

WHAT THE BIBLE CONTAINS FOR THE BELIEVER

By George F. Pentecost, D.D.
Darien, Connecticut

1. The Bible is the Only Book that can Make Us Wise unto Salvation.

The Bible is not a book to be studied as we study geology and astronomy, merely to find out about the earth's formation and the structure of the universe; but it is a book revealing truth, designed to bring us into living union with God. We may study the physical sciences and get a fair knowledge of the facts and phenomena of the material universe; but what difference does it make to us, as spiritual beings, whether the Copernican theory of the universe is true, or that of Ptolemy? On the other hand, the eternal things of God's Word do so concern us. Scientific knowledge, and the words in which that knowledge is conveyed, have no power to change our characters, to make us better, or give us a living hope of a blessed immortality; but the Word of God has in it a vital power, it is "quick and powerful" living and full of divine energy (<Heb. 4:12>)-- and when received with meekness into our understanding and heart is able to save our souls (<James 1:18,21>), for it is the instrument of the Holy Spirit wherewith He accomplishes in us regeneration of character. The Word of God is a living seed containing within itself God's own life, which, when it is received into our hearts, springs up within us and "brings forth fruit after its kind;" for Jesus Christ, the eternal Word of God, is the living germ hidden in His written Word. Therefore it is written, "The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit and they are life" (<John 6:63>), and so it is that "he that heareth My words"-- that is, receiveth them into good and honest hearts-- that heareth the Word and understandeth it, "hath everlasting life" (<John 5:24>). Of no other book could such things as these be said. Hence we say, the Word of God is the instrument in His hand to work in us and for us regeneration and salvation; "for of His own will begat He us with the Word of truth, the engrafted Word, which is able to save your souls" (<James 1:18,21>).

This leads us to say that we are related to God and the eternal verities revealed in this Book, not through intellectual apprehension and demonstration, but by faith. Not by reasoning, but by simple faith, do we lay hold on these verities, resting our faith in God, who is under and in every saving fact in the Book. (See <1 Pet. 1:21>). It seems to me, therefore, to be the supreme folly for men to be always speculating and reasoning about these spiritual and revealed things; and yet we meet constantly even good people who are thus dealing with God's Word. First of all, they treat the revelation as though it were only an opinion expressed concerning the things revealed, and so they feel free to dissent from or receive it with modification, and deal with it as they would with the generalizations and conclusions, more or less accurate, of the scientists, and the theories, more or less true, of the philosophers. If the Word commends itself to their judgment they accept it; thus making their judgment the criterion of truth, instead of submitting their opinions to the infallible Word of God. It is not seldom that we hear a person say they believe the Word of God to be true; and then the very next instant, when pressed by some statement or declaration of that Word, they say, "Ah! but then I believe so and so"-- something entirely different from what God has declared. Then again, many people who profess to believe God's Word seem never to think of putting themselves into practical and saving relation to it. They believe that Jesus Christ is the Saviour of the world, but they never believe on Him or in Him; in other words, that He is a Saviour to them.

God's Book is full of doctrines and promises. We declare them, and some one says, "You must prove that doctrine or that promise to be true." The only way to prove a doctrine to be true is by a personal experience of it through faith in Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ says, "Ye must be born again." Should you attempt to master the meaning and power of that doctrine by mere speculation, you would presently land just where Nicodemus did, and say, "How can these things be?" Instead of doing so, suppose you attend further to what is said, namely, "Whosoever believeth is born of God" (<1 John 5:1; John 1:12-

13>). In obedience to this divine teaching, not knowing how it is to be done in us, we take that Word and yield ourselves to Jesus Christ; and lo! there dawns upon us an experience that throws light upon all that which before was a mystery. We have experienced no physical shock, but a great change is wrought in us, especially in our relation to God. "Old things are passed away, and behold all things are become new" (<2 Cor. 5:17>). Thus we come into an experimental understanding of the doctrine of the new birth. So every other doctrine pertaining to the spiritual life is by God's grace transmuted into experience. For just as a word stands for an idea or thought, so the doctrines of God stand for experiences; but the doctrine must be received before the experience can be had. And, moreover, we are to receive all doctrines, all truth, through faith in Him, for Christ and His Word are inseparable, just as a man's note is only current and valuable because the man is good. A banknote is received in the faith of the bank it represents. Should the bank fail, the note instantly becomes worthless.

