thing necessary either to our present or future happiness; of every thing, in fact, which its Author knows, the knowledge of which would be really useful to us; and thus confers those benefits, which the tempter falsely pretended would result from eating the forbidden fruit; making us as gods, knowing good and evil. In the fabulous records of pagan antiquity, we read of a mirror endowed with properties so rare, that by looking into it, its possessor could discover any object which he wished to see, however remote; and discern with equal ease, persons and things above, below, behind, and before him.

Such a mirror, but infinitely more valuable than this fictitious glass, do we really possess in the Bible. By employing this mirror in a proper manner, we may discern objects and events, past, present, and to come. Here we may contemplate the all-enfolding circle of the Eternal mind, and behold a most perfect portrait of Him, whom no mortal eye hath seen, drawn by his own unerring hand. Piercing into the deepest recesses of eternity, we may behold Him existing independent and alone, previous to the first exertion of His creating energy.

We may see heaven, the habitation of His holiness and glory, "dark with the excessive brightness" of his presence; and hell, the prison of his justice, with no other light than that which the fiery billows of his wrath cast," pale and dreadful," serving only to render "darkness visible." Here too, we may witness the birth of the world which we inhabit; --stand as it were by its cradle, and see it grow up from infancy to manhood, under the forming hand of its Creator. We may see light at his summons starting into existence, and discovering a world of waters without a shore.

Controlled by His word, the waters subside, and islands and continents appear, not, as now, clothed with verdure and fertility, but sterile, and naked as the sands of Arabia. Again he speaks; and a landscape appears, uniting the various beauties of spring, summer, and autumn; and extending farther than the eye can reach. Still all is silent; not even the hum of insects is heard, and the stillness of death pervades creation; till, in an instant, songs burst from every grove; and the startled spectator, raising his eyes from the carpet at his feet, sees the air, the earth, and the sea, filled with life and activity, in a thousand various forms.

Here too, we may contemplate the origin and infancy of our race; --trace from its source to its termination that mighty river, of which we compose a part; and see it separating into two great branches; one of which flows back in a circle, and loses itself in the fountain whence it arose; while the other rushes on

impetuously in an opposite direction, and precipitates itself into a gulf which has no bottom. In this glass, we may also discover the fountain, whence flow those torrents of vice and wretchedness which deluge the earth; trace the glorious plan of Divine providence running, like a stream of lightning, through the dark and stormy cloud of sublunary events; and see light and order breaking in upon the mighty chaos of crimes, revolutions, wars and convulsions, which have ever distracted the world; and which, to a person unacquainted with the scriptures, must ever appear to produce no beneficial effect; but to succeed each other without order, and to happen without design.

Here too, we may contemplate ourselves, in every conceivable situation and point of view; --see our hearts laid open, and all their secret recesses displayed; --trace as on a map, the paths which lead to heaven and to hell; ascertain in which we are walking; and learn what we have been, what we are, and what we shall be hereafter. Above all, we may here see displayed to view, that wonderful scheme for the redemption of self-destroyed man, into which "angels desire to look " and without which the knowledge of God, and of ourselves, would serve only to plunge us in the depths of despair.

We may behold Him, whom we had previously seen creating the world, lying as a helpless infant in a manger; expiring in agonies on the cross; and imprisoned in the tomb. We may see Him rising--ascending to heaven--sitting down "at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty on high;" and there swaying the sceptre of universal empire, and ever living to make intercession for his people. Finally, we may see Him coming in the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory, to judge the world.

We may see the dead, at His command, rising from their graves; standing in awful silence and suspense before His tribunal; and successively advancing, to receive from His lips, the sentence which will confer on each of them an eternal weight of glory, or consign them forever to the mansions of despair. Such are the scenes and objects, which the scriptures place before us; --such the information which they afford. Who will deny that this information is important; or that it is such as we might naturally expect to find in a revelation from God?

Equally important to the present, and future happiness of man, are the precepts which the scriptures inculcate. With the greatest clearness and precision; and with an authority, to which no other book can pretend, they teach us our duty to God, to our fellowcreatures, and to ourselves. That spiritual kingdom, whose laws they promulgate, consists in "righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost;" and were these laws universally obeyed, nothing but righteousness, peace, and holy joy, would be found on earth.