But there are some things revealed in the Word of God which we believe without experience. For instance, we believe that this "vile body" (<Phil. 3:21>), dishonored by sin and upon the neck of which death will soon put his foot, will in the day of "His appearing and kingdom" (<2 Tim. 4:1; 1 Thes 4:15>) be raised, changed and fashioned like unto His glorious body (<Phil. 3:21>). Do you know how we can so surely believe these things? We answer, because God has proved to us so much of His Word that when He announces something yet to be made true, on the basis of past experience we reach out toward and accept as true the promise of the future things. Indeed, He already makes it true in our hearts, for "faith is the substance of things hoped for" (<Heb. 11:1>). For even here we have a present spiritual experience which is as an earnest to us of the culmination yet future; for we are already risen with Christ (<Col. 2:13; 3:1; Eph. 2:5-6; Rom. 8:11>).

2. The Bible Contains in Itself the Absolute Guarantee of Our Inheritance in Christ.

Suppose we should come to you some day and call in question your ownership of your house, and demand that you give it up-- a homestead bequeathed to you by your father. "Why do you make such a demand upon me?" you ask. "Because," we reply, "it is not your house; you have no right to it; at least you do not know that it is yours." "Oh, yes," you reply, "I am quite sure it is my house." "How do you know? What is your reason for believing it is your house?" "Why, because my father lived here before me." "That is no good reason." "Well, I have lived here undisputed for five years myself." "It does not hence follow that the house is yours." "But I am very happy in it; I enjoy myself here." "Well, but my dear sir, that you may do, and still have no right to it." At last, pushed to the wall, you take us with you down to the courthouse, and show us your father's will, duly written, signed, sealed and recorded.

This may serve to illustrate the point. A great many Christians are at a loss where and how to ground their "title." It is not in the fact that you are a descendant of a saintly father, a child of believing parents, for, as old Matthew Henry says, "Grace does not run in the blood;" nor is it that you have membership in the visible Church of Christ; nor is it to be found in delightful frames and feelings-- in a word, not even a genuine Christian experience constitutes your "title-deed." Where then are we to bottom our hope? Why, just in the naked bare Word of God. It is written, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that heareth My words, and believeth on Him that sent Me hath everlasting life," etc. (<John 5:24>). Straight to the record do we appeal for a final test as to our possession in God. "This is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life" (<1 John 5:11-12>). Our faith lays hold on the Son of God, in whom we have redemption (<Eph. 1:7>) by means of and through the recorded Word of promise, for this record was "written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through His name" (<John 20:31>). The Scriptures are the covenants, old and new, in which God has guaranteed to us, by word and oath (<Heb. 6:17-18>), sealed with the blood of Jesus Christ (<Matt. 26:28>), an inheritance among the saints. We do not emphasize this point in any wise to underrate Christian experience (for it is most blessed and true), or undervalue the blessing of believing parents, or the Church and her ordinances, but only to draw your attention to "the more sure Word of prophecy" (<2

Pet. 1:19>), which is better to us for confirmation than visions and voices, frames and feelings, parental benedictions, and church sacraments.

3. The Word of God is the Means Appointed for the Culture of Our Christian Life.

James tells us (<James 1:18>) that the Word of truth is the instrument of our regeneration, and Jesus tells us that the truth not only "makes us free," but prays the Father that we may be "sanctified through the truth" (<John 6:32-36; 17:17-19>). And Paul tells us, in words which the Holy Spirit teacheth, that "Christ loved the church, and give Himself for it, that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the Word," etc. (<Eph. 5:25,27>). "This is the will of God, even your sanctification" (<1 Thes 4:3>), for God hath not called us to uncleanness, but unto holiness (<1 Thes 4:7>). After regeneration, nothing can be more important than this. We are told in the Bible and we believe it-- that by and by we shall be in another state of existence-- in heaven in the presence of the loving and glorified Jesus; that we shall see His face, and His name shall be on our foreheads (<Rev. 22:4>), that we shall be with the angels, an innumerable company, and with the spirits of just men made perfect, the saints of all ages (<Heb. 12:23>), that we shall know them and be in their society (<Matt. 17:3; 1 Cor. 13:12>), that we shall be absolutely untainted with sin, as glorious as the uncreated light of God (<Rev. 21:4,27; Matt. 13:45>). This being the place and the company toward which we are being borne along so rapidly, we want to be prepared for both place and society.