Should any one deny this, after perusing them attentively, it would prove nothing, but the weakness of his understanding, or the depravity of his heart. They require us to regard God with filial, and our fellow creatures with fraternal affection. They require rulers to "be just; ruling in the fear of God;" and subjects to "lead quiet and peaceable lives in all godliness and honesty." They require the husband to "love the wife even as himself;" and the wife "to reverence her husband."

They require parents to educate their children "in the nurture and admonition of the Lord " and children to love, honor, and obey their parents. They require masters to treat their servants with kindness; and servants to be submissive, diligent, and faithful. They require of all, temperance, contentment, and industry; and stigmatize, as worse than an infidel, him who neglects to provide for the necessities of his family. They provide for the speedy termination of animosities and dissensions, by requiring us to forgive and pray for our enemies, whenever we pray for ourselves; and to make reparation to all whom we may have injured, before we presume to appear with our offerings in the presence of God.

In a word., they teach us, that "denying ungodliness, and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously and godly, in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour, Jesus Christ." These duties they require us to perform, with constancy and perseverance, on penalty of incurring the everlasting displeasure of our Creator, and its dreadful consequences. In addition to these instructions and precepts, the scriptures furnish us with the most instructive examples--examples, which most plainly and convincingly teach us, both what we must shun, and what we are to pursue.

On every rock, where immortal souls have been wrecked--at the entrance of every path which leads to danger, they show us some self-destroyed wretch, standing like a pillar of salt, to warn succeeding travelers not to approach it; while at the gate, and in the path of life, they place many divinely instructed and infallible guides, who lead the way, beckon us to follow, and point to the happy mansions, in which it ends. Knowing how powerfully we are influenced by the example of those with whom we associate, it introduces us to the society of the most amiable and excellent of our species; makes us perfectly acquainted with their characters and pursuits; admits us into, not only their closets, but their hearts; unveils to us all their secret springs of action; and shows us the hidden source whence they derived wisdom and strength to subdue their sinful propensities, and overcome the world.

By opening this volume, we may at any time walk in the garden of Eden with Adam; sit in the ark with Noah; share the hospitality, or witness the faith of Abraham; ascend the mount of God with Moses; unite in the secret devotions of David; or listen to the eloquent and impassioned addresses of St. Paul. Nay more, we may here converse with Him, who spoke as never man spake; participate with the spirits of the just made perfect, in the employments and happiness of heaven; and enjoy sweet communion with the Father of our spirits, through his Son, Jesus Christ.

Such is the society, to which the scriptures introduce us; --such the examples, which they present to our imitation; requiring us to follow them, "who through faith and patience, inherit the promises;" to walk in the steps of our divine Redeemer; and to be "followers of God, as dear children." Nor does this precious volume contain nothing but instructions, precepts, examples, and threatenings. No, it contains also "strong consolation;" --consolation suited to every possible variety and complication of human wretchedness; and of sufficient efficacy to render the soul, not only resigned, but joyful in the lowest depths of adversity; --not only tranquil, but triumphant in the very jaws of death.

It is the appointed vehicle, by which the Spirit of God, the promised Comforter, communicates not only his instructions, but his consolations to the soul. It is, if I may so express it, the body which he assumed, in order to converse with men; and he lives and speaks in every line. Hence it is said to "be quick," or living, "and powerful." Hence its words "are spirit, and they are life;" --the living, life-giving words of the living God. The consolation which it imparts, and the blessings which it offers, are such as nothing but omnipotent goodness can bestow.

It finds us guilty; and freely offers us pardon. It finds us polluted with innumerable defilements; and offers us moral purity. It finds us weak and enslaved; and offers us liberty. It finds us wretched; and offers happiness. It finds us dead; and offers everlasting life. It finds us "having no hope and without God in the world," with nothing before us, "but a certain, fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation;" and places glory, and honor, and immortality, full in our view; and while it urges us to pursue them, by the exercise of faith in the Redeemer, and "patient continuance in well doing," it encourages and animates us in the pursuit, by the most condescending offers of assistance, and "exceedingly great and precious

promises;" promises signed by the immutable God, and sealed with the blood of his eternal Son; promises which, one would think, are sufficient to render indolence active; and timidity bold.

Unfailing pleasures; durable riches; immortal honors; imperishable mansions; an unfading crown; an immovable throne; an everlasting kingdom; an eternal weight of glory; perfect, uninterrupted, never ending, perpetually increasing felicity, in the full fruition of God, are the rewards, which these promises assure to all penitent believers. But in vain do we attempt to describe these rewards; for "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man the things, which God hath prepared for them that love him."

Such are the circumstances, which render the Bible interesting as a human composition; --such the instructions, precepts, and promises, which it communicates as a revelation from God and in proportion to the importance of its contents, are the evils which would result from its absence or loss. Destroy this volume, as the enemies of human happiness have vainly endeavored to do; and you render us profoundly ignorant of our Creator; of the formation of the world which we inhabit; of the origin and progenitors of our race; of our present duty, and future destination; and consign us, through life, to the dominion of fancy, doubt and conjecture.

Destroy this volume; and you rob us of the consolatory expectation excited by its predictions, that the stormy cloud which has so long hung over a suffering world, will at length be scattered and a brighter day succeed; --you forbid us to hope that the hour is approaching, when nation shall no more lift up sword against nation; and righteousness, peace, and holy joy, shall universally prevail; and allow us to anticipate nothing, but a constant succession of wars, revolutions, crimes, and miseries, terminating only with the end of time.

Destroy this volume; and you deprive us, at a single blow, of religion, with all the animating consolations, hopes, and prospects which it affords; and leave us nothing but the liberty of choosing, --miserable alternative! --between the cheerless gloom of infidelity, and the monstrous shadows of paganism. Destroy this volume; and you unpeople heaven; bar forever its doors against the wretched posterity of Adam; restore to the king of terrors his fatal sting; bury hope in the same grave which receives our bodies; consign all who have died before us, to eternal sleep, or endless misery; and allow us to expect nothing at death, but a similar fate.

In a word, destroy this volume; and you take from us, at once, every thing, which prevents existence from becoming, of all curses, the greatest. You blot out the sun; dry up the ocean; and take away the atmosphere of the moral world; and degrade man to a situation, from which he may look up with envy to "the brutes that perish." Who then would not earnestly wish to believe the scriptures, even though they came to him, unattended with sufficient evidence of their divine origin.

Who can be so much his own enemy, as to refuse to believe them, when they come attended with evidence, more than sufficient to satisfy all but the willfully incredulous? Who, in this view of them, imperfect as it is, is prepared to say, that they are not of all books the most important; that they ought not to be prized and studied as such, by all who possess them; and put, without delay, into the hands of all who do not? Were this inestimable treasure in the exclusive possession of any individual, would you not consider him as the most malevolent of beings, if he neglected to communicate it, as soon as possible, to his fellow creatures?

And if he were a stranger to the use of the press, would not the common feelings of humanity require him to spend whole nights, as did a wealthy merchant in the East, in transcribing it for their use? What possible excuse then, can we assign, for neglecting to distribute this treasure, when the press affords us the means of doing it at so trifling an expense? Will it be said, that few, or none of our fellowcitizens are destitute? It is a fact within the knowledge of this society, that the deficiency of Bibles in this District, to say nothing of other places, is far greater, than they are able to supply.

Will it be said, that none are destitute of the sacred volume, but in consequence of their own fault; and that they are therefore unworthy to receive such a gift? Admitting this to be the case, which in many instances, however, it is not, is this an excuse for neglecting them, which it becomes us to assign? Had God adopted such a rule in the distribution of his favors; --had he bestowed the Bible on none but the deserving; who among ourselves should ever have been favored with it?

Will it be said, that few, or none of our fellowcitizens are destitute? It is a fact within the knowledge of this society, that the deficiency of Bibles in this District, to say nothing of other places, is far greater, than they are able to supply. Will it be said, that none are destitute of the sacred volume, but in consequence of their own fault; and that they are therefore unworthy to receive such a gift? Admitting this to be the case, which in many instances, however, it is not, is this an excuse for neglecting them, which it becomes us to assign?

Had God adopted such a rule in the distribution of his favors; --had he bestowed the Bible on none but the deserving; who among ourselves should ever have been favored with it? Will it be said, that the other wants of the poor are so numerous and pressing, that nothing can be spared for the supply of this? But what other want can be so pressing, so deserving of immediate attention, as that of the Bible? In what other way can we, at an equal expense, do so much to alleviate the miseries, and promote, I will not say the eternal, but even the temporal happiness of the poor, as by putting into their hands a book, which contains such a mass of the most valuable and important information--which is so eminently calculated to render them better, and consequently happier; in all the relations of life; which teaches them, "in whatever state they are therewith to be content;" and to look for the relief of their necessities to Him who "hears the young ravens when they cry;" and to whom they will never look in vain, while they take this precious volume for their guide.