Ah, friends, you are anxious to be cultured for this world and its "best society," in its knowledge, in its customs, and in its manners. Yes, you lavish time and money upon yourself and your children, in order that they may be furnished with the accomplishments and culture of this world. You say when you appear in good society you want to be at ease, to be a peer among the most accomplished, and you wish the same for your children. Were you invited to go six months hence to take up your abode at the Court of James, as the guest of England's noble king, you would ransack all the books at your command that treated of court etiquette and manners; you would brush up in English history, so that you might not be taken unawares either in your knowledge of the affairs of the country, or in court ceremonial. But in a little while we are going to the court of the King immortal, eternal, in the kingdom of glory. We know not the day nor the hour when the Lord will come, or call us hence; and we want to be ready, both as to purity of character and the courtly culture of the heavenly city. We wish to be familiar with the history of redemption, and with the mysteries of the kingdom. We should not want to appear as an awkward stranger in our Father's house of light. We can only get this sanctification of character and culture of life and manner by constant familiarity and communion with God and the saints through the Word.

Men of the world are anxious that they, or, it may be, that their children, should appear well in the society of this world. To this end they devote themselves and them to the schools of the world and fashion; the dancing-school and the academy, they fancy, is the only place where polite manners and courtly grace may be acquired. Believers, too, are anxious that their children should be cultured and accomplished in every way worthy of being the King's sons or daughters, as by grace they are. But they should not think of seeking for them the entree of what is called in this world the "best society", or sending them to fashionable finishing-schools and dancing-academies, in order to such end. If they may have their hearts filled with the dear, great love of God, and the sweet grace of Christ; if they hang on the chamber walls of their souls as pictures, "Whatsoever things are honest, just, pure, lovely and of good report, and think on these things" (<Phil. 4:8>); if they journey through this world in companionship with Him; if the Holy Spirit guides them through the Word, as Bunyan's Pilgrim was led through the "house of the interpreter," and shows them wonderful and beautiful things out of His law; if the fruit of the Spirit, which "is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance" (<Gal. 5:22-23>), adorns their lives and characters-- Christians are not then afraid that their children will be a whit behind the foremost society people in the land in culture of mind and heart, and grace of manner. Ah, there is a heavenly culture and a divine grace of manner that far transcend anything found in the schools

of this world. Only a Christian could think of saying with Paul, standing before his judge, "except these bonds" (<Acts 26:29>).

John Bunyan, locked up for twelve years in Bedford Jail, with his Bible and concordance for his constant companions, produced and sent forth to the world his immortal dream, written with such beauty of style and in such chaste and simple manner, as to make it classic in English literature. So perfect and matchless was the intellectual and spiritual culture of this unlearned "tinker of Elstow," that the scholarly John Owen testified before the King, "Your Majesty, if I could write as does that tinker in Bedford Jail I would gladly lay down all my learning." Where did John Bunyan get his culture? In glorious fellowship with Moses in the Law, with David in the Psalms, with Isaiah and the prophets and holy men of God, who wrote as they were moved by the Holy Spirit; with Matthew, Mark, Luke and John; with Paul, Peter and all the rest who wrote and spoke not the thoughts, nor in the words, of man's wisdom, but God's thoughts, and in words which the Holy Spirit giveth. Read Homer and Milton, Shakespeare and Dante; read Bacon, Macaulay, Addison and Carlyle; go through all the best literature of all ages, and it will fall infinitely short of the purity, beauty and grandeur of thought and expression found in God's Word.

Goethe, who said he was "not Christian," has declared of the canonical Gospels: "The human mind, no matter how much it may advance in intellectual culture, and in the extent and depth of the knowledge of nature, will never transcend the high moral culture of Christianity as it shines and glows in the canonical Gospels." Renan, the French infidel author, concludes his life of Jesus with these remarkable words "Whatever may be the surprises of the future, Jesus will never be surpassed; His worship will grow young without ceasing; His legend will call forth tears without end; His suffering will melt the noblest hearts; all ages will proclaim that among the sons of men there is none born greater than Jesus." And Strauss, the rationalistic German author of the "Life of Jesus," says: "Jesus presents within the sphere of religion the culminating point, beyond which posterity can never go; yea, which it cannot even equal. He remains the highest model of religion within the reach of our thought, and no perfect piety is possible without His presence in the heart." Thus the power of the "Book and the Person" for the highest culture of the highest nature of man, is affirmed by the great apostle of modern culture, and by those who do not admit the divine origin of the Scriptures, or the deity of Him of whom they are from first to last the witness. If, then, you want to know how to serve God and do His will on the earth, and be thoroughly prepared and cultured for heaven hereafter, take His Word, and make it the rule and companion of your life.