Were they experimentally acquainted with the worth of this volume, they would themselves feel the want of it to be the first, the most pressing of wants. Send us any famine, they would cry, but "a famine of the word of God." Keep your wealth; enjoy your possessions; give us but the Bible to smooth the path of life, and the bed of death; and we will envy none their possessions, but living, and dying, will bless you; though we should perish with hunger. Such is the language of the pious poor.

Such, were it not for their vices or their ignorance, would be the language of all the poor; and who will deny, that their vices and ignorance render it still more necessary, that they should be put in immediate possession of the Bible? In requesting you to assist in supplying them with it, this Society does not so much solicit you to confer a favor, as to share in a privilege; --the privilege of uniting with the pious and benevolent in all parts of the world, in the noble design of distributing the scriptures; and the still more enviable privilege of becoming "workers together with God" in diffusing the knowledge of Himself, and His will.

With what has been already done; with what is now doing for the promotion of this God-like design, you are in some measure acquainted. You are not ignorant, that societies for the gratuitous distribution of the scriptures, have been formed in all parts of the world; and that new societies, for the same purpose, are constantly forming. By the members of these various societies nearly a million of dollars was contributed during the past year; more than four hundred thousand dollars of which, were received by the British and Foreign Bible Society alone.

To aid the efforts of these societies, not only have kings and princes lent their influence, and the rich opened their treasures; but the widow has cast in her two mites; the child has presented all his little hoard; servants have given a third part of their annual wages; and more than one military corps have offered a certain proportion of their pay. In consequence of these astonishing and unprecedented exertions, the sacred scriptures, or at least parts of them, have already been printed and circulated in upwards of forty different languages and dialects.

Shall we then be idle, while all ranks and denominations are thus actively engaged in this glorious work? While Britons, Russians, Swedes, Polanders, Germans, Swiss, Italians, Greeks, Africans, and Indians, are employed in diffusing the scriptures, shall Americans alone do nothing? Or shall we be last and least among Americans in favoring and promoting such a design? It is with no small reluctance we are obliged to confess, that in this rank, a very considerable part of this District may justly be placed.

All that has been done here, has been done by comparatively a few. We speak with confidence, when we assert, that among all the societies which have been formed for the distribution of the scriptures, in our own or in other countries, not one can be found which has received assistance so disproportionate to what might have been reasonably expected, as this. And to what is the existence of this disgraceful fact to be ascribed? Are the inhabitants of this District less religious, do they value the Bible less, --or their property more than others?

This, we presume, you will not feel disposed to allow. Shall we not then, do all in our power, to wipe off so foul a stain from this section of our country? Shall we give our destitute countrymen regret, that they were not born in any other part of the world, where they would have been supplied with the scriptures, rather than in this Christian land? Shall the eye of Omniscience, while it surveys the globe, find here the only spot, where the water of life is not permitted to flow freely; --where the cry of the poor for Bibles is disregarded; and thus be provoked to take from us a gift, of which we seem not to know the worth?

There is reason to believe, that unless we speedily and diligently exert ourselves, this will be the case. He "who cannot lie" has declared, that "the knowledge of the Lord shall fill the earth as the waters cover the seas." The period in which this prediction will be fully accomplished, is now evidently and rapidly approaching. The greatest of those obstacles, which once opposed its fulfillment, are already removed or overcome; and it is more than probable that before very many years have elapsed, there will be scarcely a human habitation on earth, unless indeed it be among ourselves, in which the Bible will not be found.

Let us then engage as one man, in hastening the arrival of this glorious and long expected day. Let us give wings to the Bible. Let us guide this life-giving stream into every abode and cottage in our wilderness. And permit us to express a hope, that your assistance in promoting this design, will not be confined to the present occasion; but that you will aid our exertions by becoming active members of this society. Above all, while engaged in conveying the Bible to others, let us beware of neglecting it ourselves.

Let us bind it to our hearts as our most valuable treasure; study it with that reverence and attention which its character demands, and submit implicitly to its decisions, as to "the lively oracles of God." Thus we shall be impressed with a conviction, far more strong and abiding than any external evidence can produce, That all scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, and instruction in righteousness; that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.

Thus shall we be enabled by our own experience, to feel and adopt the language of the Psalmist, "The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes. More to be desired are they than gold; yea than much fine gold; sweeter also than honey, or the honey-comb. Moreover by them is thy servant warned, and in keeping of them there is great reward."

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/edward-payson/the-bible-above-all-price/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net