4. The Bible is the Christian's Armory.

The Christian's calling in the world is that of a soldier. He must fight the good fight of faith (<1 Tim. 6:12; 2 Tim. 4:7>). Sinners are to be won from the power of the devil to God. Their intelligence, their wills, and their affections, are to be stormed and carried for Him; they are to be turned from the power of darkness to light; their prison-houses of sin are to be broken into; their chains knocked off and the captives set free (<Acts 26:16-18>). We also, in our own Christian life and pilgrimage, are set upon by the powers of darkness; by the fiery darts of the devil. Doubts, infidelity, temptations, evil imaginations, unclean, unholy, and vain thoughts assail us, poured in upon our souls by Satan, the lusts of the flesh being thus set on fire of hell, if by this means the child of God may be overtaken in a fault or overcome by sin. But this warfare is not carnal, or after the manner of the flesh. "For though we walk in the flesh (have our lives as other men do in fleshly bodies) we do not war after the flesh: (for the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds); casting down imaginations (reasonings) and every high thing (lofty edifice) which is being raised against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought in obedience to Christ" (<2 Cor. 10:3-5>).

Just as Joshua went up against Jericho, and took its strongholds and high towers, and cast them down and made captive the city, not with carnal weapons, but with trumpets of rams' horns (<Josh. 6>), so we, proceeding against the strongholds, imaginations, and infidel arguments of men, are to take the Gospel trump. The sword we are to wield is the "Word of God, the sword of the Spirit" (<Eph. 6:17>)

which makes him who wields it invincible. The Bible itself must be brought out, not only as the best defense against all the assaults of infidelity from the lofty towers of human reasonings, but also as the mighty weapon to overcome and bring the enemies of God into captivity to Christ. "They overcame by the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony" (<Rev. 12:11>). "Wherefore take unto you the whole armor of God; having your loins girt about with truth; and having on the breastplate of righteousness, and your feet shod with the preparation of the Gospel of peace; and above all, taking the shield of faith, whereby ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked; and take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God" (<Eph. 6:13-17>). We have only to recall how our Saviour overcame the devil with the all-prevailing weapon, "It is written," in order that we may be furnished with the secret of successful warfare for Him.

Very often Christians, young and old, come to us in the "inquiry room" and say, "Won't you come and talk with this friend of mine?" "Why don't you talk with him (or her) yourself?" we reply. "Because I don't know what to say to him, and, besides, you know more of the Bible." "Well, why don't you know more of the Bible?" To this, various answers are given. At any rate we meet here one grave mistake. An ignorance of the Bible, which not only furnishes us with our spiritual weapons, but "thoroughly furnishes us unto all good works" (<2 Tim. 3:17>), leads many earnest Christians to the doubtful use of their own argumentation in dealing with their own and others' souls. It is a hopeless task to pull down the strongholds of the unregenerated mind and heart with anything less than these divine weapons. But all may equip themselves from this great armory. The Bible contains ideas which no philosophy or human theory can furnish, and therefore puts us in possession of weapons which the enemy cannot withstand when hard pushed by them, reinforced as they are by the invisible and mighty presence of the Holy Spirit, and which renders us impregnable to the assaults of the adversary. Of this mighty power of the Word and Spirit of God we have a splendid example in the case of Stephen, and other early disciples, whose words, drawn from the Scripture, the Jews could not withstand. We have never yet met an infidel or atheist whose arguments we could not turn aside when depending simply on the Word of God. Nay, more, we have never yet met one in the "inquiry rooms" who has been able to withstand God's Word and the mighty facts of the Bible, when, in humble, dependence upon God we have set them in array before him. If you know God's thoughts and seek to be guided by the Holy Spirit, He will say out of your mouth the right word at the right time, both to ward off an assault and to strike a telling blow for the truth. And amidst all this warfare, the light and love and gentleness of Jesus Christ will so shine out in your bearing and manner that they will be convinced of your sincerity, and God will give you the victory.

5. The Bible is a Perfect Map and Chart to the Christian on Pilgrimage Through the World.

With God's Word in hand and heart you may tread your way with perfect safety and confidence through all the labyrinths of this world. The straight and narrow way is so clearly and sharply marked that he who runs may read. It is a highway (unseen, it may be, by the worldling) in which a wayfaring man, though a fool, need not err (<Isa. 35:8>), for it is everywhere marked by His commandments. More than that, we have an unseen Guide, even the Spirit of Truth, who leads us, and says to us, in places of doubt or uncertainty, "This is the way, walk ye in it" (<Isa. 30:21>). Thus, a pilgrim and a stranger, you may keep your onward way to the city of God in safety and confidence, following in the light of the Word, which is "a lamp to your feet, and a light unto your path" (<Ps. 119:105>), the path that no one knoweth save He that leadeth thee. Yea, and you will find that the way, over hills and through valleys, shines more and more unto the perfect day (<Prov. 4:18>). The Word of God is a chart that marks all the rocks and reefs in the sea of life; if we heed, and sail our frail bark by it, we shall come safely into the haven of rest at last. But if we are heedless and proud, and self-sufficient in our own conceits, we shall make shipwreck of our faith. A young lieutenant in the English navy discovered a small but dangerous rock in the Mediterranean, never before known, and reported it to the admiralty. It was telegraphed to all the stations, and ordered to be put down on all the charts. The first ship to sail over the spot was under command of an old captain, who, noting the warning newly placed on his chart, desired to know by whom

the rock was reported. On being informed he replied: "There is no such rock there. I have sailed over this sea for twenty years, and if such a rock had been there I would have found it." And then in his pride and conceit he gave orders to his sailing-master to steer directly over the spot indicated. The gallant ship was driven over the danger spot under full sail. There was a tremendous crash, and the noble vessel went down with all hands. Many a Christian suffers shipwreck through unheeding conceit or neglect of his infallible chart. May the Holy Spirit incline us to study diligently our divine chart, and sail closely by it!

6. The Bible Reveals Things to Come.

It contains not only the history of the past, of God's dealings with nations, but it also contains much unfulfilled prophecy. Revelation is a book devoted to things that "must shortly come to pass" (<Rev 1:1>). Prophecy has been called unacted history, and history is but fulfilled prophecy. It is a mistake to suppose that God's hand in history has been limited to those nations mentioned in the Bible. Could we have the story of God in history, it would be seen that His providence has been in and over all the great and small events of all nations. Daniel in his great prophecy has given a rapid and graphic sketch of the course of history from the golden-headed Babylonian Empire down to the end of time, when the "Son of man shall come with the clouds of heaven" (<Dan 7:13>) ... when there "shall be given Him dominion and glory, and a kingdom, that all nations and languages should serve Him" (<Dan 7:14>). When He comes, "His dominion will be an everlasting dominion which shall not pass away, and His kingdom one which shall not be destroyed" (<Dan. 2:44; 7:13-27>). Meantime God among nations will be overturning, and "overturning, and overturning until He comes whose right it is" (<Ezek. 21:27>). The Book of Revelation is a detailed exposition of the second and seventh chapters of Daniel, and the two books should be read together.

Emperors and kings and cabinets are rapidly bringing to pass things that God has marked out in prophecy ages ago. But they know not what they do. There are "signs in the heavens," and on the earth there is "distress of nations with perplexity; and the sea and the waves roaring; men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth; for the powers of the heavens shall be shaken. And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud, with power and great glory" (<Luke 21:25-27>). Of the day and hour when the flaming heavens shall reveal the "appearing and kingdom" of our Lord Jesus Christ (<2 Tim. 4:1>), no man knoweth; but we are bidden to wait and be ready, lest we be surprised by the great and notable day of the Lord. To this end the Scriptures are also written, that the loving Student of them may live in advance of history, and be overtaken by no untoward event. If His prophetic Word dwell richly in our hearts and minds, there will be no great surprise for us as time goes on. We shall discern through the prophetic telescope, dimly, it may be, the approaches of those things out of which history is made. Should it be our blessed lot to be "alive, and remain Unto the coming of the Lord" (<1 Thes 4:15>) we shall see the sign of Him in the heavens (<Matt. 24:30>) before the startled and amazed world, lying in sin and mocking unbelief (<2 Pet. 3:3; Luke 18:8>), are overwhelmed in that "everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power" (<2 Thes 1:7-9>). We know that there is a growing disposition on the part of many excellent Christians to make light (they know not what they do) of all prophetic study; but our risen Lord, in His last revelation to John concerning things to come, caused him to write, at the very outset: "Blessed is he that readeth and they that hear the words of this prophecy; and keep those things which are written therein; for the time is at hand" (<Rev 1:3>); and at the close of the book to add: "These sayings are faithful and true; and the Lord God of the holy prophets sent His angel to show unto His servants the things which must shortly be done. Behold I come quickly; blessed is he that keepeth the sayings of the prophecy of this book" (<Rev. 22:6-7>).

May the Spirit of God give us a mind to study His Word reverently and believingly with a prepared heart, as did Ezra (<Ezra 7:10>), in the light and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Then will He "show us things to come" (<John 16:13>).

(from Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth)